
■ Trevor Grundy

The sinking of Jeremy Corbyn

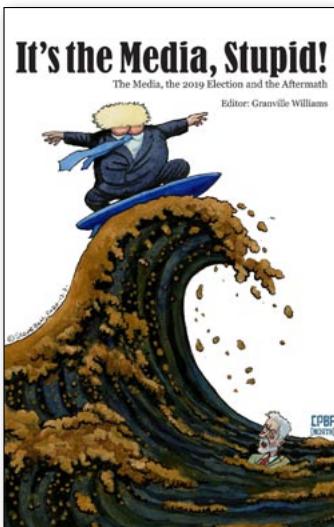
New book shows how a vicious campaign by right-wing tabloids helped drive the UK Labour Party to a massive 2019 general election defeat,

In his seminal book *In Defence of Politics*, the late academic Bernard Crick wrote: “Boredom with established truths is a great enemy of free men”. He wrote that in 1962. It could have been written yesterday.

The Edinburgh-based socialist said the purpose of his book was to try to restore confidence in the virtues of politics as a civilising human activity, saying that “politics, like Antaeus* in the Greek myth, can remain perpetually young, strong and lively so long as it can keep its feet firmly on the ground of Mother Earth.” (*Antaeus was the son of the gods Poseidon and Gaea in Greek mythology. He drew his strength from his mother, earth, and was invincible while he was in contact with her. He challenged people who passed by his area to wrestling matches and always won, as long as he kept both feet on the ground.)

In other words, in politics stick to where you come from and know where you belong.

It's the Media, Stupid! –The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath, edited by Granville Williams of the Campaign for



IT'S THE MEDIA, STUPID!

The Media, the 2019 Election and the Aftermath

Edited by **Granville Williams**

Published by the **Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North)**

£9.99

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Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) should be praised for having a similar aim as Crick – to restore confidence in opposition politics. He has produced a short,

important book that should be read by socialists wanting to know what went so *wrong* for Labour, and so *right* for the Conservatives in the December 2019 general election.

James Curran, Professor of Communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London, says in the book's foreword, “Here we are in the wake of a catastrophic Labour defeat. In 2019, the Labour Party sustained the second largest drop in its poll share since 1931. It has now the smallest number of MPs since 1935. The cross-class coalition that sustained Labour's rise is now fractured and will be difficult to repair.”

He continues: “British people's trust in the British press is now even lower than that of Serbians in their press, while trust in British broadcasting has fallen below the EU average.”

This reminded me of what Dorothy Byrne, Chair of the Ethical Journalism Network, said about the state of Britain and its media at the Edinburgh Festival last year.

Two things worried her: First, a general election where the two main parties were led by men who were out-of-touch with grass roots



ELECTIONWATCH: Concerned at the manner in which Corbyn was portrayed by the mainstream media.

opinion; and, second, what to do if a confirmed liar was installed as prime minister.

“Isn’t it time”, she asked,” for us to start using the ‘L’ word (liar). I believe that we need to start calling politicians out as liars when they lie. If we continue to be so polite, how will our viewers (on TV) know that politicians are lying?”

Were Johnson and Corbyn listening? They ought to have been.

This book’s origins are interesting. When the 2019 general election was called on October 30, 2019, *MediaNorth*, the magazine of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) decided to produce regular “watchdog” magazines (six in all) titled *ElectionWatch**, to monitor the way the news was handled.

Much of what *ElectionWatch* said is repeated in this book, with several of the publication’s writers expressing their concern at

* *ElectionWatch* and *mediaNorth* magazines are available at www.coldtype.net/MediaNorth.Newsletters2.html

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the manner in which Corbyn was treated by the top-selling mainstream newspapers including the *Times*, the *Sun*, the *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*, the *Guardian*, and the BBC.

But why the surprise? Why the shock? The moment the election was announced, the opponents of anyone who wasn’t for Boris Johnson, became the *enemy*.

The media condemnation of Corbyn was predictable, but the way the Labour leader and his advisers retaliated was little short of pathetic. His failure to explain his position on Jews, Zionists, Israel and his commitment to a non-racial Britain and its defence is extraordinary, perhaps the subject of another book.

It was almost as if a group of arrogant Labour Party advisers said, “Look, we’re the antennae of the masses. No-one will believe these arrogant right-wing media billionaires. We have our feet on the ground. We are the masses. We know what they think because they are us and we are them.”

How wrong they were.

Labour’s election defeat was followed by a one-day conference in Leeds in February, organised by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom (North) in order to expose what the Communist daily *Morning Star* saw as the links between the right-wing press, the BBC and politicians, which “undermine Britain’s democratic process through the mass spreading of propaganda and outright lies.” *It’s The media, Stupid!* is the book that came out of that conference.

Labour militants can cry if they want to and hold further talks if they feel the need, but unless there is some form of new united front they’ll get nowhere. It is necessary to find out why so many tra-

ditional Labour voters swung to the Tories. And young men from England's most expensive private schools might not be the right ones to do the job, which requires listening to the voices of ordinary men and women in some of the poorest parts of the UK.

It becomes clearer by the day that the majority of working class Northerners voted for Johnson because they felt let down by Labour and confused by Corbyn. Several of the authors make that abundantly clear, and it is to their credit that they've stopped worshipping Corbyn and started to examine what went wrong under his watch.

Traditional Labour Party voters were unsure about Corbyn's attitude towards Europe and Brexit. They were startled about claims Corbyn was anti-Jewish. They were bewildered when presented with a policy documents that might be acceptable to graduates doing PhDs but hard to swallow if you were an ordinary Joe from a northern town such as Blyth, Whitley Bay, Seaton Sluice, South Shields, or Ellington Village.

Then, along came Bouncy Boris, oozing what Evelyn Waugh called *creamy English charm*, accompanied by his private-school educated Dominic Cummings, promising the earth with simplistic slogans: *Get Brexit Done. Take Back Control*

Three-word slogans do not constitute policy, but they're comforting when the masses are confused and, above all, bored with established truths.

It's The Media, Stupid! is well edited by Granville Williams who calls for all Labour reform groups to work together. "The danger is, if



SAVAGED: The UK tabloids dished out stories warning readers of Corbyn and his "Apologists for terror."

we all go off and do our own thing, we will dissipate our effectiveness."

The outstanding chapter of the book, which well-illustrated with 16-pages of colour reproductions of the front pages of various British papers during the build-up to the election, is Nicholas Jones's *The Vilification of Jeremy Corbyn*, where he shows how the media continually dished out stories warning readers of Corbyn's friends in high terrorist places.

Those charges were reinforced when Peter Dearlove, the ex-head of MI6, joined in the chorus of abuse, saying Corbyn could not be trusted with state secrets.

But perhaps the hardest blow came from Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, who accused Labour of harbouring rampant antisemites, and indicated that Jeremy Corbyn was doing nothing to stop it, on the day Labour released its lengthy policy document and the Muslim Council of Britain issued a scathing attack on Islamophobia in the Tory Party.

Andrew Neil, former editor of Murdoch's *Sunday Times*, now chairman of the company that owns the right-wing *Spectator* magazine, and who gets paid £200,000 a year by the BBC, climbed in and virtually crucified the Labour leader on television for refusing – four times – to say sorry to Britain's 280,000 or so Jewish citizens.

Jones points out just how badly Corbyn (and presumably his special adviser Seamus Milne) handled the whole thing.

Jones also informs us that long before the *Daily Mail* and other papers climbed aboard the "Corbyn is a closet antisemite" bandwagon,

the *Jewish Chronicle* had carried an editorial on August 14, 2015 expressing concern that there was antisemitism in the Labour Party.

Jones says: “An editorial expressed ‘deep foreboding’ at the prospect of his election as Labour leader, although there was ‘no direct evidence of his association and support for Holocaust deniers, terrorists and some outright antisemites.’”

Jones adds: “His failure to address the *Jewish Chronicle*’s challenge that summer and his own subsequent ineptitude and that of his aides in tackling the party’s crisis over charges of antisemitism, would open the floodgates to a virulent press campaign that tarnished Labour’s name throughout the build-up to the 2019 election. In the face of the hostile media environment he was up against there were steps that he could and should have been taken in 2015 to mitigate the damage, but the chance was missed.”

Jones, a former BBC industrial correspondent, also speaks about Corbyn’s “personal ambivalence”

There are signs that the love affair with Johnson is eroding. His former friends are turning against him – and fast

towards EU membership and how that confused voters in the Labour Party’s former Northern ‘Red Wall’ strongholds who were seduced, misled, conned and lied to under that so often repeated mantra, *Get Brexit Done*. It was a slogan that warmed the hearts of hundreds of thousands of men and women who felt they had been side-lined by the party they once supported.

However, there are signs that the love affair with Boris Johnson is rapidly eroding. His former friends are turning against him – and fast.

Matthew Parris wrote in the Times (May 9) that Johnson needs to stop his “blustering talk” and

get on with the task of leading. “Can you remember any big event of government he ever tackled and sorted?” he asks.

And the *Guardian*’s John Crace went further, writing on May 11 that Johnson is splitting-up the four country United Kingdom with his mishandling of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Boris is deep down a coward, a man who runs from the first hint of personal responsibility.”

As Oscar Wilde said: “A halo doesn’t have to fall far to become a noose.” **CT**

Trevor Grundy is an English journalist who lived and worked in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa from 1966-1996 and who represented Time magazine during the Rhodesia War, the Financial Times and the BBC’s Focus on Africa in Zambia and Kenya, and Deutsche Welle, the SABC and Beeld newspaper in Zimbabwe. He is the author of ‘Memoir of a Fascist Childhood’ which was published by William Heinemann, London in 1998.



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