

Blanket Silence: Corporate Media Ignore New Report Exposing Distorted and Misleading Coverage of Corbyn

By [Media Lens](#)

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If there's one thing we've learned in the 17 years since Media Lens began, it's that media professionals generally hate being challenged, critiqued or criticised. This fierce antipathetical belligerence underlies the corporate media's total refusal to mention, far less discuss, a recent damning [report](#) on how the corporate media have been misreporting Labour and its supposed 'problem' with antisemitism.

The report was published last week by the [Media Reform Coalition](#) (MRC), set up in 2011 in the wake of the [News International phone hacking scandal](#), to promote debate about the media and democracy. The MRC coordinates effective action by civil society groups, academics and media campaigners, and is currently chaired by [Natalie Fenton](#), Professor of Communication and Media at Goldsmiths, University of London.

The urgent need for such a media initiative is highlighted by the disturbing [reality](#) that Britain has one of the most concentrated media environments in the world, with just three companies in control of 71% of national newspaper circulation and five companies running 81% of local newspaper titles.

In the careful MRC study, articles and news segments on Labour and antisemitism from the largest UK news providers, both online and television, were subjected to in-depth analysis. The research was undertaken by Dr Justin Schlosberg, Senior Lecturer in Journalism and Media at Birkbeck, University of London, together with Laura Laker, an experienced freelance journalist.

In their study, Schlosberg and Laker identified:

'myriad inaccuracies and distortions in online and television news including marked skews in sourcing, omission of essential context or right of reply, misquotation, and false assertions made either by journalists themselves or sources whose contentious claims were neither challenged nor countered. Overall, our findings were consistent with a disinformation paradigm.'

In other words, the corporate media have been pumping out reams of 'fake news' promoting a narrative that Corbyn and Labour are mired in an ['antisemitism crisis'](#).

Out of over 250 articles and news pieces examined by Schlosberg and Laker, *fully 95 examples were found of misleading or inaccurate reporting*. In particular, there were (our

emphasis):

- 29 examples of false statements or claims, several of them made by news presenters or correspondents themselves, six of them on BBC television news programmes, and eight on the Guardian website.
- A further 66 clear instances of misleading or distorted coverage including misquotations, reliance on single -source accounts, omission of essential facts or right of reply, and repeated value-based assumptions made by broadcasters without evidence or qualification. In total, a quarter of the sample contained at least one documented inaccuracy or distortion.
- Overwhelming source imbalance, especially on television news where voices critical of Labour's code of conduct on antisemitism were regularly given an unchallenged and exclusive platform, outnumbering those defending Labour by nearly 4 to 1. Nearly half of Guardian reports on the controversy surrounding Labour's code of conduct featured no quoted sources defending the party or leadership.

This is, to say the least, totally unacceptable from any supposedly responsible news outlet. It is even more galling when it comes from the *Guardian* and BBC News, both with large global audiences, who constantly proclaim their credentials for 'honest and balanced reporting'.

Much recent corporate media coverage has focused on the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of 'antisemitism'. Corporate media across the spectrum have argued that in refusing to accept the IHRA definition in total, with all of its accompanying examples, Corbyn has promoted antisemitism, alienated Britain's Jewish community and divided his own party.

Philip Collins [wrote](#) in *The Times* of Corbyn (our emphasis):

'He has, for some reason he cannot articulate, insisted that the Labour Party should be just about the only institution that does not accept the definition of antisemitism approved by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.'

In July, a *Times* editorial [stated](#) of Labour's National Executive Committee (our emphasis):

'Instead of adopting a standard definition of antisemitism formulated by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, and endorsed by governments around the world, the NEC has amended it in unacceptable ways... Let there be no doubt: these are unconscionable and antisemitic accusations.'

In September, another *Times* leader [opined](#) (our emphasis):

'Labour's national executive committee will vote today on whether to adopt the internationally recognised definition of antisemitism. It is essential that it does. Governments and organisations worldwide have adopted the carefully worded text developed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Jeremy Corbyn's hamfisted attempt to rewrite it, without consultation and with the apparent aim of protecting certain activists, shames his party.'

The Times added:

'British Jews are well placed to define what constitutes racism towards them, just as any minority deserves the last word in the debate as it applies to them. Gordon Brown has called for Labour to "unanimously, unequivocally and immediately" adopt all the examples. Anything less would mark a dark day indeed for the party.'

Noting that three leading British Jewish newspapers had [declared](#) that a Corbyn-led government would pose 'an existential threat to Jewish life in this country', senior *Guardian* columnist and former comment editor Jonathan Freedland [asked](#):

'How on earth has it come to this?'

Part, but not all, of the problem, Freedland suggested, was (our emphasis):

'Labour's failure to adopt the full text of the near universally accepted International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, including all its illustrative examples'.

He added:

'When Jews hear that the IHRA is not good enough, they wonder: what exactly is it that Labour wants to say about us?'

And yet, as the [MRC report](#) [pdf] makes clear, although the IHRA is an international body with representatives from 31 countries, *only six of those countries* have, to date, formally adopted the definition themselves. Several high-profile bodies have rejected or distanced themselves from the working definition, including the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency - a successor to the body that drafted the original wording on which the definition is based - and academic institutions including the London School of Economics and School of Oriental and African Studies. Moreover, academic and legal opinion has been overwhelmingly critical of the IHRA definition, including formal opinions produced by four leading UK barristers.

But, note Schlosberg and Laker:

'Virtually none of this essential context found its way into news reports of the controversy. Instead, the Labour Party was routinely portrayed by both sources and correspondents as beyond the pale of conventional thinking on the IHRA definition.'

Nearly 50% of *Guardian* reports failed to include any quotes from those critiquing the IHRA definition or defending Labour's code of conduct on antisemitism. In fact, media reporting (our emphasis):

'effectively gave those attacking Labour's revised code and championing the IHRA definition a virtually exclusive and unchallenged platform to air their

views. By comparison, their detractors – including a number of Jewish organisations and representatives of other affected minorities – were systematically marginalized from the coverage. Furthermore, Labour MPs adopting even moderate positions defending the code were subjected to far more aggressive questioning from interviewers than those adopting extreme positions attacking it.’

In a calm, methodical and rigorous manner, the MRC has exposed to public view the blatant anti-Corbyn bias of even the ‘best’ media outlets: the BBC and the *Guardian*.

Response To The Media Reform Coalition Report

Our searches using the ProQuest newspaper database reveal that there has not been a single news article or editorial published about the report. This is a remarkable symptom of the glaring tendency of the media to reject, or simply blank, reasoned, well-researched criticism.

When *The Canary* website published an [article](#) about the MRC report, they approached both the *Guardian* and the BBC for comment. The *Guardian*’s response was boilerplate rhetoric – ‘*The Guardian* has featured a wide range of voices in this debate’, etc – that failed to acknowledge the paper’s unambiguous distortions and omissions. The BBC did not even provide a comment.

The sole newspaper mention to date is a [letter](#) in the *Guardian* which may only have been published because Noam Chomsky is one of the signatories, along with high-profile figures such as Brian Eno, Yanis Varoufakis, Ken Loach and a number of media academics. They make a crucial point that relates to criticism of the *Guardian* itself (mentioned earlier):

‘In relation to the IHRA definition of antisemitism that was at the heart of the dispute, the research found evidence of “overwhelming source imbalance” in which critics of Labour’s code of conduct dominated coverage, with nearly 50% of *Guardian* reports, for example, failing to include any quotes from those defending the code or critiquing the IHRA definition.’

The letter also notes the MRC researchers’ conclusion that media distortions and inaccuracies:

‘were not occasional lapses in judgment but “systematic reporting failures” that served to weaken the Labour leadership and to bolster its opponents within and outside of the party.’

Chomsky and his co-signatories add:

‘In covering the allegations that Labour is now “institutionally antisemitic”, there have been inaccuracies, clear distortions and revealing omissions across our most popular media platforms. We believe that significant parts of the UK media have failed their audiences by producing flawed reports that have contributed to an undeserved witch-hunt against the Labour leader and misdirected public attention away from antisemitism elsewhere, including on the far right, which is ascendant in much of Europe.’

Given the *Guardian's* [appalling record](#) of boosting fake news of a Labour 'antisemitism crisis', and given its vehement opposition to Corbyn's brand of moderate socialism, it is no wonder that #DumpTheGuardian and #BoycottTheGuardian were trending in the UK last Friday as part of a dedicated Twitter campaign.

Pro-Corbyn Labour MP Chris Williamson [tweeted](#) his support in response to the MRC report:

'My reference to McCarthyism vindicated by this report. The Guardian newspaper's deplorable contribution explains why so many people are saying #BoycottTheGuardian'

Last Wednesday, Jeremy Corbyn gave a [speech](#) to the Labour Party conference in which he dared to criticise the British corporate media who have been gunning for him ever since he became the party's leader:

'It turns out that the billionaires who own the bulk of the British press don't like us one little bit.

'Now it could be because we're going to clamp down on tax dodging. Or it may be because we don't fawn over them at white tie dinners and cocktail parties.'

He added:

'We must, and we will, protect the freedom of the press to challenge unaccountable power.

'Journalists from Turkey to Myanmar and Colombia are being imprisoned, harassed or sometimes killed by authoritarian governments and powerful corporate interests just for doing their job.

'But here, a free press has far too often meant the freedom to spread lies and half-truths, and to smear the powerless, not take on the powerful.

'You challenge their propaganda of privilege by using the mass media of the 21st century: social media.'

Pippa Crerar, *Guardian* deputy political editor, [responded](#) with the standard kneejerk conflation of Corbyn's reasoned comments with the idiotic 'fake news' mantra of Trump. She tweeted:

'Corbyn criticises some parts of British media, claiming they "smear the powerless, not take on the powerful". As a journalist, makes me very uncomfortable to hear him leading attack on our free press. Dangerous, Trumpian territory.'

We [responded](#):

'Honest, rational criticism is not an "attack", and it is not "dangerous". A corporate press that refuses to listen or respond to this kind of reasonable criticism is itself dangerous. If anyone has a right to criticise media smears, it

is @jeremycorbyn.'

The level of popular support for this view is indicated by the fact that our tweet has so far received 518 retweets and 1,222 likes; a massive response by our standards.

To her credit, Crerar did [engage](#) with us reasonably, unlike the vast majority of her media colleagues over many years:

'Totally agree media has to reflect/listen. Not for a minute saying we're perfect (some elements extremely *imperfect*). But orgs also do invaluable work eg Windrush, grooming scandal, MPs expenses so just not true to say we don't hold power to account.'

We [answered](#):

'Thanks for replying, Pippa, very much appreciated. Glad you agree "media has to reflect/listen". Doesn't that mean taking Corbyn's thoughtful, reasoned criticism seriously, rather than lumping it in with Trump's awful tub-thumping? Corbyn and Milne really aren't "dangerous".'

Her [follow-up](#):

'I've sat back today & watched pile-on. I'd always rather engage but not when abusive. Like I said, media far from perfect, but I fear JC's comments ignored excellent journalism that does exist & undermined journalists who produce it. Of course, nowhere near as extreme as Trump.'

And our [reply](#):

'Our response generated nearly 800 [now 1,700] likes and retweets - that gives an idea of the strength of feeling. Like other media, the Guardian's smearing of Corbyn has gone way too far. It's time to start listening to your readers @KathViner.'

To date, there has been no further exchange; and certainly not a peep out of *Guardian* editor, Katharine Viner; which is typical for this extraordinarily unresponsive media professional.

Justin Schlosberg, lead author of the MRC report, [told](#) *The Canary*:

'Neither the Guardian nor the BBC have acknowledged or even directly responded to the myriad reporting failures highlighted in our research. It is completely inadequate to offer blanket dismissals or simply kick into the long grass of their respective complaints procedures.'

Schlosberg pointed out:

'The failure to answer to these allegations is even more serious than the

reporting failures themselves.'

Conclusion

As a further, related example of bias, consider the corporate media's stunning indifference to the [bomb threat](#) that interrupted the screening of a new film, 'The Political Lynching of Jackie Walker', in Liverpool on September 25. Walker is a former [Momentum](#) Vice-Chair who was suspended from the Labour party as part of a propaganda blitz attempting to silence critics of Israel. The screening was organised by Jewish Voice for Labour which has been supportive of Jeremy Corbyn.

If the corporate media were genuinely motivated by concerns about alleged rising antisemitism, this shocking threat would have generated headline coverage. Instead it was met by a blanket of silence. A brief online *Guardian* [piece](#) was, to say the least, ambiguous in its narrative. Ex-*Guardian* journalist Jonathan Cook [noted](#):

'Another "fake news" master-class from the Guardian. A bomb hoax to stop Corbyn-supporting, Jewish Labour members screening a film about how Labour's "anti-semitism crisis" has been manufactured is framed as *more* evidence of Jew hatred in the party!'

According to our ProQuest database search, the only mentions in the print press have been in the *Liverpool Echo* and *The Times of Israel*. Where are all the editorials and major comment pieces in the *Guardian*, *The Times* and elsewhere?

As for the Media Reform Coalition report itself, it is no surprise that the BBC, the *Guardian* and the rest of the corporate media should brush away detailed reasoned criticism of their biased reporting, or pretend such clear evidence does not exist. These media outlets sell themselves as publicly accountable; or, at least, as defenders of the public interest; a valiant fourth estate standing up for the truth and honest, neutral news coverage. And yet, when the alternative media makes a [mistake](#), or says '[the wrong thing](#)', there are angry howls and screaming mockery from the corporate commentariat. The hypocrisy is staggering, and, again, entirely predictable.

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