

Media's War on Labour Under the Spotlight

Shadow minister calls out BBC's 'conscious bias' against the party. Ofcom slammed as John Pilger's NHS exposé delayed until after the election

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The media's role in last week's Tory election victory was under the spotlight today — even as the new government threatened the BBC licence fee.

Shadow transport secretary Andy McDonald accused the BBC today of “playing a part” in Labour’s heavy defeat.

He said on BBC Radio 4’s Today programme that the public service broadcaster has been “consciously” biased against the Labour Party and its leader Jeremy Corbyn.

Mr McDonald said:

“We got this [election] wrong, but if the BBC are going to hold themselves out as somehow having conducted themselves in an impartial manner, I think they’ve really got to have a look in the mirror. We’ve got a lot to say about this.”

He referred to a BBC presenter standing in front of a TV camera talking about the election victory that Boris Johnson “so richly deserves.”

Radio host Justin Webb described the statement as “a slip of the tongue.”

Mr McDonald replied:

“How many slips of the tongue until you accept it?”

Huw Edwards – who led the BBC’s coverage on election night –admitted that BBC staff “sometimes make mistakes, which we deeply regret.” He hit back against claims of deliberate bias that are “carefully planned to undermine one party and boost another.”

The 10 o’Clock News presenter said BBC journalists had to resist “relentlessly vitriolic attacks” and “the sometimes appalling levels of pressure from political parties and their puppets in parts of the press and elsewhere.”

It comes after Labour’s co-national campaign coordinator Andrew Gwynne wrote to BBC director-general Tony Hall earlier this month to accuse the broadcaster of a catalogue of bias, including allowing Boris Johnson to avoid being interviewed by Andrew Neil. Labour has

accused the BBC of informing it that an interview with Mr Johnson had been agreed when the party consented to Mr Corbyn doing the interview.

In response a BBC spokesman said: “The BBC will continue to make its own independent editorial decisions and is committed to reporting the election campaign fairly, impartially and without fear or favour.”

Journalist and media critic Jonathan Cook said: “There is little hope of radical change in society if public awareness of state-corporate media bias is weak or non-existent.

“As state broadcaster the BBC is naturally loyal to the Establishment because it is the Establishment. Johnson’s new threats against the licence fee are designed to ensure it moves even more firmly into the Tory camp than it already is.”

Now re-elected with an 80-seat majority, Mr Johnson is reported to be considering the decriminalisation of non-payment of the £154.50 per year licence fee for watching the BBC on TV or its iPlayer online catch-up service.

The National Union of Journalists warned government not to undermine public-service broadcasting.

General secretary Michelle Stanistreet said today: “Knee-jerk changes to the licence fee would massively damage BBC programmes and news. The corporation is already facing serious cuts in the coming year, with potentially more on the horizon.

“It needs greater resources, not an attempt to destabilise its very existence.”

ITV was also criticised for censorship by freelance filmmaker John Pilger. He said on Sunday that publicity for the ITV broadcast of his film *The Dirty War on the NHS* was embargoed at the very time that the sell-off of the NHS was “at the forefront of British politics.”

ITV was obliged by the rules of government-approved TV regulator Ofcom to embargo all basic publicity for the film during the election campaign period.

Mr Pilger’s website asked: “The question arises: What exactly is the impartial role of the regulator Ofcom?”

Mr Johnson indicated that a report into alleged foreign interference in politics would now be published — with the election safely out of the way.

Corporate media bias watchdog Media Lens said: “The whole media ‘regulation’ system in the UK is a disgrace and a sham.”

The Dirty War on the NHS, which will be broadcast tonight at 10.45pm, was shown in some cinemas across the country and was also screened online.

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