

Tom Watson Interview: The British Media, anti-Semitism and Clifford's Tower.

By [Jacob Phillips](#), Editor (2017/18)
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Image: Rwendland

Tom Watson has recently made headlines for reversing his type two diabetes however, Watson is best known for playing a significant role in helping to expose the News International phone hacking scandal in 2011. Since then he has remained highly critical of Rupert Murdoch, comparing him to a mafia boss and even writing a book on Murdoch's relations with senior British politicians and police officers. Watson currently serves as Shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport alongside his duties as Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and MP for West Bromwich East.

It's been 10 years since you begun investigating phone hacking. What do you think of the current state of the British media?

"The British Media is currently under threat. We've lost 30 local newspapers a year for the last decade.

There are now half as many journalists working in local and regional media than when we first started looking at phone hacking. We've also had the rise of the tech oligopolies, principally Google and Facebook, who do not fund good journalism and probably do not pay enough taxes in the UK. We know that Rupert Murdoch is well into his eighties and is about to step back from his empire, Paul Dacre has retired, but there is a risk that the likes of Rupert Murdoch will be replaced by Mark Zuckerberg. We need to look at the media market.

"The problem the industry has now is that most local newspapers are owned by five companies, which are worth hundreds of millions of pounds, and the consolidation in the tech sector means that all these bright new start ups get hoovered into the oligopolies. That's a problem for pluralism and it's a problem for our democracies."

What does the Labour Party plan to do to tackle this?

"We're looking at a whole host of things such as whether we need to tax the tech platforms to make sure they invest in journalism. Maybe we need tax breaks for new forms of media start ups like community interest companies or for journalism which is charitable or has social entrepreneurial intent.

We certainly think that we need to look at a public interest test when it comes to media takeovers. The conduct of people who runs these organisations needs to be factored in to the decisions made. Do these mergers stifle innovation? There has been a reduction in innovative small startups because these huge tech companies buy everyone up.

We also need to make sure the regulators, who are there to uphold current laws, are not outmaneuvered by an army of lobbyists and lawyers. Maybe these tech platforms need their own regulatory body."

"One of the criticisms that is always unfairly levelled at the Labour party is that we have attacked journalism. This is because we have been strongly arguing for Leveson Two and lots of journalism bosses feel threatened resultantly.

"I have always said that phone hacking was exposed by courageous journalism exposing corrupted journalism and we need more journalists who are like a dog to a bone searching for criminal wrongdoing. We do not have the answers yet however we want to make sure the pipeline of talent is maintained in journalism."

How do you want to see the Media world change?

"The problem we have with 300 less newspapers is that less people are becoming qualified journalists. This could create a narrowing of the type of journalists we have. Look at the Oxbridge and City University recruitment into the national media. If you have journalists coming from the same kinds of backgrounds you're losing so many stories and networks. There's a different emphasis and approach. We need much greater diversity. Some of the figures show that more than half the country is no longer covered by a local newspaper. That's a tragedy, local newspapers keep local democracy clean and hold people to account. They stop councils from doing dumb things. This is a democratic crisis. Labour does not have all the answers to this but we are trying to map out the problems."

What do you think York Students can do to effectively bring about change?

York has always had a strong political tradition. I remember demonstrating against racism and anti-Semitism outside Clifford's tower with students from the University of York during my time at Hull University. The collective voice of students is very powerful. You have to work collectively. The student world took control of the last general election. The government created a generational divide and decided

that its policies would be focused towards an older population who are more likely to vote. Young people decided that they weren't going to have that. I think they set the agenda then. You can do it again and you can do it between general elections too. I'd say to anyone at York who is thinking the world is looking a bit bleak, don't lose that energy. Get involved in politics within your university and get off campus. Bring campuses together and try and do things regionally and nationally. If you do that you force the political classes to respond.

There has been a few half baked attempts by Theresa May and some of her colleagues to reach out to 'the kids' but in the run up to the next general election parties will have to respond to the demands of young people. If there is still a Conservative Society on York's campus then people should be talking to the members of that group to make sure they are fighting for what they want inside the Tory party too."

You mentioned campaigning as a student against anti-Semitism, what is the Labour Party doing to tackle current issues of anti-Semitism?

"We are all very concerned about this. There is no doubt that some Labour members hold anti-semitic views and it has taken us too long to work out the way we deal with this fairly that means that our friends in the jewish community are satisfied and that we do not allow that hatred to spread whilst also allowing people the fair right to criticise the policies of Israel. It has taken us too long to get this balance right. But I am certain we will sort this out."

The Labour Party has been criticised for being divided. What is going on to fix this in the party?

"I think there's a lot more written about divide in the Labour Party than I think is warranted. There is a phenomenon going on in my party that I am very proud of. Last time I checked we had grown to 550 000 members. Our membership has tripled in the last two or three years. There's a huge influx of members with new ideas and a new energy wanting change. It can be hard to bring them together with established members. You only read about when things spillover into rows."



One comment

AlexPI

16 Oct '18 at 7:26 am

This is the british empire,divide and rule is the main aim of british rule,dont join this organisation this organisation spread only hatred news against secular countries, create discrimination between religion,the best example like Israel Palestine,india Pakistan, sudan etc.

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