

# A Liberal Pillar of the Establishment - 'New Look' Guardian, Old-Style Orthodoxy

By [Media Lens](#)

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As Noam Chomsky has often [remarked](#):

*'liberal bias is extremely important in a sophisticated system of propaganda.' One major news outlet that Chomsky had in mind was the New York Times, but the same applies in the UK. As a senior British intelligence official [noted](#) of the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan: 'It is always helpful for governments who want to get the Guardian readers of the world on board to have a humanitarian logic.'*

This suggests that respected liberal media like the *New York Times* and *Guardian* are key battlegrounds in the relentless elite efforts to control public opinion.

On January 15, the *Guardian* was relaunched as a tabloid with a 'new look'. Katharine Viner, the paper's editor, [proclaimed](#) in all seriousness:

*'we have a special relationship with our readers. This relationship is not just about the news; it's about a shared sense of purpose and a commitment to understand and illuminate our times. We feel a deep sense of duty and responsibility to our readers to honour the trust you place in us.'*

Those words – 'shared sense of purpose and commitment', 'duty', 'responsibility', 'honour', 'trust' – imply an openness to readers' comments, even to criticism; an important point to which we return below.

Viner continued:

*'We have grounded our new editions in the qualities readers value most in Guardian journalism: clarity, in a world where facts should be sacred but are too often overlooked; imagination, in an age in which people yearn for new ideas and fresh alternatives to the way things are.'*

The grand declaration to honour the yearning of its readers 'for new ideas and fresh alternatives to the way things are' rings hollow. This, after all, is a paper that fought tooth-and-nail against [Jeremy Corbyn](#). As Rob Newton [pointed out](#) via Twitter, linking to a lengthy series of screenshots featuring negative *Guardian* coverage:

*'The "left liberal" Guardian's campaign against @JeremyCorbyn was as relentless as the right-wing Daily Mail & The Sun. [Here's the proof](#)'*

Vacuous phrases continued to pour forth from the editor on the 'new look' paper:

'Guardian journalism itself will remain what it has always been: thoughtful, progressive, fiercely independent and challenging; and also witty, stylish and fun.'

'Fiercely independent and challenging'?

When the Guardian Media Group is owned by [The Scott Trust Limited](#), a '[profit-seeking enterprise](#)'? (In other words, it is *not* a non-profit trust, with many readers still mistakenly holding a romantic vision of benign ownership.)

When the paper is thus [owned and run](#) by an elite group of individuals with links to banking, insurance, advertising, multinational consumer goods, telecommunications, information technology, venture investment, corporate media, marketing services and other sectors of the establishment? When the paper remains dependent on advertising revenue from corporate interests, despite the [boast](#) that 'we now receive more income from our readers than we do from advertisers'. When the paper has actually [ditched](#) journalists who have been 'fiercely independent and challenging'?

However, it is certainly true that the *Guardian* 'will remain what it has always been': a liberal pillar of the establishment; a gatekeeper of 'acceptable' news and comment. 'Thus far, and no further', to use Chomsky's [phrase](#). But, as mentioned, the *Guardian* will not go even as far in the political spectrum as Corbyn: a traditional left Labour figure, rather than a radical socialist proclaiming 'Revolution!' or an anarchist itching to bring down global capitalism.

Meanwhile, readers can expect the 'new look' *Guardian* to continue its attacks on Julian Assange and WikiLeaks, such as the recent [smear piece](#) by ex-*Guardian* journalist James Ball that began scurrilously:

'According to Debrett's, the arbiters of etiquette since 1769: "Visitors, like fish, stink in three days." Given this, it's difficult to imagine what Ecuador's London embassy smells like, more than five-and-a-half years after Julian Assange moved himself into the confines of the small flat in Knightsbridge, just across the road from Harrods.'

Ball went on, dripping more poison:

'Today, most of those who still support Assange are hard-right nationalists – with many seeing him as a supporter of the style of politics of both Trump and Vladimir Putin.'

When we [challenged](#) Ball via Twitter for evidence of these foolish claims, he was unable to provide any. His [facile response](#) was:

'The WikiLeaks twitter feed is a pretty good start tbh [to be honest]'

That Katharine Viner's *Guardian* would happily publish such crude propaganda in an

ostensibly 'serious' column speaks volumes about the paper's tumbling credibility as well as conformity to power.

No doubt, too, this liberal 'newspaper' will continue to boost Tony Blair, the war criminal whose hands are indelibly stained with the blood of [over one million people](#) in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and elsewhere. But, for the *Guardian*, he will forever be a flawed hero, someone they have worked hard to rehabilitate in recent years, constantly seeking out his views and pushing him as a respectable elder statesman whose voice the public still needs to hear.

The essence of the *Guardian* was [summed up](#) by satirical comedian reporter Jonathan Pie on the day of the relaunch:

'New design. Same old virtue signalling, identity politics obsessed, champagne socialism (minus the socialism), barely concealed contempt for the working classes bullshit I presume though.'

### The Empty Rhetoric Of Seeking 'Uncomfortable' Views

One of the *Guardian* stalwarts helping to project an illusion of consistent challenge to authority is long-time columnist George Monbiot. We were once admirers of Monbiot, and we still respect his environmentalist writing, particularly on the imminent dangers of climate disruption...up to a point (for instance, he never properly addresses the key issue of the corporate media, including the role of his own paper).

But well over a decade ago, we first started [challenging](#) Monbiot on his serious blind spots and establishment-friendly ignorance when it came to foreign policy. In more recent years, we have even been smeared by him, in a [pitiful manner](#) akin to that of [Oliver Kamm](#) of Murdoch's *Times*, an inveterate supporter of Western 'interventions', on whom Monbiot often seems to rely for his slurs.

A recent [piece](#) by Jonathan Cook, once a Middle East *Guardian* reporter, is a skillful skewering of Monbiot's stance. Monbiot has repeatedly attacked those who dare question Washington-approved narratives on Syria, Rwanda and the Balkan Wars. Anyone who challenges Western government propaganda claims about Syria, for example, is condemned as an Assadist or conspiracy theorist. His targets have included [Noam Chomsky](#), [Edward Herman](#), [John Pilger](#), university professors Tim Hayward and Piers Robinson, and [Media Lens](#).

On Twitter last month, Monbiot [alleged](#) that Hayward and Robinson 'have disgraced themselves over Syria'. But when has Monbiot ever excoriated *Guardian* columnists Jonathan Freedland and Natalie Nougayrède, Nick Cohen of the *Observer*, David Aaronovitch of *The Times* and John Rentoul of the *Independent*, all of whom have 'disgraced themselves' over US-UK wars of aggression?

And why is Monbiot's focus so skewed to 'their' war crimes rather than 'our' war crimes? The editor of the [Interventions Watch](#) blog searched Monbiot's Twitter timeline in December 2017 and [found](#) he had mentioned 'Syria' in 91 tweets and 'Yemen' in just three tweets. With rare exceptions, virtually the entire UK political and media system has disgraced itself over Yemen – currently the world's greatest humanitarian catastrophe. This should be a key central concern for any honest dissident commentator today.

Cook writes of Monbiot:

‘Turning a blind eye to his behaviour, or worse excusing it, as too often happens, has only encouraged him to intensify his attacks on dissident writers, those who – whether right or wrong on any specific issue – are slowly helping us all to develop more critical perspectives on western foreign policy goals than has been possible ever before.’

He adds that the many leftists:

‘who defend Monbiot, or turn a blind eye to his hypocrisy, largely do so because of his record on the environment. But in practice they are enabling not only his increasingly overt incitement against critical thinkers, but also undermining the very cause his supporters believe he champions.’

Cook sums up:

‘All indications are that Monbiot lacks the experience, knowledge and skills to unravel the deceptions being perpetrated in the west’s proxy and not-so-proxy wars overseas. That is fair enough. What is not reasonable is that he should use his platforms to smear precisely those who can speak with a degree of authority and independence – and then conspire in denying them a platform to respond. That is the behaviour not only of a hypocrite, but of a bully too.’

We will return later to that point of dissidents being denied a platform to reply. Meanwhile, Monbiot has not responded to Cook, as far as we are aware.

Ironically, of course, the *Guardian* [sells itself](#) as a fearless supporter of ‘open’ journalism, delivering ‘the independent journalism the world needs’. But, once again, there are always safe limits. Tim Hayward, mentioned above, is Professor of Environmental Political Theory at Edinburgh University. He recently [recounted](#) what happened after the *Guardian* published a long [piece](#) by Olivia Solon, a senior technology reporter for *Guardian US* in San Francisco. Solon argued that critical discussion of the White Helmets in Syria had been ‘propagated online by a network of anti-imperialist activists, conspiracy theorists and trolls with the support of the Russian government’.

After publishing this hit piece, the *Guardian* essentially shut down all discussion, refusing even to grant a right of reply to those who had been maligned, including independent journalists. Hayward described what happened after publication:

‘What the Guardian did next:

- quickly closed its comments section;
- did not allow a right of reply to those journalists singled out for denigration in the piece;
- did not allow publication of the considered response from a group of concerned academics;
- did not respond to the group’s subsequent [letter](#), or a follow up email to it;
- prevaricated in response to telephone inquiries as to whether a decision against publishing either communication from the group had or had not been taken;
- failed to respond to a message to its Readers’ Editor from [Vanessa Beeley](#),

one of the journalists criticised in the article.'

George Monbiot played his part too, says Hayward:

'tweeting smears against critics and suggesting they read up about "the Russian-backed disinformation campaign against Syria's heroic rescue workers".'

This was disreputable behaviour from a 'progressive' journalist who [claims](#) that:

'I believe that a healthy media organisation, like a healthy university, should admit a diversity of opinion.'

The *Guardian* journalist added that newspapers, including his own, 'should also seek opposing views and publish them too, however uncomfortable this might be.' Monbiot's own behaviour exposes these words as empty rhetoric.

#### *Guardian* Looks Beyond Corbyn To The Next 'Centrist' Candidate

Meanwhile, the *Guardian* is looking beyond the time when Corbyn is Labour leader. A recent [article](#) by Ian Sinclair in the *Morning Star* argues that the *Guardian* is putting its weight behind Emily Thornberry, Corbyn's shadow foreign secretary. A [Guardian interview](#) with her was, unusually, advertised well over a week in advance of publication. It was a major feature in which she was described as 'a key architect of Labour's comeback, and widely tipped to be the party's next leader'. But there was very little in the piece about the policies she espouses, not least foreign policy issues.

One such issue is the Middle East, which was wholly absent from the *Guardian* interview. Last November, Sinclair observes, Thornberry proclaimed that Israel 'stands out as a beacon of freedom, equality and democracy'. And, in a December speech to Labour Friends of Israel, she described former Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres as 'a hero of the left, of the state of Israel and of the cause of peace.'

Sinclair points out:

'In contrast, in 2005, US dissident Noam Chomsky called Peres "an iconic mass murderer," presumably for his role in the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians that led to the creation of Israel and for being head of government when Israel shelled a United Nations compound in Lebanon in 1996, killing over 100 civilians.'

Thornberry's comments on Israel, says Sinclair, 'are a cause for concern for those who want to see an anti-imperialist, humane attitude towards international affairs'. He continues:

'Thornberry is the perfect candidate for Guardian "centrist" types who would like to neuter Corbynism — someone who can gain the backing of significant numbers of Corbyn supporters while at the same time diluting the movement's relative radicalism by returning the Labour Party to safer, Establishment-friendly ground.'

The indications are that the 'new look' *Guardian* will be happy to promote a potential Labour leader who soft-pedals Israel's crimes. This is part of a bigger picture of the paper offering little more than token criticism of elite Western power. We should not be surprised. No amount of redesign can gloss over the structural issues that ensure the *Guardian* remains very firmly a liberal pillar of the establishment and essentially a guardian of the power-friendly *status quo*.

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