

The Great Merger - The Rise of Oligarchical Politics

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Millions of people in the UK are beset by insecurities and worries about the rising cost of living. Fuel and energy prices are escalating, variously blamed on Brexit, Covid, and the war in Ukraine. A recent [survey](#) reported that 67% of Britons are worried about paying food and fuel bills, and 56% believe their household finances have worsened in the past 12 months.

The NHS is experiencing huge pressures. Rachel Clarke, a palliative care doctor and the author of ‘Breathtaking: Inside the NHS in a Time of Pandemic’, [said](#) in March that the NHS:

‘is not coping much better now than it was at Covid’s peaks. We are drowning – in Covid patients, cancer patients, the patients on the waiting list backlogs, and the patients whose conditions have become infinitely more complex and harmful because they’ve been waiting so long. There are so few staff – and those left are so burned out and traumatised – that patients are inevitably being neglected.’

Too many people in this country are relying on food banks. Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, the [Trussell Trust network](#), the UK’s largest foodbank organisation, distributed over 2.1 million emergency food parcels to people in crisis. This is an increase of 81% compared to the same period five years ago.

Hundreds of thousands of disabled and chronically ill people are having to wait an average of [five months](#) for disability benefits. Employees are working long hours on short-term and zero-hour contracts. There are persistent delays and poor services on public transport. And people have to wait inordinately long times to obtain driving licenses and passports.

All of this is taking place against the reality of industrial action and rising public dissatisfaction with what passes for ‘news’ or ‘politics’ in the Westminster bubble, or any of the other bubbles inhabited by Western elites.

Public trust in the ‘mainstream’ media has dropped dramatically in recent years. According to a [recent analysis](#) by Press Gazette, BBC News experienced the biggest drop in public confidence, along with the Times and the Telegraph. BBC News, regularly touted by its

managers and senior journalists as the 'gold standard' in reliability and accuracy, has seen trust in its journalism drop from 75% four years ago to 55% now.



For what it's worth, that still leaves it the most trusted newsbrand in the UK, along with ITV news, also at 55%. Channel 4 News was just behind on 54%. Sky News saw trust in its output decline from 62% to 45%. The Guardian could only manage 48% (remarkably high, given its [record](#)), down from 61%.

Press Gazette summed up the findings:

'Major newsbrands have a crisis of trust'.

Former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook [observed](#):

'Is the reason all establishment media are seeing huge drops in audience trust the fault of Russian disinformation? Or is it because they act as brazen mouthpieces for the establishment? Be sure all these outlets will tell you it's down to Russia.'

Commenting on the low trust figures, Cook added:

'half of audiences think our main news shows actually peddle fake news.'

Rossalyn Warren, Reuters audience editor, recently [shared](#) a headline finding from the Oxford-based Reuters Institute that:

'46% of people (mostly women and young people) actively avoid the news because it has a negative impact on their mood. That's up from 24% in 2017.'

The prevailing public mood was pithily [summed up](#) by writer Umair Haque as a 'feeling of downward mobility'. This, he said, is how many people feel today:

'They don't feel good. Confident. Assured. Optimistic. They feel...*worthless*. Defeated. Helpless and hopeless. Traumatized and weary.'

Haque continued:

'I can't take it anymore. I can't take it financially — how am I going to [make ends meet](#)? I can't take it economically — no matter how hard you work, little seems to change. I can't take it culturally — nothing, no one out there seems to help me, aid me, be there for me. I can't take it socially — this whole society feels like it's against me.'

There is, warned Haque, a ‘tsunami of demoralisation’ sweeping our societies:

‘And as people grow demoralized, they grow *de-moralized*. Their moral centers and cores stop working. Only the strong survive, and the weak perish? I had better become ruthless, cunning, cruel. I must learn how to be a knife. Not a lever, not an open hand. A closed fist. In the bitter battle for self-preservation, the great virtues — empathy, grace, truth, knowledge — all themselves become needless luxuries and unaffordable indulgences.’

To some extent, in this harsh depiction, Haque was playing devil’s advocate. But his point was clear. Many of us are struggling and perhaps tempted to protect and preserve what we have, in our own limited spheres; and woe betide anyone who gets in our way.

However, rather than feel despair or harden our hearts, an alternative approach is to admit that many of us sometimes feel demoralised, even overwhelmed, and to share that feeling with others. As Haque said:

‘You’re not alone, my friend.’

That may be a small step on a new journey that we all need to take. Because we have to accept that real change is not going to come from our ‘leaders’, but from ourselves.

Consider the rail strikes that have been taking place in the UK. The most overtly right-wing press – the likes of the ‘soaraway Sun’ – [wailed](#) about ‘a return to the 1970s’ driven by ‘[Marxist thugs](#)’. Such defamation is to be expected in the vitriolic pages of the billionaire-owned press.

But how different is this from the more subtle vilification by an ostensibly neutral BBC journalist? On the eve of recent industrial action, Nick Robinson, former BBC political editor and now a Radio 4 Today presenter, [tweeted](#):

Who’s the man behind the strikes which are threatening a week of rail chaos ? Is he a champion of workers who deserve a pay rise or a politically motivated dinosaur ? You decide after listening to my half hour conversation with Mick Lynch [@RMTunion](#) <https://t.co/e7EUtsRsig>

— Nick Robinson (@bbcnickrobinson) [June 16, 2022](#)

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This might appear a relatively minor example. But it is symptomatic of the insidious, endemic anti-working class, anti-trade union stance embedded in BBC News ‘impartiality’. Robinson would never say of a senior Tory leader:

‘Is he a public servant or an oligarchy-serving, greed-driven predator?’

Scale up Robinson's attitudes, shared across leading BBC News presenters and editors, and you get what the BBC represents; indeed, what the BBC is: a [state-affiliated broadcaster](#) relentlessly pitching elite perspectives on domestic and international affairs. Challenges are routinely met with disdain, blanking or [arrogance](#).

'Once You See How The Super Rich Run Everything Solely For Their Own Benefit You Cannot Unsee It'

In his calm, articulate determination to get his points across in recent media interviews, many of them conducted risibly by highly-paid celebrity journalists, RMT union leader Mick Lynch has been a ray of hope for many people.

Speaking live on BBC News from a picket line in London last month, Lynch [said](#):

'The whole country is suffering. And we have got a membership and a trade union that is prepared to fight for what we've got. What the rest of the country suffers from is the lack of power.'

Lynch expanded:

'The lack of the ability to organise and the lack of the wherewithal to take on these employers that are continually driving down wages, and making the working class in this country poorer, year on year on year, while the rich get richer and dividends are accelerated and the stock market is reasonably healthy. We've got full employment and falling wages, and that is a situation that has never happened before and it cannot be tolerated by working people or by the trade union movement.'

In a Sky News interview, the union leader [highlighted](#) the deceptive rhetoric of many businesses:

'What we're seeing here is a smokescreen caused by Covid, and many employers are taking this opportunity. They're using what is a temporary phenomenon - Covid - and the temporary phenomenon of people being told *not* to go to work as a smokescreen to get rid of decent conditions, decent pay rates and decent agreements.'

Making the kind of rational, reasonable points that rarely get an airing on state-corporate 'news' outlets, Lynch added:

'Everybody wants our cities, towns and villages to recover. The way we do that, and one of the most important aspects of that, is by having a decent public transport system that can be relied on, is safe and accessible. Cutting staff, cutting services and cutting funding is the opposite to that, and nobody in our community should tolerate that from this government of billionaires who tell everyone else they've got to tighten their belts while they're raking it in.'

Lynch's assured media performances, particularly when confronted with ludicrous questions, won him praise from many corners. A Guardian piece [observed](#) that the union boss had been 'deft, scornful and effective.'

Political economist Matt Bishop [noted](#):

'What's remarkable about the Mick Lynch coverage is just how rarely we hear

straightforward, working-class lefty union people in mainstream debate. Our media is dominated by a privately educated professional pundit class, their MP and banker chums, and it's all the poorer for it.'

Exactly. Although, of course, it is not 'mainstream' debate. It is a tightly-controlled 'debate' that exists within the severely skewed bias of a state-corporate media, owned and managed by elite interests.

Even Mark Solomons, a former industrial correspondent at the Sun [noted](#) in an article in the right-wing Spectator, that:

'Lynch is currently dominating TV screens and social media, making mincemeat out of politicians and broadcast interviewers alike.'

Solomons added:

'He has stuck to his guns, confounded his opponents, and used simple, plain-talking language. He comes across as a working-class man who has made it to the top of his profession without selling out his principles, someone who makes it quite clear why the union is doing what it is doing irrespective of whether or not we agree with him.'

There was understanding and support from members of the public. An anonymous 53-year-old manager of an NHS mental health team living in south London [blamed](#) the government for the rail strikes:

'I wish the government would meaningfully and consistently fund public infrastructure and the key workers who keep our city and society running. I'm tired of services being cut to the bone, everything being done on the cheap and workers being told to simply work harder to fill the gaps.'

Giles Barret, a 38-year-old owner of a recording studio, [said](#):

'Collective action is the reason we have a weekend, among many other hard-won rights, and we must never stop fighting for them – capital certainly won't.'

And David Ling, a 69-year-old pensioner, also [pointed](#) to the bigger picture behind the rail strikes:

'There's so many problems in this country that are caused by austerity, privatisation and cutbacks that in the end it's gonna be a reaction. It's not just the railway workers – it's teachers and nurses and everything. In the end, something's got to give. You can't carry on cutting back and people scrimping and saving. It doesn't work.'

Barnaby Raine of Novara Media [commented](#) approvingly of Mick Lynch's media performances:

'Our whole media debate is a surreal circus until someone bursts it open.'

An opinion poll [showed](#) that public opinion had shifted dramatically in support of rail strikes following Lynch's media appearances. Previously, support for the strike was at 38%, while opposition to the strike was 43%. [Afterwards](#), support for the strike had risen 7% to 45%, while opposition to the strike had dropped 6% to 37%.

On Twitter, political writer John Traynor provided a potent summary of why Lynch had been so effective at getting his points of view across to the public.

First:

'Lynch knows that what he is saying is both factually correct and consistent. This contrasts with conservative voices who know what they are spouting is [a] pack of lies and drivel, and comically inconsistent.'

Second:

'Lynch understands fully what he is talking about. His knowledge allows him to counter any derisory interruption. This contrasts with conservative voices who know only a few mendacious soundbites with no in depth knowledge, and this causes them to fall.'

Third:

'Lynch speaks sincerely; he believes in all the points he makes. This contrasts with conservative voices who believe in nothing and are just playing a part for money.'

Matthew Todd, author of the best-selling LGBT mental health book, 'Straight Jacket', [said](#) via Twitter that:

'I've worked in the media alongside politicians for 25 years. Once you see how the super rich run everything solely for their own benefit you cannot unsee it. If people understood what lies in store for us they wouldn't be on strike, there would be a revolution [#RailStrikes](#)'

Despite this brief opening in permissible debate around the economy, if Lynch continues to be this effective, then the state-corporate media will revert to type and attempt to crush him, just as they did with Jeremy Corbyn.

The Guardian Is 'A Tool Of The British Establishment'



Indeed, in a recent compelling [interview](#) with Matt Kennard of Declassified UK, Corbyn opened up about the experience he had gone through as Labour Party leader during which he had been the target of arguably the biggest ever propaganda blitz against a British political leader. He was particularly scathing of the Guardian which, long ago, may have been regarded by some as a reliable left-leaning newspaper:

'I have absolutely no illusions in the *Guardian*, none whatsoever. My mum brought me up to read the *Guardian*. She said, "It's a good paper you can trust". You can't. After

their treatment of me, I do not trust the *Guardian*.”

He continued:

‘There are good people who work in the *Guardian*, there are some brilliant writers in the *Guardian*, but as a paper, it’s a tool of the British establishment. It’s a mainstream establishment paper. So, as long as everybody on the left gets it clear: when you buy the *Guardian*, you’re buying an establishment paper.’

Indeed, the *Guardian* and BBC News were central to the establishment’s cynical exploitation of antisemitism allegations to [kill Corbyn’s chances of becoming Prime Minister](#):

‘an analysis of the *Guardian*’s treatment of the time that I was leader of the party needs to be made because they and the BBC had more unsourced reporting of anti-semitic criticisms surrounding me than any other paper, including the *Mail*, *The Telegraph* and the *Sun*.’

As for the British media as a whole:

‘We have a supine media in this country. The British self-confidence of saying we’ve got the best media in the world, the best broadcasting in the world, the best democracy in the world. It’s nonsense, utter, complete nonsense. We have a media that’s supine, that self-censors, that accepts D-Notices, doesn’t challenge them, and the vast majority of the mainstream media haven’t lifted so much as a little finger in support or defence of Julian Assange.’

Today, Labour has a new ‘leader’ who is trying as hard as possible to stifle left policies and voices within the party, dragging it relentlessly towards the right; or what Sir Keir Starmer calls the ‘centre ground’. In an Observer [opinion piece](#), ‘Labour has now claimed the centre ground – and has shown it can win’, this Blairite establishment stooge boasted:

‘Since the horror of the last general election, we have rolled up our sleeves and focused on listening to the public and changing our party. We’ve rooted out the poison of antisemitism, shown unshakeable support for Nato, forged a new relationship with business, shed unworkable or unaffordable policies and created an election machine capable of taking on the [Conservatives](#). Being able to win again has taken more than two years of hard graft from all those who ache to see the transformation a Labour government would bring the country we love.’

As political writer Steve Topple [noted](#), Starmer’s comments were largely ‘vacuous dross and detached from reality’. In particular:

‘Labour has “shed unworkable or unaffordable policies” but with no clear reference to what these are. Clearly, it’s those [promises he made during the Labour leadership election](#). Remember those? The talk of nationalisation of industries and services? We can now categorically see that Starmer’s pledges were nothing short of manipulation of party members. This is despite the fact that with things like [rail renationalisation](#), the public consistently supports it.’

A ‘Bent’ System Of Government

Peter Osborne, former political editor at the Spectator and former Daily Telegraph chief

political commentator, recently [warned](#) of the rising oligarchical nature of politics in the UK, whether Conservative or Labour:

‘You would hope that in a well-managed democracy the purpose of political power was to challenge the super-rich, make sure they didn’t get what they wanted. Under [Boris] Johnson, political power has been a vehicle for the super-rich to make sure that they do get what they want.’

Oborne offered this damning verdict on our supposed ‘free press’:

‘The second element of Johnson is that the media class and the political class have merged in Downing Street; they are the same thing. And so all the stuff which we as journalists get taught at journalism school – it’s the task of the press to hold government to account, and there is a sort of separation of powers – is no longer the case. There has been a merger.’

Oborne called Johnson ‘the billionaire’s bitch’. Why? First, because Johnson was, before he announced his [resignation](#) as Tory leader on 7 July, dependent on billionaire donors to the Tory party who saw him – until recently, at least – as the best option to represent their interests:

‘You can see what they want is access to power, it’s contracts – we saw this with Covid when Tory donors were rewarded endlessly.’

Second, because Johnson has curried favour with billionaire newspaper proprietors, such as the Barclay brothers, owners of the Telegraph, and Rupert Murdoch, owner of the Times and the Sun.

In an [article](#) titled, ‘Boris Johnson is finished. But will the rotten system that created him fall too?’, Oborne pointed out:

‘The Murdoch Press, Associated Newspapers and the Telegraph group control approximately three quarters of the newspaper reading market. These three groups have been central to Johnson’s success.

‘Every title in all these groups supported Johnson’s bid for the Tory leadership, his 2019 general election campaign, and through last month’s vote of confidence. Throughout all of this they played down the corruption, fabrication, scandal, cronyism, law-breaking and incompetence of the Johnson government.’

Oborne found some hope in democratic pressures at last having some effect:

‘Very late in the day the reputational damage of sticking with Johnson has struck home. The newspapers, finally scared of their readers, are running for cover. On Wednesday, Rupert Murdoch’s Times belatedly [pulled the plug](#) – “The prime minister has lost the confidence of his party and the country. He should quit now”.’

Faced with the prospect of crumbling support from even the right-wing press, together with multiple [resignations](#) across government, Johnson finally bowed to the inevitable and resigned as Tory leader, while remaining as Prime Minister until a new leader can be elected in the autumn.

What will happen next? Osborne warns that nothing much will change:

‘The global super-rich are looking for a British prime minister who will look after their interests without the reputational damage. Ex-chancellor Sunak, now the bookies’ favourite, looks like their choice.

‘A near-billionaire himself, he at least has no incentive to take bribes. But he’s been at the heart of the bent Johnson system of government for almost three years, [repeating the prime minister’s lies](#) and tolerating his incompetence, bigotry and incessant sleaze.’

Whether Sunak or someone else takes over, [warned](#) Osborne:

‘The next Tory leader will almost certainly pursue the same policies as Johnson.

‘On Brexit. On civil liberties. On the Human Rights Act. The same English nationalism and cheap, ugly, vicious populism.’

He added:

‘Remember that all the leading candidates in the leadership contest served in Johnson’s cabinet. They supported his policies, and in many cases [repeated his lies](#).’

As for Keir Starmer, Knight Commander of the Order of Bath, Osborne is [scathing](#), pointing out that the politician ‘dishonestly’ represented himself as coming from the left when bidding to become Corbyn’s successor. Since Starmer was elected Labour leader, he has been ‘trying to buy into the Blair model’ of relying on donors, appeasing newspaper proprietors, ‘ruthlessly’ excluding the trade unions, and indeed [attacking the left](#), notably Stop the War and any Labour MPs critical of Nato:

‘He made a choice to define himself not against Boris Johnson, the billionaire’s person. He decided to define himself as not being Jeremy Corbyn. That was the classic Blairite pivot. Blair chose to win by sucking up to Rupert Murdoch, and sucking up to the billionaires, and Starmer appears to be doing just the same thing.’

Osborne predicts that, if Starmer ever becomes Prime Minister, all he would be is ‘maybe a more scrupulous version of Boris Johnson’; in other words, ‘a slightly softer version of oligarchical politics.’

If the public is to get what it supports and deserves – not least a basic standard of living, and a rational and urgent response to the [climate crisis](#) – we all need to take action now.

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