

The News Media Offers Wall-to-wall Propaganda Every Day. The Death of Prince Philip

We Only Notice When a Royal Dies

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

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A few lessons to be learnt from the wall-to-wall coverage of Prince Philip's death in the British media:

1. There is absolutely no commercial reason for the media to have dedicated so much time and space to the Prince's death. The main commercial channel ITV, which needs eyeballs on its programmes to generate income from advertising, saw a [60 per cent drop](#) in viewing figures after it decided to broadcast endless forelock-tugging. Audiences presumably deserted to Netflix and Youtube, where the mood of “national mourning” was not being enforced. Many viewers, particularly younger ones, have no interest in the fact that a very old man just died, even if he did have lots of titles.

The UK is one of the world's most propagandised nations on the planet.

Just look at the top of the [@BBCNews](#) website or the major 'newspapers' today.
[pic.twitter.com/mv9si3863X](https://twitter.com/mv9si3863X)

— Media Lens (@medialens) [April 10, 2021](#)

The BBC, the state broadcaster, similarly ignored the wishes of its audiences, commandeering all of its many channels to manufacture and enforce the supposedly national mood of grief. That even went so far as placing banners on the CBBC channel for children encouraging them to forgo their cartoons and switch to the BBC's main channel paying endless, contrived tributes to Philip. The resulting outpouring of anger was so great the BBC was forced to open a dedicated complaints form on its website. It then had to hurriedly [remove it](#) when the establishment threw a wobbly about viewers being given a chance to object to the BBC's coverage.

BBC inundated with complaints over 'too much' Prince Philip coverage
<https://t.co/1t7YfTyQCr>

— The Independent (@Independent) [April 10, 2021](#)

2. The BBC is reported to have heavily invested in coverage of Philip's death for fear that otherwise it would face a barrage of criticism from Britain's rightwing press for showing insufficient patriotism and revealing a supposed "leftwing bias". That was what apparently happened when the BBC failed to [grovel](#) sufficiently to the royal family over the Queen Mother's death in 2002. But if that is the case, doesn't it simply underscore how vulnerable the supposedly "neutral" state broadcaster is to pressure from the rightwing billionaire owners of the establishment media?

If Rupert Murdoch and company can force the BBC into alienating and antagonising many of its own viewers with endless homilies to a royal little loved by large sections of the population, how else is the BBC's coverage being skewed for fear of the potential backlash from corporate media tycoons? Is the fear of such repercussions also responsible for the BBC's complicity in the recent, evidence-free smearing of a socialist Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, or the BBC's consistent failures in reporting honestly on countries like Syria, Libya, Iraq and Venezuela – all of them in the oil-rich regions of the Middle East and Latin America that the United States and the west demand control over?

If the BBC makes its editorial decisions based on what rightwing and far-right newspaper tycoons think is good both for the country and for the world, then how is the BBC not equally rightwing?

3. The BBC is also reportedly afraid that, if it is not seen to be deferential enough to the royal family, it risks being punished by the ruling Conservative party, which regards the institution of the monarchy as sacrosanct. The BBC's licence fee and wider funding – which need government approval – might be in jeopardy as a result.

But that is no less troubling than that the BBC is kowtowing to billionaire media magnates. Because if the ruling Conservative party can wield a stick sufficiently big to dictate to the BBC how and to what extent it covers Philip's death, why can the government not also bully the BBC into giving it an easy ride on its failures to deal with Covid and its cronyism in awarding Covid-related contracts?

At what point does the UK officially become a banana republic? At the point when its health secretary awards a massive contract for medical supplies to his former neighbour and pub landlord? <https://t.co/9DPiVXj5DB>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [November 27, 2020](#)

Similarly, if the BBC is quite so craven, why can the ruling party not also intimidate it into ignoring the biggest current assault on journalism: Washington's relentless efforts to imprison for life Wikileaks founder Julian Assange after he exposed US war crimes?

And what would there be to stop Tory leader Boris Johnson from arm-twisting the BBC into ignoring the rampant racism documented in his own party and pressuring the state broadcaster instead into presenting the Labour party as riddled with antisemitism, even though figures show that Labour has less of a problem with racism than wider British society and the Tories?

And there is the rub. Because that is exactly what the BBC has been doing, serving as little

more than a propaganda channel for the right.

That same fear of the ruling Conservative party might explain why the BBC keeps filling its top posts, and its most influential editorial jobs, with stalwarts of the right. Most egregiously that includes the BBC's new chairman, Richard Sharp, who is not only one of the Tory party's biggest donors but helped to fund a firm accused of "human warehousing" – stuffing benefit recipients into "rabbit hutch" flats – to profit from a Conservative government scheme.

New BBC chair Richard Sharp is not only a major donor to the Conservative party but he helped to fund a firm accused of 'human warehousing', stuffing benefit recipients into 'rabbit hutch' flats to profit from a Conservative government scheme <https://t.co/nR4wOeZozv>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [February 26, 2021](#)

It would also explain the appointment in 2013 as head of BBC news of James Harding, a Murdoch loyalist and former Times editor who vowed that he and his newspaper were unabashedly "pro-Israel". It would explain too why Sarah Sands, editor of the unabashedly rightwing Evening Standard, was seen as suitable to serve as editor of the Radio 4's morning news programme, Today.

4. The truth is that these factors and more have played a part in ensuring there have been only wall-to-wall tributes to Prince Philip. Corporate media is not there simply to make quick profits. Sometimes, it is seen by its billionaire owners as a loss-leader. It is there to generate a favourable political and social climate to help corporations accrete ever greater power and profits.

Manufacturing the pretence of patriotic solidarity in a time of supposed national loss or calamity; cultivating a reverence for tradition; promoting unquestioning respect for socially constructed authority figures; reinforcing social hierarchies that normalise grossly offensive wealth disparities is exactly what establishment media is there to do.

Is the worst our corporate media has to say about Prince Philip that he could have a 'gruff exterior'? Why is the supposedly 'liberal-left' Guardian offering page after page of homily? Could his death not have been wrapped up in one story, leaving it to the redtops to grovel? pic.twitter.com/IUAyf8XzqM

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [April 10, 2021](#)

The corporate media, from the rightwing Daily Mail to the supposedly liberal BBC and Guardian, is there to make the patently insane – mourning an entitled man most of us knew little about and what little we did know made us care even less for him – seem not only natural but obligatory. To refuse to submit to compulsory grieving, to state that Philip's death from old age is less important than the deaths of tens of thousands of people in the UK who lost their lives early from the pandemic, is not rudeness, or heartlessness, or a lack of patriotism. It is to cling to our humanity, to prize our ability to think and feel for ourselves, and to refuse to be swept up in a carnival of hollow emotion.

And most important of all, it is to sense – however briefly – that the wall-to-wall propaganda we are being subjected to on the death of a royal may look exceptional but is in fact entirely routine. It is simply that in normal times the propaganda is better masked, wrapped in the illusion of choice and variety.

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This essay first appeared on Jonathan Cook's [blog](#).

Jonathan Cook won the Martha Gellhorn Special Prize for Journalism. His books include "Israel and the Clash of Civilisations: Iraq, Iran and the Plan to Remake the Middle East" (Pluto Press) and "Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair" (Zed Books). His website is www.jonathan-cook.net.

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