

Starmer: Government Has Dragged Its Feet On Levelling The Playing Field Between Tech Platforms And News Organisations

Op ed for Journalism Matters by Leader of the Labour Party Sir Keir Starmer

Impartial, responsible journalism is a cornerstone for a healthy, secure democracy. It must be protected.

Journalism matters because it tells of the struggles and successes of people and communities across our country, providing a common thread. It informs the public on crucial issues like the cost of living crisis, and the reality of life in communities outside of our own. It uncovers scandals. It shines light on global issues like climate change. We are fortunate to enjoy the impartial and free press we have in this country.

If any of that was ever in doubt, the last momentous year has shown the importance of journalists who have chronicled our national story. From coverage of people coming together across the country to celebrate the Late Queen's Platinum Jubilee, to the national mourning of her recent passing. From campaigning journalism uncovering abuses of power and holding those responsible to account, to uniting the nation in cheering our sporting prowess. Our athletic triumphs in the Birmingham Commonwealth Games were marked in all four corners of the UK, and little girls everywhere realised that they too could be Lionesses on the world stage, thanks to our free press.

Journalism is far from easy work. We've seen countless reports by British journalists and broadcasters this year, bravely risking their lives to tell the truth and challenge Russian misinformation about Putin's barbaric war in Ukraine.

And yet, despite the heightened importance of their vocation, journalists across the world face an increasing array of threats and intimidation designed to silence them. These crude and dangerous attempts at censorship are an attack on us all and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

Labour will take a different stance when it comes to national broadcasters and local newspapers. The UK's proud history of impartial journalism is being put under threat by the Tories' politicisation of our media landscape. Their attacks on British news institutions are a stain on the fabric of British culture. My Labour government will free the BBC from party political meddling, and we oppose the privatisation of Channel 4.

And the Tories' refusal to engage adequately with local newspapers and radio is short sighted and disrespectful. Speaking to local papers when touring the country is an important way for me to not only convey our message, but to learn what local people are worried about, what they need, and what they aspire for.

This is not just about culture and a vital free press. The creative industries and the pipelines for talent they nurture, are a driver of economic growth in lots of cities around the UK.

I also recognise that the landscape is changing. Big tech platforms now dominate the online advertising market, to the detriment of consumers, potential rivals, and newspapers. The way the government has dragged its feet on levelling the playing field between big tech platforms and news organisations,

threatens the sustainability of journalism. Paralysed with chaos, action on this vital issue to secure a sustainable future for journalism is stuck in a legislative logjam.

In the platform age, it's only fair that creators are fairly rewarded for their work and not just the platforms that profit from it. That's why we support moves to make platforms pay for news content and to give newspapers and publishers greater control of their data and content. The government must act to secure the future of our media.

Labour is proud of our country, and the journalists who report on our daily life. They have a crucial job in holding us to account, and a special trusted place in the life of the nation. We will always be committed to ensuring a sustainable, secure future for our media.