

Our partisan press: does it matter to journalism or politics?

UPDATED: To mention the Sun's interesting decision to back the SNP in its Scottish edition and the Tories in its English edition. See end of article.

[This is the full version of [an article that first appeared in The Guardian](#)]

Is anyone really still surprised how far our newspapers will go to back their chosen political party? What was shocking about today's [Daily Telegraph Tory election leaflet of a front page](#) was not that it had been organised by Conservative Central Office. It's that they think it might work.

The full page splash 'exclusive' revealed how [5,000 small business people backed Conservative economic policy](#). 'Wow', you think, 'fancy that! In that case I'm voting Conservative!'

The Daily Telegraph

telegraph.co.uk

Exclusive letter to The Telegraph from 5,000 small business owners who helped to get the economy moving again

'Businesses like ours have helped to create 1,000 jobs a day since 2010. We would like to see David Cameron and George Osborne given the chance to finish what they have started. A change now would be far too risky'



By Peter Dumbikow
Political Editor

THE Conservatives today received a strong endorsement from British businesses after the leaders of 5,000 small companies signed a letter backing David Cameron and warning that Labour would pose a risk to the economic recovery. The firms, which employ nearly 114,000

people across the country, state in an exclusive letter to the Daily Telegraph that they "would like to see David Cameron and George Osborne given the chance to finish what they have started". In a major endorsement 10 days before the general election, the businesses praise Conservative economic plans and say that the Tories are "generously committed to making sure Britain is open for business".

The firms, from every region of the UK, say the Conservatives' commitment to low taxes has helped "to get the economy moving again", creating 1,000 jobs a day since 2010. The letter is designed to counter Labour claims that the Conservatives are focused only on supporting big business.

Ed Milliband said earlier in his party's early April broadcast the more than 100 company bosses who signed a letter to the Daily Telegraph warning that a Labour government would "blotter

the works since, Mr Milliband has sought to open dividing lines by claiming the Conservatives are the party of the wealthy, and only Labour backs working people.

Mr Cameron launched a fightback yesterday following claims that the Tory campaign had lured pensioners.

The Prime Minister insisted "strong and stable government" was the key to Britain's future. He made clear that he will use the remaining days until the May 7 vote to focus on the economy, and the threat of a Labour government dependent on support from the SNP.

He said that "nothing matters more" than Britain's economic security and that Labour can take its criticism of the Tory campaign and "stick it where the sun don't shine". Mr Cameron said that "more jobs,

INSIDE
Reports 2/21/15
Comment 2/17
ONLINE
Letter in full and the signature
telegraph.co.uk

and more security in retirement" are policies that "require millions more".

He said: "If you want political theatre, go to Hollywood. If you want political excitement maybe you could go to Greece. That's an exciting country, I am told, I don't think that's exciting. I think that's terrifying. What excites me is the idea of being able to say to another person 'you've got a job', being able to say 'you're coming off sick'."

"What excites me is seeing young people get the keys to their first flat. That's the excitement we need, it's about continuing with a plan that works."

The letter, which coincides with the launch of the Conservatives' small business manifesto, was organised by Business Brady, the star of the Apprentice and a Conservative peer.

right across the country. We work hard, make sacrifices and invest our own money to help our businesses grow and succeed."

"I was tough during the recession, but we kept going. This Conservative-led Government has been generously committed to making sure Britain is open for business."

"They've managed to get the economy moving again by tackling the deficit, helping to keep interest rates low and inflation down. We've been helped by their steps to lower taxes, reduce red tape, simplify employment law and get the banks lending."

The letter adds: "We would like to see David Cameron and George Osborne given the chance to finish what they have started. A change now would be far too risky and would undo all the good work of the last five years."

Writing in the Daily Telegraph, Business Brady wrote that "Ed Milliband and

a business". She writes: "If Labour got into government and started working our economy again, many more businesses would struggle and jobs would be lost."

"It doesn't bear thinking about. David Cameron and the Conservatives have a clear plan for this country which is already taking us in the right direction."

Signatories to the letter include Glenn Cooper, the managing director of ABC Access, a business in the North West that makes hairbrushes, and Paul Fisher, a founder of Brilliance Business in Birmingham, which provides advice and helps to provide finance for start-ups.

The letter, *The Telegraph* said, was organised by Apprentice star, West Ham chairman and Tory peer Karren Brady. Some people on twitter then got very excited because a simple check revealed that the document had, in fact, been prepared by 'CCHQ-Admin'.

Your 5 steps to see how Conservative Party HQ left their fingerprint on 'Bosses' letter to The Daily Telegraph.

1 Go to Telegraph story

2 Click to see signatories

3 Save the pdf to your computer

4 Right-click on pdf & select 'properties'

5 And there you have it! 'Author: CCHQ-Admin'

So what? At every election our fiercely independent [sic] newspapers take a party line and pursue it with varying degrees of rigour and veracity. This morning's *Mirror* was just as enthusiastic in service of Ed Miliband and his rent freeze proposal. So this is not new and it is not just a right-wing thing.

Britain's newspapers are clearly partisan and some more than others. *The Independent* has drifted left-wards to join *The Guardian* and the *Mirror*, although the bulk of sales and online traffic is garnered by newspapers who want a Conservative victory. Richard Desmond's *Express* has gone even further and backed Ukip. Some papers, like Rupert Murdoch's *Times*, swing both ways in their coverage, even when their party allegiance is declared.

This is all very transparent. Any *Sun* or *Mail* reader, for example, who doesn't realise that their papers have a political point of view is beyond help. Out there on the social networks everyone is a media critic so these Pravda style gestures are relentlessly pilloried. The evidence seems to be that the political Twitter tribes cancel themselves out. They are even more partisan than the papers. But the effect of all that online calling out of servile articles does mean that the rising public scepticism about journalists and politicians is amplified.

Propaganda Piece

So I am not sure that anyone beyond the core vote of the Tory party will be swayed by such a crass piece of propaganda. In this election it seems that undecided voters are deeply mistrustful of the big parties and mainstream politicians. So it seems silly to treat them like sheep to be rounded up.

There are signs that the newspapers – including the *Telegraph* – realise this. *The Guardian* is a pioneer in data journalism and interactive, live political coverage. But all the papers now have lots of online political journalism that gives you a much better range of opinion, information and sources than you would find in the hard-copy paper. *The Telegraph* has even teamed up with Vote Match to provide an app to help you work out how to vote without treating you like an idiot.

Of course, the biases are still there. *The Sun*'s lively digital election offering *Sunnation* is very engaging and plays well across different online platforms, but while it is often funny and insightful, it is still unmistakably right-wing.

Compare that to the BuzzFeed which is targeting a similarly youthful market. It has hired a talented bunch of budding political hacks who are churning out a wide range of content including serious interviews with party leaders as well as polls, jokes and photo-led list-style pieces on odder aspects of the campaign. Yes, they loved the #milifandom thing. They include a lot of perspectives but the editorial line is non-partisan.



POLITICS



Ed Miliband And Boris Johnson Just Had A Massive Row On Live TV And People Loved It

Was this a taste of a future PMQs?

posted on April 26, 2015, at 11:29 a.m.



Emily Ashton
BuzzFeed News Reporter



I don't mind that our newspapers have a point of view. We have a mainstream media ecology that still offers a real choice. Don't forget that the biggest source of political information for the public is still the much more 'balanced' broadcasters. But I do think that the papers need to grow up. Even Lord Leveson thought that we have some of the best political journalism in the world. We are not making the most of their talents if we put them in a strait-jacket of party loyalty. Leave that to the politicians scrambling for votes.

Paper sales are falling and so is their influence. The parties don't even bother with daily press conferences during election campaigns anymore. If our news brands want to remain relevant then they need to ditch the party press releases and stage the honest debate that our politicians are so keen to avoid.

UPDATE: 30.4.15

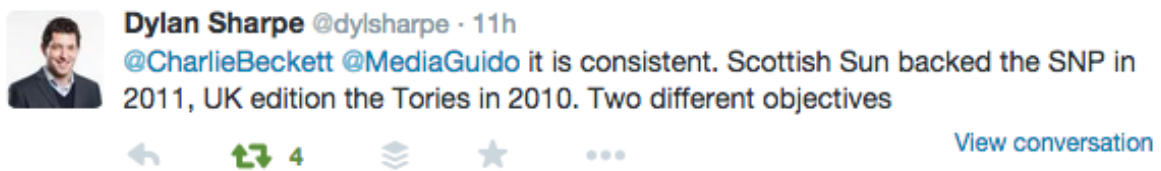
The Sun has decided – and don't think for a second that the decision wouldn't be cleared by London and therefore have to pass the Rupert Murdoch Approval Test – to back the SNP in Scotland and the Conservatives in England. On the face of it this appears to be contradictory.



But the Sun's managing director took to twitter to counter criticism of this:



And their press person pointed out that they have done it before:



Indeed, here are those previously 'devolved' front pages:



The difference this time, of course, is that the SNP is now on track not just to rule over Sun readers in Scotland but to have a decisive factor in the government for those who enjoy the Sun in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Normally the Sun likes to back a winner because it is a popular, not niche paper. But this time it is intervening in a complex political equation. Backing the SNP will play well in Scotland and a strong SNP hurts Labour. However, a strong socialist SNP that has the whip hand over a minority Labour government might mean we end up with more lefty policies for the whole of the UK including a tougher line on media regulation and ownership. Of course, the Tories might win...

My point would be that this is clever marketing from the Sun. Few Scottish readers will go online and spot the bifurcation. Even fewer will care. In the end I would repeat the point of the above article. Telling your readers how to vote looks increasingly old-fashioned and patronising.

More [commentary on media and the General Election here](#)

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