

August 2017

# FREELANCE

## A close look at the election

THE QUESTION before the July meeting of London Freelance Branch was: what trends can we identify in media coverage of the election campaign? Tim Gopsill – our Branch Secretary and also editor of *Free Press* ([www.cpb.org.uk/freepress/](http://www.cpb.org.uk/freepress/)) introduced our speaker.

Tim noted that the reason our other hoped-for speaker couldn't make it was "a symptom of the world we find ourselves in": Eleanor Penny and everyone else at Novara Media was "in the office fighting a Twitter-storm". Novara, Tim observed, "are part of a

big change that has happened in this election... if the spell of the right-wing popular press has not been broken, it's at least been called out."

We were able to welcome Professor Dominic Wring who, with a team at Loughborough University, has closely monitored coverage of elections and a referendum for a quarter century. He was "pleased to be speaking to fellow trades unionists" – he's active in the University and Colleges Union.

Loughborough is one of the UK universities that closely monitor the media. In 1992 the *Guardian* commissioned a report on what was going on, what was reported, what wasn't, and wanted to know how "presidentialised" campaigning was becoming. The team did reports on the 2015 general election and on what turned out to be the Brexit referendum. Their summary of the 2017 election was that it was "a two-horse race



Professor Dominic Wring: Photo: Hazel Dunlop

with no winner". What was striking was the dominance of two parties and the diminution of the Scottish National Party, UKIP and the Lib Dems: we have "not seen such a binary campaign since the Blair era."

Since 2015, Dominic agreed, such outlets as Novara and *The Canary* have given "insurgents" in the Labour Party a voice. Research showed that those over 47 were more likely to vote Tory.

Has age replaced class as a pivotal demographic in political terms, Dominic mused. He observed that the readership of the traditional popular newspapers – the "tabloids" – is largely people in their 50s and 60s. The centre-right newspapers still obviously reach a critical mass of voters.

The team tallied positive, negative and neutral stories about parties and their leaders. Dominic showed a chart of such stories, weighted by

the newspapers' circulations. This showed "mostly a story of papers attacking Labour and ignoring the others" – except in week three of the campaign, with the Tories' "dementia tax" debacle the likely cause of a small net negativity for the Tories and the heat taken off Labour.

It's maybe not surprising that the *Financial Times* was broadly neutral. It is perhaps more surprising that the *Daily Star* was "the most neutral".

In response to questions from the audience we learned that, compared to the 2015 election, what changed this year "was a lack of positivity toward the Tories," while in the 1983 election, Labour leader "Michael Foot did rallies like Corbyn's and lost." Coverage has changed as a result of a hung Parliament: journalists "visibly moved" by the Grenfell Tower disaster seemed to have "relative freedom to editorialise."

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## The Freelance

We are sending this issue of the newsletter of London Freelance Branch to all *Journalist* readers, not least because many of you who are not Branch members will want to see our very brief guide to copyright and the personal liability insurance offer negotiated for members by the NUJ's Freelance Office.

If you want to receive monthly email updates from the *Freelance*, visit [www.londonfreelance.org/linkup](http://www.londonfreelance.org/linkup) – and do visit [www.londonfreelance.org/fl](http://www.londonfreelance.org/fl) to read longer and updated versions of most of these stories.

LFB meetings:

August

no meeting

11 September

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09 October

Trauma

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