

Funding the Future

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I have this morning published another video in my series on what Labour could do almost costlessly now that it is in office. In it, I argue that the UK's libel laws massively limit free speech and proper investigative journalism in this country. That's dangerous for our democracy. Labour needs to change these laws now, and it would cost them nothing.

https://youtu.be/_V5jGR6muQk?si=OzbCkqrBfh1Ay6Q2

The audio version of this video is here:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=r6fpf-166638c-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=c73a3a&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=3267a3

The transcript is:

As anybody who's ever published a YouTube video, put something on TikTok, written a blog post, let alone been a journalist knows, in this country there are exceptionally penal libel laws.

You have to be able to prove what you say is right in the UK. A person who complains about what you've said does not have to prove that you're wrong, you have to prove you are right.

The consequence is exceedingly draconian. In the UK, it is very hard to call out corruption because unless you have emphatic proof that somebody is doing something wrong, you can't even speculate on whether that might be happening or not. People quite literally get away with, well, not quite blue murder, but most certainly with things that should not happen as a result of the libel laws in the UK being far too weighted in

in favour of those with wealth and power who can go to court and bring libel actions against people who are trying to call out what is wrong in society.

Now, most countries in the world don't have libel laws like ours, and they seem to function quite well. For example, the USA does not have libel laws, anything like those in the UK, and so it is possible there to make accusations without having absolute proof, and without the fear of being bankrupted by a libel action.

I'm not calling for a free-for-all and an open day on bringing accusations into the public domain, which would be wholly inappropriate. There must be some limits in place. But the current laws are so biased against fair and open and inquisitive journalism that they have to be wrong. They're there to support the establishment and people within it against the interests of ordinary people and the need for openness to prevent wrongdoing happening.

Labour could change these laws. They could rebalance the system so that there were appropriate checks and balances in place. But fair comment could be raised without the fear of a libel action being brought.

If we value a free press, if we value a free society, if we want to have open debate, we need reformed libel laws. Labour could do that. It will cost them nothing.

Come on Labour, let's do it.