

When will Labour tell Trump where to go?

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As the [Guardian](#) has reported this morning:

Donald Trump has filed a lawsuit against the BBC over its editing of a speech he made to supporters in Washington before they stormed the US Capitol in 2021, requesting up to \$10bn in damages.

The US president alleged the broadcaster “intentionally, maliciously, and deceptively” edited his 6 January speech before the insurrection, in an episode of Panorama just over a year ago.

When Trump first said that he might do this, I suggested his chances of success were minimal. Then lawyers waded in everywhere, and it was clear I had overstated his chances. They thought:

- * His statement of claim was almost meaningless.
- * His chance of success, given that the programme to which the claim refers was not shown in the USA, was incredibly low.
- * His action was out of date (although he has switched to US law to get around that)
- * And his quantum claim for damages, given he won the subsequent election, and as a result clearly suffered no harm, was ludicrous.

I do not think much has changed.

So what is really going on here:

- * There is a far-right political claim to undermine a state broadcaster that the far-right has always hated.
- * The aim is to destabilise by imposing costs for as long as possible, whilst being indifferent to the outcome.

- * The aim is to support GB News, as Trump has explicitly made clear, is his objective.
- * To attack a key part of the infrastructure of the UK state.

Of these, the last is key. If Trump were to win, he would be granted damages of around two years' income of the BBC, ending it as an institution or requiring a UK government bailout to make the payment. It might do both. This, then, is a direct attack on the UK government, and not just the BBC.

We know the BBC's position. It says it made an error of judgment. It does not admit any liability as a result. I strongly suspect that in a UK court, that defence would stand. Errors of judgment happen. They have taken the piece down now. Trump suffered no loss. The story is over. Any wise lawyer would tell Trump that.

In that case, we should assume that this action is not about suing the BBC: the level of claim for damages makes that clear. The BBC could not pay them without gutting itself as an entity, for example, by selling all its commercial operations. So what is it about? I suggest these things:

- * Undermining the UK government.
- * Undermining freedom of speech in the UK.
- * Undermining press freedom, as we are seeing Trump also do in the US.
- * Directly challenging the authority of the UK state.
- * Undermining UK soft power, which has often been associated with the BBC.
- * Undermining the idea of balance that should exist in the BBC, albeit in a flawed fashion right now, which as a result means that the BBC very often portrays views Trump hates.

View this, then, in the context of Trump's war on Europe, which he claims has failing civilisations because of our embrace of migration, and we see the true story of what is happening, which is that this is a direct assault on the UK.

In that case, there are questions for the government to answer:

- * Will the government fund the BBC's defence?
- * If not, why not?
- * Will they defend what the BBC represents?
- * If not, why not?
- * Will they make it clear that the right to free speech might inevitably involve the risk of mistakes occurring, but that responses must be proportionate?
- * If not, why not?

* Will they instead bow down to Trump, and simultaneously sacrifice the BBC and what it represents to many in the UK to Trump?

* If so, why?

I am sure more points could be added. My point is that this is not a fight about a mildly mistaken edit where the gap between statements should have been made clear (and it should have been). It is part of a war on the UK and Europe and its culture. And the question is, will the government defend who we are, and our multicultural society that is under attack from the far-right, or will they give in to it? That is the question we need an answer to. My problem is, I am not expecting an answer, and that troubles me.

When will Labour draw a line in the sand?

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