

## Andrew Neil and the GB News brigade will try to bash indy at every step

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Across the pond, Trump had surpassed himself by refusing to say he would guarantee a peaceful succession if he lost the White House come November 3. Nothing like a bit of overt fascism to get the blood flowing. Yes I know The Donald is a past master at saying outrageous things in a deliberate move to grab the headlines and wrong-foot his opponents – but offering to end the republic seems heavy stuff even for Trump.

Over here, the headlines brought no better news. The march of the New Wave libertarians continues with Boris Johnson seeking to appoint an avowed enemy of the **BBC** (Charles Moore) to be its next chair, and to make the former editor of the Daily Mail, Paul Dacre, head of the public regulator that is supposed to ensure the broadcasting industry and social media are kept within democratic boundaries rather than becoming agents for corporate mind control. Both men are **Brexit** fanatics.

The similarity with Trump's shenanigans could not be closer. These appointments are a British front in the global culture war being unleashed by the libertarian right. Moore, like Jacob Rees-Mogg, pretends to be an old-fashioned Tory reactionary – he was formally the editor of The Daily Telegraph. But this manufactured persona hides a laissez-faire, anti-state libertarian.

In league with the BBC's new, right-wing boss Tim Davie (former head of marketing at PepsiCo), Moore plans two coups. First to remove the Beeb as a tax-funded competitor to private, mostly American media platforms. And secondly to neuter what he claims is the BBC's liberal, Oxbridge cultural bias and turn the corporation into a conservative mouthpiece or (more probably) reduce it to a subscription service in order to destroy it totally.

Another straw in the wind is the decision by Andrew Neil to quit the BBC after a quarter of a century to head up a new TV channel called GB News. Think a British version of Fox News, though perhaps a tad more sophisticated. GB News is being fronted by Robbie Gibb, **Theresa May**'s former head of communications (you get the bias already). Gibb is telling everyone that GB News is aimed at people who believe the BBC has become too "woke". Surprise, surprise: GB News has already been licensed by Ofcom – and that's before Paul Dacre has arrived as regulator-in-chief.

Let's dig a bit deeper into GB News. An independent voice in the news business it is definitely not. GB News is owned by a new company called All Perspectives Ltd, which in turn is controlled by two associates (Andrew Cole and Mark Schneider) of the US libertarian billionaire John Malone, aka "the cable cowboy".

Apart from being the single biggest private landowner in America, Malone owns Liberty (the name is no accident), a frontrunner in the corporate struggle to control the global airwaves.

Among lots of other brands, Liberty also owns Virgin Media and the Discovery television network. Discovery is putting up the cash for GB News.

Malone was a big contributor to Donald Trump's inauguration festivities back in 2017. Since then, he has had second thoughts about the chaos The Donald leaves in his wake. Last year, Malone was touting fellow billionaire Michael Bloomberg for president. With Bloomberg out of the race, it remains to be seen which way Malone will jump. Malone is on the board of the libertarian Cato Institute, which wants to abolish most taxes, scrap the US central bank, and generally dissolve the state. Meanwhile, Malone is moving to dominate UK media as part of his "libertarian" agenda. Which means GB News will have deep pockets.

ALREADY GB News is in the process of hiring more than 100 journalists in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. And now it has Andrew Neil as its main TV anchor. I worked for Neil in my Scotsman days. No-one should underestimate Mr Neil, his broadcasting professionalism, or his political nose.

If we get a second **independence** referendum any time soon, expect Neil and GB News to try and make its reputation by attacking the indy side day and night. If you thought the BBC was biased, wait till you see GB News report Scotland.

Here in Scotland, we have been relatively sheltered from the libertarian culture wars that are sweeping America and now polluting England. Our own right-wingers are comparatively sane by comparison. The philosophical weight of the Scottish Enlightenment means that political debate in Scotland is still referenced using logic, empirical evidence, and the belief we are all (to some extent) democrats. But this level playing field is being destroyed in the global culture wars and replaced by a semi-fascist view on the libertarian right that the public institutions of democracy created after the Second World War are part of the problem.

The libertarian media billionaires and city hedge fund moguls have embraced the ideology of libertarianism – an extreme aversion to state regulation in any form – because such regulation stops them shaping the world as they choose. Regulation means limits on what the likes of John Malone can do with his two million acres of land or his ownership of the global airwaves.

But why is libertarianism – which as an ideology has been around for a long time – making such ground now? One reason is that both global communications and global finance have captured the internet, thus escaping the boundaries of the nation state. The owners and profiteers of the internet are no longer bound by national considerations. They want it to stay that way.

Fortunately, here in Scotland we are still living our own "national" revolution. Here the Enlightenment vision still holds of creating an independent nation bound by laws voted on by the people – a land that embraces collective fairness and social justice.

The libertarians are scornful of such a vision. But the pseudo libertarians are crafty. The commentators on GB News will tell Scottish viewers that an independent **Holyrood** will raise their taxes, although most Scots have seen their incomes flatline for a generation under the present UK arrangements. And we will be told we have no right to a second referendum, which just shows that so-called libertarians are a bunch of hypocrites.

The antidote to the virus of libertarianism is democracy – but genuine democracy. The billionaire libertarians tell the people that law, government and wise regulation are a burden that must be abolished. What they mean is that these things are a burden to the billionaire class.

The real way forward is a Scottish democracy where the people have a genuine say in what is spent and how it is spent, and on the running of institutions that affect them directly, such as schools and hospitals. We want a Scottish People's State rather than no state at all.

That includes a media that is pluralist rather than owned by plutocrats such as John Malone, and a media whose regulators are elected – not appointed by Tory politicians from among their cronies.