

Lloyds de-banks *Canary* in fundamental attack on independent media

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Workers, youth and all defenders of democratic rights must demand that Britain's Lloyds Bank immediately reverse its de-banking of left-wing media publication *Canary*.

Canary announced Lloyds' freezing of their account in a statement Tuesday, explaining, "Despite banking with them for almost a decade they are currently withholding a substantial amount of our money. We are left with barely any funds.

"Lloyds has not explained why it has taken this action. Despite multiple communications from us, the bank has not been forthcoming with its reasoning.

"The *Canary* is now in a financially precarious situation. We do not know when our money that Lloyds is holding will be returned. Moreover, we do not know how it will affect our ability to get another bank account in the future."

Launched by former Occupy activist Kerry-Anne Mendoza in October 2015, *Canary* played a prominent role in supporting Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party. It has since become the most widely read left-wing publication in Britain, with more than 231,700 monthly visits in May, according to Semrush, a web analytics and marketing company.

On May 26, with a major cash injection by businessman Cecil Hetherington—founder of Northern Ireland classifieds website Used Cars NI—*Canary* launched a daily "yellow top" print edition, with 20,000 copies distributed across 6,500 newsagents in England and Wales.

Despite *Canary*'s high profile in Britain, its de-banking by Lloyd's met a wall of silence from the mainstream media over the past 48 hours. Only the pro-Scottish independence *National*, business publication *City AM*, and right-wing *GB News* carried news of Lloyds' actions.

Independent *Doubts*, including *Dove*, *Middle East Eye*, *Declassified UK* and *Novara Media*, have condemned Lloyds' actions as a major attack on press freedom and speech.

Robert Stevens, UK editor of the *World Socialist Web Site*, wrote, "Lloyds' de-banking of *Canary* is a major attack on democratic rights—if this stands, all left-wing and independent media are threatened."

Guardian columnist Owen Jones, who recently co-launched media group Zeteo, wrote, "This is really disturbing... a frightening precedent – where banks can pull the plug on media outlets without even saying why."

Peter Osborne, formerly of the *Telegraph*, tweeted: "Massive implications for free speech. Lloyds needs to explain itself and fast."

Canary is the latest victim in a wave of de-banking measures, targeting especially opponents of the Gaza genocide. Prominent Jewish anti-Zionist campaigner Tony Greenstein has suffered repeated de-bankings by HSBC subsidiary First Direct, while signatories for Greater Manchester Friends of Palestine (GMFP) had their personal accounts frozen last year by Yorkshire Building Society (YBS). GMFP's own account was frozen by Virgin Money.

Last May, Postbank, owned by Deutsche Bank, terminated the business account of Mehring Verlag, the German language publishing house of the *World Socialist Web Site* and Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party).

The state's use of the banking system to cripple and silence socialist, anti-war and left-wing journalism was pioneered through the US-led vendetta against WikiLeaks. Years before Julian Assange's frame-up indictment under the Espionage Act in May 2019, WikiLeaks faced coordinated efforts by finance and

tech companies to crush it.

In December 2010, over the course of little more than two weeks, Amazon removed WikiLeaks from its cloud-hosting services; EveryDNS.com stopped providing routing/domain services; PayPal permanently restricted the donation account; MasterCard withdrew payment processing; Visa suspended transactions; and Bank of America ceased processing payments to WikiLeaks.

On Wednesday, *Canary's* Steve Topple told WSWS, “So far, we have not received any further communication from Lloyds relating to why the decision was made. This is since we have gone public with it.

“The immediate effect has been that we have been unable to pay any staff or contractors. We have a large team, and all of them are now extremely distressed and in limbo. Many of them are marginalised people, and it has hit them very hard. We are trying our best to mitigate the situation and have so far received much-appreciated support from members of the public.

“Whilst we do not yet know the reasons for our de-banking, we cannot afford to be naive about it. It is an outrage that the *Canary* has been unceremoniously dropped into financial instability with no notice or explanation from Lloyds. Our situation is a damning indictment of the treatment of independent media in this country—whereby you can be potentially ruined without recourse by banking giants like Lloyds. It also shows just how at risk independent media is at all times.”

Lloyds' de-banking of *Canary* was announced the same day as Labour's National Security States Threats Bill passed through the House of Lords with minor amendment. It criminalises anyone associated with state organisations deemed a threat “to the UK or its interests”, treating them as terrorists, punishable by up to 14 years' imprisonment.



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