

# The Lanyard Class

by [Brian Patrick Bolger](#) (June 2026)



**As the sun set over the** silver River Mersey, two lines of Lowry type people shuffled, in opposite directions, along the Liverpool dock front. Here stands the epochal Royal Liver Buildings, The Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building, built in Italian renaissance and Edwardian Baroque, symbolising the era of British industry and maritime brilliance. Strange then that further down the skyline, in a garish one style fits all bowl-shaped conference centre, was the Labour Party Conference. On one side of the road the meandering attendees plodded back and forth. In the centre of

the road a Police fence as long as the docks, separated the people. The group on the city side were heading off to an Everton football match and there was a constant drone of abuse aimed across the divide. The party which introduced deindustrialisation, cancelled free speech and demonstrations and settled thousands of aimless illegal immigrants into the city, was about as welcome as Harry and Meghan at a Royal Banquet.

There was no difficulty spotting the Labour people. They were like identical caricatures from a modern Vanity Fair. Marks and Spencer's shirts and ties, and the men with the requisite bearded countenance (also a '*marqueur de classe*' of the British Policeman these days). But that is not enough for the new class. They seemed aloof, unable to speak, and walked staring sullenly into mobile phones. The party of Labour had no interaction with the working-class locals. There were even signs banning Labour people from many city centre pubs. The entire scene, like an eerie doomscape resembled Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, the dystopian science fiction classic set between Anarres and Urras. In arid Anarres, the dispossessed sat behind the wall separating the two, whilst in Urras, an authoritarian state, a bureaucratic elite and Universities controlled the output of knowledge.

Now Burnham spoke of 'The Managerial Class,' Milova Dilas spoke on the 'New Class.' They shared a common theme, whether in the Capitalist West or Tito's Communist Yugoslavia. That is the class becomes self-serving and loses its ideological background. The main requisite is consolidating power and privilege. Drab, bureaucratic civil servants, like Blair, Mandelson and Starmer, flock to this set up. In Britain I call them the 'Lanyard Class.' Without having any intellectual or artistic substance, the Lanyard Class always wears the 'Lanyard.' It is the status symbol of the Civil Service. From rug chewing office dwellers to primary school teachers, the Lanyard is the face of modern Britain. It is a liberal

fetishcit says "I'm righteous" and "I'm anti-fascist." But they must be seen to be righteous. Liberalism works on its performative gestures. Liberalism envelopes the entire personas of these people.

They can be identified long before they speak, long before they produce the departmental jargon, long before they invoke "stakeholders," "frameworks," or "best practice." They announce themselves semiotically. Around the neck hangs the sign of office: the Lanyard.

The Lanyard, in itself, is an absurd object. It is merely a strip of fabric carrying a plastic card granting access to a building of mediocre architectural quality somewhere in Westminster, Croydon, Salford, or Canary Wharf. Yet its symbolic function is disproportionate to its material value. The Lanyard is not worn because it is useful. It is worn because it signifies membership within a bureaucratic order. It is an insignia of procedural authority. Starmer tells us that 'Pakistanis are the face of modern Britain.' It is certainly not the Union Jack anymore. It is the Lanyard. What is striking is that the authority signified by the Lanyard is frequently hollow. The contemporary administrative state is crowded with middle-ranking officials whose practical power is minimal, whose social prestige is ambiguous, and whose relation to production is indirect or non-existent. Yet through signs, rituals, language, and institutional theatre, a form of symbolic importance is manufactured and sustained. This is the "Lanyard Class": the managerial-bureaucratic stratum of contemporary Britain whose identity rests not upon ownership, craftsmanship, or statesmanship, but upon procedural legitimacy and symbolic markers of institutional belonging.

To understand this phenomenon, one must begin with Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the sign. Saussure distinguished between the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the external form; the word, symbol, image, or object, while the

signified is the concept associated with it. Crucially, Saussure argued that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. There is nothing naturally "dog-like" about the word "dog." Meaning arises socially and relationally. The Lanyard operates precisely in this manner. There is nothing intrinsically authoritative about a strip of nylon carrying an ID badge. Yet within contemporary bureaucratic culture it signifies competence, access, professionalism, procedural power, and institutional relevance. The wearer becomes legible as a participant in the machinery of governance. The Lanyard says: "I belong to the apparatus." Look at me, I'm important.

But the arbitrariness of the signifier becomes important when the signified itself becomes unstable. The authority signified by the Lanyard is increasingly detached from practical competence or substantive achievement. The symbolic system survives even as the underlying reality weakens. One sees this throughout the British administrative landscape. Vast bureaucratic ecosystems proliferate around compliance, diversity management, communications strategy, regulatory coordination, behavioural insight, and stakeholder engagement. Entire careers are built not upon producing material goods or exercising sovereign decision-making, but upon navigating procedural environments. The symbolic order becomes self-referential. The bureaucratic process itself becomes the source of legitimacy.

The Lanyard is therefore less an instrument than a credential of inclusion within Milovan Djilas' "The New Class." Djilas used this term to describe the bureaucratic-managerial elite of communist systems, the administrative strata who, while not formally owning property, exercised control over institutions, resources, and ideological legitimacy. Contemporary Britain is not quite communist yet, but it has nevertheless produced its own managerial-administrative Brahmin caste whose power derives from organisational process, accreditation, and

procedural control rather than traditional bourgeois ownership. The Lanyard Class differs from the older civil service traditions of Britain. The old administrative elite possessed a conception of statecraft, continuity, and institutional duty. The new bureaucratic order is therapeutic, managerial, and performative. It is obsessed with process because process itself is its source of identity.

This explains the peculiar symbolic inflation surrounding bureaucratic markers. Meetings, workshops, consultations, inclusion forums, policy roundtables, safeguarding modules, and mandatory trainings become ritual acts through which bureaucratic status is reaffirmed. The British army spends more time on *'How to Spot Racism in the Army,'* than physically training to fight wars. The Lanyard functions as the visible sacramental object of this world as the woman from *'Diversity and Inclusion'* introduces Maggie, who will conduct the sessions on *'Meeting the Needs of Transsexuals at Work.'* By the way, charge what you want. Maggie charges 50000 pounds. No matter, the taxpayer is paying.

Clifford Geertz, the anthropologist, in his famous [essay](#) on the Balinese cockfight, argued that the cockfight was not truly about Cocks fighting. Rather, it was a dramatisation of status competition, masculine prestige, hierarchy, and symbolic identity. The Cocks functioned as extensions of their owners' social selves. The spectacle encoded deeper social meanings.

The modern bureaucratic environment functions similarly. The endless circulation of Lanyards, passes, branded mugs, security clearances, departmental acronyms, internal communications platforms, and organisational rituals are not primarily functional. They are symbolic enactments of status within an administrative tribe. Most of the civil service class are adept at spoofing the timesheet. The recent *Telegraph* [exposé](#) into mass idleness within the British Civil Service revealed the contempt with which the Lanyard Class

treats the taxpayer. It shows logging into office Wi-Fi from car parks ("drive-by logins"), then straight home for a well-earned breakfast. Or briefly showing their face in empty offices before going home. Many had not physically attended offices for very long periods and are neither fired or penalised. Related *Telegraph* commentary argued that parts of the Civil Service had become detached from ordinary working norms and overly reliant on remote work arrangements. One young female Civil Servant reported to 'work' dressed as an old man, in trench coat and boiler hat, and said she identified as an 'old man,' –therefore unable to work for long hours in the office.

Lots of free time means more space for sessions on how 'AI Can Help with the Workload.' The meeting is rarely about the meeting. The policy paper is rarely about the policy. The conference badge is rarely about access. These objects and rituals perform social significance. They reassure participants that they belong to an institutional order which matters. The irony, however, is that the symbolic intensity often increases where substantive power declines.

Thus, the Lanyard Class becomes a curious political formation: a managerial caste whose symbolic self-confidence masks institutional insecurity. Its members frequently possess token credentials but lack authority, they have communications strategies but no strategic direction. The Lanyard itself becomes an object of compensatory symbolism. It marks inclusion within the institutional machine at precisely the historical moment when that machine's legitimacy is increasingly questioned. There is also an unmistakable class dimension to this phenomenon. The Lanyard Class occupies an ambiguous social position. It is not traditionally aristocratic, industrial, entrepreneurial, or proletarian. It is credentialed rather than rooted. Its culture is metropolitan, managerial, university-mediated, and linguistically coded through therapeutic and administrative

jargon. They are 'déclassé' in the sense that they don't fit into traditional class analyses.

One can often identify members of this class through linguistic signifiers before observing the physical Lanyard itself. Phrases such as "safe spaces," "lived experience," "stakeholder mapping," "impact pathways," and "facilitating conversations" form part of a broader symbolic system through which bureaucratic identity is performed.

Pierre Bourdieu would immediately recognise these patterns as forms of cultural capital. The Lanyard is not merely an object but a social marker, a visible signifier of institutional legitimacy within a particular status order. Yet the fragility of the signifier remains. Because the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary, it depends entirely upon collective belief. Once the public ceases to associate bureaucratic symbolism with competence or legitimacy, the sign system weakens. This is where modern bureaucratic societies sit. The game is up. You have been rumbled.

This perhaps explains the growing public suspicion toward managerial institutions across the Western world. The symbolic language of bureaucratic legitimacy increasingly collides with perceptions of administrative inefficiency, elite insulation, and procedural paralysis. The signs remain omnipresent while confidence in the signified deteriorates. And still the Lanyards proliferate. One encounters them everywhere: hanging from fleece jackets in railway station coffee queues, draped across conference tables, swinging from the necks of local authority officers, NGO managers, policy consultants, university administrators, and public-sector coordinators. The Lanyard has become the heraldic emblem of procedural Britain. There is an immense amount of shuffling about, signifying nothing.

Its power lies not in utility but in recognition. Like the Balinese cockfight, its deeper meaning is social and symbolic.

The Lanyard-wearer is not merely displaying identification; he is performing institutional belonging. The object says: "I participate in the administration of society." The classic sovereign state, in the Schmittian sense, rested upon the capacity to decide. Carl Schmitt famously defined the sovereign as "he who decides on the exception." The contemporary *British bureaucratic apparatus increasingly avoids decision in favour of process management*. Responsibility dissolves into committees, consultations, impact assessments, guidance notes, and stakeholder exercises. Decision-making fragments while procedural symbolism expands. This of course extends into the higher echelons of the state; to the executive—to the head of Lanyardism: Keir Starmer.

Whether society continues to believe the performance is another matter entirely. Lanyardism abounds now within the woke corporate sphere. Rather than turning a profit, twirling a Lanyard becomes the fetishistic object. Diversity and Inclusion now places incompetence over ability and the result is Britain losing its place at the centre of the financial markets. Yet Lanyardism is spreading. Lanyardism is like a form of the Hantavirus—without the free meals, cocktails and vistas of the Caribbean. It shuttles around the liberal ports of the world emptying its rat cargo onto another hapless outpost.

In a recent *Times* [spectacle](#), an attractive female banker for JP Morgan has been accused of using a male underling as a sex slave in the office. How does that fit with 'Health and Safety'? Did he get a bonus? Does it classify as 'work'? Is this what 'Swaps' means on the financial markets?

But more importantly—was he wearing his Lanyard?

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