

Henry Nowak, The Media and the 'Far-Right' Explanation

By Patrick Keeney

The brutal murder of Henry Nowak should have focused public attention on the circumstances surrounding his death and the troubling questions it raises about justice, race, and social cohesion in contemporary Britain.



Yet one need only read the CBC headline to know that another story is about to be told. "How Britain's far right hijacked the murder of Henry Nowak"

Predictably, the tragedy is being pressed into service as evidence of the supposedly inexorable rise of the “far right” and “white grievance.” The victim, it seems, is of secondary importance.

What truly concerns much of the legacy media is not the murder itself but the possibility that ordinary citizens might draw conclusions that fall outside the approved narrative. Once again, a deeply disturbing event is filtered through a set of ideological assumptions so familiar that the outcome is known before the reporting has even begun.

The most revealing aspect of this story is not the crime itself, however disturbing, but the legacy media’s inability to imagine it meaning anything beyond its established ideological script. The circumstances may change, but the narrative remains reassuringly familiar: another cautionary tale about the rise of the “far right.” The conclusion is already written before the reporting begins.

Predictably, the legacy media appears determined to interpret the controversy through the now-standard lens of right-wing extremism. Whenever social tensions arise around immigration, crime, identity, or unequal treatment under the law, the first instinct is rarely to assess whether the public’s concerns have any merit. Instead, attention immediately shifts to the alleged dangers posed by those raising concerns. The story ceases to be about the underlying issue and becomes about the people noticing it.

What is striking is not merely the persistence of this explanation but the absence of curiosity that accompanies it. The first duty of serious journalism is to ask why people believe what they believe. Increasingly, however, many journalists appear content to attach a label and consider the matter settled. Citizens express concern about immigration levels, and they are said to be flirting with the far right. Voters reject establishment parties, and the far right is

declared resurgent. Parents object to educational policies, communities complain about crime, or workers protest economic dislocation, and once again the familiar spectre is summoned. The conclusion invariably precedes the investigation.

This habit of mind reveals a deeper failure of imagination. It is easier to believe that millions of ordinary people have succumbed to irrational prejudice than to entertain the possibility that governing institutions may have made serious mistakes. For the political class, it is easier to proclaim a moral pathology in the electorate than to consider whether public policies have produced consequences that citizens find intolerable. Easier, in short, to pathologise dissent than to understand it.

The result is a form of intellectual stagnation. Like an academic whose favourite theory explains everything, the legacy media increasingly relies on a shrinking repertoire of concepts that have become detached from reality. The term "far right" has evolved from a descriptive category into a universal solvent that dissolves every inconvenient fact. Any event that challenges prevailing assumptions is immediately filtered through the same interpretive machinery. Nuance disappears, contradictory evidence is ignored, and complex social phenomena are reduced to a Manichaean morality play populated by heroes and villains.

Yet a more plausible explanation often presents itself. Perhaps public frustration stems not from an outbreak of extremism but from a growing perception that institutions no longer operate by consistent principles. Is it reasonable for people to object when standards appear to vary by race, ethnicity, religion, or political utility? Is it reasonable to conclude, based on the evidence at hand, that a two-tier system of justice is in place? Or perhaps they are angered when authorities are more concerned with managing public perceptions than with addressing legitimate grievances.

In the case of Henry Nowak, the question many people are asking is straightforward. Would the response have been identical had the races of those involved been reversed? Would the media framing have been the same? Would public officials have reacted in precisely the same way? These are not inherently extremist questions. They are questions about fairness, equal treatment, and institutional legitimacy. And we all know the answer.

Yet for many journalists, the possibility that institutions themselves may be engaging in differential treatment is dismissed before it can even be considered. The hypothesis cannot be entertained because it collides with a set of assumptions that have become foundational to institutions throughout the West.

The result is a curious form of media myopia. Evidence is laid upon a Procrustean bed, and anything that might challenge prevailing assumptions is either ignored or reinterpreted until it fits comfortably within the existing narrative framework. The rise in public discontent cannot be attributed to institutional failures; therefore, it must reflect the rise of extremism. Declining trust in the media cannot result from biased reporting; therefore, it must result from misinformation. Electoral revolts cannot be responses to genuine policy failures; therefore, they can only be reactions driven by fear, prejudice, or ignorance, that is, by far-right extremism.

The far-right explanatory model is remarkably resilient. Like the medieval physician who attributed every illness to an imbalance of humours, today's media class has found a single diagnostic tool that explains virtually every social phenomenon. Economic stagnation? Far right. Concerns about immigration? Far right. Questions about crime? Far right. Scepticism towards public institutions? Far right.

At some point, one begins to suspect that the diagnosis may

reveal more about the diagnostician than the patient.

The irony, of course, is that this approach increasingly undermines the very institutions that employ it. Public trust in mainstream media has declined dramatically across much of the Western world. Journalists often attribute this erosion to social media or partisan manipulation. These factors undoubtedly play a role.

But another explanation suggests itself: people lose confidence in the media when they repeatedly observe a gap between what they see with their own eyes and what they are told to see. One thinks, for example, of the obvious dementia of the American President, Joe Biden, even as the legacy media repeatedly told us to ignore the evidence of our own eyes and propagated the blatant lie that he was, in fact, better than ever.

The public may not hold advanced degrees in journalism or sociology. They may not speak the language of intersectionality, structural privilege, or critical theory. Yet they retain a stubborn attachment to common sense. When institutions appear unwilling even to entertain obvious questions or obvious explanations, ordinary citizens naturally begin to search elsewhere for answers.

This is the disaster facing much of the legacy media today. The problem is not simply bias. All human beings possess biases. The deeper problem is an inability to recognise alternative explanations. A profession once dedicated to curiosity increasingly shows a remarkable lack of it. Stories are filtered through a set of approved assumptions that have hardened into dogma. Facts are welcomed when they confirm the narrative and treated with suspicion when they complicate it.

Meanwhile, the public grows steadily less willing to accept these interpretations at face value.

The great danger for legacy media is not that the “far right”

will triumph. The greater danger is that journalists will continue to mistake every challenge to their assumptions as evidence of what they continue to label “extremism”. In doing so, they become incapable of understanding the societies they claim to describe.

After all, if every criticism of institutional behaviour is dismissed as evidence of right-wing radicalism, the term eventually loses all explanatory power. It becomes less a description than a ritual incantation, invoked whenever reality threatens to intrude on the narrative.

And when that happens, people stop listening. And they are right to do so.

The public’s patience with such shibboleths is not infinite. Indeed, one suspects it is already running thin. Nevertheless, the old formulas still appear on cue. The familiar warnings are dutifully repeated. The spectre of the far right is once again summoned from its cupboard. Yet with each repetition, the performance becomes less convincing, the term emptied of meaning.

We have heard the script before. The plot no longer surprises. Increasingly, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the storytellers have lost touch with the story.

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