

Doors on celebrity and academic circuits swing open for Sean Spicer

Previous actions seem to account for nothing



Sean Spicer at the Emmy Awards (Image: Invision)

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After the recent [US television awards](#), global audiences were assaulted by the rather nauseating sight of celebrities such as [James Corden](#) cosying up to Sean Spicer, former director of communications at Donald Trump's Whitehouse.

Spicer also appeared on stage at the ceremony recreating [Melissa McCarthy's impersonation](#) of himself to largely rapturous acclaim, which only served to enhance the

suspicion that – in the words of New York Times commentator Frank Bruni – fame truly is its own reward and celebrity really does trump everything and redeem everyone.

It is clear that following his resignation as Trump's press secretary Spicer is on a tour of rehabilitation. As well as the appearance on the Emmys he has been interviewed in the New York Times and appeared on the popular [Jimmy Kimmel](#) chat show.

He has also, perhaps more alarmingly, accepted the position of visiting fellow [at Harvard University](#). It could be that he will bump into Corey Lewandowski, Trump's election campaign manager, who has also been hired by that most famous of colleges.

But there has been backlash against what can be seen as a collective willingness to completely disregard the true nature of Spicer's time in the Whitehouse.

An open letter signed by 1,900 of [Harvard's alumni](#) said the invitations to Spicer (and Lewandowski) had bestowed an "imprimatur of intellectual and moral legitimacy" to two men who had "done much to degrade public discourse in this country, re-ignite white nationalism, and further reactionary policies that harm millions".

Damningly, [the letter asked](#) in respect of Spicer's suitability: "What can undergraduates learn from a man whose brief tenure in national communications began with an unabashed lie about crowd sizes, continued with an ignorant minimization of the Holocaust, dabbled in unvarnished hostility to the free press, and ended in public ignominy?"

I suppose the point of the adverse reaction now surrounding Spicer is in the fact he is being lauded by sections of the media he attempted to disable. His previous actions seem to count for nothing as the doors on the celebrity and academic circuits swing open to welcome him.

It also demonstrates once again that while the actions of the political classes may impact significantly on the lives of ordinary people, the architects and defenders of policy simply move on to other projects.

In 10 years time, health permitting, what's the betting we see Trump on chat show after chat show sharing jokes about "the wall" "fake news" and the "rocket man" in North Korea?

This thought came to mind when I read [Oliver Wainwright's splendid review](#) of Douglas Murphy's new book about Boris Johnson, Nincompoopolis. Wainwright quotes Murphy:

"It's as though politics is just a game, played by the elites. With the rest of us simply the mob, particles in a cloud of ambition that leads only to gratification for the people who think they belong at the centre of the world."

As the Liberal Democrats [congregated in Bournemouth](#) last week for their annual conference, their publicity people decided to release a party political broadcast celebrating the freshness, vibrancy and relevance of their leader Vince Cable.

Sir Vince Cable makes his keynote speech (Image: PA)

Entitled "Strong and Cable" (geddit?) [the 4.40-minute long advertisement](#) is ostensibly a satire on the perceived vacuity and mindlessness of advertising agencies.

It features a hapless group of 20-somethings sitting around an office trying to think up a campaign strategy for Cable, of whom they have clearly not heard. They are joined by "Rach", a party member, who helpfully fills the gaps in their knowledge.

After a day's deliberating the only thing they can agree on is a liking for hats.

At the end of the broadcast the pitch is presented to Cable himself who proclaims, "I like the hat".

He is on screen for approximately five seconds.

The style and tone of the film is clearly meant to mimic the savage wit of the BBC's self reflexive mockumentary [W1A](#) and is clearly aimed at the disaffected millennials who have apparently flocked to Jeremy Corbyn.

But if this film is an attempt to win back those voters who haven't yet forgiven the broken promises over [university tuition fees](#) then it's surely a forlorn hope.

The main error, I suspect, is in the representation of the young people in the film (with the notable exception of the lovely Rach, of course) as collectively thick and charmless. [Initial reactions](#) have been, to be very kind indeed, mixed.

But does any of this matter? In the age of rolling news 24/7, YouTube and Snapchat do old-style five-minute broadcasts have any currency? The answer is yes, in a way, they do.

Party political broadcasts are still the single most effective instrument that parties have in terms of unfettered contact with the voting public on television.

They enable the politicians to speak to the electorate on their own terms free from the nagging interventions of troublesome journalists and the confines of news and current affairs.

But whether they affect [voting behaviour](#) is a separate issue. Politicians obviously calculate the benefits, but measuring the effect of an advertising election campaign in terms of the result is inconclusive, since the result of any election is based on so many factors. One result may have many possible causes.

Adverts, posters and party political broadcasts can test levels of recall or the appreciation of voters. But these are campaign outputs not outcomes, they do not tell us about effects on voting.

But one thing is certain. “Strong and Cable” has got people (well, some people anyway) talking about the Liberal Democrats again. Maybe that’s enough.

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