Theorising BBC bias

Tom Mills

Jeremy Corbyn has claimed that the BBC is 'obsessed' with undermining his leadership, and a former BBC chair has raised concerns about its coverage, referring to the 'attacks' on the Labour Leader as 'extraordinary'. The available evidence, meanwhile, suggests that the output of BBC News is heavily weighed against Corbyn, and in favour of his opponents in the Parliamentary Labour Party. This finding is in keeping with a broad body of scholarly work suggesting that BBC news and current affairs tends to reflect the interests and perspectives of powerful groups in society. What might lie behind such pattern of reporting? In this seminar, Tom Mills will draw on his own research, and on other scholarly studies, to argue that BBC 'bias' – of which the coverage of Corbyn and 'Corbynism' is but the latest example – needs to be understood as the outcome of a complex set of socio-historical processes which have shaped the Corporation and its orientation towards different groups, classes and institutions in British society. He will point to some central problems with the dominant liberal conceptions of the BBC and public service broadcasting, as well as some weaknesses in alternative radical theoretical approaches.