

[Q](#) | [News](#) [Election](#) [Euros](#) [Sport](#) [Money](#) [Travel](#) [Business](#) [Health](#) [Opinion](#) [Po](#)[See all Business](#)

How Labour eco-donor Dale Vince is unleashing a legal blitz to fight off his critics

Tycoon steps up his assault as he launches libel lawsuits against his detractors

James Warrington

12 July 2024 • 7:01am

Related Topics

[Labour Party](#), [Freedom of speech](#), [Palestine](#), [Gaza](#), [Israel-Hamas War](#)



When Dale Vince, the millionaire eco tycoon and top Labour donor, aired his views about Hamas last year, he was met with a fierce backlash.

During an interview with Times Radio, in which he was asked whether a Hamas terrorist attack was Palestine defending itself, Vince said: “I think one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter, right? That’s how it works.”

Angela Rayner, now deputy Prime Minister, branded the comments “appalling”, while a slew of media outlets published reports suggesting the businessman had expressed support for the terrorist group.

Yet rather than backtrack, Vince has stood by his remarks and launched a wave of libel lawsuits against his detractors.

Now the tycoon is stepping up his assault as he seeks a court order that would effectively block access to the right-wing Guido Fawkes blog.

For Vince, who donated £5m to Labour in the run-up to the general election, the campaign is the “most important piece of the puzzle” as he tries to clear his name. But the move has sparked accusations that Mr Vince is using a tactic most commonly deployed in copyright cases in an effort to silence his critics.

Following widespread coverage of the comments, Vince went on the defensive.

Lawyers for the businessman filed a string of lawsuits, claiming the clip was used to imply that he was supporting Hamas’ actions, including “mass murder, kidnapping and rape”, during the October 7 attacks.

He has already successfully sued GB News and the Daily Mail for libel over their reporting as both outlets agreed to pay “substantial” damages and cover Vince’s legal costs.

In addition, Vince has started proceedings against Reform chairman Richard Tice and Tory peer Shaun Bailey, while legal threats against a trio of current and former Conservative MPs triggered swift apologies.



Dale Vince joined Just Stop Oil activists during a protest in central London last year | CREDIT: Aaron Chown/PA

Now, though, the former Just Stop Oil donor who switched his allegiances to Labour last year, has stepped up his campaign with a lawsuit against Paul Staines, the editor of political blog Guido Fawkes.

Staines has long boasted that his Irish nationality and the fact his blog is hosted in the US means he can ignore British court orders. However, the blogger has declared that on this occasion he will forgo any safe haven protection and defend the lawsuit head on.

In a blog post last week, he said: “We have no intention of apologising for reporting and commenting on his disgraceful equivocation. We’re going to make a stand and defend free speech and our reporting of the words he said.”

Staines also said he has given Vince the opportunity to “put on the record unambiguously that he does not think Hamas are freedom fighters”, but that he declined to do so.

Alongside the libel claim is a second legal threat that has raised eyebrows in the legal community and sparked a furious response from the political blogger. Vince has said he is seeking a website blocking order that would require British internet service providers to restrict access to Guido Fawkes.

These orders are most commonly used by media companies as a means of combatting infringements of their intellectual property rights, such as shutting down illegal streams of Premier League matches or piracy of new blockbuster films. The orders, which are

directed at broadband firms such as BT or web hosting services, are particularly helpful where an infringing website has moved offshore and out of the reach of English courts.

No application has been filed yet and it is understood that a blocking order would only be deployed if Staines refuses to voluntarily take down material from his blog or comply with any injunction forcing him to do so.

Nevertheless, the threat has sparked accusations of communist-style censorship.

In a characteristically inflammatory blog post, Staines branded Vince a “thin-skinned megalomaniac rich bully” and accused him of trying to create a “Chinese-style internet firewall” to censor him.



Paul Staines, the editor of political blog Guido Fawkes, has pledged to 'make a stand' against Dale Vince and 'defend free speech' | CREDIT: Ken McKay/Shutterstock

“This case has obvious implications for freedom of speech and in my view Dale Vince is attempting a SLAPP – a Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation to intimidate critics – like some Russian oligarch using his wealth and power to bully opposition politicians and other political critics,” Staines told The Telegraph.

“He has used his wealth to intimidate people scared of the legal costs, he menaces people like Shaun Bailey with ruinous costs. Even media organisations settle rather than risk lengthy costly legal battles with a thin-skinned rich narcissist.”

Lawyers report an increase in the number of clients using web blocking orders as a tool in defamation case, as well as deploying copyright laws, as it can help to circumvent tricky arguments over free speech.

“The balancing act between something that’s defamatory and something that’s freedom of speech is very nuanced,” says Emily Nuttall-Wood, an intellectual property lawyer at Addleshaw Goddard.

“It can be more straightforward to rely on IP rights because if you’ve got a trade mark or you’ve got a copyright work and it’s clearly just being reproduced and there’s no fair use exception, then it’s infringement and it’s likely more straightforward to prove your case.”

However, Nuttall-Wood says the use of a website blocking order is unusual. “So far the blocking orders have been used largely for larger-scale copyright and trademark misuse, but I haven’t seen a lot of it being used where the actual underlying cause of action appears to be libel.”

Legal experts say blocking orders cannot be disproportionately wide or long-lasting, and the court must be persuaded that they are not shutting off access to legitimate content.

Still, even the attempt to shut down Guido Fawkes on copyright grounds is enough to anger Staines, a vocal free speech campaigner.

“Guido would in Dale’s fantasy become [dissident samizdat material], read in Starmer’s Britain only by tech savvy users or on the dark web,” he wrote last week.

Vince, who is represented by law firm Brett Wilson, said in a statement: “Through Guido Fawkes, Paul Staines set out an entirely false narrative around my views on Palestine, it became a right wing pile on in the media and on social media – he did it intentionally in my view.

“And so it’s more than a little rich to be running some kind of freedom of the press argument. The press in our country are free, but not free to tell lies. That is what this case is about.”

Related Topics
Labour Party, Freedom of speech, Palestine, Gaza, Israel-Hamas War



License this content

Show comments