

Still Too Lenient With The BBC

On further reflection, we no longer entirely **agree** with **Oliver Kamm's take** on the BBC in the light of the Hutton Report.

Kamm himself noted that his previous broadsides against the BBC had "*still* erred on the side of the BBC". We think it's still so.

Kamm wrote:

These were not faults of administrative torpor or inefficiency: they were instances of professional misconduct compounded by an institutional abdication of responsibility to investigate grave and unfounded allegations.

Yes, but those are themselves only symptoms, and minor symptoms at that, of what has fundamentally gone wrong with the BBC: *they have become a political faction* – and not a nice one. At the heart of their politics is a certain world view, far left of the political centre and dominated by 'political correctness', but there is more to it than that. It is a **fantasy-ideology**, a way of thinking and being in which certain ritual behaviours, certain formal utterances, become the entire purpose of existence, replacing what an unaffected person would think of as ordinary morality and displacing all connection with facts. That is why Andrew Gilligan still thinks of himself as having suffered a punishment out of all proportion to his offence: in terms of *ritual behaviours and utterances*, he did indeed make only a minor slip-up when he said, for instance, that the government knew that the 45-minute claim was false before they inserted it into the dossier. To Gilligan, who was painting with a very broad brush, that utterance meant no more than "Saddam's government is legitimate, the war is unjustified, America is the source of all evil and the Blair government is illegitimate for siding with America", which was also the implicit content of practically every other report that he or any of his BBC colleagues had made on the issue. It is only if the truth – in the sense of correspondence the facts – plays some significant role in your psychology that you would see this particular statement as differing greatly from those others. Considered as a ritual utterance whose purpose was to express Gilligan's virtue and help

draw the audience into his state of mind in regard to the Iraq crisis,

it did not differ from them at all.

To interpret all this as a failure by Gilligan and by his editors and their bosses *to check their facts* is to miss most of what has been happening. This was not merely an error of incompetence, or an institutional failure to achieve a standard of excellence to which they aspired. It was case of aspiring to something else entirely: to express, to promote, to *embody*, a certain moral take on the world. Fundamentally, it is because reporting facts or even opinions was subordinated to that aspiration that Gilligan thought nothing of casually making up stories as he went along, and his colleagues and bosses thought – and continue to think – nothing of his doing so.

By the way, Kamm also wrote:

The resignations of the two most senior figures in the BBC's management are welcome and honourable.

But since then it has emerged that Greg Dyke did not resign, but had to be **pushed out kicking and screaming**. And the BBC staff, backed by the National Union of Journalists, **continue to kick and scream for his reinstatement**. And so does much of the rest of their profession. Kamm admits to "revering" Martin Bell and expresses admiration for other veteran journalists. But those very journalists are blind to the nature of Gilligan's wrongdoing: not just Martin Bell but for instance **John Tusa, Max Hastings** ("Hutton's assault upon the whole culture of the BBC and journalism is out of all proportion to their offences"), and **many others**:

The growing mood of discontent within the BBC was highlighted at the weekend with some of the most distinguished of its staff signing a newspaper advertisement protesting at the departure of Mr Dyke. Among those who signed the advertisement were John Simpson, the world affairs editor, Gavin Esler, the News 24 presenter, Joan Bakewell, the broadcaster, Jeremy Vine, the Radio 2 presenter, and Ben Brown, the BBC's special correspondent

That blindness is closer to the heart of the disaster than any specific reporting failures.

To a frightening extent, this pathological, manipulative, dishonest approach to news reporting has taken over **the whole profession of journalism** in Britain. But the BBC has the worst and most dangerous manifestation because of its unique status which shields it from criticism, not only in the narrow sense that its massive unconditional subsidy tends to immunise it from market forces, but also because its official role, like that of the monarchy, gives it a sort of automatic, unearned moral authority – even (dare we say it) with the likes of ourselves and Oliver Kamm – which, in a better world, no rational consumer would grant any news provider.

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Beware

The Free and Independent Media. Nothing in the public sector is more vital than a free and independent media. The case of the BBC makes this more obvious. No free nation or body of citizens can or should depend on one outlet for news and journalism. It is all too easy to be led down the path to falsity. Humans have bias, and flagrant biases, and even blindnesses to truth. It is not inherent to being human, but is an all too easy perceptual flaw.

Free your mind. Free the BBC. Free the sources of public opinion and discourse. Free the media. Hand in hand, free your mind.

Open the media to many rational and considered views. Free one's own mind to be rational and critical of not only others' opinions and biases but especially one's own. Seek truth. Do not expect to easily find it. Write, speak, discuss, critique. Be not only a rational consumer. Be also a rational provider of content.

If this bothers you to read this, you are definitely on the right track, which is only the first step to thinking. Which of course, you already know.

This has been an unpaid political advertisement for a free and independent and critically rational media, often found lacking in a free world, and nonexistent in an oppressed one. Beware its loss.

by a reader on Tue, 02/03/2004 - 16:20 | [reply](#)

v nice

good work

-- Elliot Temple

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