



Taking offence at Clarkson (Dec 2011)

by Simon Belt

Being topical with a guest renowned for being bullish and provocative, BBC One's ***The One Show*** raised the topic of the Protest Day on 30 November when many Public Sector workers went on strike. Jeremy Clarkson duly provided a comment that it felt like being back in the 1970s when strikes were more common. It was a rather banal comment about the roads being clearer, airport queues being smoother etc.

Then as a dig at the BBC's anodyne approach to providing neutrality he added a comment attacking the strikers, saying that the strikers be shot in front of their families. For some it was a funny way of showing up the banality of balance as formula when trying to understand developments in current affairs, and especially through inviting people to provide comment on events.

Either there does seem to be a increasing propensity to be offended these days or I'm becoming sharper and more obnoxious than ever. Actually, I think that although I can be a little sharper than I used to be, I think I'm far less obnoxious yet I seem to cause more offence than I ever did - maybe I'm becoming more sensitive, but I think there's a more generalised sensitivity and **desire** to be offended. People today express their offence at things I'm involved in who I would never have thought were such fragile things, and do so in such a profoundly contradictory way it exposes that their 'offence' is not caused by what they say it is. Having offence officially recognised also seems to be such an important component of being offended now, it's like there's a desire to seek offence though only really if and when it can be used to include others in recognising that offence. I appreciate the cynical side of complaining to businesses in the hope of extracting recompense, but much 'offence' today seems to seek attention and public recognition of hurt rather than financial recompense. Are we becoming a society so desperate for public hugs?



Initial reports, twitter feeds and Facebook posts exposing the nastiness of Jeremy Clarkson's comments on wanting to shoot Public Sector strikers in front of their families was a tad alarming. And when many of the people leading the charge against public bad boy Jezza were people I was involved with in the heat of the miners strike in 1983/4, I did think there must be a mood change by establishment figures turning on people defending their pensions. How wrong I was. This was no return of Thatcherite contempt for organised workers, and it turned out to be a reasonably valid pop at the formulaic political correctness of 'balancing comments' on the BBC.

The vitriol alongside demands that Jeremy Clarkson be sacked (without disciplinary process by many supposed defenders of worker's rights) was perplexing. He's something of a toff who's occasionally funny in his wind ups against Political Correctness and Health and Safety jobsworths, but is he really an arch enemy of the people? I think not, but maybe that's the issue - Jeremy Clarkson represents the free(r) spirited past rather than the petty control freekery many left wingers and progressives of the Thatcher era have ended up as?

So, why did trade unions, trade unionists and '*progressives*' effectively call for the their opponents to be censored rather than defeated, albeit by selecting the comments of someone who made them to have a pop, not at strikers but the BBC's approach towards discussion and debate by requiring anodyne balance? It's surely a sign of weakness to want to silence opposition, even when it's a straw-man opposition, and especially to do so by claiming to be offended and have to prostrate how fragile you are to substantiate that claim. At the very moment when the establishment are actually bereft of ideas and purpose, to present how weak and vulnerable you are seems like a crazy strategy - and demanding speech codes to protect us because we're too weak to deal with some words doesn't help. In fact, isn't it the tell teacher snitchiness of union and previously progressive left wing politics the very reason for Jeremy Clarkson to have eeked out a niche for himself as kicking against the pricks?

I say leave the policing of the playground to teachers IN SCHOOL and when in public learn to be an adult and remember those dark and distant voices that sticks and stones may break our bones but words will never hurt us. And remember that phrase even more when the words are actually a joke and directed at a completely different target, otherwise we will all end up before the headmaster as we tell tales on each other.

Some background readings

[Stewart Lee on Top Gear](#) , YouTube 08 Jan 2011

[Jeremy Clarkson's critics should be taken out and shot](#) , by James Delingpole The Telegraph
01 December 2011

[Jeremy Clarkson insisted he would not apologise over 'shoot strikers' comments - then did](#) , by
Mark Jefferies, Daily Mirror 02 December 2011

['Pretend offence' over Clarkson](#) , BBC Radio 4's Today programme, 03 December 2011

[It's Jeremy Clarkson's fans they really fear](#) , by Rob Lyons, spiked 05 December 2011