



Campaign Against Antisemitism
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BBC Complaints
PO Box 1922
Darlington
DL3 0UR

25th November 2014

Dear Sir or Madam,

BBC NEWS

8th November 2014 at 23.30

**Newspaper Review: Tim Willcox, Jo Phillips, Nigel Belson
(the "Programme")**

I write on behalf of the Campaign Against Antisemitism, an organisation that has been established to combat the recent rapid increase in antisemitism.

Complaint

- 1 Public pronouncements have been made by government that decry the rising tide of antisemitism. It is incumbent on all responsible organisations operating in our multi-cultural society to act responsibly in their reporting and in their commentaries to respect ethnic and religious minorities and to avoid offensive stereotypes.
- 2 Our complaint arises in relation to that part of the Programme in which the newspapers were reviewed, specifically an article in The Independent headlined "Jewish donors drop 'toxic' Miliband"; there are two aspects to the complaint:
 - (a) firstly, certain of the remarks made by those contributing were antisemitic and, as a consequence, their broadcast was in breach of Section 5 of the editorial Guidelines;

- (b) secondly, the manner of the introduction by Tim Willcox (“Willcox”) of Jo Phillips (“Phillips”) failed to comply with BBC Editorial Guidelines as to impartiality.¹

Programme Details

- 3 A transcript of the applicable extract of the Programme is annexed to this letter; the extract of the Programme may be viewed via the following YouTube link: <http://youtu.be/yF5TSWuEwEg>

Antisemitic Content

- 4 The BBC’s Editorial guidelines² address the issue of religious bias and racial stereotyping in terms:

“We aim to reflect fully and fairly all of the United Kingdom’s people and cultures in our services. Content may reflect the prejudice and disadvantage which exist in societies worldwide but we should not perpetuate it. In some instances, references to disability, age, sexual orientation, faith, race, etc. may be relevant to portrayal. However, we should avoid careless or offensive stereotypical assumptions and people should only be described in such terms when editorially justified.” (Section 5.4.38).

- 5 During the Programme, BBC presenter, Willcox and ‘Political Adviser’ (*sic*), Jo Phillips, discussed reports suggesting a withdrawal of Jewish supporters from Labour over its stand on Israel. During the course of the discussion Willcox, made antisemitic comments. Willcox interrupted Jo Philips to say:

“And a lot of these prominent Jewish er, er faces ... will be very much against the ‘mansion tax’ presumably, as well...”

- 6 The suggestion that a new tax would not be supported by Jews plays upon classic antisemitic association of Jews being attached to money; the use of the term ‘Jewish faces’ – emphasised by Willcox’s use of a snide tone of voice – was clearly intended as a racial slight. Neither of the elements of this nasty comment was relevant to the discussion. The idea that an allegedly wealthy Jewish lobby uses money to manipulate public policy is a centuries old antisemitic trope. The BBC’s unchallenged promotion of this slur is a shocking example of what many Jews feel is institutional antisemitism by the broadcaster.
- 7 That Willcox appears to bear an antisemitic bias is, of itself, egregious; that he is given a platform by the BBC from which to disseminate his

¹ BBC Editorial Guidelines Section 4: Impartiality

² BBC Editorial Guidelines Section 5: Harm and Offence, para 5.4.38



views is wholly unacceptable. Willcox's position requires to be considered and appropriate action taken against him. The bigger picture requires the BBC to ensure that its journalists and contributors are made fully aware of its Editorial Guidelines and that they comply with them.

- 8 Following broadcast of the Programme, the Campaign Against Antisemitism ("CAA") received a number of complaints from its supporters and requests for action. The CAA made initial contact with the BBC Director-General's office, while questions were raised by journalists from both the Jewish Chronicle and the Jewish News. As a consequence the BBC took the unusual step of endeavouring to defend its broadcast of the Programme before an investigation has taken place. The BBC's defensive statement ("BBC Statement") may be found via this link: <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/125424/bbc-defends-mansion-tax-remark-after-viewers-complaints>
- 9 The BBC insists that Willcox's mention of 'Jewish faces' presumed to be objecting to the proposed 'mansion tax' was not antisemitic. The BBC claims: "*Tim named Maureen Lipman in this context, and as part of a wider discussion, asked if Labour's 'mansion tax' policy was one of the factors*".
- 10 While Willcox does bring up the 'mansion tax' as a reason for some Jewish opposition to Labour (with no evidence at all, and it was not even mentioned in the Independent article being discussed), when it is suggested to him that non-Jews might also oppose this proposed tax, he says that he didn't mean to suggest otherwise, but uses words which make it clear he is in fact still trying to assert that Jews oppose the 'mansion tax', using Lipman as an illustrative "example". The BBC's denial runs counter to the clear facts of the broadcast. Absolutely no evidence at all, was, or has subsequently, been produced by the BBC, Willcox, or, indeed, anyone else that supports the broadcast suggestion that wealthy Jews are challenging taxation proposals in an endeavour to influence Labour policy.

Impartiality

- 11 Last November the BBC's Editorial Complaints Unit ("ECU") recommitted to BBC editorial guidelines on impartiality which state:

"We should not automatically assume that contributors from other organisations (such as academics, journalists, researchers and representatives of charities) are unbiased and we may need to make it clear to the audience when contributors are associated with a particular



viewpoint, if it is not apparent from their contribution or from the context in which their contribution is made.”³

Specifically regarding BBC News, the ECU stated:

“The production team have been reminded of the importance of clearly summarising the standpoint of any interviewee where it is relevant and not immediately clear from their position or the title of their organisation.”

- 12 Phillips’ introduction by Willcox as ‘our political advisor’, is an indication that she works for the BBC. Phillips is in fact a spin doctor with well-established ties to the Liberal Democrats. In a 2001 article on the BBC's own website she is referred to as the “*once head of media in former Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown's office.*”⁴ On her publisher’s website she is said to have “stood for Parliament”. Yet on the Programme her politically partisan background was not mentioned by Willcox when introducing her (or at any other time). Thus viewers were led to believe that Phillips’ views were the views of the BBC. This alone is against the BBC's own guidelines.
- 13 Further, even allowing for the fact that on two occasions Phillips arguably implied that certain of her observations were commentary by declaring “*I think*”, these opinions went totally unchallenged and unquestioned, so the BBC failed to maintain due impartiality. The BBC Statement⁵ that “*the comments were made about the Independent on Sunday story...*” are disingenuous in the extreme – particularly seen in the context of Willcox’s contribution and the description of Phillips as a BBC adviser.⁶

Conclusion

- 14 The elements of the Programme of which complaint is made require to be addressed as follows:
 - (a) the BBC should require Willcox to acknowledge that his comments regarding the ‘mansion tax’ were antisemitic and made without any foundation in fact;
 - (b) Willcox should formally and publicly acknowledge that his comments regarding the ‘mansion tax’ were antisemitic and made without any foundation in fact in terms that are agreed by CAA;

³ BBC Editorial Guidelines Section 4.4.14

⁴ http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/1225412.stm

⁵ <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/125424/bbc-defends-mansion-tax-remark-after-viewers-complaints>

⁶ See paras 5-7 above



- (c) the responsible senior executives in the BBC should be required to make clear to all of its presenters, journalists and contributors that antisemitic comments will not be tolerated and, in so doing, the BBC should reiterate its commitment to avoiding making any offensive stereotypical assumptions – whether to Jews or to anyone else;

- (d) the responsible senior executives in the BBC should be required to make clear to all of its presenters, journalists and contributors that introductions to commentators, contributors, panellists and others of clearly summarising the standpoint of programme participants where it is relevant and not immediately clear – whether from their position or the title of their organisation, or otherwise.

We await hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,



Gideon Falter
Chairman, Campaign Against Antisemitism



Annex: Transcript of relevant extract of the Programme

Tim Willcox (BBC News)

Nigel Nelson (Sunday People)

Jo Phillips (BBC Political Adviser)

Tim: The Independent on Sunday splits its front page in half. Its main photograph is of Remembrance Sunday but it also follows the Labour leadership story reporting that some of the parties' donors are dropping Ed Milliband. Jo just talk us through this.

Jo: So this ... according ... again, I mean, here's another example of a headline that's of "Jewish donors drop 'toxic Milliband'". Erm, when you get to the inside pages of this story –

Tim: Which we do have –

Jo: Which we do have, which is great luxury... erm, Jewish backers abandon Labour... What you get is a lot of unnamed people [*scathing tone*] erm, from the, sort of, the Jewish Lobby, obviously they've been very supportive of the Labour Party and they are abandoning 'toxic Labour'. But they are not abandoning it because of Ed Milliband's personal ratings, according to this, this is because of what Ed Milliband actually said erm in the summer, his aggressive condemnation of Israel's attacks, erm disproportionate attacks and incursion into Gaza and he actually accused David Cameron of being sort of rather weak erm, and not, and wrong in not condemning it earlier.

Now, I think, actually, that was extremely principled and I think Ed Milliband does really well when he comes out and says that. And, actually, if you read this whole story, you sort of think well this bloke's being accused of being too cautious and too timid. Here's something where he's absolutely, you know, prepared to take on people, prepared to risk losing donors but of course the reality is they need money to fight an election.

Tim: Yeah –

Jo: They don't get it from here –

Tim: And a lot of these prominent Jewish er, er faces ... will be very much against the 'mansion tax' presumably, as well...

Jo: Well. Who knows? But I –



Nigel: They would be... I'm sure they would.

Jo: I'm sure they would but –

Nigel: *[Talking over Jo]* But a lot of non-Jewish rich people would be against the 'mansion tax' –

Tim: I'm not suggesting otherwise but Maureen Lipman, for example, is pictured here isn't she –

Jo: Well, yes, she said she was not going to have anything to do with the Labour Party after five decades of supporting, you know, again, because of his stance on –

Tim: *[Talking over Jo]* This is on his –

Jo: Exactly but you know it is this terrible thing you're not supposed, apparently, to say anything anti-Israeli. Erm, if you attack Israeli political erm policies or the Government policies, then this is what you get. You know, it seems to me, that this is totally hypocritical that on the one hand they are now going to have to look to the unions to get some funding but will be accused of being in the unions' pockets and when he is being brave and principled and standing up and saying, you know, this time Israel you've gone too far, erm, people take their money away, so, he can't win, can he?

