



CONSERVATIVE PARTY
NEWS
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Press & Public Relations
Department.

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Release Time: Immd. Wednesday
5th November 1986. 647/86

Statement by the Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP (Chingford), Chairman of the Conservative Party.

I welcome the assurance from Lord Barnett and Mr Hussey that the Board is committed to impartiality and the maintenance of high standards, and that its responsibilities will be discharged in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Charter.

I naturally assume, although it was not mentioned, that undertaking extends also to the Licence and Agreement and Annex thereto, most particularly clause 13.7.

Although my criticism did not accuse the BBC of political bias I am particularly glad that the Deputy Chairman and Chairman designate re-affirm that the BBC will be impartial.

Mr Hussey and Lord Barnett also sent me the defence put up by officials from BBC news departments to my suggestion that in this instance at least the BBC news reporting fell far short of the high standards which the Corporation espouses.

Clearly it would be irresponsible for me to give an immediate reaction to that document, but it will be carefully examined. We will make our initial comments as soon as possible and give our full assessment of the BBC defence in due course.

END



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On an initial reading we find the BBC has made a convincing defence against the charges we did not make. For example, it spends four pages defending Kate Adie against criticisms we did not make. We did not even mention her name. Our criticisms are of the editorial and managerial standards used in compiling the whole of the reports, not her specific activities in Libya.

On a matter of more significance, the BBC has simply changed the words of its own Diplomatic Editor, John Simpson. Our criticism was: "The BBC made the principle feature of its news the 'worldwide condemnation' of America - a subjective and emotive description which is repeated but never substantiated throughout the broadcast".

The BBC defence says: "Our Diplomatic Editor, John Simpson, reported that only Canada, Israel and Britain had supported the American action".

But, in the original broadcast Mr Simpson said: "Only Canada and Britain support the American action. All the others, loyal allies as well as fair

/.. weather ones,

weather ones, are uniformly hostile to it."

Elsewhere they seek to confuse: they mix up film footage in an extraordinary exercise in statistical gymnastics in an attempt to refute the clear fact that the BBC gave much longer time "to the discussion or depiction of civilian casualties" which, as ITN stated, was being used as a Libyan propaganda weapon. Their response throws in coverage of the raid itself, damage to buildings, interviews with civilians, coverage of demonstrations and other material - all of which avoid the point.

So far we have found one error on our part. ITN's "discussion and depiction of civilian casualties" was not 45 seconds, as we originally stated. Our re-checking puts it at 48 seconds, against the BBC's 130 seconds.

The BBC's response has raised the issue of alleged political bias, and their report states that "no evidence is adduced at any point by the CCO to demonstrate that the BBC's reporting constitutes a deliberate intention to manipulate the news." No such implication is made in our report. We said: "Perhaps the news coverage of the Libyan attack is a reflection of (this) lack of direction. I have no way of knowing whether the coverage was affected by bias, incompetence, low professional standards or simple error." That remains our case.

It is time the BBC officials answered fact with fact and fair criticism with fair defence.

We will issue our full response to the BBC officials' defence in due course but we believe it important that the public should be aware of the BBC techniques as they assess these issues.

ENDS