

To:

- (1) **BBC Complaints Dept,**
Darlington, County Durham DL3 0UR.
- (2) **Timothy Douglas Davie CBE,** Director-General, BBC,
BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA.
- (3) **Richard Simon Sharp,** Chairman, BBC Board of Governors,
BBC Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA.
- (4) **Dame Melanie Henrietts Dawes DCB,** Chief Executive, Ofcom,
Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA.
- (5) **Terence Burns, Baron Burns GCB,** Chairman, Ofcom,
Riverside House, 2a Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1 9HA.

[**BBC Complaints - Case number refs:** CAS-6686338-M7T8X8 / CAS-6566992-X3Q7F3]

SUBJECT:

Detailed complaint brought by Martin Webster against the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for and on behalf of himself and the former members of the lapsed political party known as the National Front (NF) of which he was National Activities Organiser from 1969 to 1983. This complaint is also referred in identical terms to the Office of Communications (Ofcom) for its consideration as the complainant has no faith in the BBC's ability to be an impartial judge in respect of a complaint against itself and willing to impose on itself the necessary actions to correct injustices perpetrated by its employees and associated other persons.

This complaint relates to ***"Britain's Fascist Thread"***, Episode 3, presented by Camilla Schofield, and broadcast on Radio 4 on Friday, 5th March 2021 at 11:00am and available for listening and/or download at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000sbdx> .

It is submitted that both the 30 working days time limit specified in the **BBC Complaints Framework** and the 1,000 word content limit do not apply to this complaint on the grounds that:

- (a) there are no less than nineteen (19) complaints embodied in this one complaint, each of which required time to assess and prepare a suitable response, and each of which could, as a separate complaint, use up to 1,000 words, making a total of up to 19,000 words. This complaint contains a little less than 4,500 words;
- (b) common sense dictates that it would be more convenient for all concerned to have all 19 complaints amalgamated into one complaint.
- (c) in view of the above, this complaint is a wholly exceptional and serious complaint that fully justifies waiving both the 30 working days time limit and the 1,000 words content limit.

I General Complaint

- (a) This programme is in breach of the BBC Charter (2016), paragraph 6 (1) and the BBC Agreement (2016), Schedule 3, paragraphs 2, 3 and 4. The only relevant voices heard were those of the presenter, who was openly "anti-fascist" and left wing, and interviewees whose opinions were, without exception, left wing or extreme left wing.
- (b) The subject matter of the programme included the National Front. The duties of fairness and impartiality imposed on the BBC by its Charter (paragraph 6(1)) demand that, in such programmes, representatives from the National Front be interviewed and allowed to give their accounts of the events covered, to counter-balance the views of those interviewees from the left and extreme left.
- (c) No effort was made by the programme makers to contact the person who could

have not only given the National Front's viewpoint on the allegations levelled at it by the presenters and interviewees but also enlightened listeners and provided them with a fairer, more complete account of the National Front and what it stood for. That person is myself. I am still alive, easily contactable, and have been so contacted on numerous occasions in the recent past by BBC producers for just such a purpose.

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(d) This programme contained numerous factual errors which could have been easily avoided if a reasonable amount of research and fact-checking had been carried out, together with the action mentioned in paragraph (c) above.

(e) The tone of the programme implied, contrary to fact, that the National Front was a "fascist" organisation, and that it encouraged and practised violence and intimidation to achieve its objectives. This insinuation is completely false, and could have been easily rebutted had I been invited onto the programme. In fact, the National Front was a political party that contested elections and won serious levels of support, being arguably at one time Britain's third party, not (as implied) a mere street gang. For example, almost 120,000 Londoners voted for the National Front at the GLC elections on 5th May 1977. In parliamentary by-elections (Stechford and Ladywood), also in 1977, the National Front polled ahead of the Liberal Party (now the Liberal Democrats). The NF was able to nominate 303 candidates in the 1979 general election. Further, the NF had a comprehensive Constitution which provided for:

- a governing body (the National Directorate) a third of the places on which fell vacant every year and were filled by an annual postal ballot of the entire membership of the party;
- an Annual General Meeting at which all members were entitled to attend and vote on resolutions concerning the party's policies and Constitution submitted by a sufficient number of members;
- a constitution for branches requiring annual elections for posts on branch committees.

(f) Numerous interviewees made serious and unsubstantiated allegations against the National Front, its members and supporters, including allegations of violence, intimidation and other unlawful activities, which were unchallenged by the presenter. Again, my inclusion as an interviewee on the programme would have provided a counterbalance to the extreme left-wing interviewees, as well as further, vital, information that would have given a fairer account to listeners of the events covered.

(g) When I heard about the series of programmes, of which this episode is one, being about to be broadcast, I contacted someone who had been involved with a previous interview of myself by the BBC to establish how I might make contact with the producers. That person contacted the BBC and was told that, "the whole series is a historical one and they only spoke to or interviewed academics and used archive. They didn't interview anyone around who was there". This is a lame excuse for excluding the voices of people likely to contradict the opinions of the producer and presenter. Not all the interviewees were academics (e.g. Imam Attar) but all of them were left wing or extreme left wing. This is in breach of the BBC Charter, as mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b) above.

II Detailed complaints, all of which breach paragraph 6 (1) of the BBC Charter (2016)

The web page hosting the programme replay

1. The short description on the web page hosting the replay includes the following: "From the formation of the British Fascisti in 1923, through the BUF [British Union of Fascists], the National Front and the BNP [British National Party], the history of fascism in Britain is, in a sense, an unbroken thread." This untrue and completely unsubstantiated statement implies that the National Front (NF) is a "continuation" of

the BUF, when in fact both the Constitution and the Statement of Policy of the National Front differ in many important respects from the way the BUF was run and the policies advocated by it. Furthermore, the post-WW2 continuation of the BUF was an organisation known as Union Movement (UM). It was formed by Mosley in *circa* 1948. It continued after the the NF was formed in 1967 and was succeeded by an informal association known as 'Friends of Mosley' (FoM), which still exists.

2. That description also includes the following: "a lineage of hatreds, pseudo-science, failed leaders and tactics", referring to, among other bodies, the National Front. Whether the National Front contained or formed part of "a lineage of hatreds [or] pseudo-science" is a matter of opinion. As to "failed leaders and tactics", these can be found in abundance in the establishment parties of Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats, yet no mention was made in the programme of that fact.

Neither of these parts of the description of the programme on the BBC web site was appropriate for an organisation that is required to be impartial in politics.

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The programme itself

[Please note that the times given refer to the time elapsed, to the nearest couple of seconds, from the start of the programme.]

3. 1:06 Joe Mulhall says, "There's people still active today that started engaging in fascist politics in the UK in the 1950s and they learned directly from the individuals that ran the movement in the 20s and 30s."

If there are people "still active today" as described by Mulhall, they should have been traced and interviewed by the presenter for corroboration of Mulhall's assertion and to provide a counter to the extreme left wing slant of this series of programmes. The presenter failed to do this.

4. 1:17 The presenter says, "Joe Mulhall is a historian and researcher for the anti-extremism charity, 'Hope Not Hate', which gives him a close-up view on the threads of continuity in British fascism."

'Hope Not Hate' is a left-wing organisation devoted to promoting multi-racialism and issuing propaganda against all those who reject multi-racialism. How being a researcher for it gives Mulhall "a close-up view on the threads of continuity in British fascism" was not explained by the presenter, and should have been. This person is hardly likely to give an unbiased view of the subject matter.

5. 1:25 Mulhall says, "There's an organisational lineage that goes British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, you then that kind of moves through to the Union Movement in the post war period with Oswald Moseley still, then out the back of that, you know, you have the National Front, which is very much the heirs to classical fascism, then out of that you have the British National Party, a party that is still around today. So there is an organisational continuity, and then finally I think there is a ideological continuity, the politics of hatred, division, of anti-semitism at its very core, of racism, these individuals pushed that ideology and politics from the 1920s. In some ways it's identical to the policies we're seeing from the contemporary fascist movement, from groups, you know, within the so-called alt-right. Their ideology and their outlook on the world is not so different to that of Oswald Moseley in the twenties and thirties."

The National Front's Constitution and policies were markedly different from those of, for example, the British Union of Fascists. Why was not research done to check on this and the point then put to Mulhall?

These are not the proper standards of a BBC presenter, who is supposed to be impartial.

6. 3:24 The presenter says, "We asked almost every interviewee for their definition of fascism, and that one phrase was used more than any other. 'Palingenetic ultra-nationalism'."

If the presenter wanted to make this point then she should have specifically asked each interviewee and included their replies in the programme, but she failed to do so.

7. 3:36 The presenter says, "It refers to an extreme kind of nationalist politics, premised on a sense of revolutionary renewal."

This is a vague, uncorroborated statement. The presenter should have referred listeners to a confirmatory source, but failed to do so.

8. 8:20 The presenter mentioned the murder of Stephen Lawrence by white youths, but

(a) failed to mention even one young white person murdered, assaulted or sexually traded by Asians or blacks, of which there are plenty. She assumes the leftist stance that "racist" crimes can only be committed by Whites, and never by non-whites (an attitude which is, surely, "racist" / anti-indigenous white-British);

(b) failed to establish even any slight connection between any of his alleged killers and any element of the so-called 'far right'. To the best of my knowledge no such connection has ever been established or even alleged by anyone, though there have been several articles detailing the organised crime connections of one of the alleged killers.

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9. 12:58 An interviewee says, "If you wanted to get involved in the National Front you had to join the National Front, get a membership card, you had to go leafletting. People knew you were a fascist, and that had a social cost to it. Now you can sit in your bedroom without a picture on your Twitter and send anti-semitic hate to a Jewish person anywhere in the world and no-one's ever going to find you. So the social cost of getting involved in fascism has gone down and the ease with which you can find content has become much easier. You know, you can go on any major Social Media platform and increasingly ... smaller bespoke social media platforms and find the most extreme fascist literature at the click of a button."

(a) The interviewee is bewailing the existence of freedom of speech because some people can use it to send what he would regard as "hate" messages to other people or to make available literature with which he disagrees. The presenter had a duty to put this to him but failed to do so.

(b) The interviewee also states that if you joined the NF, "people knew you were a fascist". This is a distortion of the facts. Only left wingers regarded such people as "fascists". Ordinary people, for the most part, accepted them for what they were - patriots who were concerned about the direction in which the country was being taken. The presenter failed to clarify this point for the benefit of listeners. These are not the proper standards of a BBC presenter, who is supposed to be impartial.

10. 13:33 Dave Rich says, "The amount of violent incitement to kill Jews and other minorities that circulates on far right social media channels is completely off the scale. It's out of control."

(a) The same goes for Rich, who, it seems, doesn't like freedom of speech either. The same comment is made as in point 9 (a) above.

(b) The presenter failed to press Rich for examples of such "violent incitement" that, according to him, circulates on social media, or what he means by "out of control", bearing in mind that freedom of speech is, by definition, always "out of control".

11. 14:12 Rich says, "This is a violent anti-semitic threat coming at Jewish communities from extreme right wing actors who idolise Adolf Hitler and Oswald Moseley and other characters from the history of fascism and nazism. One of the biggest changes in the propaganda coming from this part of the far right that really sums up the change is that they don't bother trying to deny the holocaust any more. They just celebrate it and glorify it and wish there could be another one."

Rich makes a serious allegation, i.e. that Jewish communities are facing the threat of violence levelled against them by unspecified "extreme right wing actors". The presenter failed to ask him to clarify his accusation or to provide evidence for this, just as she failed when he went on to say that "this part of the far right ... don't bother trying to deny the holocaust any more". In fact Jewish organisations assert that the holocaust narrative is as hotly contested today as it ever was. The presenter should have picked up this point and put it to Rich, but she failed to do so.

12. 15:12 The presenter says, "If he'd been a young man in the late 1950s, perhaps Renshaw would have found a home with the gangs who beat up black people during the Notting Hill and Nottingham riots. Or perhaps he would have been at home as a far right skinhead at Lewisham in the 1970s. But in the 2000s he had a different focus."

(a) The riots mentioned by the presenter were not all about "gangs who beat up black people", as she no doubt knows. They were about several complex issues. She failed to produce a single example of her allegations.

(b) The presenter also tried to give listeners the impression that the "far right" at Lewisham consisted solely or largely of skinheads. Skinheads in fact constituted a tiny proportion of National Front members and supporters at that or any other time.

(c) The presenter failed to research this, or alternatively deliberately allowed a false picture of typical National Front members and supporters to be presented to listeners. These are not the proper standards of a

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BBC presenter, who is supposed to be impartial.

13. 15:30 An interviewee (believed to be Gilroy or Mulhall) says, "In 2014 when he was a student at Manchester Metropolitan University he was an activist in the youth wing of the British National Party, and he did all the kind of stuff a young BNP activist would do. He stood in a local by-election as a BNP candidate, he held meetings or gave speeches or [?] just a general student BNP activist. Five years later, in 2019, he was put in prison for planning to murder a Member of Parliament and a senior police officer. And along the way he had moved from the BNP to National Action, which was an openly neo-nazi, Hitlerite organisation, and Jack Renshaw really personified this journey and this shift in focus for really where the energy really sat on the British far right. Whereas in 2010 the centre of gravity and the energy and most of the focus of the British far right was still on elections, nowadays it has moved completely away from that into street movements and terrorism and violence that far surpasses the kind of racist violence of the past."

(a) This is a disproportionate focus on one person (Jack Renshaw) with the implication

that he is typical of what the programme dubs the “far right” (“exemplar (sic) of one aspect of the more fragmented world of British fascism today”; “really personified this journey and this shift in focus for really where the energy really sat on the British far right”).

(b) The presenter failed to challenge this person on either this or on his accusation that the “British far right....has moved completely away from that [elections] into street movements and terrorism and violence”.

(c) In addition, the insinuation is that the one or two people on the patriotic right of today who have been convicted of violent crime are typical of National Front members and supporters of the 1970s. This is untrue.

(d) The interviewee refers to “racist violence of the past” as if it is a well established fact. Bearing in mind the controversial nature of the subject-matter, he should have specified one or more examples of such “racist violence” but did not. The presenter should have asked him for an example of such but she failed to do so.

14. 16:57 Paul Gilroy says, “I was living in Brighton in the late seventies and Brighton was very much a centre of fascist organising – the printing press that produced a lot of the holocaust denial literature and the racist literature was located in Sussex at that time and there was a family that ran a guest house there that was very implicated in all of this, and I can tell you, when they put their rubbish out, that household who were the principal organisers in the area, their rubbish didn’t go in the back of the rubbish van, it went directly to the anti-fascist community where a number of people who’d worked in British Intelligence in the war and were members of AJEX, that’s the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, and so on, would go through their rubbish every week and use all that information to fuel local organising against the kind of violence and the threats that they represented, so there were at that time political institutions at local level that conducted those struggles carefully.”

(a) The theft of household refuse is still theft. The presenter should have challenged Mr Gilroy on this, but failed to do so. No evidence is offered in support of the serious allegation that the family mentioned engaged in “violence and threats”. What evidence is there of this?

(b) What does Mr Gilroy mean by “fuel local organising against....” and “conducted those struggles carefully” mean, if not planning and carrying out violence against the family concerned, and its printing press? The presenter failed to press him on this point.

(c) That printing press was subjected to an arson attack in September 1980, for which Manny Carpel, a close associate of Gerry Gable, who edited the magazine *Searchlight* (which the presenter, in Episode 2 mixed up with a magazine published in support of the National Front), was convicted at Lewes Crown Court and jailed for two years. Note that Gable and Carpel were jointly convicted in the 1970s of attempting to steal documents from the home of historian David Irving while posing as gas board engineers. This raid on Irving’s home had been “prompted” by the publication of his hugely successful 1962 book *The Destruction of Dresden*. All this information about Gable’s record of criminality and the terrorist criminality of his closest associate could have easily been obtained by the presenter. Her failure to do so seriously

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misleads listeners as to the true situation that patriots faced in being targeted by the extreme left in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

These are not the proper standards of a BBC presenter, who is supposed to be impartial.

15. 19:15 Female voice (foreign): “We’re talking about fascism there has been an increase in the level of organised [?] in terms of [indecipherable]... we’ve seen a lot of interconnectivity in what happens in the online world and the attacks that took place on communities and the street [? difficult to listen to].”

This woman is saying that organised attacks on Muslims has been increasing, but fails to cite any examples,

so there is no evidence of such attacks, or, if they have occurred, who may be responsible for them. This contribution to the programme is therefore of no value whatsoever, yet the presenter still decided to include it. Why?

16. 19:49 Imam Attar says, “So sometimes it is organised groups that are behind these attacks, but also, let’s not forget, it is really people who are consuming [?] online. Each person has got their own vulnerabilities and they consume this material day in and day out that is on their screen promoting hate [unclear] that is saying... communities are coming to take over your country, that is talking about the Islamisation of Europe and you see it day in and day out and that is the only thing that you’re consuming then eventually you will take action into your hands and go onto the street and commit something, whether it's abusing a Muslim woman who's walking down the street or maybe in certain instances as we've seen as well and we've had three people who were killed on our streets [unclear] here in the UK.”

(a) This is an absurd claim, i.e. that people who read anti-Muslim material on the internet are liable to go out and kill Muslims. That deserves investigation, yet the presenter simply accepts it without question.

(b) The same applies to the claim that “we’ve had three people who were killed on our streets”. No details or evidence in support are offered, and no-one is interviewed to contest the claim.

(c) Who were the people she says have been killed and what were their names?

(d) Did the police arrest or charge anyone for these murders?

(e) Were there any convictions?

All these basic questions, and more, should have been asked, but were not.

17. 20:31 An interviewee, believed to be Gilroy or Mulhall, says, “There is a clear connection between the discourse and the propaganda that circulates in the broader far right and the violence and the terrorism that a small number of people at the extreme end of the far right direct against minorities and the connection is expressed nowadays in a conspiracy theory called the Great Replacement theory.”

The interviewee failed to give any evidence to support his contention about the “clear connection”, yet the presenter failed to challenge him on this. Any unbiased presenter would have done so.

18. 20:57 The presenter says, “The Great Replacement, an idea coined by the French author, Renaud Camus in 2011, is a white genocide conspiracy theory. It’s an apocalyptic idea that non-white immigration into Europe and North America is being deliberately orchestrated and will make white people into a minority later this century, destroying European civilization. It’s a twist on Nick Griffin’s earlier paranoia, and it’s nothing new. A thread that goes back to the far right thinkers from the 1960s and 1970s who looked at population growth in the developing world and the decline in European birth rates and the global shift towards human rights and decolonisation to the dismantling of the supposed moral authority of white domination, and panicked. The Great Replacement was also the stated motivation behind the killing of 56 Muslims by a fascist in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019. It’s an idea that

crosses boundaries, it creeps into mainstream political conversations and also into the manifesto of the terrorist.”

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(a) Renaud Camus (1946 -), creator of ‘The Great Replacement Theory’. has been an active socialist for most of his life, and certainly not part of any “unbroken fascist thread”. Yet the presenter dismissed it as an “apocalyptic idea” and a “twist on Nick Griffin’s earlier paranoia”. Discussion between both supporters and opponents of the theory would be required before anyone can form their own conclusions on such a vast topic.

(b) The presenter states that the theory creeps “into the manifesto of the terrorist”, yet fails to cite a single example or state where terrorists publish manifestos (presumably in support of an election campaign).

19. 21:57 From here to the end of this episode there are comments from the presenter and her interviewees that are not worthy of serious investigation or rebuttal, but nonetheless illustrate the one-sided, biased nature of the whole programme and the failure of the presenter to do the research that was essential in order to present a fair and balanced coverage of the subject matter.

These are not the proper standards of a BBC presenter, who is supposed to be impartial.

There are nineteen (19) points of complaint made above about this programme, some of them in the form of questions. In the interests of justice and in order to display the BBC’s impartiality I think it right and fair that

(a) this podcast be withdrawn from the BBC’s archives and no longer made available for downloading or listening to;

and

(b) consideration be given to the preparation of a fresh programme dealing with the same subject but including someone such as myself, who was involved intimately with the National Front as its National Activities Organiser for over fourteen years, to give the true facts and answer questions from an unbiased presenter.

Signed:.....

Martin Webster

Dated: Thursday 14th April 2022

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