

COLUMN LIST

Glasgow University Media Group have frequently accused to BBC of right wing bias. In this issue they examine the somewhat different view taken by Norman Tebbit.

Norman Tebbit has put the news in the news, but has he added anything to our understanding of news processes? The BBC offered, according to Tebbit 'a highly flavoured editorial view.' He feels justified in coming to this conclusion on the basis of his sample which covered only four bulletins on BBC1 and ITN and these not even on consecutive nights (15 and 17 April). A larger sample would have revealed BBC news coverage which showed a clear anti-Libyan stance. For example, a journalist on BBC2's Newsnight on 29 July 1986 stated that 'whatever damage the raid did it did not topple Gaddafi. He is still in charge despite the rumours, still the desert Arab, shrewd and cunning, plotting and planning, for the time being lying low. But the homespun philosophy of his little green books looks more and more threadbare, out of touch, even as he struts Libya's tiny stage dreaming his fanciful dream.'

The Tebbit report criticises the BBC for not emphasising that filming in Ripoli was 'Libyan controlled'. It states that 'in countries which exercise tight control over the activities of journalists (the) media have ample opportunity to film what is favourable to the regime and are barred from the rest - in this case the damage to military and terrorist installations'. But is there any country in the world which allows journalists free access to its military installations, let alone five hours after they have been bombed? How much access is there in our country? Will the BBC, ITN (and Libyan) cameras now be allowed into GCHQ Cheltenham or Faslane nuclear base? By these criteria

all news is state controlled.

Tebbit's report sees the American bombing as 'one of those events open to two quite opposite interpretations.' One a 'vicious and illegal attack by a militaristic super-power on a small nation, killing civilians and children with callous disregard for human life.' And the other a 'legitimate and necessary defensive action against a military dictator who was using the resources of his state to carry out acts of barbarous terrorism against innocent people in foreign countries.'

This position takes no account of the wide range of views that actually existed. For example, it is quite possible to condemn the bombing without approving of Gaddafi. Indeed, in the above BBC2 report, which is absent from Tebbit's sample, a journalist stated that the American air raids had shown that Gaddafi was 'isolated and friendless abroad' (Newsnight 29 July 1986). But by creating a huge category of pro-Libyan coverage the Tebbit report can assert that everything - from concern about innocent deaths to the views of world leaders - can count as being 'in favour' of Gaddafi.

According to Tebbit's report, Libya's interests are served by coverage which suggests that 'the raid would result in a fundamental realignment of Arab sympathies behind Libya' or that 'America would be isolated by world opinion.' the implication seems to be that coverage in Libya's interests should not be heard on TV news. The problem with this is that in this case civilians were killed, there was worldwide condemnation of America and a rallying of support for Gaddafi, even amongst his erstwhile critics such as Egypt. But are these unpleasant 'facts' simply to be left out of the news? If this is what Mr Tebbit wants then his argument is not for balanced reporting. It sounds more like the MOD official during the Falklands war who told journalists 'we only want you to print the good news.'

Tebbit fury • BBC defended

