

Helen Tunley

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Sent: 07 July 2003 12:28
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Subject: Statement following Governors' meeting

Dear Governors

I attach a clean copy of the Statement which I issued on the Board's behalf last night

I was aware during the meeting that I may have been rushing the discussion more than usual, because there was a hard deadline around 9pm. If we had missed this deadline, the Governors' conclusions would have missed the morning papers completely, and would then have been swamped by the news about the FAC report on Monday. This explains why it was so important to get the statement agreed quickly in our final meeting (Thanks to Pauline's eagle eye, we narrowly avoided the cardinal error of writing the mistaken words "allegations made by Andrew Gilligan" in the final draft; in the end, it correctly said "allegations reported by Andrew Gilligan")

Chairing the meeting, I was very impressed by the seriousness and toughness displayed by the Governors. My view is that we demonstrated that the Board of Governors is not a body which can be easily bullied, either by politicians or the management. I am sure that we will benefit from demonstrating this in the long run, even if we get some of the familiar flak in the immediate future.

There were two traps which we could have fallen into on Sunday -- caving in to No 10, or caving in to the executive. I strongly believe that we did neither.

I asked someone who has worked for the BSC how other regulators would have reacted to having to rule on the Campbell allegations, if Ofcom were ever to get responsibility for BBC impartiality. He said simply, "In my experience, they would run a mile."

As I write this e-mail, the FAC report has just been published. Given that the key conclusion, "clearing" Alastair Campbell, survived only on the casting vote of the chair, and much of the rest of the report was highly critical of Mr Campbell's role, it looks as though the BBC has emerged intact from the report, though some will say that it is still very messy. I hope, perhaps optimistically, that this may give us a chance to move on to other matters.

Alastair Campbell and Jack Straw have both now withdrawn their general claims that the BBC was systematically biased during the war. This is a major step forward, and a victory for the Governors, since this would not have happened without our intervention. It also suggests there may be a willingness to de-escalate the overall row with the BBC. But the government is still adamant that the Gilligan report, in its specific allegation, was plain wrong, and have - very sensibly from their point of view - noted that the Governors did not substantiate the accuracy of this report. Richard Sambrook has said in public that the government and BBC News may have to "agree to disagree" on this. Since there is nothing much more to be said on this until the intelligence committee reports in September, the row may begin to move off the front pages.

Thank you once again for the solidity displayed yesterday

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