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Published: November 29, 2018 **Ben Rogers: Ofcom must not give China's TV propagandists special treatment**

16 comments



By Benedict Rogers (https://www.conservativehome.com/author/benedict-rogers-2)

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Benedict Rogers is the East Asia Team Leader at the international human rights organization CSW (<http://www.csw.org.uk/>), the co-founder and Deputy Chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission (<http://www.conservativehumanrights.com/>), the co-founder of the International Coalition to Stop Crimes against Humanity in North Korea (<http://www.stopnocrimes.org/>), the co-founder and Chair of Hong Kong Watch (<http://www.hongkongwatch.org/>), and author of three books on Burma.

Two months ago I came face-to-face with the shrieking, ferocious, thuggish human face of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at the Conservative Party Conference.

As we were concluding a fringe meeting on Hong Kong hosted by the Conservative Party Human Rights Commission (<http://www.conservativehumanrights.com>) and Hong Kong Watch (<http://www.hongkongwatch.org>), Kong Linlin (<https://chinachange.org/tag/kong-linlin/>), a reporter for China Central Television (CCTV), the CCP's propaganda arm, screamed abuse at me. It was yet another example (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/01/chinas-global-propaganda-is-aimed-at-bosses-not-foreigners/>) of China's "tantrum diplomacy" (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2018/11/20/inside-chinas-tantrum-diplomacy-at-apec/?utm_term=.02f8e8f25124).

I had ended by saying that I am pro-China (<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/10/11/i-pro-china/>), even if I am critical of the regime. I have spent much of my life in China and I want China to succeed. But, I argued, it is in China's interests for Hong Kong to succeed, so China must honour its promises to the people of Hong Kong (<https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2018/01/benedict-rogers-britain-must-honour-majors-promise-that-hong-kong-will-never-have-to-walk-alone.html>).

With a venom which I have never before encountered, Ms Kong yelled out: "Liar, liar. You are anti-China. You want to divide China". She continued to yell at me and our three speakers from Hong Kong – Martin Lee, founder of Hong Kong's Democratic Party, and Benny Tai and Nathan Law, leaders of the Umbrella Movement.

Then, when she refused to sit down, she slapped a young student, Enoch Lieu (<https://twitter.com/enochcafe/status/1047266025098698752>), three times after he politely asked her to leave. Part of the incident was captured on video and went viral (<https://www.facebook.com/HongKongWatch1/videos/a-chinese-journalist-assaults-a-fringe-meeting-volunteer-at-the-conservative-par/1543672115778226/>). She was arrested and charged (<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/25/uk/cctv-journalist-charged-china-uk-intl/index.html>), although last week



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(<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/nov/20/kong-linlin-chinese-journalist-case-dropped-allegedly-slapped-tory-delegate>) the Crown Prosecution Service dropped the charges (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-46287565>).

After that experience, it was a shock to learn that CCTV is opening their largest media hub outside China in Chiswick (<https://www.broadbandtvnews.com/2018/06/18/chinese-state-tv-cgtn-to-set-up-european-hub-in-london/>) next month, employing over 300 staff. The thought of hundreds of CCP agents roaming around Britain is alarming. Kong Linlin's behaviour is part of the Chinese regime's growing pattern (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/17/china-new-diplomacy-broken-porcelain-sweden>) of thuggery around the world (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-chinas-new-era-diplomats-are-acting-distinctly-undiplomatic/>), and it should not continue unchallenged.

That is why I was delighted when Peter Humphrey, a former Reuters journalist-turned-corporate investigator, filed a complaint last Friday with Ofcom (<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/11/23/ordeal-haunts-uk-regulator-must-ban-chinese-state-tv-says-man-appeared-forced-confession/>). At a press conference after filing the complaint, Mr Humphrey was joined by Swedish human rights activist Peter Dahlin to launch a new report on China's use of forced televised confessions, titled *Trial by Media: China's new show trials and the global expansion of Chinese media*. (<https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0999370626>)

Humphrey and Dahlin have first-hand experience of the CCP's most brutal behaviour. Both have been imprisoned in China – Humphrey and his wife for 23 months in a Chinese jail (<https://www.ft.com/content/db8b9e36-1119-11e8-940e-08320fc2a277>), Dahlin for 23 days in secret detention (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/03/human-rights-activist-peter-dahlin-secret-black-prison-xi-jinpings-new-china>). Humphrey was forced to confess on television twice.

"They drugged me, locked me to a tiger chair, and placed me and the chair inside a small metal cage," he says.

"CCTV journalists then aimed their cameras at me and recorded me reading out the answers already prepared for me by the police. No questions were asked." His confession was broadcast on CCTV, before his case had even come to trial.

Humphrey was subjected to a catalogue of abuse: an overcrowded cell, poor sanitary conditions, meagre food rations, sleep deprivation, separation from family, denial of legal representation or consular access for part of the time and denial of medical treatment for cancer. "The aggregate of these different types of duress adds up to what the UN would describe as torture," he says.

Complicit in this torture was CCTV. In his complaint to Ofcom (http://rsdlmonitor.com/cctv-complaint-ofcom/?fbclid=IwAR3RzY9v7TBZa8GSUyd3b82QRsS-rU8Z97P1GsorvdhQGodG3Lq_KsSB8ws), Humphrey writes: "CCTV was working in active collusion with the police and the Chinese state". Under duress, Humphrey was paraded on CCTV's domestic and international broadcasts, "confessing" to crimes he had not yet been convicted of.

Seven years ago, Ofcom ruled that Iran's *Press TV* was in violation of Britain's Broadcasting Code (<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2011/may/23/iran-press-tv-maziar-bahari>) for airing a forced televised confession. Press TV's license in the UK was revoked. It was this precedent that prompted Humphrey to file a 17-page complaint with Ofcom, detailing 15 violations of the Broadcasting Code by CCTV.

Dahlin was subjected to psychological torture in secret detention (<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/02/04/chinas-residential-surveillance-designated-location-licence-disappear-hold-torture-dissenters/>). His organisation Safeguard Defenders has published two previous books – *The People's Republic of the Disappeared* (<https://www.hongkongfp.com/2018/02/04/chinas-residential-surveillance-designated-location-licence-disappear-hold-torture-dissenters/>) and *Scripted and Staged: Behind the scenes of China's forced televised confessions* (<http://rsdlmonitor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SCRIPTED-AND-STAGED-Behind-the-scenes-of-Chinas-forced-televised-confessions.pdf>). Their new book, *Trial by Media*, (<http://rsdlmonitor.com/book-release-trial-by-media/>) provides analysis of CCTV's key role in China's apparatus of repression.

Forced televised confessions, filmed and broadcast by CCTV, are now commonplace in China. Typically, Dahlin explains, confessions fall into three categories – "defend", "deny" or "denounce". The person giving the statement must defend the CCP, deny any mistreatment, and denounce their own 'crimes' and the regime's critics. Chinese-born Swedish citizen Gui Minhai (<https://unherd.com/2017/10/question-china-gui-minhai-question-us-protests-disappearance/>), who was abducted from Thailand in 2015 and continues to be held in China, was forced to read a statement denouncing Sweden.

My own experience pales into insignificance compared to the trauma which these two men endured, and the even worse treatment to which Chinese detainees are subjected. All I have experienced is being denied entry to Hong Kong (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-41586529>) on Beijing's orders, receiving seven rather absurd anonymous threatening letters (https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/xi-jinpings-regime-reaches-well-beyond-its-borders_uk_5b3e5878e4b0a28cfbc1e1) to me, my neighbours, employers and mother, and a woman screaming at me (<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/25/uk/cctv-journalist-charged-china-uk-intl/index.html>). I didn't even get slapped.

But what I have experienced gives me a glimpse into CCTV's character and its relationship to the CCP, and what I have heard from these two brave men leaves me in no doubt that allowing CCTV to build its media centre in London without reference to our Broadcasting Code would be an appalling surrender of our values. When I asked Peter Humphrey what he made of Kong Linlin's behaviour, he responded with stark clarity: "Kong Linlin's conduct reminds me of the woman who interrogated me while I was strapped to a tiger chair in a small metal cage – a total viciousness that is in the bloodstream of the CCP."

Yet it is important to emphasise that at the heart of this are the values that make Britain different from China. We believe in a free press. Strangely, after Kong Linlin was arrested by West Midlands Police, the Chinese Embassy tried to portray her as a victim (<http://uk.businessinsider.com/china-demands-apology-after-conservative-party-kicks-out-reporter-for-slapping-2018-10?r=US&IR=T>), suggesting that her right to freedom of expression as a journalist

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was denied (https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d774d3259544e7a457a6333566d54/share_p.html). In the next sentence, the Chinese Embassy demanded that the organisers of the meeting apologise, because apparently we have no right to discuss Hong Kong.

Without a hint of irony, the CCP defends the freedom of its representatives to assault people, but denies the freedom of expression of the co-signatory to the Sino-British Joint Declaration to discuss Hong Kong.

The truth is, if she had asked a question or made a comment, however hostile, in an appropriate manner, she would have been welcome to do so. And Dahlin is clear that the Ofcom complaint is not about trying to drive CCTV out or to “silence them,” even though most western media is banned in China. “This is not about revenge or retaliation,” he said. “On the contrary, we want them to participate in the conversation – but on the same rules as everybody else. We want this to influence their behaviour”. China, he adds, “should not be afforded special treatment”.

That is all that Humphrey and Dahlin seek. They want Ofcom to enforce its own Broadcasting Code (<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code>), and act according to precedent. I hope Ofcom will respond accordingly. Broadcasters cannot be accomplices to torture.

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(https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Jack_Graham)

Jack_Graham (https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Jack_Graham) ·

I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

Surely they are entitled to the same special treatment as the dead tree press propogandists, and the BBC and Channel 4 propogandists get in this country.

You do know that our press are considered by the public as sychophants of the establishment, and that practically the whole journalist profession is composed of second rate partisan party hacks, who couldn't lie straight in bed.

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This is the true face of the regime <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2018/august/ch...>
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 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Dorothea43>) Dorothea43 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Dorothea43>) · 1

~~Never~~ ask how typical the horrors reported here are. The Chinese students I met on MA courses were cheerful and free spirited with no hint of coming from an oppressed country (in contrast to Iranians, all escapees, who hated what had happened to their Persia). Is there any scope for influencing the Chinese government I wonder. We need friends as much as they do.

Reply Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/TaxedToDeath911>) · 1 week ago

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 (https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Major_Plonquer) · 1 week ago

Major_Plonquer (https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Major_Plonquer)

We gave Hong Kong back because our lease ran out. And if anybody lied to the people of Hong Kong it was the despicable Fatty Pang (aka Chris Patten) who PROMISED democracy, never delivered and ran away to become an EU Commissioner.

Reply Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/ConHome1005>) · 1 week ago

PeterBeater (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/ConHome1005>)

I don't see what the issue is. Ofcom allows Brussels to operate with impunity from inside Broadcasting House. No-one makes a fuss about that.

Reply **3 replies** · active 1 week ago Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/CorkinCues>) CorkinCues (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/CorkinCues>) · 1

~~Week ago~~ Ban PressTV. Ban RT, Ban CCTV (The chinese one not the cameras that watch what we are doing all day long.)

But leave CH4, BBC and Sky to push the centrist viewpoint and denounce any view that veers off the Centrist track.

Reply Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/WallyRobbins>) · 1 week ago

WallyRobbins (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/WallyRobbins>)

More media voices are most welcome, for that matter bring back PressTV, I can decide for myself what is accurate or not.

Let a thousand flowers bloom.

Reply Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/CorkinCues>) · 1 week ago

CorkinCues (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/CorkinCues>)

All of them including Infowars?

Reply Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/dickpi>) dickp (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/dickpi>) · 1 week ago

Why do we regulate the broadcast press at all these days? What makes it so different from the printed press or internet? The justification of limited frequency available has long since died, and arguments based on influence are now on the wain.

Liberalise the whole sector, and fire all the pen pushers whose singular purpose is to enforce arbitrary and archaic rules.

Reply Report

 (https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Major_Plonquer) · 1 week ago

Major_Plonquer (https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Major_Plonquer)

As someone who has lived and worked in China for the better part of 40 years, I have to say, I don't recognise the China this wally talks about. Of course he's a Yuman Rites virtue signaller and the Chinese are spot on right about him. He should fix his own country first.

Chinese people have human rights that we in the UK can only dream about. They have the right to walk around in their crime-free capital city, the right to have their government tell them the truth and the right not to be interfered with by foreign countries and uneducated foreigners trying to foist political concepts on them they don't want (see EU).

Of all the countries in the world China's government has the HIGHEST levels of popularity amongst its own people typically around 86% (see Pew Research) compared to the 29% we currently achieve. Perhaps he should take his views on forcing television channels to be open and honest and walk into the BBC. See how far he gets with that.

And Hong Kong isn't China.

Reply **1 reply** · active 1 week ago

Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Laz200>) Laz200 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/Laz200>) · 1 week ago

Yeah yeah freedom is slavery, war is peace etc etc.

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Report

 (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/oldcolonial>) oldcolonial (<https://www.intensedebate.com/people/oldcolonial>) · 1 week ago

It's interesting to note the comments from China stooges following this article. China is the focus of a dreadful mess in Australia.

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