

Brown and the 'bigoted woman': the control freak caught out

This post was originally posted on [Charlie Beckett's blog](#) on April 28th.

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It's bad enough to [call a life-time Labour supporter a 'bigoted woman'](#) but what this gaffe really reveals is Gordon Brown's 'clunking fist' control freak approach to political communications.



It's not crime of the century. It's not more important than the national debt. So let's not get things out of perspective. But it reveals so much about Brown's real character at a moment in the campaign when swing voters are making up their minds on exactly that basis.

His reaction was bullying and bad-tempered and showed a distaste for interaction with a real person who disagreed with him on a few things. That ain't good politics.

Instead of a personal, straight-forward apology on the [Jeremy Vine Show](#) he attempted to distance himself from what had happened. He tried to blame the broadcasters and his aides and he refused to accept he had spoken out of turn. Now he has to go back to make a laboured and humiliating personal apology in person.



This gaffe will hurt Labour even more because their leader doesn't know how to deal with the fall-out from the new guerilla journalism.

It's the first real gaffe of the campaign and so will be amplified by a mainstream media corps that has been waiting impatiently for some reckless spontaneity. This is also manna from heaven for the online political commentariat.

And if you think it's just clever media types who think this is a scandal then go and look what 'real' people are saying on Twitter or other forums. On second thoughts, don't if you are a Labour official because it will make you suicidal. This is an online wildfire.

Of course, this was a private remark made public by chance. But it does reveal how his mind works. And as usual, it's not the original offence as much as the cack-handed attempt to cover it up that does the real damage.

It also revealed to anyone who didn't know just how desperate Labour is to avoid Gordon meeting anyone who is not slavishly loyal and who fake these public encounters are. That doesn't quite accord with all that stuff from Gordon in the second TV debate about how he rejected presentation in favour of policy.

Political media historians will be comparing it to the [Mayhill Fowler expose of Barack Obama's 'bitter' comments](#) during the last presidentials. I thought that 'guerilla journalism' moment was justified. I also thought it was fair game when the [Sun published the phone conversation between Gordon Brown](#) and the war widow last year.

The question for politicians in the digital 24/7 media age is not whether they can control the media, but how they respond to it. Obama ended up undamaged by the 'bitter' comment and has risen above minor media infractions. Brown simply becomes mired in them.

[John Harris rightly suggests](#) that this is not just a problem for Labour. It reflects on the wider disconnect between the political machines and the public. I agree. It is not just that the politicians should not make mistakes. It is that they should not expect to control the message. We are in an era when media saturates all political process. The successful new media politician is the one that practices what they preach on transparency, engagement and interaction.