

# 'Like ticket touts at Stamford Bridge' LSE's Howard Davies on Journalists

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/03/30/like-ticket-touts-at-stamford-bridge-howard-davies-on-journalists/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/03/30/like-ticket-touts-at-stamford-bridge-howard-davies-on-journalists/)

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Technically, Howard Davies was my boss at the LSE until he resigned over the donation from Libya. Along with that he can also be accused of having created POLIS, the journalism think-tank that I run. Therefore, I have more than a passing interest in his views on media coverage of the story that forced his departure.



I liked Howard a lot. He's thin-skinned and doesn't suffer fools gladly, but he was a brilliant manager of the LSE as well as a funny and intelligent person. He was a critical but very astute and committed supporter of my project to bring journalism into the heart of the LSE. He was an adept writer and broadcaster and would have made a great journalist, though he was not entirely approving of the trade:

*"they are part of the flora and fauna of British life, I suppose. They have a job to do, like ticket touts at Stamford Bridge or men in braces in the City. We don't have a settled family view on this issue – my wife was in the business for 35 years. And, anyway, complaining about the British press is like moaning about the weather: satisfying, but ultimately fruitless."*

In his [diary article for Management Today](#) he doesn't whinge about the coverage but there were obviously times when it became personally irksome:

*"There have been, though, a few interventions that might try the patience of a saint, or even of Bob Geldof. I don't think anyone would enjoy the experience, over 24 hours after resigning, of having a journalist barking repetitive and entirely redundant questions at him as he tried to extract £50 from an ATM on a Friday night."*

In typically sardonic fashion he reserves his main criticisms for 'the columnists and correspondents with their pet theories on what really went wrong':

*"We must be charitable here. Anyone who writes a regular column knows there are days when – how shall I put it? – the muse deserts one and the words come out tidily processed, but content-free. That is the charitable interpretation of Simon Jenkins' eccentric piece in the Guardian."*

But as he rightly points out. Some journalists just don't know their subject well enough or can't be bothered to do their research before launching forth with opinions:

*"the wooden spoon goes to Tom Bower, who has just written a kind of authorised biography of Bernie Ecclestone. (Someone's got to do it.) He thinks the LSE's problem is too many foreign students, speaking pidgin English, not challenging their professors, and depriving English students of places. Quite what that has to do with donations from Libya I don't know. But, leaving that aside, the fact we*

*have a government-imposed cap on the numbers of Brits we can take, and there is no competition between the two sorts of students, whose applications are considered separately, has passed him by. And these benighted foreigners don't do so badly: 26% of them get firsts, while only 16% of the domestics do – in identical exams, of course. So they are smarter than the average pigeon.”*

Whatever you think about the LSE/Libya issue or Howard Davies personally, it is clear that anyone operating in the public eye now needs to be a master in media as well as good at their job. Howard did virtually nothing wrong in terms of media handling. But sometimes a story will simply consume all its path. In the wake of this Howard may be down as far as the LSE is concerned, but I doubt he is out in terms of his contribution to public life.

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