

Brown Bullying Story Is A Nightmare For Good Journalists

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The Brown 'bullying' allegations are a nightmare for good journalists. They are also a dream for bad hacks who simply repeat every smear and concentrate on the process instead of substance.

It's a cracking yarn of psychosis at the heart of government and manna for radio phone-ins and online [forums](#). But if you were, for example, to watch Monday's BBC Ten O'Clock News followed by Newsnight you would be hard-pressed to extract any factual basis for the narrative.

People who responded to my [tweets](#) last night drew diametrically-opposed conclusions from exactly the same reportage. This reflects their politics, but also the difficulty of reporting what is a 'rumour'.

It seemed that the BBC's political editor and the Observer's Andrew Rawnsley do not believe Gus O'Donnel, Britain's most senior civil servant, when he denied having warned the Prime Minister about his 'bullying' behaviour. (And don't get me started on how the word bullying has come to mean any instance of rudeness or disagreement).

The charity that was cited in evidence has been shown to be shaky at best and ill-motivated at worst. Rawnsley can't name anyone to back up his allegations. And Robinson seemed to spend a lot of his air-time quoting people like Mandelson who rubbish the story. Dear Viewer, Confused? I am not surprised.

Here's the odd thing. I am sure that Rawnsley and Robinson's hunch/narrative is correct. I have the advantage that at least one very senior person has confirmed to me first hand knowledge of the kind of uncontrolled, vindictive, violently abusive behaviour by the Prime Minister. I have heard a lot of corroborating testimony, too.

I don't particularly care that the country's leader loses his rag sometimes. But this behaviour does seem systematic and a direct influence on policy and political mismanagement. So it does matter.

The real conundrum is for journalists like Rawnsley and Robinson who can't get sources to go on the record. If they don't report these things then they stand accused of keeping secrets in the cozy club of the lobby. If they use journalistic conventions then they face the bluster of people like Prescott. You decide.

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