

Blair takes on the media 'beasts'

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The outgoing British premier Tony Blair has made a [speech](#) attacking the UK news media for dragging down standards and hunting in packs like 'feral beasts'. It is a very good speech that outlines some of the pressures upon the media to deliver 'impact' at the cost of objectivity, fairness and intelligence. It rightly points out that new technology and free competition can have a price to be paid in terms of quality. He also acknowledges that his New Labour machine tried to handle the media in a way that has failed to halt that process. It is a speech well worth reading in full.

But some would say that his speech is laughable. For example, he talks about how speeches in parliament are not reported, and yet fails to accept that he, too, ignored parliament. I think he was right to do so, because so much of parliament is dull and irrelevant and of poor quality itself. I also think that the man (and Gordon, too) who was so kind and helpful in the past to papers like The Sun has a cheek to turn around and complain about tabloidisation of the British media. But the real charge is that this speech could have been made by just about any retiring PM over the last 20-30 years. Indeed, John Major made such comments at the [LSE](#) last month.

Things are changing in the way that politics is reported – politics is changing, too – I wish that politicians would do more to encourage and foster a better news media instead of spending their time trying to manipulate or deride it. I have more respect for the approach of Alastair Campbell who accepted that the relationship between politics and the media *should* be adversarial and then proceeded to out-fight the hacks. If Mr Blair wants a better media I would invite him to join our efforts here at POLIS to find ways that we can take advantage of new media technology to create a more networked journalism that allows traditional journalistic virtues to engage with the wider public.

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