

# THE BBC DEFENDS ITSELF

On October 13, BBC radio responded to objections made by a Sri Lankan listener about reports filed by its correspondent in Sri Lanka in September this year.

In its programme *WRITE ON*, which solicits audience comment, compliment and criticism, the BBC defended the reports and the reporter.

The letter referred to two reports filed by Christopher Morris in the programmes *Newshour* and *Outlook*:

*"After spending one week with the terrorist group Tamil Tigers, [Morris] gave vivid descriptions of training camps in which boys and girls are trained to fight against the government forces. Terrorist groups thrive on publicity ... We don't hear much about the IRA over the BBC."*

## WRITE ON:

Yes, a fair enough point, but you do have to remember, as always, that one man's terrorist is, as they say, another man's freedom fighter. From the Sri Lankan government point of view, obviously, the Tamil Tigers would be looked upon, I would imagine, as terrorists. So should the BBC carry these kinds of reports? Here's the head of the World Service Current Affairs, Andrew Joynes.

## Andrew Joynes:

There is what amounts to a full-scale civil war going on in some parts of Sri Lanka and that has been the case for some years. During the last year, for instance, it is thought that anything up to 10,000 lives had been lost. This report actually followed a battle that occurred at Elephant Pass. It's not a case of actually giving publicity to any group - it's a question of actually providing the background to what is a major military phenomenon in that part of the world.

## WRITE ON:

The specific form of this report - do you think it rather tended to show the Tamil Tigers in a favourable light?

## AJ:

Well I don't think it did. There were two reports. There was the report which was carried on *Newshour* which gave something of the flavour of what amounts almost to the fanaticism with which very young people are indoctrinated and equally, the *Outlook* report that looked at the way women are involved and actually become so involved in Tiger military activity that it seems that they are actually neglecting their connections with their families.

## WRITE ON:

How do you answer the comment in the letter to the effect that the BBC does not cover the activities of the IRA in the same kind of way?

## AJ:

Well, it's not the case that the BBC does not cover the activities of the IRA - I think every atrocity, every murder, every explosion is reported upon. And, in fact, programmes for many years have been providing the background to their para military infrastructure.

It is the case that under present British government legislation, the BBC along with the other media in Britain, are unable to carry directly interviews with representatives of paramilitary organisations. Now when this legislation was introduced in 1988, the BBC and the rest of the British media argued very strongly against this on the grounds that it would look as though the media here were applying double standards. It is far better - in our view - to allow the audience - the ordinary, decent members of the audience to make up their minds about whether or not an argument is specious or whether it is valid in democratic terms.

## WRITE ON:

I think that most broadcasters in the United Kingdom would agree with what Andrew said there and I believe that in the long run you do have to let listeners make up their own minds about the rights and wrongs about what groups like the Tamil Tigers and the IRA are doing.

## Editor's Note:

Velupillai Prabhakaran, the elusive and reticent leader of the Tamil Tigers was interviewed by Chris Morris in September this year. A transcript of this interview was published in the local newspapers.

## *Cracks in the Church of England ?*

A senior clergyman in the Church of England has given a warning that there will be an exodus of clergy and congregations if women are ordained as priests. The Archdeacon of York has already suggested that the Church of England may have to be formally split into traditionalist and liberal wings because of deep differences on many issues.

The question whether women should become priests is discussed by diocese throughout the Church of England and a decision will be taken by the Church's parliament, the General Senate, next year.

BBC, October 1991

## **Rape in Marriage**

The ruling by Britain's Law Lords that a husband who forces his wife to have sex is acting unlawfully and could face charges of rape has been greeted as a triumph by women's rights campaigners and victims of sexual abuse in marriage. The Law Lords have looked again at a ruling dating back to 1736 which said that by marrying, the woman had given her consent to sex whatever the circumstances. That, said the Law Lords, was no longer appropriate in a modern marriage which is a partnership of equals. A man who in future insists on conjugal rights can be prosecuted for marital rape.

BBC, October 1991