

Sir Robert M Worcester KBE DL of MORI v The Sunday Telegraph

Clauses noted: 1

Sir Robert M Worcester KBE DL of MORI complained to the Press Complaints Commission that two articles in The Sunday Telegraph headlined "Blair prepares to use his deadliest weapon" and "The elderly are allowed to say what they like, however rude, and no one can touch them for it", published on 31 October 2004 and 7 November 2004 respectively, contained inaccuracies in breach of Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Code of Practice.

Following an offer of remedial action from the newspaper, no further action was required.

The first article was a comment piece on the date of the next general election, which referred to James Callaghan's decision not to hold an election in the autumn of 1978. It stated the following – "Advised by Robert Worcester of MORI to wait, Callaghan did so – with disastrous consequences". The complainant said that he did not discuss timing with the Prime Minister at any time and had no personal contact with him from July to September 1978. The article was therefore misleading when it stated that he had "advised" him. While he may have had his own views on the issue, he had not offered any advice to the Prime Minister.

The second article referred to the complainant's predicted victory for John Kerry on the night of the United States Election. It stated that, in 1992, "MORI hilariously predicted a Labour victory based on exit polls". The complainant said that the organisation did not predict a Labour victory nor conduct any exit polls. The complainant wished for a correction and apology on both points to be published in the same column as the original piece of 31 October.

The newspaper said the first article did not assert that the complainant had discussed the matter with the Prime Minister but rather that his publicly-given advice was not to call an election in the autumn. At the time, the complainant had stated on national television that, in light of a MORI poll, the Prime Minister "would have been perhaps foolish" to have risked an election. Nonetheless, the newspaper offered to publish a clarification which outlined the distinction between his public comments and the fact that he had not given any private advice to Mr Callaghan.

In regard to the second article, the newspaper provided cuttings of previous articles that referred to the MORI prediction of a Labour victory in 1992 election. However, as these articles related to polls before the election – rather than exit polls – the newspaper offered also to clarify the position in its proposed text for publication.

The proposed text was as follows:

On October 31, an article in the Comment section described James Callaghan's decision not to hold the election in the autumn of 1978 when his Government was ahead in the polls and said that "advised by Robert Worcester of MORI to wait, Callaghan did so". We have been asked by Sir Robert to make clear that, while he said in public that Mr Callaghan should not go to the country in 1978, he gave him no private advice on this matter.

A separate Comment piece on November 7 included a satirical claim that "MORI hilariously predicted a Labour victory based on exit polls" on the night of the 1992 election. Although MORI polls conducted before the election showed Labour ahead, we have been asked to make clear that the firm did not hold exit polls on the night of the election. We are happy to clarify both points.

The complainant did not accept the newspaper's offer.

Adjudication

In relation to the first article, the Commission considered that the statement to which the complainant objected was sufficiently ambiguous to require clarification. Although it appeared that the complainant had offered a public view about the advisability of holding an election in 1978, the Commission agreed that some readers may have been misled into believing that the advice was of a more formal nature. In these circumstances, it was right that the newspaper should offer some form of remedial action to the complaint.

The second point of complaint also, in the Commission's view, required a published clarification, as the newspaper had not been able to substantiate the suggestion that MORI had predicted a Labour victory in 1992 on the basis of exit polls.

Taking both these issues into account, the Commission reviewed the newspaper's suggested clarification and considered that, in all the circumstances, it was a proportionate and appropriate response under the terms of the Code. There were no further issues to pursue under Clause 1 of the Code as a result.

Adjudication issued 2005