

A Boulton  
First  
25 April 2012  
Exhibits TABB1-7

**IN THE LEVESON INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE  
PRESS**

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**EXHIBIT TABB7**

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This is the exhibit TABB7 referred to in the first witness statement of Thomas Adam Babington Bolton dated 25 April 2012.

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advance copy of Brown's speech into a meeting of Lib Dem peers which coincided with it. Their Liberal lordships were said to be 'euphoric' at the news.

It was shortly after Gordon Brown had addressed the cameras in Downing Street that Alastair Campbell headed for the media village that had sprung up on Abingdon Green opposite the Houses of Parliament. He went knowing that this was a vital juncture in the news cycle with early evening news bulletins going out on all main channels, and yet the Cabinet was still tied up back in Number 10. Campbell was one of Gordon Brown's closest unelected aides, and perhaps Labour's most reputed expert on communications. At 5.39 p.m. he stepped in front of a Sky News camera to promulgate the Labour view as seen from Downing Street. Because this resulted in an on-air confrontation between Campbell and Adam Boulton, Adam Boulton takes up the next section in the first person.

When I started out in television, a news editor passed on a saying from his days as a tabloid reporter: 'Never sleep with or become the story'. Unfortunately while such advice undoubtedly protects star reporters like Simon Walters of the *Mail on Sunday* or Mazher Mahmood (aka the 'Fake Sheik') of the *News of the World*, it doesn't really work for television personalities such as me. We are part of our company's brand, we contribute to and defend its reputation and we are constantly in the unblinking gaze of the camera.

In the days after the election, we were on public view to an exceptional extent. For me, this was not just because of the Debates and the ten-hour-long election-night programme I had just presented, but because the political situation was fluid given the hung parliament, and people, even leading politicians, did not know what was going on. That is when rolling

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news, 24-hour news, comes into its own: a point not missed by the civil servants and other guardians of the constitution who had taken pains to ensure that we were well briefed in advance on the niceties of procedure should no party secure an outright majority.

At Sky News we were devoting all our resources, on-screen but far more off-screen, to finding out and reporting what was going on. Even during the weekday mid-afternoons, on Monday 10th and Tuesday 11th May 2010, we still had more than 750,000 people tuned in to the main channel in the UK, plus hundreds of thousands more following us abroad, online, via Twitter or our iPhone app.

During those fine May days those of us reporting from Westminster were also quite literally on view to passers-by. We and colleagues, including those from the BBC, CNN and ITN, were broadcasting in the open air from platforms purpose-built on Abingdon Green opposite the Palace of Westminster or from the pavement outside buildings in which key meetings were taking place. Political high days always attract demonstrators and cranks and they know where to come to try to get on camera. The Sky News platform was relatively low to the ground, positioned immediately next to the wide Millbank pavement. We attracted more than our fair share of attention, mainly because of BSkyB's links to Rupert Murdoch, that perennial soft target of the rabble-rouser. On the Saturday afternoon my colleague Kay Burley and I had nearly been forced off air, when the hard left faction of a voters' rights march surrounded our spot, blocked the view with their banners and tried to drown out our broadcast with electric bullhorns, shouting such witticisms as 'Sky News is Shit'. (Thus generating footage for rebroadcast on *Have I Got News for You*.)

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A main reason why we set up camp opposite parliament at moments of high political volatility is that those involved in the drama know where to find the cameras. We don't exactly offer an open microphone, but the political players know that they stand a good chance of getting their opinions broadcast on several channels simply by turning up 'on the green'. Inevitably, the rolling news channels are always hungriest for the latest titbit from the latest interviewee.

Clever media managers have sometimes exploited this situation to get disproportionate coverage for their views. Most famously in 1995 when John Major resigned and put his continued prime ministership to a vote of Tory MPs, his supporters flooded the green with ministers declaring loudly what a fantastic result he had won, thus, by their own admission, converting a near-terminal close shave into a mandate that propped him up for another two years.

That Monday evening, I knew that we were near a climactic moment. I was conscious that live broadcasters had perhaps been guilty of a collective failure to challenge adequately what we were being told during similar circumstances in the past. I knew from the many contacts our team had exchanging information that there was deep unhappiness in many quarters of the Labour party – both with the outline deal with the Liberal Democrats that was becoming apparent and with the fact that it was being negotiated by a small clique of Brown advisors without any formal reference to Cabinet, party or MPs. Finally, at that hour I was no longer the channel's main presenter from Westminster. In the interests of variety Jeremy Thompson, the regular anchor of Live at Five, had taken over, relegating me to the role of reporter/commentator.

Suddenly Alastair Campbell strode onto the green – and no TV channel, alas, was going to turn down the opportunity of

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Blair's former director of communications live. (Indeed, a few days later the BBC even had him on *Question Time* in preference to a member of the new coalition Cabinet.)

What followed was an on-air row between Campbell and me of which the best that can be said is that it added greatly to the gaiety of the nation. Many viewers have told me it was the highlight of their general election. A snowballing YouTube hit, it trended on Twitter that night, a new expression to me meaning it was one of the dominant topics of online chatter in the English-speaking world. But it was not one of my proudest moments as a broadcaster. I regret losing my temper, although I stand by the comments I made. It was a Harry Hill 'fight, fight' moment in which two unelected observers of the political scene squared up to each other – but there were no blows, or other physical contact between us – to the disappointment of many of those watching, as I subsequently found out.

Half past five that Monday evening was a great moment to hear from Campbell who had come straight from Number 10. An hour earlier Gordon Brown had made his dramatic and confusing statement proposing that he would form a new government with the Liberal Democrats before resigning in the autumn. The Cabinet was still meeting. There had been no authoritative statements from Labour over the weekend. Campbell had no official position in the current party team but Alastair was Alastair, famous for his intimate friendships at the top of New Labour.

My instinct was to leave the interview to Jeremy and I withdrew out of camera-shot to the edge of the scaffold platform. But just before going live Campbell challenged me to take part with words to the effect of 'Come on, let's have a dust-up.' Against my better judgement I agreed to move back into shot and join the discussion.

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Jeremy Thompson: *I'm joined here in Westminster by Alastair Campbell. Good evening to you. A lot of people are trying to make head or tail of what the Prime Minister said. Your colleagues say it's a dignified and statesmanlike offering from him, those on the other side of the House saying that it's a blatant piece of party gamesmanship and has nothing to do with dignity.*

Alastair Campbell: *What it is I think, it brings sense to this very, very complicated and difficult situation, which the election result threw up. No party won, no party leader got a very clear mandate. The Tories got most seats, they got the biggest share of the vote and the options remain a minority Tory government, some sort of deal between the Tories and the Liberals and they can carry on their discussions with that. But what's happened today is that Nick Clegg has indicated to Gordon Brown that there may be sense in actually a discussion developing, there have obviously been sort of behind the scenes discussions going on, but a proper policy-based discussion developing between Labour and the Liberal Democrats to see whether the basis for a coalition government can be formed and I think actually a lot of people will feel that's not a bad . . . if that materialises it is not a bad outcome from this election. Let's just go back a bit where we were . . .*

Jeremy Thompson: *Do you think that's what the British people really voted for?*

Alastair Campbell: *Well I don't, what they certainly didn't, they certainly voted for change of some sort, no doubt about that . . . let me finish, they voted for change of some sort . . .*

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Adam Boulton: *Oh I see, I thought you wanted to have a discussion.*

Alastair Campbell: *No, I wanted to answer Jeremy's question if I may.*

Adam Boulton: *Oh right.*

Alastair Campbell: *They wanted change of some sort, they did not go for David Cameron despite the utterly slavish media support that he got, despite all the money from Lord Ashcroft and his friends, despite the fact that we'd had the recession and so forth, they didn't really want Cameron. There's obviously been, Gordon accepts that there was also . . .*

Jeremy Thompson: *Well this was their least worst option. They certainly didn't give Gordon Brown a ringing endorsement did they?*

Alastair Campbell: *What Gordon said was no party leader and no party won the election.*

Adam Boulton: *Hang on . . . but let's be clear of the facts of the election. In the election we take three main parties . . .*

Alastair Campbell: *Yeh.*

Adam Boulton: *. . . there is one party that lost both in terms of share of the vote and seats — that is Labour. There is one party that is behind the Conservatives and on top of that we have now got a Prime Minister who wants to stay on for four months but is saying he is going to resign in four months' time. Now none of that, with all due respect to Alastair*

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*Campbell, can be seen as a vote of confidence by the voters in the Labour party.*

*Alastair Campbell: But nobody is saying that it is, in fact that's the whole point . . .*

*Adam Boulton: But you're saying nobody won . . .*

*Alastair Campbell: Well they didn't.*

*Adam Boulton: What I'm saying is, if you look at the results there is a party which clearly lost in as much as it moved down . . .*

*Alastair Campbell: What you're therefore saying, but what you are saying though is that . . . look David Cameron didn't do that much better than some of his predecessors but I accept he got more seats and a bigger share of the vote but my point is . . .*

*Adam Boulton: A much bigger share of the vote.*

*Alastair Campbell: Right, OK but my point is that the situation constitutionally . . .*

*Adam Boulton: And the second point if I can just . . .*

*Alastair Campbell: Can I answer the first point?*

*Adam Boulton: The second point is if you put together the percentages of the vote or the parliamentary seats, a Lib-Lab combination doesn't do it.*

*Alastair Campbell: No, you'd then have to look at other parties . . .*

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*Adam Boulton: It doesn't have a majority so you can't claim . . .*

*Alastair Campbell: But nor has a minority Tory government.*

*Adam Boulton: Yes, but a Lib-Lab, a Lib-Conservative coalition clearly has got a majority and a majority of seats.*

*Alastair Campbell: And that may happen, and that may happen, all that's happened today . . .*

*Adam Boulton: Well, why not do what Malcolm Wicks says and just go quietly, accept that you lost this election? Why not do what David Blunkett says and accept that you lost this election?*

*Alastair Campbell: No, because, well because I don't think that would be the right thing to do because I don't think that is the verdict that the public delivered.*

*Adam Boulton: What, the national interest is actually what you are seriously thinking about in this?*

*Alastair Campbell: Yes, it is actually, yes.*

*Adam Boulton: The nation needs four more months of Gordon Brown limping on until he retires?*

*Alastair Campbell: Well, Adam, I know that you've been spending the last few years saying Gordon Brown is dead meat and he should be going anyway . . .*

*Adam Boulton: I've not been saying that, OK show me where I said that once?*

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Alastair Campbell: *Well you've pretty much, you pretty much have . . . Adam, I don't want to go and rewind . . .*

Adam Boulton: *But are you saying in the national interest what the nation needs is four more months of Gordon Brown and then resign having lost an election?*

Alastair Campbell: *I am saying, I am saying there are three options. One is a Tory minority . . . none of them are perfect, one is a Tory minority government. That would be perfectly legitimate, OK. It wouldn't be terribly stable, it might not last very long but it is legitimate. The second is a Lib-Tory deal either formal . . .*

Adam Boulton: *Which would be stable.*

Alastair Campbell: *. . . which could be stable but what's absolutely clear, Adam, you can't tell the Liberal Democrats to do things they don't want to do.*

Adam Boulton: *No, I'm not telling anybody to do anything.*

Alastair Campbell: *No, but you're sort of saying that it is an easy option for them and it's not and what's coming through loud and clear from a lot of the Liberal Democrats is that their activists and their supporters are saying, hold on a minute, we did not vote to get you to put David Cameron in power, we voted to stop that happening.*

Adam Boulton: *Well, did they vote to put, keep Gordon Brown in power?*

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Alastair Campbell: *They voted, they voted . . .*

Adam Boulton: *Did they vote to keep Gordon Brown in power?*

Alastair Campbell: *No, they didn't and Gordon has accepted that today which is why . . .*

Adam Boulton: *No exactly, so on that basis you, he didn't win at all, . . .*

Alastair Campbell: *Well what does he do, what does he do? He just sort of says here you go, David Cameron come on in, you didn't actually get the vote you should have done, you didn't get the majority you said you were going to do . . .*

Adam Boulton: *'You got a lot more votes and seats than me.'*

Alastair Campbell: *Yes I know. Adam, you're obviously upset that David Cameron's not Prime Minister.*

Adam Boulton: *I'm not upset.*

Alastair Campbell: *You are, you probably are.*

Adam Boulton: *No, no, no, don't keep casting aspersions on what I think . . .*

Alastair Campbell: *Adam, calm down.*

Adam Boulton: *I am commenting, don't keep saying what I think.*

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- Alastair Campbell: *This is live on television.*
- Jeremy Thompson: *Alastair, Alastair . . .*
- Alastair Campbell: *Dignity, dignity.*
- Adam Boulton: *No, don't keep telling me what I think. This is what you do, you come on and you say no one won the election . . .*
- Alastair Campbell: *No, I mean, Jeremy . . .*
- Adam Boulton: *. . . no don't you talk to me, I'm fed up with you telling me what I think, I don't think that.*
- Alastair Campbell: *I don't care what you think, I don't care what you're fed up with, you can think what you like. I can tell you my opinion . . .*
- Adam Boulton: *Don't tell me what I think.*
- Alastair Campbell: *I will tell you why I think you are reacting so badly.*
- Jeremy Thompson: *Alastair, you're being, you're being very, you are being a bit provocative here and unnecessarily so.*
- Alastair Campbell: *Well, sometimes politics is about passionate things.*
- Jeremy Thompson: *I understand that.*

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- Alastair Campbell: *He is saying Gordon Brown is no longer legitimately in Downing Street . . . He is.*
- Adam Boulton: *No, I'm saying Gordon Brown, I'm saying if you look at the performances in the elections, Labour did worse than the Conservatives, will you accept that?*
- Alastair Campbell: *No. They got more seats, of course they did, the Tories got more seats . . .*
- Adam Boulton: *So you do accept it?*
- Alastair Campbell: *Yes. But equally Gordon Brown is constitutionally perfectly entitled to be Prime Minister and . . .*
- Jeremy Thompson: *Can we er, Alastair, just tell me how . . .*
- Alastair Campbell: *Let me finish this point, Jeremy, let me finish this point. He has managed this situation. I think perfectly properly. He has today announced he will not be the Prime Minister . . .*
- Adam Boulton: *Well, can I ask you a simple question?*
- Alastair Campbell: *Yes.*
- Adam Boulton: *Why hasn't he had a Cabinet meeting before making this offer?*
- Alastair Campbell: *He's about to have a Cabinet meeting now.*

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Adam Boulton: *Yes, but he hasn't had it now, he has made the offer, what can the Cabinet do . . .*

Alastair Campbell: *He's spoken to his Cabinet, he's spoken . . .*

Adam Boulton: *. . . why haven't you had a meeting with the Parliamentary Labour Party like the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives have had?*

Alastair Campbell: *He's having one tomorrow, he's having one tomorrow.*

Adam Boulton: *In other words it's you, you, you totally unelected have plotted this with . . .*

Jeremy Thompson: *Gentlemen, gentlemen.*

Alastair Campbell: *Me? What and you're elected are you . . . ?*

Adam Boulton: *Yes. You're up here speaking about him, no but . . .*

Alastair Campbell: *No but that's because the Ministers are going to a Cabinet meeting . . .*

Adam Boulton: *He's has got a parliamentary party. You're the one that cooked it up, you're the one that's cooked this up with Peter Mandelson.*

Alastair Campbell: *[laughing] Oh my God, unbelievable. Adam, calm down.*

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Jeremy Thompson: *Gentlemen, gentlemen, let this debate carry on later. Let's just remind you what Gordon Brown said a few minutes ago that seems to have led to this latest debate, this is Gordon Brown's statement . . .*

Adam Boulton: *I actually care about this country.*

Alastair Campbell: *You think I don't care about it, you think I don't care about it?*

Adam Boulton: *I don't think the evidence is there.*

Alastair Campbell: *Well, OK, Adam, you're as pompous as it gets . . . [unintelligible].*

Jeremy Thompson: *This is Gordon Brown's statement [cuts to footage of Gordon Brown].*

Readers must draw their own conclusions about both of us. My view was that the tide finally going out on Campbell's influence-peddling exposed him for what he had always been. He had not expected to be challenged on his tendentious assertions but once he was, and was forced to concede their validity, he resorted to bullying, baiting, impugning his inconvenient challenger. It may possibly have worked for him during the Kelly Affair and the Iraq War, but it didn't, as history repeated itself as farce, with the attempted 'Coalition of the Losers'.

Although upset I was immediately heartened by the messages of support which pinged onto my BlackBerry from bosses at BSkyB – 'what he said was outrageous'. Experience told me to walk away and get on with the job of reporting the major political story. I decided not to blog, let alone Twitter, on the matter.



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Regrettably, unjustifiable attacks on Sky News' political impartiality by some Labour figures had become commonplace since the *Sun* had taken its quite independent decision to switch its editorial allegiance from Labour to Cameron in September 2009. (As a matter of fact the *Sun* had informed Sky News of its change of line at exactly the same time as it told the BBC.)

Peter Mandelson had started the calumny. Prescott and Campbell had spread the attacks online. In an interview with the *New Statesman* during the campaign Ed Balls smeared 'Sky News and most of the newspapers are deeply partisan . . .', apparently backing off when challenged by me and others. All he was able to cite was a question, which I had asked of Mandelson, about cuts at an open news conference. So it was hardly a surprise when the Cabinet Minister Ben Bradshaw took up Campbell's tune later that evening on air and told me 'I know you feel very sore about this, Adam [the putative Lib-Lab pact].' By this stage I was quoting on the record views against the deal from across the Labour spectrum – from John Reid to Diane Abbott. Citing these figures, I impressed upon Bradshaw that 'this is nothing to do with my opinion'. He Twittered to his fifty-five 'followers' later 'What is wrong with him?'

The 'Boulton v Campbell' encounter quickly gathered a cult following. Every day since I have had strangers coming up to me to express their support. In Haymarket a bus driver jammed on the brakes to give me a double thumbs-up; I've had congratulations from policemen to Labour peers and Alastair Campbell has naturally claimed that he has made me famous. At the time, I declined to comment, except to the sketch writer Ann Treneman who I talked to outside the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition negotiations in Whitehall, as a passing crowd

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of demonstrators chanted my name. She reported in *The Times* that I regretted the incident. I repeated this view a few weeks later on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme when I was invited on with John Sergeant on the somewhat unlikely pretext of discussing the thirtieth anniversary of the launch of CNN.

But even though Campbell instantly claimed to have won the encounter, and in spite of his insistence that he was interested in policies not personalities, he and his cronies set about trying to dominate the post-match analysis and to do me as much damage as they possibly could.

That night Campbell contacted the most senior people at Sky News who he could find in his BlackBerry to demand action against me. John Prescott, who seems never to have forgiven me or Sky for breaking the story that he had punched a member of the public, pointed his 22,000 Twitter followers in the fight direction: 'Inundated by people wanting link to report Adam Boulton,' he tweeted, 'happy to help', before giving the address of Ofcom.

Campbell also continued to try to settle scores on Twitter: 'When JP punched someone, pompous Boulton said he must go! Wonder if same rules for TV hacks losing it live. Thought the headbutt imminent . . . Really worried about Adam Boulton . . . Wonder if he might need some of my pills. Anji ought to come home from her foreign trip.' He variously referred to my 'on-air melt down', how I 'lost it live', and my 'live toys-out-of-the-pram tantrum'. He claimed that 'online there was a lot of comparisons between Sky and Fox News – not to Sky's reputational benefit I would say.' But Campbell couldn't quite work out who was threatening who during the publicity interviews for the latest volume of his diaries, telling the *Guardian*: 'There's one point where I start to move back a little bit. I was thinking "What do you do if someone headbutts you live on TV?"' but boasting at an awards ceremony according to *PR Week*: 'If

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I hadn't thought about my mum watching at home, I'd have headbutted him.'

However along with the banter, Campbell made a more private and insidious attempt to throw his weight around and seemed to want to settle scores with me. The man who had impugned both my and the channel's professional integrity sent a letter by email that same week to John Ryley, the Head of Sky News, threatening to sue unless disciplinary action was taken against me. A copy of Campbell's email was supplied to me for my information. I reproduce quotations from it here without the permission of John Ryley or indeed Sky News. But I take this step in the firm belief that reading it reveals a lot about the man and his modus operandi.

Following the initial pleasantries, Campbell details that he has spoken that morning to lawyers:

*Their advice is that I have every right to complain to Ofcom, and have set out the grounds on which such a complaint ought to be accepted. However, I see from the media that many others have done this already. So, other than giving publicity to an interview that needs no more, I see little point in doing this. Ofcom will doubtless look at it and make up their own minds.*

Campbell also states he had been advised that what I had said during the interview and afterwards was defamatory:

*Lawyers draw attention in particular to his questioning of my motivations in seeking to discharge the duty I had been asked by the Prime Minister to fulfil, namely advising him in conjunction with the official government machine on how to navigate a complex constitutional position. Further, he questioned my integrity at various points including via allegations that Peter Mandelson and*

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*I were involved in an unconstitutional 'stitch up', that we were compulsive liars and that we were unpatriotic.*

He claims that he has

*been libelled and defamed many times, but in part because I believe in freedom of speech, and because I happen to think our libel laws are hopeless, I have rarely used them. Whenever I have, I have won.*

*I let most things go because there are more important things in life than wasting time on this kind of thing. Indeed, Boulton has defamed me in the past and, because the impact has been minimal, I have let it go. However, the attention given to this has been enormous, and worldwide. Yesterday as I went about my business, as many people raised this with me as raised the rather more important question about who our Prime Minister might be at the end of the day. It has been viewed by hundreds of thousands of people since the first broadcast, produced tens of thousands of comments online, and though the vast majority are in my favour, that does not negate the defamatory nature of what he said, and has been saying to others since. Even the Mail today, which libels me on close to a daily basis, seems to accept most professional journalists saw his outbursts as a disgraceful and unprofessional contribution to an important debate in which I was trying to engage in a responsible, restrained, if robust manner.*

While Campbell writes that his lawyers are advising he consider whether to take legal action, he stresses that he would be

*less minded to do so if Sky News were to take some steps, privately and publicly, to mark an acceptance that his behaviour was unacceptable and that I am owed an apology. For this not to happen would mean that Sky felt there was nothing wrong with his behaviour, when I know from senior executives at News that they think no such thing.*

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*I think it is best at this stage if you, rather than I, make proposals as to what the private and public expression of this should be, but be assured I am determined there should be such an expression and I look forward to hearing from you.*

Pestered by several more emails, 'Have you got anything for me?', Ryley eventually replied by letter that I had expressed regret about the incident and that that should be sufficient. Nothing further has been heard from Campbell.

Attempts by Campbell, Prescott and other interested online parties to involve Ofcom were no more successful. The regulator reported that it had 'received 1,116 complaints about this content, with complainants considering that Adam Boulton was biased towards the Conservative party and against the Labour party, and was confrontational, bullying and aggressive towards Alastair Campbell. Some complainants considered that it was inappropriate for a presenter to lose his temper on television.'

Ofcom's judgement pointed out that although the live programme went out after polling day the rules of 'due impartiality' still applied because 'the programme was dealing with arguments for and against Gordon Brown's attempt to form a coalition administration with the Liberal Democrats ... discussions around the formation of the UK government was clearly a matter of major political controversy.'

However, it took the view that both sides had had the chance to air their opinions:

First, given that Alastair Campbell had effectively accused Sky News' Political Editor of wanting a Conservative Prime Minister, we consider that it was not unreasonable, and within the requirements of due impartiality, for Adam Boulton to defend his position. Adam Boulton did become

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visibly angry – but that does not, in itself, impact on the due impartiality of the content.

In terms of the issues under discussion on the programme, Alastair Campbell was able to argue that Gordon Brown was constitutionally able to remain as Prime Minister, in the particular circumstances of the post-election period following 7 May 2010, unless another leader was able to construct a coalition that would command a majority in the House of Commons. Within this context, Alastair Campbell was arguing that, although the Conservative party had won most votes and seats at the General Election, no party had won an overall majority. Therefore, Gordon Brown could legitimately, in his view, seek to form a coalition.

In contrast, Adam Boulton was able to press Alastair Campbell on whether, given that the Labour party had come second in terms of votes and seats at the General Election, it was appropriate for Gordon Brown to seek to form a coalition Government and remain in power, taking into account the Parliamentary arithmetic of the numbers of MPs of various parties that would be involved. We considered that it was legitimate for Adam Boulton to question a leading representative of the Labour party about whether it was appropriate for the Labour party to try to continue in Government in these circumstances. It was also legitimate for the programme to explore the stability of a potential Labour Government in coalition with a number of other political parties. Further, we considered that Alastair Campbell was able to effectively get his points across. While the conduct and manner of the discussion was certainly unusual, in terms of impartiality we consider that relevant views and issues were aired.

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The regulator also considered whether the item had given 'offence' noting that some viewers had complained that the exchange was 'horrendous' and 'offensive'. But it ruled that:

... the discussion between Alastair Campbell and Adam Boulton may have proved surprising or even to be uncomfortable viewing to some, and we also accept that the exchanges were heated. However, given the nature of the programming (a live 24 hour news service), the important political issues that were being discussed and the overall context of the programme, we concluded that generally accepted standards were applied to this content. Two well-known personalities from the worlds of politics and journalism were taking part in a debate about a matter of topical and serious concern. We considered that although the tone and content of this exchange was unusual, it would not have been beyond the likely expectations of the audience for this channel. It should be noted that the discussion at no time resulted in any abusive language or gratuitous insults. Therefore to find that these heated exchanges could not be transmitted would be an unnecessary interference with the broadcaster's and the viewer's right of freedom of expression. We therefore considered there was no breach of Rules 2.1 and 2.3.

The Ofcom ruling was a great relief to me and effectively closed an incident which had always had its ludicrous side. I hope it has done no lasting damage to Sky News' reputation, hard-won over the last three decades. I have made mistakes during live broadcasts, and I admit them. What concerned me about this incident was that a political operative appeared perhaps by instinct to resort shamelessly to 'playing the man'.

As ever, family members can be relied upon to put things in their

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proper perspective. Over the summer Campbell and I ran into each other at parties given by mutual friends (some openly hoping our row would add a frisson to proceedings). Emotions were highest at a joint 60th and 21st birthday party for Blair's pollster Philip Gould and his daughter Grace. Campbell spoke movingly and at length about his friends and Philip's battle with cancer. He concluded with a jokey programme for the evening, to be rounded off with 'a naked mud wrestling match' between teams led by him and me. His only rule was that it should be 'a fight to the death'.

Grace Gould kept it shorter, advising the oldies present to 'grab a drink and, if you're lucky, a twenty year old!' Afterwards Campbell got his teenage daughter, also Grace, to confess to me that she was on my side 'because nobody has ever argued with Dad like that.' I replied that my wife, Anji, a former Downing Street colleague of his, 'backed Alastair'.

\* \* \*

Time and again during the election campaign and the days since, David Cameron had shown his ability to adjust to unwelcome circumstances. Now he was going to have to do it again; to demonstrate once more the Cameron capacity to take a blow, pick himself up and move forward. David Cameron and the Conservative party had one last card to play. He determined to make his final offer.

It was what the Liberal Democrats had been waiting for. A vote in the House of Commons on an AV referendum, with the full backing of the Tories behind it. The Conservatives would not just put a vote on the referendum before parliament, as they had already suggested to the Lib Dems, but they would use the whip to support it. Since the Conservatives and Lib Dems would command a majority in the Commons, this pledge made it a certainty that a referendum would take place.