

Full letter from Mark Steyn to *The Spectator UK*, February 25, 2023

Dear Sir,

You're entitled to your opinion, as they used to say, even in Britain. And Toby Young is entitled to his, regarding my recent departure from GB News. However, I was struck by his summation of my show: "Great television, but not always Ofcom-compliant television."

How does he know this? Ofcom, the grisly UK media regulator, has been "investigating" me for a year and has reached no such determination. They have launched three "investigations" into the show. The first they abandoned: I beat the rap. The second has been running since April and the third since October. Toby's breezy assertion of my guilt is clearly prejudicial.

Given his confidence in my non-compliance, perhaps Toby would like to give Ofcom a heads-up on which rules I've broken, because they seem to be having trouble getting the goods on me – which risks giving the impression that these leisurely 'investigations' are a racket: Producers and presenters of daily TV shows are expected to confirm that they're in "compliance" in the hours before airtime, but the fellows who wrote the rules need ten months to figure out whether I broke them?

It is odd to find Britain's supposed free-speech champ cheering GB News's decision to play Queen of Hearts – sentence first, verdict whenever. As Toby has semi-conceded elsewhere, the clause I was being asked to sign is illegal under English law, which tells you something about whether or not this was a good-faith contract negotiation. But, more importantly, on the broader free-speech question, GB News is self-censoring and conceding to Ofcom far more authority than the law demands.

Some years back, I ran into a similar situation with Canada's censorship law – Section 13, which had a conviction rate Kim Jong-Un and Saddam Hussein would envy (100 per cent). The difference then was that, unlike GB News, the suits at the corporation and our estimable QC, Julian Porter, were all in agreement on the end-game: getting the law repealed and the Canadian state out of the censorship business. It was a tough fight, but we won: on June 26th 2013 the repeal of Section 13 received Royal Assent, and that was that.

That's what should happen to Ofcom's powers over editorial content.

It is pathetic that the General Secretary of the soi-disant Free Speech Union can make no more stirring battle-cry than "Free speech – as long as it's approved by government regulatory bodies!"

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