

Murdoch no match for Benedict in the 'unfit to govern' stakes

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I have been particularly exasperated in the last few days, in common with many others I'm sure, as a result of the unfolding scandal at the Leveson enquiry. Like me, you may be astounded at the extent to which the British Government has plumbed new depths of hypocrisy.

Consider the evidence. The non-resident octogenarian Rupert Murdoch is accused of allowing his organisation to conduct gross invasions of personal privacy, and of being personally and directly complicit in covering up these crimes over many years. Murdoch is cross-examined before a committee set up by the Government, his testimonies televised worldwide along with those of his victims and some of his senior staff are arrested. He is accused by a separate Government committee of being "not a fit person" to run a major international organisation which is deemed to be guilty of "huge failings of corporate governance", and whose instinct had been "to cover up rather than seek out wrongdoing and discipline the perpetrators". Murdoch, they said, had "turned a blind eye and exhibited wilful blindness" and "wilful ignorance" to the crimes being committed.

But at least Rupert did admit there was a cover-up. Yes, celebrity telephones were indeed hacked.

Now cast your mind back to September 2010 when another non-resident octogenarian visited the country. Pope Benedict (for it was he) also stands accused of allowing his organisation to conduct gross invasions of personal privacy and of being personally complicit in covering up these crimes over many years, not least when he was plain old Cardinal Josef Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Did he oversee a culture of 'wilful blindness'? Was he guilty of 'wilful ignorance' of what went on in his organisation? Was the instinct of his organisation "to cover up rather than seek out wrongdoing and discipline the perpetrators?" Purely rhetorical questions all.

But unlike Rupert, Josef was welcomed to Britain at enormous cost to the taxpayer, feted by politicians and royalty alike and revered as a great moral leader of our day. Not one question is put to him about his organisation's record of child abuse and covering it up, far less his own direct role in the cover-up on a global scale and over the decades. No Government committee or independent enquiry calls him unfit for purpose, far less calls him to account to answer charges that the culture of cover-up 'permeated from the top', unless Baroness Warsi challenged him on these matters on her recent Vatican trip. Somehow, I suspect the topic never cropped up - too much mutual respect and admiration getting in the way. In April, the victims of priestly child abuse called for a Government enquiry into his organisation's activities, but the Government silence has been deafening. Wilful blindness? Or it could be that Josef has only admitted to 'errors of judgement' being made by his people and not to an orchestrated cover-up. Maybe Murdoch missed a trick.

So we can draw no other conclusion than this: that the British Government sees hacking into celebrity telephone mailboxes a greater crime than the brutal and systematic rape of innocent children, and its cover-up, by those entrusted with their care. Religious privilege? Don't get me started!

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