



**FSU**  
FREE SPEECH UNION

The Free Speech Union  
85 Great Portland St.  
London W1W 7LT  
[FreeSpeechUnion.org](https://FreeSpeechUnion.org)

Dame Carolyn McCall  
2 Waterhouse Square  
140 Holborn  
London EC1N 2AE

18<sup>th</sup> January 2022

By email: [Carolyn.mccall@itv.com](mailto:Carolyn.mccall@itv.com)

Dear Dame Carolyn,

I am writing to you as General Secretary of the Free Speech Union, a non-partisan, mass-membership, public interest body that stands up for the speech rights of its members and campaigns for free speech more widely.

This letter concerns recent news reports that Jeremy Clarkson's job as host of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* is in jeopardy as a result of what he wrote about the Duchess of Sussex in the *Sun* newspaper in December.

While Mr Clarkson's remarks were considered offensive by some and provoked a record number of complaints to the press regulator, the negative reaction has been completely disproportionate. For instance, the BBC presenter Chris Packham said he thought he should be sent to jail and the *Sun* closed down, while 60+ MPs wrote to you urging you to permanently ban Mr Clarkson from ever appearing on ITV again. I hoped you had ignored that letter, but the latest news reports suggests that may have been optimistic.

The MPs' letter accused Mr Clarkson of "expressing violent hate speech", but at least two of its signatories have used similarly intemperate language themselves: Claudia Webbe was found guilty of harassment in 2021, having been accused of threatening to throw acid at her partner's lover, among other things, while Zarah Sultana sent a tweet telling someone whose views on Israel she disagreed with to "jump off a cliff".

Moreover, if the people condemning Clarkson believe that the sort of language he used is harmful, why have the same people remained silent when other public personalities have said even more unpleasant things about people they dislike, such as Jo Brand on the Radio 4 programme *Heresy* joking about throwing battery acid at Nigel Farage, or a guest on Radio 4's *News Quiz* saying Michael Gove has "a face that makes even the most pacifist of people reach for the shovel"?

I accept these statements were not intended to be taken literally and the people in question were just using hyperbole for comedic effect. But isn't that equally true of Jeremy Clarkson's column in the *Sun*?

This suggests that much of the outrage caused by Mr Clarkson's comments has been 'performative', in that some of the people expressing it do not appear to really believe Mr Clarkson's remarks posed a danger to anyone. After all, if they genuinely believe his words posed a danger to the safety of the Duchess of Sussex or women and girls in general – as some have claimed – why have so many of them repeated those words *verbatim* in the course of condemning him?

Jo Brand was not banned from our screens after joking about throwing battery acid at Nigel Farage – she made that remark in 2019 and yet she appeared on *Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway* last year. It would be inconsistent to ban Jeremy Clarkson from ITV because of the similarly hyperbolic language he used to express his dislike of the Duchess of Sussex.

I hope you are not taking more seriously the complaints about Mr Clarkson because one of the complainants is a Duchess and the daughter-in-law of a King. I note that Piers Morgan was reportedly asked by senior managers at ITV to apologise for his comments about the Duchess on *Good Morning Britain* in 2021 after ITV received a complaint from the Duchess. To apportion extra weight to a complaint because the complainant is rich and powerful – worse, to sack Jeremy Clarkson because he upset a member of the Royal Family – would be to send a message to ITV's on-screen talent, including your news and current affairs reporters, that saying anything that annoys somebody well-connected and influential may result in them losing their jobs.

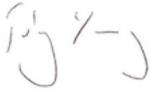
One additional consideration is that Mr Clarkson asked the *Sun* to take down the column in question and has made what appears to be a sincere apology to the Duke and Duchess. Unfortunately, instead of accepting this apology, they responded by accusing him of a "longstanding pattern of writing articles that spread hate rhetoric, dangerous conspiracy theories and misogyny". These words – which, on the face of it, are both false and defamatory – are clearly intended to destroy Mr Clarkson's career and are potentially far more harmful to him than anything he said about the Duke and Duchess.

I hope you will not reward the Duke and Duchess's vindictiveness by doing what they would clearly like you to do, which is to sack Mr Clarkson and permanently ban him from ITV. That would be an example of cancel culture at its worst. If people make mistakes and then apologise for them, we should give them the benefit of the doubt, not seek to destroy their livelihoods and turn them into social pariahs. After all, we believe in the possibility of redemption for even the most hardened criminals; why can't we extend the same charity to people whose only crime is to have said something offensive?

Finally, I would ask you to bear in mind the price Jeremy Clarkson has already paid for his remarks. Amazon has indicated it will not commission any more seasons of *Clarkson's Farm* or *The Grand*

*Tour* and his *Sun* column has not appeared in the newspaper again, suggesting he has lost that, too. Is he to be punished even further by losing his only other fee-paying job? The punishment is already completely disproportionate to the crime, without you compounding his humiliation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby Young'.

Toby Young

General Secretary

The Free Speech Union

[info@freespeechunion.org](mailto:info@freespeechunion.org)

Cc Mr Andrew Cosslett, Chairman, ITV Plc