

Green Party complains to Newsnight over sexual harassment coverage



2 November 2017

***Greens: “The programme fundamentally failed to reflect or properly examine the seriousness of what is happening to women in Britain”**

The Green Party leaders have written a letter of complaint to Newsnight over last night's coverage of the sexual harassment scandal.

The show featured 14 men and three women and used comparisons to animals, including footage of animals of nature, to discuss the behaviour of men.

The Green Party yesterday called for parliamentarians to be sent to consent lessons as part of ongoing training to prevent sexual harassment [1].

Written by co-leaders Caroline Lucas and Jonathan Bartley, and deputy leader Amelia Womack, the letter to Newsnight said:

“The programme fundamentally failed to reflect or properly examine the seriousness of what is happening to women in Britain. We urge Newsnight to think very carefully about coverage of this issue, and to ensure that they don't let misogynistic tropes dominate their coverage again.

“The use of biological descriptions of nature set against footage of animals in nature was entirely inappropriate. It not only failed to challenge the behaviour of men in positions of power but gave a defence for their actions.

“Newsnight gave very little airtime to survivors and women as a whole throughout the rest of the programme. To have guests comprising of 14 men and three women was unacceptable. To give the first half of the programme almost entirely to male voices showed just how deeply the programme's misunderstanding of the power play in society which has caused the sexual harassment crisis runs.”

Notes:

1. <https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2017/11/01/greens-call-for-consent-lessons-for-mps/>
2. Full text of the letter:

Dear Ian,

We are writing to express our concern about Newsnight's coverage of the sexual harassment scandal last night. The programme fundamentally failed to reflect or properly examine the seriousness of what is happening to women in Britain.

The use of biological descriptions of nature set against footage of animals in nature was entirely inappropriate. It not only failed to challenge the behaviour of men in positions of power but gave a defence for their actions. Among the most concerning were statements from Evan Davis such as "there is something animal about men", "it's because it's so animal we have social codes to restrain that behaviour", "it is true that in many animals males gain evolutionary benefits from... coercing females into mating", and "in most mammals, including us, males have higher testosterone levels... and this may incline them to be more aggressive". Davis' assertion he was "not going to use any of this to exonerate men" revealed the lie behind this coverage and did little to undo the damage already done.

Equally concerning was Newsnight's treatment of how it deemed society has "dealt" with the male character it presented – in Davis' words, by developing "codes of behaviour to restrain naked sexual aggression".

Newsnight gave very little airtime to survivors and women as a whole throughout the rest of the programme. To have guests comprising of 14 men and three women was unacceptable. To give the first half of the programme almost entirely to male voices showed just how deeply the programme's misunderstanding of the power play in society which has caused the sexual harassment crisis runs.

Laura Bates, Shelagh Fogarty and Eliza Anyangwe were voices of clarity in an otherwise confused programme.

We urge Newsnight to think very carefully about coverage of this issue, and to ensure that they don't let misogynistic tropes dominate their coverage again.

Many thanks,

Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party co-leader

Jonathan Bartley, Green Party co-leader

Amelia Womack, Green Party deputy leader

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