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Countries: United Kingdom

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Last month, *Sunday Times* columnist Rod Liddle came under fire for [an article](#) titled, *Chip in and we'll help Choudary on his way to Paradise* —a commentary on British radical Islamist preacher Anjem Choudary that reads more like an Islamophobic rant than a column in a reputable newspaper.

In the piece, Liddle chastises Choudary for alleged support for the so-called Islamic State, and urges British Islamists to “*blow themselves up – somewhere a decent distance away from where the rest of us live. Tower Hamlets, for example.*” Tower Hamlets is, of course, one of the United Kingdom’s most diverse boroughs, with an established Muslim and Bangladeshi community—which has borne the brunt of Islamophobic hate crimes in recent years.

Rod Liddle's column is disturbing, but more disturbing is that the British media continues to give him a platform, despite his track record of expressing racist, misogynistic, and transphobic sentiments in the mass media. Equally disturbing is the Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO)'s lackluster response, despite receiving numerous complaints—in some cases, bordering on public outrage—over the past ten years.

On one occasion, he commented on then-Labour deputy leader Harriet Harman, saying, "So — *Harriet Harman, then. Would you? I mean after a few beers obviously, not while you were sober.*"

After being extensively called out for misogyny, Liddle switched back to his signature Islamophobia with another blog for the Spectator, this time on a case in Somalia which he billed as,

"
a quick update on what the Muslim savages are up to
".

But that wasn't enough. Later that year, Liddle covered the case of two black teenagers that were jailed for plotting to murder a pregnant 15-year-old girl. He refers to them as "human filth" and goes on to use their actions to implicate the entire African-Caribbean community, saying:

"It could be an anomaly, of course. But it isn't. The overwhelming majority of street crime, knife crime, gun crime, robbery and crimes of sexual violence in London is carried out by young men from the African-Caribbean community. In return, we have rap music, goat curry and a far more vibrant and diverse understanding of cultures which were once alien to us. For which, many thanks."

The racial undertones of the piece are obvious. This time, the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) upheld a complaint against Liddle citing that he could not prove the crime statistics that he used, making Liddle the first journalist to be censored over the contents of a blog.

Still, Liddle learned nothing from that experience, referring to the perpetrators in Lee Rigby's case as "two black savages," which *The Spectator* changed to "two savages" after extensive complaints. He expanded his reach to insult the gay community by commenting on the potential criminalization of amyl nitrate (also known as "poppers") by saying,

"I would have thought that the requirement for amyl nitrate to relax the sphincter muscle and lube to accommodate entry was God's way of telling you that what you're about to do is unnatural and perverse. Or your body's way of telling you – your call. So eeeeuw. ... Crispin and others can always use a jemmy [crowbar] instead. "

He didn't limit his vitriol to *The Spectator*; in 2012 he wrote for *The Sun*, this time hypothesizing that the rise in disabled people across the United Kingdom was due to people faking their disabilities to claim benefits. Last year, IPSO upheld a complaint against

[him regarding two columns](#)

where he questioned how Labour candidate Emily Brothers, a blind transgender woman, would know that she was the "wrong sex" given that she couldn't see.

It hasn't stopped, either—if anything, it's gotten more extreme. Earlier this year, Liddle responded to [Boris Johnson's comments](#) that women who wear the niqab look like “letter boxes” with, “
My own view is that there is not nearly enough Islamophobia within the Tory party”.

Now we must ask ourselves, what has allowed this to go on for so long? Each of the aforementioned papers is a member of the Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO), who mandates that member organizations follow an [Editor's Code](#), which requires that their content, “*must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's, race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.*” Nevertheless, this is exactly what Rod Liddle does time and time again—without consequences.

If our regulatory bodies are not going to hold publications to account, what about the publications themselves? Both *The Sunday Times* and *The Spectator* are reputable media outlets that owe their readers more than to open their favorite paper and find hate speech. In addition to being offensive, it is bad for business—with every group that Liddle insults, the paper loses a demographic of its readership. Instead of continuing to give commentators like Liddle a platform, these outlets should commission a more diverse range of writers to cover pressing issues of the day, rather than give a megaphone to hateful rhetoric. It is only by actively changing their policies that publications like *The Sunday Times* and *The Spectator*—and organisations, like IPSO designed to regulate them—can create responsible journalism that serves a broad and diverse readership free from hate speech.