POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

**THERE HAS BEEN** a lot of comment on Facebook about the fall from grace of the brash leader of the Top Gear team leader, Jeremy Clarkson, for taking a swing at a member of the show’s production team, if not the producer himself.

The BBC itself has pointed out that JC has only been suspended, not sacked, and his next two, possibly three, shows will not be ‘aired’. On ‘Breakfast’ yesterday it was pointed out that the show draws some 2 million more viewers than any other, including the popular ‘soaps’ and professional sport (including Match of the Day). Indeed, the BBC seem to have shot themselves in the foot – there is now a half million strong email poll demanding the show’s return immediately, with even the Prime Minister joining the chorus of those who support JC’s cavalier approach to motoring.

Some Facebook critics (particularly the female ones) have been intemperately unkind about his manner, calling him names that no lady would have used a few years ago. JC and his team obviously don’t set out to please female viewers. With tongue very much in cheek, they have been guilty of poking fun at women drivers but – to be fair – they have also aired footage to prove that women can be every bit as good drivers as men and frequently better. (Perhaps his critics missed those shows – rare as they have been.)

The genre people choose to watch when they switch on to Top Gear is satire. It is meant to be funny in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. It takes views that are deemed politically correct and pokes fun at them. That’s what they do. If, as a towed caravan owner, you watch TG, you know perfectly well that you’re going to be lampooned. Sensible caravan owners take the jibes in good part and laugh with the crowd at yet another caravan being pushed off a cliff, knowing full well that there will always be some viewers who really do hate them for hogging the road, and not getting het-up about it.

Most of the real women I’ve seen interviewed on TG have rightly given as good as they got. As a twice married man, JC obviously is no mysoginist. He just likes to tease women, knowing that many will rise to the bait. For a mere man, there’s nothing so beautiful as a pretty woman with her dander up! His co-presenters go along with what he does, acting as perfect foils to his provocative persona. (I don’t know the man, so I can’t comment on what he’s like off-stage.)

‘Political correctness’ and ‘PC gone mad’ are now really old hat. The terms go back well into the 1960s and ‘70s – *see Wikipedia for a detailed history.* Setting out to be offensive to other people is just plain bad manners, PC aside. All of us born in the 20s and 30s right up to the 60s at least were brought up listening to our friends and acquaintances and ourselves using descriptive language about people different from ourselves that would today lead to social ostracisation, even banning from certain societies, sacking in extreme cases and possibly even to legal action. It never occurred to us that calling a black labrador N\*\*\*\*\* was offensive. We weren’t being racist, we were using a commonly used name for a black dog. (Racism is only one of many –isms that PC fans like to define by their language choices). I am now no longer allowed officially to have a wife. I have to have someone called a partner.

Now, it seems, banning the language of discrimination is not enough. We have to ban the thoughts as well. It seems it is unacceptable even to think it is wrong to ban any form of discrimination even when there’s perfectly good reason to discriminate. The thought police are with us! 1984 has been and gone!

A letter to the Telegraph the other day said that we (by that the writer meant the ‘native’ population of the British Isles) must accept that we are as much a nation of immigrants now as the Americas and that we should simply accept more and more alien peoples and their (in some cases nasty) cultural habits as here to stay. We should be adapting to them, not them to us. The writer was taking exception to popular demands that immigrants should learn to speak and use English and adopt our cultural habits and norms.

For the last thirty or forty years to use any form of discriminatory language in public has meant political or celebrity suicide. See what happened to a potential Oscar award winner when he used the word ‘coloured’ to describe one of his competitors a few weeks ago. The fact that the word was only a few years ago the preferred alternative to black was deemed irrelevant. Now it seems we must say ‘people of colour’. How long will that last? Will we come full circle and start using ‘n\*\*\*\*\*’ again. P of C have never stopped using the word amongst themselves! If my age spots keep spreading, perhaps I shall have to demand that I be called a P of some C, if only to be accurate.