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Racism: Ron Atkinson's TV slip

Ben Macintyre's suggestion (Comment, 24 April 24 2004) that we must never say in private what we would not say in public seems to me absurd. It contravenes a basic rule of human intercourse and brings the thought police into the bedroom.

I see the Ron Atkinson affair the other way round. Mr Atkinson has demonstrated by his *actions* over many years that he is the direct opposite of a racist. He should not now be condemned by a few thoughtless *words* to penalties that are wholly out of proportion to what he did.

There are people who would seek to dehumanise us by inhibiting natural speech. Our ancestors, who devised the proverb 'sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me', were more sensible.¹

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The Times, 28 Apl 2004
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¹ *The Times*, 28 April 2004. (Italics omitted from published letter.)