

Funding the Future

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The press has a great many stories about Oxfam this morning. The Times is heavily targeting the charity over the conduct of some of its staff in Haiti in 2011. The facts seem to be well [summarised by the Guardian](#).

Let be be unambiguous: what these staff did was wholly unacceptable.

And let's also be clear: Oxfam clearly thought the same way. The staff were confronted. Four were found guilty of gross misconduct. They were dismissed. Three resigned - or were 'allowed to resign' according to the allegations. Quite how someone can, however, be prevented from resigning their job is hard to imagine, and this sort of thing seems to happen frequently in the police, for example, when allegations are raised. But apparently it's not allowed in Oxfam.

Oxfam says it did not provide references to these people. The explanations provided seem entirely plausible.

Oxfam is acknowledged to have told the Charity Commission. It is said it may not have provided enough information. Maybe.

And DfID says it may not have been properly advised, but again I think maybe is the right word: it's likely no one in DfID in 2011 is now left there.

So there was horrible abuse, disciplinary action to the limit of what looks to have been possible, and no references. All that's left is a possible allegation that reporting may not have been quite as tight as it might have been.

In the meantime hundreds, and maybe thousands, of Oxfam employees are besmirched and the suggestion is hinted at that this failing was systemic when that does not appear to be the case or no action would have been taken.

So the right question has to be asked, which is why is The Times raising this question now? I have to say that it is not by chance. Oxfam has been hated by right wing politicians for decades. That's because Oxfam has the temerity to ask why poor people are poor. And it also has the temerity to suggest that this is partly the fault of the way the world's economic system. It [even challenges the wealth of the richest and says that](#)

maybe it needs redistribution.

Nothing can justify what the Oxfam staff in Haiti did. I make that clear. But I make it as clear that I believe that the attack on Oxfam is deeply cynical and entirely because it has upset those with wealth. On balance then Oxfam has faults, like everyone and every organisation. But what it does is overall immensely valuable. The balance is weighted heavily in Oxfam's favour. Unless of course you're very wealthy and deeply offended by those who suggest that may not be entirely due to your own efforts, as Oxfam do. And that is what this is all about. Oxfam's crime is to upset wealthy people. And on that issue, I agree, it is systemically responsible.

NB: I am aware of the sensitivity of this issue. Comments will be moderated with care and for a change I will be heavy handed with the delete button. I should also add that I am out for much of the rest of the day so don't get stroppy if it takes me time to get to you.