

Bernard Keeffe

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To the Editor Panorama

I think someone remarked last evening that the BBC at least showed willing in devoting an edition of Panorama to its future. But of course a comparison with a public company which was also made is meaningless in one crucial area – the BBC doesn't publish its accounts – even to a parliamentary committee. This was one of many important points that were not put forward.

The studio presentation vividly expressed the fundamental change in style that has disfigured BBC output in recent years.

Need I point out that this was a serious discussion where viewers were expected to take in detailed and often complicated views and thereby reach an opinion?. But apparently you and your staff thought they were putting on the Lottery show. A kaleidoscope of changing images flashing across screens immediately behind the speakers was crude, inept and an insult to the viewer. It typifies the current attitude that we are unable to take in words without a distracting accompaniment of irrelevant images and noise with vague and often meaningless, fatuous music. In advertising this technique is of course deliberately used to glamorise a product to distract the viewer from actually thinking about it – sell the sizzle not the sausage even if it's inedible.

I was astonished that your interlocutor thought that the governors ran the BBC. I was also surprised that he didn't point out that governments of both persuasion have appointed chairmen to suit their purposes – Charles Hill by Wilson as a punishment, Duke Hussey and Christopher Bland by Thatcher to commercialise the place and sort out the pinkos that they saw lurking in every studio and office, Gavin Davies by Blair to what? – I can't think of a more inept appointment, unless he thought that a Labour-supporting fat-cat from the city would pull the plug on the accounts. How is it that among the governors there are three former senior Conservative politicians?

Why did no-one mention BBC Worldwide? Here is a highly commercial organisation built on capital provided by the licence payer, who of course should be a shareholder. If it was not built on licence payers' money where did it come from? The stock market – corporate bonds – investment companies?

Why did your presenter not point out that the World Service has direct funding by the Foreign Office? What is its brief beyond aping CNN? I thought that it was to project British life and achievements; it used to give news about Britain – no longer. It had programmes about British scientific and commercial innovations - where are they? Programmes about British musical life beyond Pop have shrunk to virtual invisibility – but then of course that is the picture throughout apart from Radio 3.

Why did no-one explain why when I am abroad I see BBC News with commercials? Do commercials in the digital History programme pay for the BBC repeats? Why did your man not mention the deals that the BBC has made to enable it to put out BBC Legends – an admirable effort, but what is the financial background? Who pays the contributors and the royalties?

The choice of regional opinion groups typified another new BBC view of Britain - the south of England below a line from Bristol to Chelmsford apart from London doesn't exist. Has any of the top management visited the great conurbation along the south coast? Have they seen the thriving commercial life in Portsmouth, Southampton, stretching along to Bournemouth and Poole. The population of the SW and SE is 22 million (Eurostat) more than third of the UK total.; the gdp is around 340 billion or more than 40% of the UK total.

What do you think that of setting up a German pattern – divide the BBC into independent regions so that we in the South can have our own programmes to suit us paid for with our licence money? That would raise a howl. As for subscription – contemplate the death of public service broadcasting in the US. Flawed though it may be in many details, the BBC for £116 gives us unparalleled value for money – how much would it cost us if Murdoch ran it?

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