

While the BBC is bloated in some parts, the desire by some to gut it may make us all poorer.

Today the BBC announced massive cuts to its services and has plans to shed 2,000 more jobs. The Lincoln School of Journalism's [Barnie Choudhury](#) worked for the BBC for 24 years and reflects on today's news and what it might mean for the future of broadcasting in the UK.



Mark Thompson never came to the BBC to make cuts. No half-decent leader would, and, moreover, he's a decent guy. He could never have imagined that since taking over in 2004 he would continually have to slash budgets, departments and make posts redundant. If I were Mark, I'd be asking one question today: "When do I get to do the fun things?"

Today, the papers will be full of the [BBC's demise](#); how it walked into a trap and gave away too much to the government when negotiating its future licence fee settlement. And they'll blame the Director General and his senior team. They will talk about [bloated salaries](#) for executives and "top stars". They will put up Jonathan Ross' smiling photograph as proof-positive of an organisation which needs to be culled in the public interest. They will find evidence of "lavish parties". They will find former BBC staff to take a swipe about how much better it was in their day and how they didn't have as much money or resources. They will describe the licence fee as a poll tax- public money wasted on taxis and entertainment. They will ask for heads to roll and they will call for advertising on all channels. And many reading the newspapers will be sympathetic to those views.

Of course I must declare an interest. I love the BBC and what it stands for. I have friends who work for the Corporation and are worried for their future. But I don't agree with everything the BBC has done, is doing and will do. In that sense I am a critical friend. That's because I remember one thing: it costs me forty pence a day to watch at least five national channels and listen to at least eight national radio stations and forty local radio stations. I can watch and listen to specialist music and news and current affairs. I can watch the best drama in the world. And if I miss them I can see or hear them on the internet. If I want to find the latest news, it is a click away. And there in lies one reason for those who want to gut an honourable institution. Getting rid of the BBC News website will allow newspapers to capture the market and develop what Rupert Murdoch has already started – charging us to read the news online.

Yet I'm pragmatic and honest enough to acknowledge that the BBC is bloated. It does have too many layers of management. It does relish bureaucracy. Even when I worked there, I'd envy Sky News' ability to respond to breaking news in a faster and more creative way. I'd kick the literal cat every time I waited on a decision or scream silently because a junior producer was trying to second guess the Director of News on whether a story was worth it. The BBC loves its meetings, its committees and getting a consensus. The BBC is risk averse. If it were bolder, less deferential and not so concerned about what the Daily Mail thinks, I think the BBC would be in better shape. It could make decisions quicker and hang the consequences.

As a confessed (but entitled) armchair critic and you'd expect me to tell the Director General what he should have done. Well Mark, I wouldn't have moved north. I wouldn't have moved out of Television Centre. Why do it when you know your successor but one will only move out of Salford back to London and out of Broadcasting House – again? I'd have got rid of BBC 3, 4 and the News Channel. I would have capitalised on ITV's problems by investing in local radio and local TV rather than becoming more regional. I'd have argued that you win trust from the ground up. You win friends my engaging with communities. But I'm not the Director General and I don't know the full facts. Only his executives, the BBC Trust and he are fully aware of the all the facts. So let him deal with things the way he sees fit. Let history judge his actions. In opposition future Prime Ministers criticise the current PM. Once they get into office, reality bites. And that's why so few former Prime Ministers stick the boot into their predecessors.

I remember history and remember a proud BBC. One which maintained its independence from government. One which always fought for what is right – ask [Greg Dyke](#) and [Gavyn Davies](#) about the meaning of sacrifice. And Mark Thompson is right; the BBC cannot take anymore cuts. It's not just the quality of output I'm concerned about but the BBC's survival. A part of me fears that this is the forerunner to closure and if that were to happen then the world would be a much poorer and sadder place.