

Polis – Bashing the BBC

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Two of the BBC's greatest ex-employees are out bashing their former paymaster. [Jeff Randall](#) was one of most incisive and robust business journalists ever to work at the Corporation. Anthony Jay wrote Mrs Thatcher's favourite political sit-com [Yes Minister!](#) I suspect the BBC still makes a tidy sum from sales of that show.

I guess it is predictable that someone who now writes for [The Telegraph](#) and someone published by the right-wing [Centre For Policy Studies](#) will agree that the BBC needs to be smaller – much smaller. But these guys aren't mugs and deserve to be listened to.

This is the essence of Randall's anti-BBC diatribe:

“Despite its official bleating, the BBC is not underfunded. By comparison with rivals, it is, as Thompson once admitted, wallowing in a “Jacuzzi of cash”. The problem is that it tries to do too much, spreading its resources too thinly.”

The usual response to this is that it is impossible to choose what the BBC should NOT do without depriving someone of a perfectly decent BBC service. Why shouldn't young people, for example, have Radio One or BBC 3? Why should old farts like me have an expensive classical music station like Radio 3?

Anthony Jay takes this a lot further than most. He would get rid of the licence fee and replace it with 'aggressive marketing' of its archive and programmes. He would reduce output to one TV channel and one radio channel:

“There is no longer a case for taking £4 billion a year from the public to produce programmes they do not want or can obtain free elsewhere.”

You can judge for yourself whether Jay's report is the ravings of a reactionary or a bold plan for reform by reading it [here](#).

I also believe that the BBC is too big. It has to decide to do fewer things. We have to work out ways that its services can be delivered by other organisations, including other commercial or community media. This is especially true when so much will be created and delivered online. There is no doubt that the scale of the BBC's operations is inhibiting innovation and the growth of independent media. But Randall and Jay are distracted by politics.

They are on a crusade against what they perceive to be a biased BBC, a bulwark of statism and liberal political correctness. There's some truth in that charge but it should not distract policy-makers from a more rational approach to reshaping the BBC.

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