

Polis – The BBC – a class act

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2008-2-23

Two of the BBC's Radio station controllers have been showing their class credential's in a toe-curlingly self-conscious way. Radio 4's cerebral [Mark Damazer](#) went to a cathedral to preach about how the station that brings you the *Archers*, *Today*, *PM*, *Front Row* and *Money Box* isn't exclusively middle class:

"The stereotypes about class may lurk in the collective consciousness – and are applied to Radio 4 by some who don't listen, or for whom Radio 4's wildly eclectic mix is too demanding to describe properly. But in reality the middle class audience to Radio 4 is fabulously varied."

So it is middle-class after all. It's just a 'varied' middle-class. But how does he define middle-class in broadcast terms? It appears it is all about swearing and the previous absence of the words "piss, bugger or shit" which are now allowed:

"That constraint has gone. For some, it's a matter of real regret; they should not be scorned for that regret. But, in the end, proscribing this level of scatology would suffocate programme-makers and lead to Radio 4 being seen as a museum piece."

Damazer's speech appears to be in response to the new [Women's Hour](#) presenter Jane [Garvey](#) who moved from (not so middle class) Radio 5 to Radio 4. As Jane said:

"I think there is a massively middle class bent to every programme on Radio 4. Find me a programme that isn't like that."

Meanwhile, top BBC newsman [Adrian Van Klaveren](#) is taking over the reins of the sport and news network [Radio 5](#). Adrian had the very tricky task of helping shape the BBC's new media strategies such as news on demand and the user generated hub. So if he is a 'bloke' then he is a very clever one. But he too feels obliged to hint at classless credentials by speaking of his love of football and the world outside the M25, because not only do many Radio 5 listeners not live in London, but soon Radio 5 itself will be based in Salford:

"Once you get outside London some things do look different – different judgements and a different sense of what matters to people. Five Live is all about getting a rich range of voices from across the UK."

I think that the reason that the BBC talks about class so much is because it feels guilty. It realises that its culture is soaked in the values of the metropolitan middle classes because they are the people that run it. They realise that the licence fee is another example of how public money is used in this country to subsidise middle-class interests.

I think they should stop worrying about class and concentrate on the product. Both Radio stations are hugely popular and provide great entertainment and information for pretty good value. I personally find Radio 4 much too safe, middle-brow and predictable and I hope the [Channel 4's radio](#) offering shakes things up. I love Radio 5 for its

immediacy and the detail it adds. it is a much more national station than Radio 4. I like what Van Klaveren says about keeping it witty and clever rather than confrontational.

But I look forward to Adrian using his new media experience to open Radio 5 up even more to the public. In the end only by sharing the BBC with the people will the middle-class people who run it be able to claim that they have finally shed their class constraints.

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