All TV is propaganda – why worry?

I remember a long time ago editing a sequence of a current affairs film about the most boring subject possible – the future of European integration from a German perspective. I had cut a sequence of images of German politicians to a very stirring piece of music by Sibelius. When my editor came in for a viewing he demanded we cut it out. It wasn’t because of the commentary – there wasn’t any. It was simply that the combination of bombastic, Romantic orchestral music with a marching beat set to images of Germans evoked terrifying memories of the Nazis. And whatever Helmut Kohl may have been, he wasn’t a Nazi.

This week we have seen the power of propaganda TV on Channel 4’s *Great Global Warming Swindle* and BBC 2’s *The Trap* by Adam Curtis. I love counter-intuitive argument, almost to a fault. The novelty is irresistible to anyone tired of the regular voices of reason. But I disagreed with the thesis of both programmes, almost from the very first frames. Like my old editor, I could sense straight away that I was going to be manipulated by the clever and distorting selection of images and facts to construct a logical but deeply flawed and partial essay in thrall to an undisclosed agenda. Funnily enough, those very clever, tireless and very left-wing self-appointed media monitors at MediaLens had a pop at the right-wing anti-Climate Change film but were content with Adam Curtis’ efforts to undermine capitalism, although in the past they’ve even been critical of Mr Curtis. To be fair, the former was distortion of the facts -the latter was a piece of polemic and didn’t pretend to be anything else. But both used the language of TV to the limits of veracity and both were very enjoyable bits of telly.

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