

REFORM OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

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There is a general crisis of public service broadcasting. In France, the main public broadcaster (TF1) was privatised in the mid-1980s, and the remaining publicly owned channels have lost ground. Similarly, the main public broadcasters in Australia (ABC) and Canada (CBC) are in deep trouble: their public funding has been cut, their standing has declined and their audience share fell in the early 1990s to between 15 and 20 per cent. One could easily survey public broadcasting in liberal democracies round the globe, from India to Sweden, and report a seemingly remorseless pattern of reverse and defeat (Catalbas 1996; Sinha 1996; Humphreys 1996; Kuhn 1995; Dahlgren 1995; Aldridge and Hewitt 1994; Avery 1993; Blumler 1992; Blumler and Nossiter 1991; among others).

This generalised crisis may seem to suggest that the future of public service broadcasting is bleak. But, in fact, the decline of public service broadcasting has not been uniform. In some countries such as Germany, public service broadcasting (broadly defined) has been remarkably resilient (Humphreys 1994). In others such as Norway, public broadcasters have helped themselves by performing better (Syvertsen 1992). Far from public service broadcasting being subject to an ineluctable process of eclipse, the evidence suggests a more varied and complex picture.

This review will attempt to fill in one small part of this picture by looking critically at the experience of public service broadcasting in one country, the United Kingdom. However, it will glance sideways at other countries from time to time, and will only consider the United Kingdom's experience in a thematic rather particularising way. The aim will be to see what light the British experience sheds on the general problems facing public service broadcasting, and on possible responses to these problems.

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Ideational Crisis

The crisis of public service broadcasting is, in part, a crisis at the level of ideas. In particular, the technical justification for public service broadcasting, based on the scarcity of airwave frequencies, that was important historically in gaining the support of the right for public service broadcasting has been overtaken by events. With satellite and cable TV, there are now more TV channels than newspapers to choose from in Britain, and the number of TV channels will increase with digitalisation. As the British government's Green Paper on The Future of the BBC points out, "the original justification for public service broadcasting — that a small number of services should be used for the benefit of the public as a whole — no longer exists" (Department of National Heritage 1992: 15).

The second development sapping support for public service broadcasting is the rise of anti-statism. The legitimacy of public service broadcasting is derived from the state, and growing distrust of the state has weakened in turn the claim of public broadcasters to serve the public interest. The way in which opinion has shifted is indicated by the change of assumptions that inform the reports of official enquiries into broadcasting. Early reports assume that the state and public broadcasting serve a common goal — the public good (Crawford Committee 1926 and Ullswater Committee 1936). The latest major report assumes that the state is a threat to freedom of expression, and that broadcasting should be freed from public regulation as soon as it is expeditious to do so (Peacock Committee 1986).

The third corrosive trend is the rise of cultural relativism. One core justification for public service broadcasting in Britain is that it gives rise to quality programmes. However, the force of this argument was weakened by growing uncertainty as to what constituted quality, and this opened the way to the alternative claim, advanced by the free market Adam Smith Institute, that "the only fair criterion for judging a programme is by how many people like it" (Adam Smith Institute 1984).

The rising tide of cultural relativism left its imprint on successive enquiries into broadcasting. In 1962, a report steeped in Leavisite certainty was published, which had no difficulty in distinguishing between good and bad programmes and in framing its recommendations in terms of what would raise programme quality. Giveaway shows in which a person could earn a pound for correctly distinguishing his left foot from his right foot, or a wife could win a refrigerator for whitewashing her husband in thirty seconds starting from NOW, it was inclined to think were bad programmes (Pilkington Committee 1962; cf. Black 1972). The next Committee reporting in 1977 was not so sure, and was inclined to hedge its bets by arguing that the purpose of public service broadcasting was to offer programme diversity and choice (Annan Committee 1977). This defensive formulation was then followed by the market-oriented conclusion of its successor that public service broadcasting could be "described as a commitment to (...) maximise consumer appreciation" (Peacock Committee 1986, 148).

There is also a weak joist sustaining the public service case. The simplistic denigration of American TV as unending "Wall-to-Wall Dallas" has long been a significant element of the popular consensus in favour of British public broadcasting. This fails to take account of the way in which the rise of cable TV has expanded programme diversity in the United States. While the American system still has a number of shortcomings, the popular case for public service broadcasting in Britain is based on an out-of-date and misleading account of its systemic rival. Propaganda like this has a way of

boomeranging, turning delusion into disillusion.

In short, some of the core ideas on which public service broadcasting is based — the requirements of rationing, the benign state, maintaining standards, the awfulness of the Yank way of doing things — have lost some of their authority or force.

Context of Crisis

The intellectual underpinning of public service broadcasting is giving way because of wider changes in society. New arguments subverting public broadcasting are gaining currency because they are connected to technical and economic change, and to powerful new social and political trends.

The assault on public service broadcasting is part of the wider, right-wing assault on the welfare state. It is part of the process by which public services are being privatised, marketised, deregulated or run down (Kavanagh 1987). Fuelling this process is the rising tide of individualism in which private solutions are being sought in the context of the market place rather than collective solutions under the auspices of the state. Sustaining this process is the growing conviction, accelerated by the collapse of communism, that free market processes are more efficient and more responsive to public demand than collective provision or regulation. In this context, the BBC is as much in the firing line as water or gas, railways or the Royal Mail, all of which have been the targets of new right reformism.

The assault on public service broadcasting should also be seen as an attack on liberal corporatism. Liberal corporatism takes the form of power sharing arrangements between capital and labour, and other major social interests, mediated through the state. In the case of broadcasting, this has meant that major social groups have access to the airwaves, and are represented on the boards of state-linked broadcasting organisations. Britain deviates from this mainstream European model in that its public broadcasting system conforms to a depoliticised, civil service template — something to which we shall return. But British public broadcasting has strong liberal corporatist features in that it gives privileged access to representatives of political parties, and is bound by the equivalent of "fairness" rules.

Liberal corporatism in Britain and elsewhere can be viewed as the product of a stalemate between the economic power of big business and the political power of organised labour. In Britain, it was the product of an informal system which developed early in the twentieth century and was consolidated in the 1940s. However, the conditions of relative parity that gave rise to the 1940s post-war settlement were altered by the decline of organised labour as an economic, social and political force in the 1980s (Hall 1988; Jessop et al. 1988; Gamble 1988). This coincided with the rise of the radical right which perceived liberal corporatist compromise as being the principal stumbling bloc to the regeneration of Britain. The assault on public service broadcasting can thus be seen as part of a long-term realignment in the power relations of British society.

The rise of cultural relativism is more difficult to contextualise. What is clear is that there was once a close alliance between public service broadcasters and a powerful public service establishment, made up of senior civil servants, academics, clergy, lawyers and other members of the professions. Both had a shared understanding of what constituted high culture, and both tended to see public broadcasting as a way of extending popular access to this culture. By the 1960s, however, the impetus was draining away from this legitimating mission. Normative cultural commitments among

broadcasters gave way increasingly to market-influenced notions of professionalism (Burns 1977). A new generation of listeners emerged who were alienated by public broadcasting's relative neglect of teenage pop music (Chapman 1992). The public service class expanded; it ceased to have a shared perception of what constituted cultural value due to its decline of social cohesion; and it lost authority during the Thatcher era. The praetorian guard that had defended public service broadcasting lost both its Arnoldian zeal and cultural dominance.

Symptomatic of this shift was the rise of cultural studies. This was rooted in the new universities, and in its initial iconoclasm could be detected the voice of a new middle class excluded from the educational and social hierarchy. In contrast to the Leavisite tradition of literary studies at older universities that had influenced a generation of school teachers and had shored up cultural support for public service broadcasting, this new tradition taught that cultural judgement is socially constructed, and is a means of sustaining group membership and exclusion (Bourdieu 1984). This relativising position reached a wider public through the growth of cultural journalism, and assailed the conception of a hierarchy of cultural value that had been an important intellectual underpinning of traditional public service broadcasting.

The other significant shift was the rise of a commercial lobby fundamentally hostile to public service broadcasting. A key factor in the original establishment of public service broadcasting in Britain during the 1920s had been the absence of an economic lobby pressing for commercial radio, in marked contrast to the United States (Scannell and Cardiff 1991). In the 1950s, the commercial lobby was largely reformist, targeting only television and pressing for commercial TV in a public service mould (Sendall 1982). But in the 1980s and 1990s there emerged a powerful new lobby, which was opposed to public service broadcasting. Prominent amongst these fundamentalist critics was Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation which controlled the biggest press group in Britain (Murdoch 1989; Knight 1993; O'Malley 1994).

In short, the problem facing public broadcasting is not simply that it has to develop new legitimating arguments. It has also to adjust to the long-term shifts in society which have weakened its position, and to find a way of winning new constituencies of support.

Furthermore, the central position still occupied by some public broadcasting systems is likely to be eroded by the growth of cable and satellite TV, the imminent adoption of digitalisation, the diffusion of on-line services and the development of new media based on the merging of communications technologies. These developments have been powered largely by commercial organisations operating outside a public service framework. They threaten to diminish the audience, revenue and legitimacy of public service broadcasting.

Inherent Weaknesses

In addition, public broadcasting systems have inherent weaknesses. One source of weakness is that public broadcasting is susceptible to government manipulation, which undermines their democratic role and public legitimacy. The evolution of public broadcasting in France and Turkey, for example, illustrate this problem. In both countries, public systems failed to secure a substantial degree of autonomy from the state, and consequently lacked widespread public support when they came under attack (Catalbas 1996; Kuhn 1995).

Another source of weakness is that public broadcasting systems can be out of touch with their audiences. Broadcasters themselves are not typical of their publics, and can be ignorant or misinformed about them. There are also shortcomings in the chain of accountability established through committee representation. Put simply, nominees can be unrepresentative of their organisations; these organisations can be unrepresentative, in turn, of their social constituencies; and the sum of organised constituencies can be unrepresentative of society. The limitations of bureaucratic representation are perhaps best illustrated by the crisis of Dutch public service broadcasting. Its system is based on delegating control to organisations judged to be "pillars" of society. But these organisations proved not to be truly representative as became clear when a commercial satellite channel, beamed from Luxembourg and relying heavily on American programmes, became within twelve months the Netherlands' most popular TV channel (McQuail 1992). The soar-away success of RTL4 showed that the country's supposedly representative broadcasting system had bored large numbers of TV viewers.

Resilience of British Public Service Broadcasting

However, some public broadcasting systems have weathered better than others. Whereas the Dutch broadcasting system buckled under competition, that in Britain did not. The British public service system is an imperfect one, and its imperfections have increased during the last decade. But its core structures — the BBC, Independent Television Commission, Radio Authority and Channel 4 — are still standing after 17 years of rule by the most right-wing government in western Europe. The main reason why they survived is because they enjoyed public support.

Public service channels in Britain retained — though with difficulty — their relative autonomy from government, and continued to be perceived as public rather than state institutions. And their programmes continued to be popular partly because the British public service system was one of the first to incorporate a regulated market as a central feature of its organisation, and made an early compromise between elite and market values. Even in 1996, deregulated satellite and cable TV only secured 8 per cent of audience time, leaving the core public service system overwhelmingly dominant.

However, this resilience may well have a time limit. The BBC was able to draw upon the support of an older generation of Conservative politicians whose cultural paternalism is not shared, by and large, by the new generation of more market-oriented Conservative MPs. Public broadcasters also performed an organisational cart-wheel in order to defuse right-wing criticism of their profligacy and bureaucracy. The BBC casualised part of its skilled workforce by introducing an internal market for the purchase of programme services; channel 3 franchises were put up for auction (with some quality safeguards); and new managerial systems were introduced which reduced the autonomy of producers. While these changes contained right-wing attacks, they had the effect of reducing some of the creative strengths of the broadcasting system (Curran and Seaton 1997). Public broadcasting institutions were also helped by the fact that their new right critics were split between fundamentalists and gradualists, with the latter prevailing. However, the gap between the two will diminish with the further multiplication of TV channels and the development of a mature market. The key pressure point will come when a right-wing consensus emerges in favour of

converting the BBC license fee into a voluntary subscription, a simple and seemingly modest measure that will severely weaken the BBC by shrinking its financial resources.

Ideological Renewal

The continuing dangers that beset the public broadcasting system have prompted its supporters to seek to restate or reformulate the public service case. One key argument has been a unifying and strategic one. The public service approach embraces not only publicly owned or publicly funded broadcasters but all those broadcasting organisations which are subject to a significant degree of collective regulation in the public interest. This has the function of drawing up a draw-bridge between all forms of broadcasting organisation which serve the welfare of society, and the rest which are driven exclusively by profit. It also tacitly recognises that a regulated market can have a positive role.

Another line of argument is that collective regulation is needed due to the special features of the television market. Advertising funding is insensitive to intensities of demand, and encourages programme uniformity and the neglect of minorities. Pay TV does not have these defects but raises another problem. It excludes people who could be catered for at very little extra cost, and poses a difficulty in terms of the public good. However, the trouble with this debate is that it tends to internalise the free market assumption that the object of policy is to maximise consumer gratification. Its logical outcome is, usually, some form of gradualist deregulatory programme based on multiple payment systems (Congdon et al 1992; Brittan 1989).

The alternative tack is to argue that broadcasting has a wider cultural and democratic role. For this reason, policy should not be determined solely by individual consumer satisfaction in the marketplace but should take into account the wider needs of society.

However, some difficulty has been experienced in reformulating the cultural part of this argument. Public broadcasting, it is sometimes contended, is preferable because it offers a planned diversity of programmes, suited to different tastes and needs, including those of minorities that together make up the majority. This includes children's educational programmes, arts programmes, critical consumer programmes, drama that makes demands of its audience or breaks with established formulae, and programmes featuring unconventional interests or ideas, all of which tend not to be made in market-driven systems. The availability of these programmes on public service channels means that viewers have the opportunity to extend their tastes and intellectual horizons.

However, this defence can be countered by the neo-liberal argument that special provision can be made for supporting those programmes that the market does not generate. This can lead to a marginalised conception of public broadcasting, as an add-on service as in the United States, offering unpopular programmes that most people do not want to watch. It can also become a rationale for public broadcasting to become an upscale service that is marginalised, lacking in general public support and vulnerable to political attack or a squeeze on its public funding.

A more ambitious formulation is needed which thinks of the welfare approach in terms of promoting quality across a broad range of programmes, both popular and unpopular. This means overcoming the axiological uncertainty of mainstream cultural studies, and making cultural judgements that can be argued for and sustained in

public debate. Postmodernist abstention from quality judgements does not entail their avoidance: it merely involves delegating them to imperfect market processes. Cultural postmodernism is another way of saying that the accountant and the advertising media planner — not merely the audience — know best (Nelson 1996).

One way this reformulation has been attempted is to argue that public service broadcasting fosters programmes that score high in terms of humanistic criteria: illuminating the human condition, promoting empathy and understanding of others, enabling society to commune with itself (Nelson 1995; Blumler 1991). Another approach elevates literary norms such as originality (Frith and Savage 1992), and implicitly offers a way of justifying public service broadcasting in these terms. However, these promising lines of argument need to be fleshed out in two ways. They need to be argued not merely in terms of normative principle but exemplified in terms of discussions of particular programmes. No less important, this discussion needs to be related to the political economy of broadcasting. A number of admirable studies of market-based television, such as those by Gitlin (1994) and more ambiguously D'Acci (1994), help to illuminate the way in which market pressures limit and constrain the production of TV fiction by fostering drama in which the central characters are "simple and simply motivated, stories full of conflict, endings resolved, uplift apparent, and each act ... ends[ing] on a note of suspense sufficient to carry the viewer through the commercial break." Needed are comparable studies which examine the way in which different forms of public service organisation affect the creative production of fiction.

Fewer obstacles stand in the way of elaborating a democratic rationale for public service broadcasting. Consumers in the market place are also citizens in a democracy. To exercise effective control, and defend their interests, they need to be adequately informed. Public service broadcasting encourages an informed citizenry because this is one of its central objectives (Murdock 1992). By contrast, the primetime scheduling of the American networks — still accounting for the major part of American primetime TV consumption — leaves much of American society disenfranchised through lack of political information.

A second justification for public broadcasting, influenced by Habermas, is that it facilitates a rational political discourse. It encourages the transfer of relevant specialist knowledge to the political domain, and promotes balanced, evidence-based and reciprocal debate directed towards the public good (Garnham 1986; Scannell 1989). This contrasts with a free market system where the drive to sustain ratings can lead to the blurring of information and entertainment, and the domination of political analysis by brief — and rapidly shrinking (Hallin 1994) — soundbites that make few demands on the audience.

To this defence of public service broadcasting as an aid to informed citizenship and public rationality needs to be added — and elaborated — a third, more telling argument. Public broadcasting belongs to the people. Through public broadcasting, different groups in society are brought together in a common conversation that shapes public opinion, modifies social norms and guides the direction of society. The reason why public broadcasting is able to perform adequately this central democratic function is because it is under representative control, and is in principle committed to extending participation in a common discourse.

At this point, it is necessary to draw breath and stop. Because the fact of the matter is that British public broadcasting is not under representative control. Until very re-

cently, the chairman of the BBC Board of Governors was Marmeduke Hussey, the brother-in-law of a cabinet minister: his immediate predecessor, Stuart Young, had a brother in the cabinet. In 1992, eight out of twelve BBC Governors were graduates or postgraduates of three universities — Oxford, Cambridge or London.

Nor is British public broadcasting committed in principle to widening social access to the collective dialogue of society. This is not defined as an objective of the public broadcasting system in the last two Broadcasting Acts (HMSO 1996 and 1990): nor in recent government broadcasting policy reviews (National Heritage 1992; Home Department 1988; Home Office 1987) nor in any of the reports of major official enquiries into broadcasting published in the last twenty years (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee 1988; Peacock Committee 1986; Annan Committee 1977). Indeed, the Annan Committee (1977) scoffed at the very idea of seeking to make television an agency of collective dialogue as being the equivalent of wanting it to be a "Witenagemot" (an Anglo-Saxon antecedent of parliament).

The founding principle of British public broadcasting is, as mentioned earlier, that of the depoliticised civil service guided by a tradition of objectivity and disinterested public service. Members of broadcasting authorities are conceived as "trustees of the nation" rather than as representatives of sectional groups (even though in practice BBC governors tend include one representative from the Celtic "nations," a trade unionist and a woman). News reporting is required to be impartial, not to give express diverse viewpoints. The concept of access is understood in the official literature in a very limited way: in terms of ensuring that outlying areas are not excluded from receiving TV signals by cost. The notion of universal inclusion is present but in terms of the right to watch and listen rather than to be heard. The concept of diversity is also prominent but in a very specific way: it is understood in terms of taste rather than socio-economic interest, consumption rather than expression. What is emphasised is that public broadcasting should cater for different programme preferences, not that it should give voice to different class or group perspectives.

Nor does public broadcasting encourage in practice an open and diverse public dialogue. Elites strongly influence the way in which public broadcasting reports and interprets the news. This is primarily a consequence of public broadcasters' heavy reliance on a small repertory of the powerful, authoritative and accredited as news sources. While these sometimes differ from one another, they constitute an oligopoly that tends to exclude and marginalise other voices (Schlesinger 1990; Schlesinger and Tumber 1990).

The gaping contrast between theory and practice, between what could be a central rationale and justification for public service broadcasting and actual reality, underlines the case for root and branch reform. The philosophy, organisation and practice of public service broadcasting needs to be rethought in Britain, as elsewhere.

In the first place, appointments to the BBC Board of Directors and the broadcast regulatory authorities should be removed from unmediated government control and be vested in an independent appointments panel, with a membership drawn from different social groups in society. Organisations in civil society should be given the right to nominate names to this panel, which would be charged with the responsibility of recommending appointees who are representative of the cross-section of society. This would have three benefits. It would help insulate broadcasting from government control. It would symbolically assert that public broadcasting derives its legiti-

macy from civil society, and that broadcasters have the right to hold the political class to account. And it would establish a regulatory regime that reflected the plurality of society rather than government sinecurists, and the "great and the good."

Secondly, the statutory terms of reference of public broadcasting should be changed so that it becomes an official objective of public service organisations to give expression to the diversity of perspectives in society both in its information and entertainment programmes. This redefinition of the purpose of public broadcasting should be accompanied by changes in its rules and conventions. The legislative requirement of "due impartiality" has tended to be interpreted as "responsible" reporting based on the taken-for-granted assumptions of the Westminster-Whitehall consensus (which is why this concept became increasingly difficult to operate during the 1980s when this consensus broke down). It should be replaced by the more permissive concept of balance, signifying that output on any one channel should strive to achieve a balance between divergent perspectives in society. This should ensure that currently underrepresented viewpoints will get more airtime, and that the narrow, Westminster-dominated prism through which public affairs tend to be interpreted will be widened.

This shift should be linked to extending the concept of access. There is, in fact, a growing groundswell of opinion within the broadcasting community that more should be done to enable diverse groups to express their viewpoints on television and radio. This has contributed to the advent of union workshop agreements, Channel 4, community radio, the rise of the independent production sector, access programmes, phone-in talk shows, and new forms of studio participation — this last well anatomised by Livingstone and Lunt (1994). However, it is important to ensure that this movement is not confined to minority media and off-peak programmes but penetrates the core of mainstream TV journalism and drama. The danger is that the concept of social access will be quarantined by being reserved for special category, low budget, low audience slots.

In the context of mainstream TV journalism, a stress on access means going against the grain of conventional hierarchies of news values which accord to a restricted group of public persons an exaggerated respect in terms of credibility and quotability. It means a willingness to trawl for information from a wide network of sources, including those that lack the resources to service news organisations and, in effect, subsidise their news gathering operations. It also means pitting alternative news frames against established ones.

This rethinking is in fact beginning to happen in some of the citadels of conventional public TV journalism. "Involve a wider range of experts and members of the public, get away from white men in grey suits, get away from the M25 [the ring road around London]" commanded one internal memo in *Newsnight*, BBC2's prestige daily news magazine programme (BBC 1995). The way in which this aspiration has sometimes altered the way in which current affairs programmes are put together will be briefly illustrated by two examples.

On 8 November 1991, *Newsnight* experimented with the way it reported the annual Conservative Party Conference. It began with clips from the Conference, which extolled the virtues of economic freedom and individual self-reliance. The programme then switched to a profile of life on a depressed council housing estate, in Blackburn, where economic freedom was curtailed by high unemployment and where individual

self-reliance was sapped by extreme demoralisation. This was followed by a studio discussion between public figures, from working class origins, on both left and right.

This broke with the conventional format of commenting on a conference by having excerpts from the day's proceedings, followed by interviews or discussions with professional politicians. Instead, it put disempowered people marginalised in contemporary political discourses at the centre of the programme. By deliberately highlighting the tension between political rhetoric and lived experience, it also provoked a spontaneous debate that did not follow the predictable tramlines of point-scoring, party-political exchanges. Yet, the programme remained encoded within the traditionalist ethos of the BBC. The film of the depressed housing estate featured primarily a teacher and a priest interpreting life on the estate rather than residents speaking for themselves. No one from the estate was invited to join the studio discussion that followed. As a consequence, the discussion focused on what should be done about "them" by "us" in a form that tacitly constituted "them" as a social problem in need of a remedy. What even this admirable attempt to depart from the standard formulae of current affairs journalism revealed, in practice, was the hegemony of old ways of doing things.

Three years later, *Newsnight* (January 6, 1994) did something similar and very much better. Again it transmitted excerpts from Conservative Party Conference speeches, and contrasted these with a different perspective of reality. This time round, the focus was on Conservative Party's "back to basics" campaign which called for a return to traditional morality, family values and personal responsibility, contrasted with the experience of a working class community where traditional values and structures were being undermined by high unemployment.

The opening item pointed to ambiguities in the "back to basics" campaign, and in particular contradictions between the public morality and private behaviour of individual Conservatives (triggered by the news that a married minister, Tim Yeo, was resigning after fathering a child by another woman). This was followed by a profile of a working class community in a blighted area of south Wales which was introduced as having social relations "light years away from the 'back to basic' ideal home." The two central themes of this 14 minute documentary were that unemployment was causing men to be rejected by their women as irrelevant, and that a matriarchal system of single mothers was creating an island of stability in a devastated environment. The film conveyed dramatically the nature of social change with a series of arresting images (such as unemployed men building their bodies into temples of manhood in a gym, fast cut to a robot working with quiet efficiency in a local factory). It also included breathtakingly frank interviews with women who said how little their men had to offer, now that they no longer brought money into the home.

The viewer was tacitly invited to make sense of two sharply contrasting versions of reality. In one, the single parent was the problem: in the other, she was both a symptom of a wider social breakdown, and a line of defence against it. In one reality, the individual was in control needing only to take responsibility for his or her actions: in the other, people were desperately trying to come to terms with forces beyond their control. This second *Newsnight* programme, unlike the first, took the form of a bottom-up as well as top-down communication. The homilies of government ministers were implicitly answered by the subjects of their condemnation, with great eloquence and force. Ordinary people spoke for themselves, rather than being merely spoken for and at.

This exemplary piece of reporting by the brilliant young journalist, Olenka Frenkiel, indicates the way in which public service broadcasting can renew itself and in the process maintain its support and win new adherents. Among other things, public broadcasting should deploy professional skills to host a collective conversation. It should function as a horizontal channel of communication between different groups in society, as well as a vertical channel between elites and the general public. It should link not only individual citizens but also organised groups, the building blocks of a modern democracy, in a shared and reciprocal dialogue. This inclusive debate should be conducted not only through studio debate and news reporting and analysis, but also through TV drama, a key site of normative dialogue in contemporary society. Indeed, the critical naturalistic TV drama tradition nurtured by public broadcasting (such as *Boys from the Blackstuff*, a celebrated former TV drama series in Britain featuring the unemployed in Liverpool) is one of the most effective ways in which the politically disenfranchised are given a voice.

A shift in the functioning of public service broadcasting — some elements of which are already in place — will make it possible to advance a compelling rationale for its continuation. We will have a stark choice between media controlled by big business and public broadcasting under representative control, between media manipulated to advance private agendas and media directed towards serving the public. In short, reform is the best form of defence.

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