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Newsnight's Krugman love-in [1]

Written by **Sam Bowman** [2] | Thursday 7 June 2012

Last Wednesday's Newsnight was a Paul Krugman love-in, with the entire show devoted to the Nobel-prize winner (who happened to be in town promoting a book). The show was ludicrously unbalanced, treating everything Krugman said as gospel. Bizarrely, the show's producers decided to pitch Krugman against investor Jon Moulton and Tory MP Andrea Leadsom in the debate, instead of an academic economist. Obviously, Krugman knows a lot more about macroeconomics than these two, although he's wrong about most of it. (You can watch the debate above ? Moulton and Leadsom come out of it surprisingly well, given the circumstances.)

I assume Krugman was given such an easy ride because the Newsnight producers agree with him. Since I'm forced to pay for the BBC through the licence fee, I submitted this complaint today:

> *Newsnight's programme of May 30th was heavily biased in favour of left-wing Keynesian views, and it provided a platform to Prof Paul Krugman, who was not challenged sufficiently. The significant bulk of the programme was devoted to Prof Krugman, who is currently promoting a book in the UK that makes a particular set of left-wing policy claims. Prof Krugman is not an impartial commentator and his views are not consensus among economists. Dedicating a full programme to Krugman was itself a serious example of bias ? when has Newsnight ever done so for a free market economist, such as the Nobel-winning Gary Becker who was in the UK last year?*
>
> *Most seriously, Krugman was not set in a debate against another economist ? instead, he was pitched against an investor and a Conservative MP. Prof Krugman's knowledge of macroeconomics far outstrips either of these two guests, and it was entirely inappropriate to set up such a one-sided debate. Newsnight should have had a free market economist on (such as Tim Congdon, economic historian Niall Ferguson, or an American economist such as Scott Sumner, Roger Garrison or Robert Murphy). The failure to do so created a biased and misleading weighting of the debate towards Prof Krugman. A comparison might be to put Ed Balls in a debate against Nobel-winner Robert E Lucas. This would also be an unbalanced, biased debate. By giving Prof Krugman the full show & not challenging him sufficiently, Newsnight failed its duty to be impartial.*

It won't come as a surprise to many readers that the BBC acted in this way, and I don't expect that my complaint will make any difference. Why would it, when they get my money either way? That's the thing about the BBC's bias. Nobody cares about bias on the pages of the Telegraph or the Guardian. If you don't like it, don't read them. I can't say the same for the BBC. If I get a response from them, I'll post it on the blog too.

I wrote about the BBC's biased coverage of our report on renewable energy back in December [3].

Update ? Newsnight have replied:

> *Dear Mr Bowman*

Thank you for contacting us regarding 'Newsnight' broadcast on 30 May.

I understand that you believe it was wrong for the programme to donate so much time to Professor Paul Krugman without having an equally respected alternative opinion.

Although I appreciate your feelings, it is not always possible or practical to reflect all the different opinions on a subject within individual programmes such as 'Newsnight'. Editors are charged to ensure that over a reasonable period they reflect the range of significant views, opinions and trends in their subject area.

The BBC does not seek to denigrate any view, nor to promote any view. It seeks rather to identify all significant views, and to test them rigorously and fairly on behalf of the audience. Among other evidence, audience research indicates widespread confidence in the impartiality of the BBC's reporting.

Again, I understand that you believe that in the interest of balance, the programme should have asked the opinions of leading free market economists and to that end I'd like to assure you that I've registered your concerns on our audience log. This is a daily report of audience feedback that's made available to many BBC staff, including members of the BBC Executive Board, programme makers, channel controllers and other senior managers.

The audience logs are seen as important documents that can help shape decisions about future programming and content.

Thank you once again for taking the trouble to share your views with us.

Kind Regards

Richard Carey

In other words: "Get lost".

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