

[The BBC and the licence fee will be tackled when hell freezes over](#)

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Written by [JP Floru](#) [2] | Thursday 12 September 2013



In the light of the recent pay-off scandals at the BBC, one would expect there to be demands for the abolition of the licence fee and the excessive protection the BBC enjoys. There have been some mutterings, but nothing serious. Nor is it likely to. Why is this?

Public Choice Theory, which explains human actions in terms of weighing the costs and benefits by each individual, offers a powerful explanation as to why the BBC continues to enjoy such widespread support. It is important to keep in mind that the more an individual has to gain from a particular action, the harder he/she will fight for it.

The politician

Fighting the licence fee and the BBC:

Cost: Very high. Death by BBC silence. Politicians live and breathe by media attention.

Benefit: Low. A large part of the population believes in the BBC.

Standing up for the BBC:

Cost: nil. Will have political outlets to make his views known. The licence payer pays.

Benefit: Very high. Becoming the Darling of the BBC. Re-elected.

The BBC employee

Fighting the licence fee and the BBC:

Cost: Very high. Ostracised/unemployed/no leaving sweetener.

Benefit: Nil. Unlikely to succeed ? portrayed as disgruntled ex-employee.

Standing up for the BBC:

Cost: Nil

Benefit: Very high. Promotion? High salary, cushy job, big sweetener when leaving.

The licence payer

Fighting the licence fee and the BBC:

Cost: very high if one wants to make any impact at all, as virtually everybody has a reason to like the BBC (favourite nature programme, that soap, etc.).

Benefit: £145.50 if the licence fee were to be abolished.

Standing up for the BBC:

Cost: Little?join the club.

Benefit: The BBC continues as before.

Observe that in all three cases the individuals involved have a personal vested interest in the continuation of the licence fee and the BBC as before. Politicians and BBC employees have the strongest incentives and will therefore campaign extra hard.

So the BBC need not fear: neither the pay-off scandal, nor Jimmy Savile, nor BBC bias are likely to challenge the status quo. The only chance of change is a Churchillian figure with a bee in his bonnet. [Churchill famously abolished the BBC monopoly in favour of commercial TV.](#) [3] He called the BBC tyrannical for having effectively banned him from the airwaves in the 1930s. John Reith, the BBC's founding father, said that commercial television would be as disastrous for Britain as 'dog racing, smallpox and bubonic plague'. John Reith's objection was probably the main reason why Churchill went for it. One more Churchill might just do the trick tomorrow.

JP Floru is the author of [What the Immigrant Saw](#) [4] and [How to Create Mass Prosperity](#) [5]. On Saturday he will speak at the [Conservative Renewal Conference](#) [6] about the abolition of the licence fee.

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