

Experts, politicians and the media

Beware the tyranny of experts.

Whilst like the next person if I fell ill I would turn to a good doctor to help me, that does not mean experts are always right or should make all the decisions.

It has been fashionable for some years to say experts should be in charge of more of our public policy decisions and politicians fewer. This resulted in some famous policy disasters chronicled here . It has also led to greatly contrasting styles of interview on the UK media, especially by the BBC and Channel 4.

If an "expert" is interviewed they are introduced positively, they are rarely interrupted, they are asked questions designed to let them explain their knowledge and viewpoint. The interviewer is often on their side and usually concludes with a short summary of their main points to reinforce them.

In contrast a politician interviewed on the same subject is often introduced with some critical or derogatory reference or characterisation, interrupted often, asked questions which make allegations or allege views to the interviewee which he or she does not hold, seeks to set the interviewer against the politician with a superior moral position and ends with a put down or critical comment.

I have a bigger complaint about the way the so called expert is interviewed than the politician. I of course think interviewers should be challenging and put alternative views where necessary. When interviewing an expert we should be told

Who they represent

Who pays them

Their political affiliations where they have them

What their main qualification is

The interview should consider covering professional competence where relevant. For example, if interviewing an economist about the current crash, did they forecast it or the last one and what did they say about previous disasters? If they earn money from a related interest the interview should also refer to or ask about that. If the expert is a known supporter of a particular political party or movement that too might need to be questioned.

No politician should be given an easy interview, but they should be allowed to state their case before it is probed and questioned. I sometimes am frustrated by interviews of Labour people because the interviewer talks over them to the point where we cannot hear what Labour does actually think or

recommend about a crucial topical issue. I will look in a future post at the ploys interviewers use to ensure politicians come over badly.