

Lack of trust stifles debate

Listening to the interviews on the main media is a frustrating experience. The interviewers assume all politicians are telling fibs, so they keep asking the same questions over and over again. The politicians expecting to be on trial usually play safe and stick to a few sound bites their party wants to get across. No-one is allowed to explain the complexity or nuances of many topics, because to do so would be seen as a weakness, or undermining the clarity of the approved soundbite.

The introduction of so called professional fact checkers is particularly corrosive. These people are often said to be experts. They are also people with their own political views, party preferences and biases, but we are not told about those. They may be an expert in their chosen field, but the point at issue may be one where different experts have different views. They are allowed to present as if their expert view is the only one possible. An expert economist for example is allowed to assert a future growth rate, without having to admit his or her attitude to future political events affecting the growth rate, and without having to explain that many other economists have different forecasts.

It is true that some parties and individuals in election debate wander well from the truth, whilst others believe in their view of the truth knowing they will have to deliver on it if elected. This has always been true, and used to be dealt with by the free flow of debate between the parties. When Labour lie that the Conservatives are going to privatise the NHS, past experience of Conservative governments and united voices saying No we will not should be sufficient to persuade many voters that this is simply a false accusation. I'm not expecting a BBC Fact checker to clear up that one.

Many of the issues in dispute are matters of judgement more than matters of fact. Many of them relate to the future, so they cannot be a matter of proven fact. Listening to a debate recently about the NHS and trade deals showed what a stupid position the media have got us into. There was no background understanding that the fundamental principle of free at the point of use with health care delivered on the basis of need is shared territory between all the main parties. Nor was there much permitted understanding that for profit companies supply drugs, cleaning, catering and a range of services where that makes sense, and did so under Labour governments. No one is proposing harming the NHS in anyway by a trade deal so why dont the fact checkers guide us on that one?