

# The BBC and devolution

The election coverage once again revealed the BBC's disdain for England. We had many programmes and representations of the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish viewpoint and their separate issues but nothing on England. England once again did not exist as a country of the Union in the BBC handling of questions, guests and subjects. The same has been true of their remorseless anti Brexit coverage. We often hear of special problems for Northern Ireland or Scotland over Brexit, but never hear why England wants it and voted for it. Either the BBC should concentrate on being the UK's national broadcaster on its main channels, or it must be fair to all four parts of our devolved country.

This matters. Let me remind the BBC that 84% of the population of the UK lives in England and pays their Licence fees. Many of us wish to hear English news and discussion of English matters yet we are denied this. Instead the BBC provides a BBC Wales and a BBC Scotland for those parts of the country, and doubles up by reproducing some of the Scottish and Welsh content and debate on BBC UK. It does neither for England.

When it came to the leader debates their attitude to devolution was a mess. They decided that they would give equal prominence to the SNP and the Welsh Nationalists, though neither of these parties could form a UK government or supply a Prime Minister because both only fielded candidates in a few Westminster seats. Yet they ignored the leaders of the main Ulster parties, who surely deserved attention if the Welsh and Scottish Nationalists got it? I could understand asking all party leaders to a big debate, or just inviting all party leaders who led parties fielding candidates in a majority of the Westminster seats. I could not see any justification for the choice of Leaders they did make.

What the BBC achieved by their seven way Leaders debate was an unruly shouting match between two parties that might provide a PM and form a government, three other national parties that were polling badly and two devolved regional parties out of the several who could have been invited who could clearly not provide a PM. The balance politically was by these means skewed heavily to the left of the voting patterns of the electors, with just two leaders representing the half of the electorate with Conservative and Eurosceptic leanings, and with five representing the other half. It meant there were far more pro EU representatives, out of line with the referendum results.

I made no complaints or remarks at the time. Media is a bit like the weather to candidates. You have to accept much of it and just make sure you have an umbrella handy, as they are out to rain on you. Now after the event I would suggest the BBC rethinks its whole approach to reporting devolution, and to choosing which people and issues to select for main election broadcasts. If they want to play up devolution then give England a voice and a role. Maybe it would be better to stick to the UK as the BBC's country in a General Election, and do more to discuss the national issues and matters common to

the whole country. The more non English lop sided devolution the BBC goes in for, the more it appears to be on the side of independence movements which are currently waning in popularity.