

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *Was it right for the BBC to invite the Leader of the British National Party to appear as a representative on the **Question Time** programme on 22nd October, 2009?*

Answer: Well, although I didn't like it, I felt that the decision of the BBC was one which they could not have avoided in a free country.

Admittedly, such extremist parties would not offer the same opportunity to people with alternative views if they were in charge of the country, but we have to show that we are different, don't we?.

To be frank, I gave up the habit of regularly watching **Question Time** a long time ago. I find David Dimbleby impossible to tolerate. He is so self-important, and he interrupts when a speaker strings more than two sentences together. It is my view that television always tends to trivialise any subject it deals with because the programme makers are concerned with the ratings war with other broadcasters and so require entertainment rather than serious discussion. I also found the point-scoring "yah-boo" between politicians tedious and so I stopped watching the programme and prefer to read newspaper reports about serious issues instead. The programme is in fact a knock-about show not a serious attempt at political discussion or teasing out the deeper issues behind so many of the big headlines of the day. Such an in-depth discussion would look boring and attract very few viewers indeed. What does attract are the big names and the latest controversies and, like this event, the expectation of something really exciting to watch.

So, despite my misgivings, on this occasion, and noting all the ballyhoo, I decided to stay up beyond my normal bedtime and watch the fun-of-the-fair on the show.

The following day, the BNP complained that the BBC had deliberately altered the format of the programme so that it became Nick Griffin battering evening. At one level, it did seem that this was the case although Mr Dimbleby condescended to allow two general questions

as the end of the show approached. Nobody felt sorry for Nick Griffin because we all know where he is coming from and it an ugly sight indeed, and one, in my opinion, that does need to be exposed rather than censored by which it might gain some mystique which could mislead people. The last thing we need is for the BNP to look like a plucky underdog because we know that the British always warm to an underdog!

The BBC has a policy of inviting politicians to speak on **Question Time** when their poll ratings rise above a threshold of 5%, and we know that the BNP polled 6%

of the last election in which two members including Nick Griffin became members of the European Parliament. Given these facts, it was difficult for the BBC to make a discriminating action against the BNP since this party is both legal and to this extent, electorally



successful.

Nick Griffin appeared unable to explain his dodgy past, and was visibly shifty about statements he had made which now, on **Question Time**, were clearly ridiculous and unsupportable. He was exposed as a very inadequate politician with a view of Britain which was sheer fantasy, and all this is a positive result.

He did land a punch on Jack Straw, though, as he told the viewers that whilst Jack Straw's father spent the war years in prison as a conscientious objector, his father had been in the RAF. Ouch!

However, Mr Straw, the Justice Secretary, summed up the situation well when, the following day, he said:

"Mr. Griffin was last night exposed as a fantasising conspiracy theorist with some very unpleasant views and no moral compass. But now that he has been exposed for what he is it is time to move on."

Agreed!

Neil Richardson