



Tony Hall
Director-General of BBC
Broadcasting House, Peel Wing
Portland Place
London
W1A 1AA

14 June 2019

Dear Tony,

Dark Money Think Tanks

I am writing to welcome your announcement that the BBC will get to grips with the issue of dark money think tanks such as the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and the so-called 'Taxpayers Alliance' appearing on your platforms without full disclosure.

As the Scottish Greens' spokesperson on culture & the media and as a member of the Scottish Parliament's Culture Committee, I have raised concerns about these pseudo-think tanks on a number of occasions. In November 2018, senior BBC officials, including Deputy Director General Anne Bulford, appeared before the Culture Committee, where I directly raised the issue of these so-called think tanks advocating for policies and positions which are beneficial to their secret funders without the public being informed of who these funders are.

Those present were unable to clearly explain how viewers are given the relevant information regarding the contribution of a guest from one of these organisations. It is of course impossible to give this information so long as the organisations in question refuse to reveal their donors, thus raising the question of their suitability to appear at all.

Following that meeting I wrote to the BBC, seeking to confirm your editorial approach to transparency and disclosure in these circumstances. Fran Unsworth, Director of News and Current Affairs, responded that the corporation 'should normally identify on-air and online sources of information and significant contributors, and provide their credentials, so that our audiences can judge their status.' Again, the editorial policy appears unclear.

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Since then, I have noted a number of occasions on which the Institute of Economic Affairs was invited to appear on BBC programmes without any context being provided whatsoever. So far this month their appearances have included Politics Live, the Start the Week podcast, Today on Radio 4 and no doubt others. In each of these instances, some of which are noted below for clarity, no further information or any context whatsoever was provided about the IEA. In each case, they were simply introduced as a think tank. This left the representative of the IEA free to comment on topics including healthcare, Brexit, a UK-US trade deal and the climate crisis without disclosing any information regarding their funders and thus the potential motivations being their advocacy for particular positions.

You will be aware of the revelations that the IEA has on a number of occasions been found to have advocated positions beneficial to corporations funding them, for example in the case revealed by the Guardian and others in 2013 of both the IEA and the Adam Smith Institute receiving funding from the tobacco industry whilst lobbying against public health initiatives regarding smoking. It is essential that the viewing public are aware of clear conflicts of interest such as this. To not make this clear only makes it easier for powerful corporations and individuals to manipulate public discourse and public policy to suit their objectives.

I would therefore like to ask that you to keep me apprised of any new editorial guidelines or procedures introduced by the BBC to address the issue of dark money funded think tanks and how the BBC ensures that both the corporation and the viewing public are aware of any potential conflicts of interest or other relevant information before such organisations are given the opportunity to advocate on your platforms.

Kind regards

Best Wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ross Greer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ross Greer MSP

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Examples of IEA appearances:

BBC Start The Week podcast with Andrew Marr: 03/06/2019

Kate Andrews was introduced as from the 'conservative, free market think tank, the IEA' but no mention of their funding was given. Topics discussed included healthcare.

BBC Politics Live, Andrew Marr: 06/06/2019

Kate Andrews was introduced as from the Institute of Economic Affairs, but no mention of their funding or further context was given. Topics discussed included Brexit and rent caps.

BBC Radio 4 Today: 07/06/2019

Mark Littlewood was introduced as being the director of the Institute of Economic Affairs, but no mention of their funding or further context was given. The topic under discussion was the climate crisis and the cost of reaching net zero.

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