

It's time the BBC realised that the opposite of ...

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[Rupert Read](#) is a Green campaigner; philosopher; former Green Party candidate and a friend of mine. We don't always agree. But we share a lot in common, including a lot of mutual respect. So I was delighted to see him writing this in the [Guardian](#) (which I quote extensively with his permission):

Like most Greens, I typically jump at opportunities to go on air. Pretty much any opportunity: BBC national radio, BBC TV, Channel 4, Sky — I've done them all over the years, for good or ill. Even when, as is not infrequently the case, the deck is somewhat stacked against me, or the timing inadequate for anything more than a soundbite, or the question up for debate less than ideal.

But this Wednesday, when I was rung up by BBC Radio Cambridgeshire and asked to come on air to debate with a climate change denier, something in me broke, and rebelled. Really? I thought. This summer, of all times?

So, for almost the first time in my life, I turned it down. I told it that I will no longer be part of such charades. I said that the BBC should be ashamed of its nonsensical idea of "balance", when the scientific debate is as settled as the "debate" about whether smoking causes cancer. By giving climate change deniers a full platform, producers make their position seem infinitely more reasonable than it is. (This contributes to the spread of misinformation and miseducation around climate change that fuels the inaction producing the long emergency we are facing.)

From a public service broadcaster, this is simply not good enough.

I entirely agree. And I share his frustration. For years I have been seeking to present balanced argument on tax in the media. It's hardly radical to say that you expect people to pay the right amount of tax, in the right place, at the right rate and at the right time, after all. Nor is it radical to say that you want the government to do this even-handedly in the interests of fair competition. From whatever political perspective you come that, surely, makes sense.

But like Rupert, I have been put up, time and again, against people I consider extremists. That is people like the so-called Taxpayers' Alliance and the Institute for Economic Affairs, both of which organisations argue for the end of the structure of society as we know it, the destruction of democracy as we are familiar with it, and the end of those services on which the most vulnerable people in this country rely. They also promote tax havens that would destroy fair competition and undermine markets. And that has been done in the name of supposed balance. But it is not. It creates bias.

And Rupert has stood up against that bias, and for good reason. As he argues, including those with such partisan, and unreasoned views, in on-air discussion actually destroys the debate. He put it like this:

What makes it so frustrating is that there are important debates to be had around climate change. And so I told the Beeb that I would be very happy to come on and take part in a different debate. For example, we should be debating whether the Paris climate accord is going to be enough, or if we need to do more. Or discussing just how radically our society needs to change to meet the challenges of the climate crisis, and how we should rethink our activism. But I will no longer put up with the absurd notion that a straight debate about the science can be justified.

I applaud his decision.

It was the right thing to do.

The time has come for the BBC to stop giving extremists a platform on the basis of supposedly providing balance.

Will the BBC listen though? Who knows? Maybe they might if Rupert's suggestion were followed through:

However, here's the exciting thing. If we get more momentum behind the idea of refusing to participate, it will force a change of coverage methods by the BBC, which experts have been calling for for years. For if we all refuse to debate with the climate change deniers on public platforms, and press the BBC to catch up with the 21st century, it will be forced to change its ways, because the BBC cannot defend the practice of allowing a climate change denier to speak unopposed. If we truly want to see change on this issue, we need to be willing to let it know exactly how we feel. So, now I'm going to get on with filing my [official complaint](#) to the BBC ...

I will have to think hard about that one. And the next time I am asked to go on air with the likes of Mark Littlewood from the Institute of Economic Affairs I might have to think seriously about whether to do so, or not.

The BBC is biased. It's biased because it gives the far right a platform where none can be justified.

I'm not arguing against free speech. Nor is Rupert. What we are saying is that the balance in reasonable debate is not unreasoned extremism. And it's time the BBC realised that. As yet they do not.