



The ABC Has Just Moved Further From The Mainstream

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Perhaps the staff at the ABC voted themselves a pay rise so they could donate the extra money to the 606,000 Australians who have lost their job in the private sector since March because of the lockdowns the public broadcaster has been amongst the loudest in cheerleading.

Or perhaps ABC staff simply think they are better and more deserving of a pay rise than mainstream Australians who are self-employed or work for small businesses.

In April the Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister, the Hon Ben Morton asked the Australian Public Service Commissioner (APSC) to write to non-Australian Public Service agencies, informing them of the government's expectations that they implement a six-month deferral of pay increases.

That request has been largely agreed to by non-APS agencies, except for the tin-eared pay increases voted for by staff at ASIC and the Australian Deep Space Communication Complex.

This week, ABC staff voted to accept a 2% pay increase over sensibly freezing their pay for 6 months in line with the government's public service wage freeze policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic



The Community and Public Sector Union called on ABC staff to reject the pay freeze, advising members they deserve the \$5 million worth of pay rises.

This is further proof that the ABC, despite their insistence to the contrary, are not a part of Australia's cultural fabric but are completely removed from mainstream Australia.

Institute of Public Affairs analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data found that jobs in the private sector decreased by 5% between 14 March and 5 September, while they increased by 2.4% in the public sector. This represents around 606,000 jobs lost in the private sector and 19,700 gained in the public sector.

The ABC staffs decision to grant themselves a pay increase in defiance of government and APSC advice is further evidence of Australia's "K-shaped recession" where the private sector is languishing while the public sector and the ABC are shielded from the real-world impacts of the lockdowns and recession.

In May Communications Minister Paul Fletcher wrote to ABC Chair Ita Buttrose advising that he expects the ABC to comply with the six-month wage freeze, saying that it would be a "highly appropriate gesture of solidarity with journalists in the commercial media" who have been smashed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He is right.

Paul Murphy, the Chief Executive of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, argued Minister Fletcher's intervention was an issue of ABC independence.

Given his apparent concern for independence, Paul Murphy will presumably be investigating the extent to which ABC journalistic integrity was compromised by payments it received from news site *The New Daily* which is funded by Industry Super.

One of the ABC's key editorial standards is to "Ensure that editorial decisions are not improperly influenced by political, sectional, commercial or personal interests." ABC advocates often cite its complete independence from commercial interests as being vital for balanced journalism in the national interest.

Yet many journalists at the national broadcaster, along with those at *The Guardian*, have called for the ABC to get access to the Federal Government and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's planned digital platforms reform which would see advertising revenue from Google and Facebook syphoned off to commercial media.

If the ABC were to gain access to this questionable revenue stream, then a key part of the ABC balance sheet would be directly linked to the commercial success of Google and Facebook.

So much for independence from commercial interests.

Surely a better outcome both for the ABC, and taxpayers, would be privatisation, or at the very least, to allow the ABC to air commercials since they are so keen on a slice of advertising revenue in the first place.



Detachment from commercial interests causes independence issues too. The ABC continues to run a pro-COVID elimination, pro-lockdown narrative, while it remains almost untouched by the pandemic.

While the rest of the media is being smashed as advertising revenue dries up, ABC staff have opted for an incredibly tone-deaf pay rise.

Staff members at our national broadcaster now consider themselves morally superior and more worthy of a 2% pay rise than staff at Services Australia, Centrelink, the Department of Health and the Department of Social Services, who have all been on the front line of the response to this pandemic and have all taken a six-month pay freeze.

This self-indulgent pay rise, though, is merely the consequence of a deliberate strategy of ABC staff to further remove the organisation from the mainstream. Last November the ABC altered its editorial policies and asked staff to stop using unifying words such as “us” and “our values”.

Not being all in this together is official ABC policy.

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