

# BBC attacks Russell Brand to defend a discredited political setup

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The BBC's political editor Nick Robinson has penned an extraordinary attack on the comedian and activist Russell Brand.

In his highly personalised comment in the *Radio Times*, Robinson wrote that he had a "beef" with Brand over his assertion that there is no party worth voting for in elections. Arguing that abstention could open the door to extremist parties, Robinson insisted "Yes it does make a difference whether you vote or not and who you vote for. Are you listening, Russell Brand, and admirers of the man with the most manicured chest in Britain?"

Robinson denied that his comments breached his professional obligation to political impartiality, arguing that he was not "required to be impartial between democracy and the alternatives."

The experiences of his "German Jewish grandparents" who "were forced to flee the Nazis and then, later, the Communists who took over China, the place they'd sought refuge," Robinson went on, made him an "unapologetic believer in elections."

In point of fact, Brand has not called for electoral boycotts as a point of principle. His transgression, in the eyes of Robinson and others, is that he has the temerity to point out that the UK's political system is designed to serve only the interests of big business and the super-rich, thereby disenfranchising the vast majority.

Robinson's op-ed was timed to coincide with the launch of campaigning for the May 7 General Election. But even as the BBC's political editor vouched safe for British democracy, there were numerous warnings that the election presented an existential crisis not only for the official parties but for the bourgeois state.

After five years of austerity—first piloted under the Labour government and continued by the

Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition—many people have rightly concluded there are no fundamental differences between the parties. All have overseen a staggering decline in the living standards of working people, especially the youth, while the super-rich are once again enjoying record fortunes, paid for by spending cuts and bank bailouts.

Rowena Mason in the *Guardian* commented, "It is a deeply risky situation for the two main parties that, with so short a time before polling day, this is set to be the year of their lowest popularity since the polling company Ipsos MORI began collecting records in 1978."

Pollsters anticipate that the Conservatives and Labour will, between them, garner just over 60 percent of voters on May 7, and even that is considered an over-estimation. With talk of a hung parliament forcing a constitutional crisis, the Tories are reportedly making plans for a second general election within months.

Having already pushed through the largest spending cuts since the 1930s, the Tories go into the election pledged to additional spending cuts of £25 billion. It means the loss of one million public-sector jobs, on top of the 500,000 already destroyed, and further savage inroads against welfare.

At Labour's press conference, leader Ed Miliband said he was on a "crusade to change the country", pledging a hike in the minimum wage and additional help for the National Health Service, to be funded by a "mansion tax" on homes worth over £2 million.

However, his effort to posture as an alternative to penury under the Tories was in tatters within hours. Amid an outcry from sections of the media, Labour's Ed Balls made clear that his party would keep Tory spending cuts in place up to 2016 at least. Labour would not commit to ending the public sector pay

freeze or reversing spending cuts, he said.

“Labour has the most cautious approach of all the parties and has promised no net giveaways,” Balls said, demanding that all parties should submit their spending plans to the Office for Budget Responsibility for approval.

In the *Guardian*, Labour apologist Polly Toynbee wrote despairingly that “Keeping expectations low while inspiring enthusiasm to get the vote out is the tricky balancing act of the next 127 days to the election.”

A “broken first-past-the-post electoral system” meant that a “government lacking the consent of more than a third may have caused irreversible damage.”

A government was only formed following the 2010 general election because the Liberal Democrats ripped up their manifesto commitments to enter a coalition with the Tories. It was the first time in British history that a coalition government was formed directly as a result of a general election.

The Liberal Democrats are highly unlikely to be able to act as “kingmakers” this time. Its role in the coalition, which has included support for tripling tuition fees, welfare cuts and war with Libya, has seen its electoral support plummet so low that the party lost its deposit in a string of recent by-elections.

That is why the focus is on smaller parties, such as the Scottish National Party, United Kingdom Independence Party and the Greens, to help either the Tories or Labour deliver a workable government.

Robinson claims it is this that will mean the May 7 election “will make a real difference.” This is just as bogus as his other assertions.

The SNP, UKIP and the Greens are bourgeois parties committed to capitalism. UKIP’s anti-immigrant, anti-European Union rhetoric is aimed at channeling social tensions in a reactionary nationalist direction. Its pretensions to represent the “ordinary man or woman” is belied by leader Nigel Farage’s hint that his party would support a minority Tory government and its demands for the greater deregulation of business and a “streamlined welfare system.”

In Scotland, the SNP is expected to gain at least 17 seats at Labour’s expense, leading to expectations that horse-trading between the two may offer an alternative viable coalition. But the SNP’s price for backing Labour austerity will include the slashing of

corporation tax in Scotland, which can only further decimate workers’ wages and living standards.

Where the Greens have helped form administrations at a local level in the UK, such as Brighton, they have pushed through spending cuts. In countries where they have been able to enter office, like Germany and Ireland, they have enforced policies of militarism and austerity.

It is small wonder then that any questioning of the electoral setup brings down a furious response. Indeed, in the run-up to May 7, Robinson is to host a BBC Radio 4 series dedicated to refuting Brand’s “assertion that the power of global corporations has drained all power from our elected politicians.”

Robinson sought to deflect criticism that the BBC was straining its own impartiality code by claiming, “I asked Russell Brand to do an interview, but as he posed for a few selfies I was told he was ‘too busy’.”

In Brand’s absence, appearing alongside UKIP leader Nigel Farage and Tory William Hague is none other than former Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. That the BBC has to call on the services of a man widely reviled as a war criminal and bagman for despots the world over testifies to the putrid character of the “democracy” it is desperately attempting to defend.



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