

PETER ALLAM

BBC CHARTER REVIEW CONSULTATION
DEPARTMENT FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT
2 - 4 COCKSPUR STREET
LONDON SW1Y 5DH

FEBRUARY 7TH 2004

Dear Sir

Review of the BBC Royal Charter

I am sixty eight years of age. I have long admired the BBC for:-

- 1) The independence and generally high standards of newsgathering and reporting.
- 2) The high standard of entertainment and cultural programmes.
- 3) Its refusal to seek the lowest common demoninator of audience satisfaction.

However, I feel that its performance in points 2 and 3 has recently changed for the worse as follows:

1) Degradation of programme breadth and standards. BBC1 and BBC2 are now virtually indistinguishable from each other and from ITV and Channel 4. BBC2 in particular used to be a beacon of quality: Classic films from across the world and selected from the past eight decades; concerts, operas, musical competitions such as Leeds, Cardiff and Young Musician of the Year (in all their stages) and intelligent new drama, were routinely shown. Now, if shown at all, they have been shunted off to BBC 4 and not accessible unless you have cable or digital television. (BBC3 used to show quality programmes and now has Liquid News, East Enders, 'sensational' programmes with themes of drugs, sex and murder and popular youth programmes such as Posh and Becks Liquid Assets, leaving BBC4 as an expensively produced channel with little audience share)

BBC2 now shows repeats of USA sitcoms and cartoons, gardening, cooking and light hearted quiz programmes. The result is that a vast number of licence payers have lost access to a wide range of knowledge and cultural experience.

2) Advertisements ('trailers'). The BBC does not have to spend portions of programme time in raising income to survive, as do the commercial channels. However, it has apparently decided to use an amount of time each hour to advertise itself, intrusively and repetetively (on radio as well). The BBC's argument that these are necessary to inform viewers cannot be sustained; do they expect viewers to sit with pen and paper to note down this suddenly imparted information, when it is already available elsewhere? Commercial channels have to use the same amount of time to secure funding, and cannot constantly remind viewers of forthcoming programmes; they are thus at an unfair


disadvantage. I have always thought that the absence of advertisements was a good reason for the licence fee. At the moment we have the disadvantages of commercial television and still have to pay.

3) Expenditure. I would also query the large amount of money spent on the new digital programmes and on the vast army of sports 'commenters', as opposed to commentators, who sit in studios all over the world saying either very little or the very obvious and could be called a collection of luvvies.

Summary

If the BBC wishes to pursue the lowest common denominator, then BBC1 (without news or comment), Radios 1,2, and 5 should be funded by advertisements or sponsorship. News, comment and cultured programmes should be funded by subscription or a much reduced licence fee. This would keep the BBC free from Government interference.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Allam', written in a cursive style.

P. Allam