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BBC Charter Consultation.

Being about to enter my 70th year, my memories of the BBC take me back to the days of Larry the Lamb and ITMA. Even as a young boy I can vividly remember that everything had to stop for the news bulletins; John Snagge, Alvar Liddel, even the broad Yorkshire accents of Wilfred Pickles! For people of my generation, then, the BBC has always been a part of the fabric of our lives. My great concern is that for those without that background, exposed to a multitude of television channels, the corporation means much less. Also, what views they do have of the organization are probably coloured by their exposure to the many newspapers whose owners, for reasons of their own, conduct a non-stop campaign of anti-BBC propaganda. Add to this the review being carried out for the Conservative party by David Elstein (not noted for his warm feelings towards the public-service in broadcasting) and one fears for the future.

What, then, are the values of the BBC, which I feel need to be upheld in the face of these threats? No institution of its size and complexity could be expected to get everything right all the time, but generally, when it comes to reporting on, and commenting about current events, it achieves a good, sound balance. No other broadcasting company can rival it in the thoroughness of coverage from all parts of the world. A single example of this is that fine Radio 4 programme; "From our own correspondent". Having recently acquired a set-top digital box, I can now both see News 24 and listen to the World Service.

Keeping its listeners and viewers informed about the world around them has, then, always been a cornerstone of the BBC's operation. Equally so is its service to the arts. Since its birth in the 1920s it has done more than any other group to bring music into the homes of anyone willing to listen. The most obvious example is the Henry Wood promenade concerts. Would they have survived in their present form without the BBC? No commercial competitor would support the national and regional symphony orchestras, such as the one we have here in Wales. Radio 3, unlike its main competitor, does not talk down to its audience and does play a wide range of music. Drama, too has always been a strength. I wonder, though, why the complete Shakespeare canon produced a quarter of a century ago has never been repeated.

Education, from infant to graduate, is well catered for. I have personal experience here; remembering still the schools programmes back in the 1940s and having recently completed an Open University degree.

Sports coverage in recent years has diminished considerably, thanks to the appropriation of some of the "crown jewels" by those commercial rivals. Thank goodness for 5live and the unique test-match special. Like many others I watch Channel 4's gimmick-

ridden coverage with the sound turned down and Aggers, Blowers and CMJ describing events on Radio 4 long wave.

Quizzes (Mastermind, Univ. Challenge, Round Britain Quiz, Brain of Britain) and, of course, comedy (from classic sitcoms to the quirky - Goon Show, Python up to Little Britain), have brought me many hours of entertainment and enlightenment. Why, though, in recent times, the plethora of make-overs and DIYs? They must be doing something right when so many of their original ideas are filched by rivals; most recently programmes about antiques.

Whatever the quality, or lack of it, in a BBC programme, one is saved the exasperation of the constant, interminable interruptions of commercial breaks. On those occasions when I do watch a commercial station, I tend to pre-record; it saves so much time!

Not being an internet user I cannot comment on the second and third questions. As for the commercial services, such as Radio Times and DVDs of its own programmes, I see no reason to object, especially as the proceeds are ploughed back into programme making.

On the question of paying for the BBC, I do not object in the slightest to making a weekly contribution equivalent to the price of one pint of beer (probably less at London prices). The two main alternatives normally posited are subscription and adverts. The first would be so unlikely to provide anything like the current income that the range and quality of programmes would wither on the vine. As for adverts, just imagine the screams of "foul" from the commercial companies.

When it comes to the systems of organization and management, it seems to me that the current independent board of governors probably provide as responsible a method as any other.

It will be obvious from what I have written that I am a devoted supporter of the BBC. Like any organization of its size it is bound to have failings. Decision-making can be a slow and cumbersome business and there is probably a certain amount of buck-passing. However, when one compares it with its rivals, all answerable to a greater or lesser extent to advertisers, long may it thrive!


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