

Ms Tessa Jowell,
Minister, Department of Culture, Media and Sport,
[For the attention of the Strategy, Policy and Delivery Team]
2-4 Cockspur Street
LONDON
SW1Y 5DH

Monday 29 March 2004

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Dear Minister

re: Submission to 'Your BBC, Your Say' Review Body – Breaches of BBC Charter – Political Bias

I wish the following comments to be taken into account in your review of the BBC and its Charter.

I have for the past 18 months been associated with a group of people who are concerned about political bias in a number of key areas on the BBC - both TV and radio. I believe that a key aim of your Review should be to ensure that there are adequate structures and mechanisms in place to prevent the BBC from ever again using its massive influence to transmit news, current affairs programmes and other material which is politically biased. I was one of the organisers of a conference last May which drew together around 100 people seriously concerned about political bias on the BBC. I am also a member of the campaign group 'Stop BBC Bias'. This group has currently produced a provisional set of conclusions and recommendations, which are reproduced below. I heartily support them and urge you to take the action recommended there.

I trust you accept in full the research evidence of Minotaur Media Tracking who, in a series of studies, exposed the huge degree of bias by the BBC over a number of years in favour of those who support further European integration, whom I might categorise as 'anti-independence' politicians, and those who (very much in a minority these days) support the introduction of the euro and the abolition of sterling.

I trust you also accept the evidence supplied to you by Jewish groups who have compiled extensively researched reports showing the degree of promotion of the Palestinian Arab viewpoint on the Palestine/Israel dispute; another clear example of bias and which is currently getting worse according to many accounts.

Any political bias is unacceptable and a clear and fundamental breach of the duty of the BBC and its governors in the Charter to ensure 'impartial' reporting of controversial subjects.

There are many examples of bias on political issues by the BBC which are not covered in the list of conclusions and recommendations. There is for example a widespread view that the BBC does not give impartial coverage of the current debate

on level of legal and illegal immigration. It is perceived that it continually emphasises the benefits of large-scale immigration whilst not allowing an effective say to those who are concerned about its disadvantages.

I am sending this submission also via e-mail to:
bbccharterreview@culture.gsi.gov.uk.

The provisional conclusions of the 'Stop BBC Bias' Campaign follow:

'STOP BBC BIAS' REPORT TO 'YOUR BBC, YOUR SAY' REVIEW BODY

CONCLUSIONS AND DEMANDS

Our report has focussed on the extent to which the BBC shows political bias on a range of topics, the extent to which therefore the BBC can no longer be trusted to provide neutral and balanced reporting, and on what action needs to be taken to remedy this completely unacceptable situation.

Our conclusions are:

1. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport is not the appropriate body to carry out this Review. The problems of political bias on the BBC are so serious that an independent Royal Commission is needed to examine this problem and how to deal with it.
2. The six studies by Minotaur Media Tracking, all proving conclusively that the BBC was systematically biased in its news and current affairs reporting in favour of European integration and against those opposing European integration, are a serious indictment of the BBC and a gross breach of its duties of neutrality and impartiality under its Royal Charter.
3. The BBC has failed to admit to proven systematic bias on this issue and is in effect in denial.
4. The BBC has failed to take any observable steps to eradicate this bias.
5. The BBC has repeatedly been challenged over its bias in favour of the Palestinian argument and against the Israeli argument over 'Palestine-Israel'. There is ample evidence that this bias exists. The BBC has again denied any bias in this respect and therefore failed to take any steps to eradicate it.
6. There is a very strong impression, yet to be fully confirmed by independent research evidence, that the BBC has also become biased in the following respects: it is widely seen as favouring left-wing views generally and the Labour and Liberal Democrat Parties in particular. There is evidence that it has become anti-American. There is evidence that it pushes certain agendas, such as multiculturalism and republicanism.
7. At the same time as this widespread perception of left-wing and pro-Labour bias, the former Chairman of the Governors of the BBC, Gavyn Davies, the former Director-General of the BBC Greg Dyke and its current Chief Political Correspondent, Andrew Marr, are all either former members of the Labour Party, or have made substantial donations to it, or have other close connections with it. The same applies to many other senior staff at the BBC.
8. The BBC relies heavily on political commentators, through whom the news is filtered. The public does not want to hear what are in effect the political views of commentators. It wants to hear both sides of every argument so that it can make

up its mind on those arguments. The public wants equal weight to be given to either side of an argument, and to hear a full range of views on a topic. By contrast, the situation which all too frequently happens on European issues like the E.U. and the euro is that the integrationist argument is heard in full while the anti-integrationist, 'pro independence' argument is scarcely being heard at all.

9. The BBC does not deal effectively with complaints of political bias. Its Programme Complaints Unit only looks at complaints within one programme. It cannot deal with complaints of bias over a range of programmes.
10. The Programme Complaints Unit does not have teeth. It only has the power to give a minor 'slap on the wrist' to the makers of biased programmes.
11. The BBC does not even record the numbers of complaints made about political bias, so it is impossible to check how many are being made, by whom, and what the BBC is doing about them, if anything.
12. Senior BBC staff and its governors have brushed aside complaints of political bias and often do not even answer letters of complaint or protest about political bias.
13. BBC staff are not there to propound their views, either on TV or radio, and certainly not in the press. The BBC's news and current affairs function should be that of totally impartial news reporting and, when it comes to political debate, to fairly represent all arguments and to be neutral in reporting those arguments.
14. Previous BBC journalistic standards of accurate and unbiased reporting have plummeted as was highlighted in the recent Hutton Report.

Our Recommendations are:

1. Those BBC staff, at all levels, who have produced or authorised political programmes that are biased - and can therefore be said to have abused their positions - should be dismissed for their failure to act in accordance with the BBC Charter.
2. The BBC Governors, as the Hutton Report also showed, cannot both manage and regulate the BBC. Their track record in failing to address political bias, and their frequent failure even to answer letters on the subject, means they should all be dismissed and a fresh set of Governors appointed.
3. A method must be found of appointing governors whose political views genuinely span the entire political spectrum.
4. There must be an independent complaints body to whom the public can complain if they consider that any one programme, or series of programmes, amounts to political bias. That independent complaints body should have, inter alia, the following specific duties:
 - (a) to regularly meet with those organisations who have credibly alleged political bias
 - (b) to record all complaints about political bias, and
 - (c) to publicise what action has been taken in response to complaints.
5. The governors should have the power to fine journalists and others who the governors find to have shown political bias.
6. Every complaint received by the BBC, whether by letter, 'phone call, e-mail etc., and about whatever subject, should be logged, recorded, and given an individual complaint number.
7. Complaints - and the BBC's response to them - should be made available in the BBC Library and available for inspection on request to bona fide researchers. The current denial by the BBC of access to written complaints, so that they may be studied, is a breach of its Charter obligations.

8. Given that support for keeping the pounds is running at around 70% of those who have a definite view, and support for the United Kingdom leaving the European Union has consistently been in the region of 30% to 50%, the BBC must immediately review its choice of news topics on these issues and choice of invited speakers so as to reflect more accurately the balance of opinion on these matters.
9. The BBC must immediately consider its output on the European Constitution and must reflect the huge and growing opposition to it. To date, the BBC has given virtually no coverage to the various campaigns for a referendum on the European Constitution.
10. Staff vacancies for the BBC should no longer be almost exclusively advertised in a left-wing newspaper, *The Guardian*. They should be advertised in a range of newspapers.
11. There must never again be a situation in which the Chairman of the Governors of the BBC, and its Director, and its Chief Political Correspondent, and other key staff, are all either past members of the Labour Party or have had very close connections with it. The same would of course be true of the BBC's connection with any other political party. The BBC should preferably be managed at the top by those whose track record shows no evidence of strong political views or associations with any political party.
12. BBC staff must no longer propound their views (mostly socialist or left-wing), neither on BBC TV or radio, nor elsewhere and certainly not in the press (this latter point appears to have been substantially addressed by the BBC in its drawing up revised contracts for its journalists effectively banning them from expressing their political views publicly).
13. The amount of comment from political commentators must be drastically reduced. The public need to hear the views of the protagonists to a dispute, just as they would in a debate. They do not want to hear endless analysis, comments and views by BBC-employed political pundits.

Yours sincerely



Tony Bennett

Member, 'Stop-BBC Bias' Campaign