

In answer to your request for opinions on the BBC →

I am sorry if this answer to your request for opinions is randomised, but that is the way in which my thoughts arrive. I have no certainties as to the structure of the BBC other than to affirm that its management should be independent, professional and courageous. I found the last quality lacking after the Hutton report which has now been found to have been unfairly biased against the BBC, for even the Gilligan report was substantially correct, if a little sloppy in presentation. I saw no need for abject apologies, nor should any directors have resigned on that issue.

In this respect I believe that the Arabic TV station Al Jazeera admirably demonstrated how to stand up to the sort of pressure which Mr. Campbell and the Government exerted. It also seemed that Campbell achieved more than he knew as my wife and I had the impression that for a while political comment, and even news reporting was very 'prissy' and we turned to the Channel 4 for more honest news reporting. Happily, there has been some return of balance recently.

My criticism of programming is much the same as is commonly expressed, that there has been a significant dumbing down in quality, presumably to match the lower IQ of the population, probably by reacting to competitive pressure. Perhaps the idea is to follow, rather than to lead what is supposed to be popular taste.

There are some examples, but one which stands out is in sports, the time given to darts and snooker when, say activities based on intellect, chess and bridge are entirely neglected. No balance here. We chess lovers are bereft.

Although there are some successful cultural programmes, they are not frequent. I would hope there could be a channel devoted to a higher cultural standard, not necessarily as eclectic as the Third Programme, but to cater for those who do not want to be forced to turn off from rather silly give-away competitions, poor quality comedy and repetitive old American films. There could be some revival of former, good quality series such as the Wars of the Roses. Also, it would be nice to see some good foreign drama. For example, the radio play of some time ago, the Schiller Trilogy 'Wallenstein', or French plays say by Cocteau, Anouilh, etc. produced for TV.

However, I guess that BBC took a decision some time ago to down grade the intellectual level of its programmes and the former difference between BBC1 and 2 has evaporated. It is a pity as both Britain and Europe has a richness of culture which is largely neglected. We should be proud of our cultural heritage.

On the discussion programmes I am happier as you cater for those who prefer penetrative presenters like Paxman down to the almost deferential like Frost. That is a fair balance, but I am mildly irritated by the Chairmen of Question Time programmes who dominate the programme so that they seem to ask and want to answer all the questions themselves.

I am not a great sports watcher, except for cricket and losing that coverage was a tragedy, I liked it on BBC.

So, my conclusions are, for a Channel devoted to a higher standard of culture and intellect; agreed we are a minority. Some more courage from directors when facing up to the spleen of our political masters, no need to have made grovelling apologies

and forcing resignations; that last episode was painful to watch and I often felt like shouting out, 'for God's sake have some backbone' when the spin doctors got to work. I leave sex and violence to the moralists; I only abhor them in poor quality programmes when they are used to boost a weak story line.

One small point, I noticed that in many of the routine crime stories the players smoke quite a lot and I just wonder if a few brown envelopes have been flying about from the tobacco companies.

From: Geoffrey Bucknall,

