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There is one issue alone that I wish to bring up. Superficially at first glance it may appear to be a complaint with regards to the way the BBC schedule their programmes, however it is far more wide ranging and significant than that. It touches on the BBC licence fee, the BBC funding, the crucial issue of analogue reception, digital reception and particularly the BBC's accountability in providing a public service and of course what that means is debatable. Having got that preface registered as a start, my starting point is this.

Through a hypothecated tax otherwise known as a licence fee, that is my licence fee. I along with all the other licence fee payers, pay the salaries and all expenses of everyone who works for the BBC. If we leave aside BBC Radio and other than to say that I am permanently switched on to Radio 4 and I have absolutely no issues or complaints about the excellent service, ever improving, that I enjoy and which keeps me sane. The issue, which I wish to address, could be summed up in Alistair Campbell tabloidese possibly along the lines of – and here of course I realise this will not make me popular with Tessa Jowell the Minister, nor the senior bosses from Greg Dyke downwards at the BBC – “How The Government get the BBC to do its dirty work” and a sub headline might be, “BBC does Governments' dirty work by stealth”.

Let me explain how this issue has been irritating me increasingly for well over a year and came to ahead last week, with a particular instance which epitomises, better than anything else I can think of the issues involved. Of course I realise that part of my licence fee will be used by the BBC to fund and make some programmes which will not be to my taste and I will never watch, e.g. sports, soap operas and so on. I have no problem with that. My problem arises because until recently I have always been more than satisfied with the diversity and depth of interest of programmes provided on BBC2. I have thoroughly investigated the so-called benefits of digital television for me as a consumer, viewer, customer and elector. The result of my evaluation has been that there is absolutely no benefit to me what so ever in digital television reception over analogue television reception. The claimed picture and sound qualities elude me, I have no wish to participate in what I believe those in the trade call “interactive television” and if the BBC, with the tacit and enthusiastic collusion of the Culture Secretary were not creating a spurious benefit of access to programmes only available on BBC4; which of course is not an alternative analogue medium but an entirely different digital medium, I could continue happily watching BBC2 on my analogue television sets.

For several years now the BBC has been cross-promoting its digital News 24 programme on what I feel is my BBC2 analogue channel, to which my reaction is fine, they are using my money to produce that 24-hour programme. I can't access it but I'm perfectly happy with that as I still get all the news on the analogue channels. The BBC have not transferred their BBC News programmes over to a digital channel, thus preventing me access to them; but with the launch of BBC4 which is only on digital, I am expected to pay extra on top of the television licence fee (the hypothecated tax) which goes through the Television Licensing Fee Authority.

I assume this is an executive arm agency of the government, exclusive to the BBC and the BBC has been repeatedly funding, producing and showing programmes only on BBC4, which of course I cannot access.

The BBC has made things worse for me by advertising, cross-advertising, cross-promoting the BBC4 programmes, advertising and promoting them on BBC2. The important thing is that this is not the same as cross promoting between BBC1 and BBC2, which of course are all on analogue. To watch the programmes that the BBC advertises are going out on BBC4, I would have to pay either a subscription to BSkyB (which is a satellite provider) or subscribe to one of the cable companies, or without subscribing to anything spend money on equipment (as a one off payment) to buy either set top boxes as they are called and/or digital television sets. Why should I have to do this? The size of the one off fee is irrelevant. It doesn't really matter whether it's £1, £10, £50, £100 or whatever, nor does it matter whether I have 1, 2, 3, or 4 television sets, it's the principle.

The BBC has a self-serving interest in extending its empire, and the government through its current Minister Tessa Jowell has an avowed interest in switching off the analogue signal, so that all BBC television would only be available to people with access to the digital system. I have read enough to know that politically, the government would not dare to switch off the analogue while there were still millions, perhaps 30% of households or maybe more without digital television.

I believe the current Minister, or one of her predecessors committed the government to not switching off until a minimum of 95% of households were already converted to digital, so I know that despite the assurances from the BBC when the BBC were seeking approval for BBC4, that decent BBC2-type programmes would not be shifted over to BBC4. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the Minister and the government are turning a blind eye to the BBC's flagrant attempt to force current analogue only viewers who enjoy BBC2, to either subscribe to a satellite or cable/digital system, or to make the totally unnecessary for the customer capital outlay of buying set top boxes or digital television sets.

The incident over the last week/ten days, which has brought this issue to a head, has been the showing of the *Alan Clarke Diaries* programme on BBC 4. Now just think for a moment. The BBC has two regular programme slots for those with a political/current affairs interest, namely *The Politics Show* (normally hosted by Andrew Neil four times a week Mon – Thurs) and *Newsnight* (which goes out at 10:30pm every weekday from Mon – Fri). In all honesty, how on earth can the BBC justify abusing their public service remit to their BBC2 viewers with an interest in current affairs, by spending licence payers money on producing and funding the *Alan Clarke Diaries* series of programmes by making it available only on BBC4?

Now this is the real salt in the wound, having the chutzpah, the sheer effrontery to heavily spending what must be millions and millions of pounds of television airtime promoting the *Alan Clarke Diaries* programme on the analogue channels, to all the millions of analogue television viewers who simply can't access BBC4.

If Jeremy Paxman was acting as a barrister interviewing Greg Dyke/Tessa Jowell, I'm sure it would be fascinating to watch their facial expressions and body language when he accused them, or put the proposition to them, that this was the BBC blatantly trying to bully BBC2 analogue viewers into spending money on either subscriptions or new equipment to watch the programmes they would like to watch but could only access on BBC4, and worst of all that this strategy, because that is undoubtedly what it is, is being implemented without fear of government reprimand. On the contrary the Minister and the government are effectively using the BBC to achieve their own political objective, which is to get the analogue spectrum switched off.

As far as the Charter Review is concerned therefore, I believe the BBC governors as the only people who currently regulate the BBC, or if there's any change Ofcom, or whoever it might be, should stop this abuse, whereby my money, the hypothecated tax I pay through the television licence fee is used to produce programmes by which putting them out on BBC 4 (when they would have otherwise of course go out on BBC2) because they fall into the same audience profile as those who watch *The Politics Show*, *Newsnight* and *Working Lunch* etc. My money is funding these programmes and all the air time promoting them on this digital system which I can't get and don't want, to try and persuade me, strong arm me, seduce me, into spending extra money on top of the licence fee which I've already paid!

So I challenge the government and the current Minister of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and anyone who might succeed her in the interim, to have the guts, the honesty to say what they will do if enough millions of electors, viewers and customers of the BBC like me, continue to be anti digital television and succumb to the creation of a spurious choice benefit. Spurious of course because the benefit is artificial, in that *The Alan Clarke Diaries* should have been on BBC2 in the first place. The BBC's incredibly heavy promotion of them only underscores that, the BBC in their heart of hearts knew and have known this from the start. Frankly I feel betrayed by the BBC, my BBC, in colluding with the government in trying to force me to spend additional money, on top of the licence fee, in order to see programmes, which I would have otherwise been capable of seeing, quite normally and routinely on BBC2.

The licence fee, the Charter renewal, the analogue and digital issue for television are intricately intertwined and the government is getting its dirty work done, (by which I mean trying to bully electors, viewers and customers of the BBC) by allowing the BBC to spend television licence fee payers money on producing programmes which they are putting out solely on digital channels like BBC4, and then spending air time money on promoting these programmes on BBC2 the analogue channel, in a very unsubtle attempt to get analogue viewers to switch to digital by subscribing to satellite, cable or buying set top boxes/digital television sets.

So how can we poor BBC 2 viewers expect the great and the powerful to LISTEN to us? Who is going to have the muscle to stand in the way of all the vested interests in both the government, the manufacturers and the broadcasters? Finally, before the BBC, if they were treating this as a scheduling complaint or indeed trying to defend themselves over this disgraceful bullying strategy, jump in and perhaps say that *The Alan Clarke Diaries* are going to be shown at a later date, say this Summer on BBC2, let me warn them that by putting forward any such plea, defence, excuse or mitigation, they are in fact doing themselves a severe injury and only underlining the justice of my case, in that they thereby demonstrate that there is plenty of room in the scheduling of BBC2 to have included *The Alan Clarke Diaries* on BBC 2 in the first place in January 2004 and not have to make us wait until some later date.

Sorry BBC2 and the Machiavellian planners behind this bullying strategy, saying *The Alan Clarke Diaries*, or indeed any other programmes of a similar ilk will be shown on BBC2 at a later date just doesn't wash. I only hope that my little voice may be heard and perhaps even have some influence so that it affects the outcome of the Charter review and thereby the behaviour of all the main players involved – government, the BBC, Ofcom, manufacturers, retailers et al.

Thank you

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