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BBC Charter Review Consultation
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Ref. comments on BBC Charter renewal

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES: it seems inappropriate, & also hypocritical, for the BBC to be "in business". It is a public operation, with what used to seem a clear mandate for producing programs, as a sole activity; it now seems more like just one part of the "media circus", which has freedom to do whatever its current management is interested in, regardless of the interests of the viewing or listening public, & also unhindered by cost constraints. What is the BBC doing joining in a commercial property-development group (White City)? Blatant advertising has been a feature of the BBC for many years, despite hypocritical statements from the BBC (e.g. the "Durex F1 affair" many years ago); it is hard to accept that "we have to do it". The production of software for PCs can be adequately handled by non-public companies, & association with specific software companies (especially monopolistic ones such as Microsoft) is highly undesirable.

BUDGET: £2-3 billion per annum is enough for many companies & countries to manage on, & seems singularly excessive for a "broadcasting corporation" funded from the public purse.

OBJECTIVITY: the "gut feel" I get from the radio programs of the BBC is that many of the broadcasting staff have an "agenda" they intend to get across. This does not seem compatible with a mandate to be objective. The recent war in Iraq was a good example of lopsided & sloppy reporting, & the same lack of competence & honesty shows in quite-different areas, e.g. music.

BBC GOVERNORS: the Hutton Report made a point which was obvious from newspaper articles much earlier, that the governors were/are not "independent" & were/are not representing public interest. They may be no worse than non-executive directors in many commercial companies, but somehow one wants to see higher standards from the BBC than from "any old company". The governors should not have a split responsibility, & should not be in a position where they can be steam-rolled by the BBC management, as they were by Messrs. Dyke & Davies.

DIGITAL BROADCASTING: the BBC is to the fore of the current campaign to kid people that this new "invention" is miraculous & will be a great benefit to them. Actively promoting digital broadcasting is a purely-commercial act, but will it benefit the BBC's income directly? It does not take much technical knowledge to know that digital broadcasting is unlikely to alter the perceived quality of radio programs. It takes a little more knowledge to know that the digital channels require considerably more "space" than the analogue ones they are to replace. As digital broadcasting also requires considerable expenditure on new equipment, including the enforced purchase of new receivers by all radio listeners, is it "ethical" to allow the BBC to blatantly advertise on behalf of commercial interests?

INTERNET BROADCASTING: as Tony Blair has long made very clear that he supports almost any commercial use of the Internet, despite his obvious lack of understanding of the

medium, it is not surprising that the BBC also has its Web site, but is this within the terms of the Charter? Does it provide a much-needed service to listeners & viewers? We are often fed statistics that suggest the whole population sits glued to the PC screen, looking at Web sites all day long, but I see little evidence of the truth of this from my clients (PCs are my business). There is plenty of evidence to show the internet as a very poor-quality medium, compared with radio/TV broadcasting & the print trade. Maybe the BBC should stick to what it understands best.

REPORTING: I find "news" broadcasts depressing, because of their single-minded pursuit of a small range of subjects, e.g. murder, rape, & abduction, to the detriment of everything else. This narrowness of view is very apparent where matters of national interest are concerned, e.g. the EU & the war in Iraq — if nobody is killed, it isn't of interest to the BBC.

MUSIC: the quality of radio music programmes has held up remarkably well, as that of other areas has deteriorated. Is this accidental, or is there some message to be had from looking at the BBC's handling of music, compared to the way it deals with "news", for instance?

RELATIONSHIP TO POLITICS: we do suffer from a lot of "politically-correct pressure", e.g. the use of presenters (mainly for pop music programs) who seem to be chosen for their sheer awfulness, & the need to present programs on what are non-subjects to many (most?) people. Government influence is important here, as the current government is clearly "politically correct" & wishes to enforce this attitude, through the media. Should UK broadcasting be State-directed or -controlled, similar to that in Russia or France? Not having watched or heard programs in those two countries, I can't sensibly offer an opinion on them, but surely State involvement in broadcasting is not what the UK should be "about"?

FUNDING: as it is stated that virtually the whole population watches TV, there seems little point relating income to the possession of licences. If this method of funding were dropped, the TV Licencing Authority also could be dropped, freeing the large cost of this operation for better use, in making programs. It would additionally kill-off one of the most glaring of government-instigated interferences in individual lives. BBC funding could come from the general taxation pool, & be reviewed each year by government.

HOW COULD IT BE MADE "PROPERLY-ACCOUNTABLE"?: rather a daft question, but the BBC did in earlier years seem to be a lot less of a "law unto itself". Has the calibre of staff & governors dropped since then? The emphasis on putting people who either actively support the government's viewpoint or are in the higher echelons of commercial media companies into senior positions seems a sure *résumé* for non-independent broadcasting. To a large extent, the types of person who join the BBC will match the inclinations of those appointed to the top jobs; it is undesirable to allow the government to have *absolute* control over senior appointments, even though it may be desirable that any government should be allowed to object to individual appointments, if it has a strong case for thinking the person concerned is strongly anti-government.

REVIEW PERIOD: 10 years seems too long, at least these days. If the BBC's activities over the past 10 years are examined, it will no doubt be obvious how "commercial" the Corporation has become *within* that period. A shorter period is desirable, to try & prevent the BBC getting again into its present "runaway" mode.

ADVERTISING: maybe some people actually enjoy adverts, but surely not a large percentage of the listening/viewing population? We are endlessly bombarded by adverts, in every aspect of life, & allowing the BBC to *increase* its current level of 'unofficial' advertising can't be what the paying public wants.

Yours sincerely,



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