

Jonathan M Hantman

BBC Charter Review Consultation
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
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Dear Sir Madam

BBC NEWS: BIAS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

It is essential that the BBC Charter Review address the critical issue of bias and impartiality in BBC News coverage.

You will be aware of substantial and compelling evidence that BBC News items are persistently in breach of charter obligations to *"treat controversial subjects with due impartiality"* and often fail to abide by the producer's guidelines. Particularly paragraph 2.2 of the Guidelines intended to ensure that *"differing views be given due weight and that the audience be presented with an accurate, intelligent, well-informed account"* and requiring reporters not to *"express a personal opinion"*.

As the Gilligan affair showed, justifiable complaints against news items or reports are rarely if ever upheld by, Head of News, Richard Sambrook, the Programme Complaints Unit (PCU) or the Board of Governors.

This is totally unacceptable.

I feel that some of the most explicit examples of bias are to be found in the BBC's coverage of the Arab/Israel conflict.

I, and others, have written detailed reports on the issue of anti-Israel bias in BBC news coverage and I invite you to review these reports [1].

I believe that the BBC's simplistic, and frequently one-sided, presentation of the conflict, is inciting hatred against Israel and the world Jewish community. This, I feel, must be contributing to a rise in anti-Semitic attacks and exacerbating the conflict in the Middle East.

In my own correspondence with Richard Sambrook and the PCU, I have been informed that explicitly tendentious remarks, by BBC correspondents, fall in line

with the BBC's accepted "*view*" of the conflict, and that valid counter arguments can be ignored if these views are held "*mainly by supporters of Israel*".

This is an effective admission by BBC management that they support biased reports and opinions by their journalists and that they feel explicit breaches of the Guidelines can be flouted with impunity.

Fraser Steele at the PCU has written to me, stating that his unit will not respond to any of my complaints because he feels they will be "*unable to assuage my concerns*".

Hence, the BBC – an organisation which I am helping to fund - have deprived me, and others, of a right of reply, simply because they do not feel able to answer my complaints.

Clearly, if BBC News continues with its frequently biased output and totally ineffective complaints procedure, then it can no longer serve as publicly funded institution.

In any event, the Government must ensure that the BBC upholds its commitment to impartial journalism and set up an independent watchdog to handle complaints.

Yours faithfully,

Jonathan M Hantman

Notes

[1] Asserson, T. and Mironi, E. (2002) "The BBC and the Middle East – A Critical Study"
<http://www.bbcwatch.com/prev.htm>

Hantman, J. (2003) "A report on anti-Israel Bias in BBC News Coverage"
www.bbcbias.blogspot.com