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February 10, 2004

Dear Sir/Madam

I wish to make the following comments with regard to the Charter Review that is taking place.

1 What do I value most about the BBC?

I value both its domestic and international news coverage. I also value the BBC World Service radio. I think this is a gift that Britain gives to the rest of the world and I have listened to it many a time while abroad. I also feel proud the general public in many undemocratic countries hears this impartial news service.

The one area the BBC could probably do better is in its high quality drama output on television. I believe this has moved from BBC 2 to BBC 4 but I have not yet purchased a free view digital box. In time I will and perhaps I will be pleasantly surprised.

2) How should the BBC adapt to cope with changes in technology and culture?

My answer to this is "keep up the good work". I feel the BBC is pioneering use of new technology and coping with changes in culture very well.

3) What do you think of the television, radio and online services the BBC provides?

I think the BBC provides superb online and radio services already. The television output lets it down. As I say, I have no access to the digital channels. I have heard good things about them, especially the drama output, but I feel there has been a general decline in standards of the traditional terrestrial channels.

4) Should the BBC run commercial services?

Yes. Without a doubt. The BBC has to reflect changes in society and provide terrestrial television channels, digital TV channels, analogue radio, digital radio, Internet services, WAP services, international television services and so on. These cannot be funded by the licence fee alone so, yes, the BBC should run some commercial services.

After all, someone has to be out there to compete against Rupert Murdoch.

5) How should we pay for the BBC?

Licence fee. I have no problem with this system.

6) Is the BBC organised in the most effective and efficient way?

I am not the best person to comment on this. But, speaking as a journalist, I have heard rumors of the way the BBC is operated. My understanding is that the organisation is monolithic in structure and very bureaucratic. There probably is room for improvement, but I think the organisation does provide excellent services for the public.

7) How should the BBC be run? How should it be regulated.

The sixty four million dollar question. If the organisation is to be free of Government interference then it should be regulated by the Governors and not Ofcom. In the current climate, and in the shadow of the recent Hutton Report, it is all the more important the BBC remains impartial.

Perhaps there should be a committee of lay people (ie people with no background in journalism) that can act as judges to assess matters of accuracy etc?

8) How should we ensure that the BBC is properly accountable to the public and Parliament?

I have no idea, but I will say this much. The BBC, like EVERY broadcaster, makes mistakes. The Hutton Report was ridiculously biased and the BBC came out of it looking bad.

Gilligan's report was not 100 per cent accurate and the mistakes should have been highlighted and corrected earlier. But the Government of the day must NEVER have the opportunity to crucify a broadcaster in the unfair way that the Prime Minister has managed to do via the Hutton Report.

Had Gilligan's report appeared on Rupert Murdoch's Sky News I very much doubt the Number 10 spin doctors would have made such a fuss about the affair.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Lavabre', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

John Lavabre