

BBC Charter Review Consultation
Dept. for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street, SW1Y 5DH

Dear Sirs,

I'm an American, resident in this country since 1970. Between then and now, it's been profoundly depressing to me to see how much of the fabric which went to make up the quality of British life, from buildings to institutions, has been energetically destroyed by the British themselves. Sometimes it seems to me that everything I had hoped to leave behind me in the US has followed me over here ! Now, it seems, these same forces are at work on the BBC , which, for all its faults—the lowering of standards over recent years, the disappearance of funding for arts programs, the vastly overblown salaries paid to its managers and administrators—is still an institution like nothing else in the world. Its independence from government and commercial pressures must be preserved. To this end I think the licence fee is essential. I for one would pay a higher fee to ensure the freedom from advertising which, after 34 years, is still a surprise and pleasure to me—one only needs to spend five minutes watching TV or listening to what passes for radio on the Continent or the US to see and hear the difference.

The question of accountability is highly ironic in the present circumstances. Compared to the governments of Great Britain and the US the BBC is a marvel of accountability. The fact that Andrew Gilligan could be forced to resign for telling the truth, and that Dyke and Davies would feel called upon to do the same for supporting him, is profoundly disturbing, and one can only hope that it doesn't hold implications for the future of BBC reporting—still the best in the world—and such programs as File on 4. Arts programmes are still well worthwhile, at least on radio—I listen to Radio 4 incessantly, Radio 3 less, but no others. BBC2 is still well worth watching. BBC1 is now by and large a morass of sports and cookery, but still far better than the commercial stations which are, by and large, unwatchable except for films and special programmes. Watching even interesting programmes continually interrupted by commercials, when non-commercial alternatives are available, does not make sense.

If the commercial operations run by the BBC enable it to put a substantial sum back into public services, these operations are probably worth while. I have to say, though, that the Radio Times, which was once so well designed and written, has (aside from its pages devoted to radio) become little different from the other slick and ghastly TV magazines on sale, and I don't buy it any more.

Re the question of how the BBC should be governed: This is such a large and important question that I'm reluctant to give an opinion on it. I would only say that programme makers should be given much more say , and managers much less.

John R. Nash