

BBC Charter Revue Consultation
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street,
London SW1Y 5DH

11th March 04.

Dear Sirs,

My comments are as follows:-

1. The most valued qualities of the BBC are its independence and the absence of commercialism – after overseas travel it has always been a relief to return to access to the Beeb.
2. Changes in technology such as digital television, might call for some programmes being duplicated until the availability of new technology equipment is virtually universal. The internet has been well assimilated with the ability of viewers to communicate and to interact with discussion programmes.
3. The range of programmes on radio and television is excellent.
4. There is a strong case to run commercial services like magazines which are closely related to BBC broadcasts, as well as DVDs of actual broadcasts, when the profits contribute to the cost of providing public services.
5. The income from licence fees is the only way to save us from the horrors of the commercialism of most other overseas broadcasting systems.
6. The arrangement of a supervisory board of governors, a Director- General's organisation, and the Regional set-up has clearly worked well as evidenced by the success and popularity achieved. The problems arise in relation to the treatment of current affairs particularly on Radio 4 and various television programmes- see para 7.
7. The Hutton Enquiry demonstrated very serious weaknesses in the organisation when dealing with important current political events. In retrospect it is obvious that the individuals appointed as Director-General, or as Head of the News Service, could well regard themselves as a Murdoch or Conrad Black, and in a position to generally slant and spin the news to suit their own predilections. Another possibility is that editorial control is so weak that programmers can do anything they want! An example of the latter situation was illustrated in connection with a programme called "The Essay", broadcast on Saturday mornings at the end of the "Today" programme. The only contributors to this, over a long period, were Frederick Forsythe and Will Self who each appeared on alternate Saturdays. The former used every broadcast to educate us, in stentorian tones what an unholy mess the government was making of everything, whereas Will Self used his contributions, invariably, to denigrate the Prime Minister! A significant number of complaints must have been received in reaction to these highly partial programmes as a representative appeared on "Feedback" to confront the programme editor. This proved to be a complete waste of time as he dismissed all criticism and made it clear that as Editor the content was decided entirely by him, and sure enough the Essay continued for a year or so in the same unbalanced and boring form. Examples of institutional bias include opposition to the mass slaughter policy adopted in the Foot and Mouth outbreak, anti the Iraq War, the farcical and

frequent use by the Dimbleby's of rebels like Robin Cook to fill the Labour slot to "balance" Conservative and Lib-Dem representation on the panel. In addition one hardly expects an impartial National broadcaster to slavishly repeat every bit of political tittle tattle which appears in the press? eg we had the Jo West/ Martin Sixsmith hogswash on every newscast for three weeks. Again when Gordon Brown gave his pre- budget statement the BBC duplicated the treatment in the press that the whole economy was on a knife edge with dire warnings of massive tax increases in the offing! In fact as was recently indicated in The Times we have a significantly lower ratio of Government debt/ GDP than any other developed country, and surely an impartial report of the Chancellor's statement would have referred to this happy state of affairs to put things in perspective.

There are, unfortunately many other examples of the BBC acting in a partial and biased way which is in marked contrast to the reputation it previously held. In my opinion this situation has existed for roughly the last four years and calls for a change in the method of regulation:-

The Governors must separate themselves from the executive including being based in a different building.

I think the governors have shown themselves to be very successful in controlling the general activities of the BBC but in the light of the criticism given earlier, the Board must include a political sub-committee which includes nominees from the main political parties to ensure the impartiality vital to a truly National broadcaster.

8. Accountability to the public can only be achieved in a meaningful way by opening out the election of Board members to a broader range of people.

I remain an enthusiastic supporter of the BBC:-

Yours truly,



D G Nicholas.