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Wed., 25th. February 2004

BBC Charter Review Consultation,
Department of Culture, Media and Sport,
2-4, Cockspur Street,
London
SW1 5DH

Dear Minister,

I have a copy of your leaflet, "Your BBC, Your Say" to hand.

Under the sub-heading: 'Key Questions', I wish to refer to questions 7 and 8, respectively, namely, 'How should the BBC be run?' and 'How do we ensure that the BBC is properly accountable to the public and Parliament?'

7. How should the BBC be run?

The current Board of Governors, along with its Chairman should be disbanded and replaced by a more virile, 'hands-on' group which is prepared to oversee the day-to-day functioning of the BBC.

It should meet regularly (once a month) to consider internal disciplinary procedures involving internal disputes between staff members and to consider complaints against BBC employees made by licence-fee payers.

One has been made aware that there have been a number of high-profile disputes within the BBC involving complaints of bullying of employees by their superiors, a number of which have had to be resolved at Employment Tribunals, duly reported on through the media.

This indicates a breakdown of inter-personal relationships within the BBC where its Director-General becomes the sole arbiter of such complaints. In other words, an aggrieved employee has no avenue to redress his complaint other than to take it to a Tribunal.

An employee should be given the right to take his complaint to the members of an organisation's governing body which is what takes place within our schools, for example. I'm sure all employees employed at the BBC would welcome the opportunity to be able to present their cases before a Board of Governors which meets regularly to preside over such cases.

Greg Dyke's response to incidences of bullying within the BBC was to send his staff on Leadership courses at a college in Hertfordshire in order to minimise bullying and to teach his staff how to get on with one another in greater harmony.

Secondly, on the occasion when I have had cause to complain to the Director-General about the content of a letter I was sent by a certain newsreader for the BBC in response to my politely-written letter which I addressed to his editor, he chose initially to ignore that complaint and was only prompted to reply when I sought the help of my Member of Parliament.

Accordingly, I wrote to the Chairman of the BBC seeking his intervention, but he, too, chose to ignore me and this also applied to the other members of the BBC Board of Governors.

This must not be permitted to occur, in future. The Culture Minister has insisted that the BBC's licence-fee payers are, effectively, its 'shareholders' and this is not the way to treat those who help fund the organisation.

(I shall be happy to send you copies of all letters in relation to the above dispute, which was reported on in certain daily newspapers and resulted in my receiving a quantity of hate-mail from supporters of the particular newsreader who is regularly seen reading the news on the BBC at ten o'clock each evening.)

8. The BBC Board of Governors must be made accountable to its licence-fee payers at an annual general meeting in the same way as occurs within the private sector.

As the BBC has been regionalised, perhaps the time has come to set up Regional Boards of Governors rather than to have one body for the entire corporation.

Any letters sent to the Chief Executive (Director-General), or to the Chairman of the Board must be read by them and not farmed out for administrative assistants located in Information Centres to reply to.

The current, so called 'Governance and Accountability Division' should be disbanded and replaced by a more transparent department. I have likened it to a 'corporate ring of steel' which has been set up to protect the Director-General from outside probing and that would include letters from licence-fee payers who are fobbed off with bland replies from 'unknowns' within the office of the Governor.



Yours sincerely,
John Owen