

BBC CHARTER REVIEW

The following views relate to BBC TV because I rarely think to turn on the radio. I occasionally listen to something specific when I have read about it in the programme guide - usually music (I *do* listen to the Proms) but in general I prefer peace and quiet when I am working, so the radio is rarely switched on.

At one time, the News was the most valuable feature of TV, but we (my family) no longer find the BBC objective or unbiased. Of course, any viewer would occasionally disagree with the reporting of the news. To expect it to be totally neutral or unbiased is simply unrealistic. Nevertheless, the distortion in some of what the BBC reports, and what it fails to report, has become more obvious in the last five years or so. Anyone who disagrees with this statement can only be advised to watch what the other channels are saying. I accept that some 'breaking news' reported on Sky News in particular is probably unconfirmed or unreliable, and I would fully support the BBC in not reporting it until it *is* confirmed. However, those on the News team who think they can sway public opinion towards their own viewpoint should be reminded that the viewing public can and does switch channels and come to its own conclusions.

Much has been written about the negative attitude of the BBC towards the war in Iraq. It made me angry because it was not only biased, but was so discouraging to all those who had family out there in the Forces. We do not expect pro-British propaganda and jingoism - just balanced reporting of the facts. It was also a disgrace that one of the largest ever public demonstrations in London (Countryside Alliance 2002) was totally ignored by the BBC. No doubt the News team were anti-hunting to a man - or woman, but that does not give them the right to suppress the report, especially when so much in the news is sheer trivia, worthy only of the tabloid press.

Another complaint I have is when the victim, or relative of a victim, of an accident or a crime is interviewed in an emotional state. This frequently happens after a Trial or Court of Enquiry. Of course those closely involved may be upset. That is understandable. What is wrong is for them to be allowed to criticise a verdict or sentence at this time, and without any other point of view being shown. Judges are not infallible, but they are still better placed and better qualified than anyone else to come to balanced and fair judgement. That is what our Trial system is all about. To allow air time to those who are emotionally involved without allowing any counter arguments is unfair and reduces public faith in our system of justice. And to interview anyone who is crying or visibly upset is embarrassing for the viewer (I frequently switch off at this point) and does not usually contribute anything to the understanding of what has happened.

So now, when we tend to turn to Ch 4 for hard news, the most valued feature of BBC TV is the Weather. To most Londoners, the weather is academic. I know. In the past, I have worked there. To the rest of us who live 'in the sticks' or who work outside, it is extremely important. It is irritating to say the least to find that the forecast has been delayed or rescheduled because some Londoner does not think it very important. I just do not have time to sit through endless chat and non-news to hear whether I need to take a waterproof or an extra thick sweater out with me, whether my journey could be delayed by weather problems, or how I should plan my week's work. And it is just as important to know what to expect at Weekends and Bank Holidays when the TV

schedules 'go to pot' and forecasts are few and far between. Does the BBC think everybody still sits at home without stirring outside during the Christmas break?

There have been improvements recently. The very useful Countryfile forecast on Sundays now comes on at a predictable time during the programme, and most other forecasts appear at regular times so I suppose the BBC has responded to complaints. What is essential to us is a professional forecast delivered by a qualified meteorologist, (with a proper Atlantic chart, though perhaps not every time, but at intervals throughout the day). Viewers are not as scientifically ignorant as some at the BBC appear to think and if, occasionally, the forecast is wrong, you can at least guess where it has gone wrong if you have seen a chart. Millions of viewers have become familiar over the years with fronts and pressure systems, and know what they mean, thanks to the BBC.

Our regional programmes from Bristol are pretty good and often come as welcome relief when the national news is bitter or depressing. Not that the regional news glosses over the unpleasant, but the good humoured Points West team manage to make it more bearable.

We have had Digital (a set-top box) for some time now. It is useful for those long periods when there is absolutely nothing on the main channels that I would waste time watching, but if there are too many channels, the watchable material is just spread ever more thinly. I would like to see a lot more on the Arts, but if this is shunted onto a separate channel, lots of viewers who think they are not interested will never have the chance to be enlightened.

For the BBC to run commercial services is great and should be expanded and perhaps better publicised.

Funding of the BBC is a difficult question. I do not think there is any better alternative to the Licence Fee. Any system that paid by viewing figures would inevitably reduce the quality in general to rock bottom. Perhaps the BBC should be paid to produce quality *unpopular* programmes? It might improve our tastes and widen our appreciation of good art, music and drama? The trouble is, who would decide what was good? Not a very realistic suggestion, I am afraid!

I do not feel qualified to say how the BBC should be run, or regulated, except that it is essential that it is free from party political influence.

25. 3. 04

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the BBC.
My printer has packed up and I have one last complaint -
those wretched 'commercials' for forthcoming programmes.
When I see them for the 3rd or 4th time, I scream and
switch off! They certainly do not persuade me to watch
the programme, usually the reverse. And it is wrong
when everything is running late, and the weatherman
has been rudely cut off in mid-sentence, but you still
find time to show the commercials.

In spite of all my complaints, I love the BBC really!

Mary Parker

(MRS M PARKER)