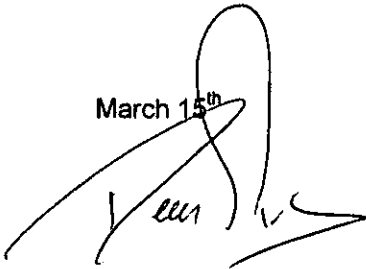


March 15th

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Lee', written over the date 'March 15th'.

Re Public Debate on the future of the BBC.

It is a baleful sign of the times that a public institution, which does its job so well, should have to justify its very existence.

Very few people paying the £360 or upwards to receive Sky television think that the £116 licence fee is anything else but amazing value.

To abolish the licence fee would be a disaster.

One example of this disaster would be the tremendous damage to musical life in the UK.

Remove the licence fee and Radio 3 would disappear. The Radio 3 live output not just of classical music but folk, world, jazz and light music is enormous. And it is not just performances I am talking about. Nor even the things one hears on air. Music is fostered by the BBC through schemes such as the young musician of the year, the world singer, the folk awards, the world music awards, the composer awards, the young artist's schemes and support to many of the wide ranging music festivals throughout the country, to mention just a few ways in which talent is being encouraged. In Bristol we do not have an orchestra, it is the BBC which enables the excellent concert venue St George's to attract world class performers. I could go on, but it is unnecessary.

For an example of 'market forces' look at Classic FM. It arranges, perhaps, 5 live concerts a year. It often doesn't even broadcast a full work, because that might be seen to be boring.

Look at the effect Sky has had on sport. Terrestrial television denuded. Millions of pounds poured into football and yet relatively little into developing the game at local and youth level, no improvement in the national team but a sad demise in behaviour both on the field, in the football players private lives and on the terraces.

If the BBC is opened up entirely to market forces (by abolishing the licence fee) the country will lose a lot more than just Broadcasting. The BBC role in education is vital for many classrooms in this country, particularly languages. The on line facility is truly wonderful. And the digital channels are so much better than what they replaced. And then there is the publishing side of the corporation.

The more I think of it, the more remarkable I recognise the organisation to be. The country gets all this for a lot less than a third of what one pays for Sky!

What is going on? The BBC is so much more than just news. I hope that the Government's decision to place the BBC fate in the hands of the public is not a clever way of punishing the corporation for the Gilligan affair. However, if it is, then such a punishment would go much further than the BBC staff, it would punish me and millions more like me and if it is not, then why such a major review?

I do hope that common sense prevails.

The government went to war in Iraq with less than a majority of the nation supporting it, so, even if a majority of the nation favours the abolition of the licence fee, I hope the government will stand up and stick to socialist educationist principles and retain it. The BBC is either a miracle or a conjuring trick and either way I do not mind.

Please ensure that public service broadcasting is retained, strong, healthy, and with a licence fee to ensure its independence.

Yours sincerely,



Paul Thomas