

T.V.LICENSE

Payment of the TV license is compulsory for anybody owning a TV set. It does not depend upon a person using the set to view BBC programmes. The so-called "license" is in fact a tax, but unlike a normal tax, the proceeds go to the BBC and not the government. The government decides the amount.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE T.V. LICENSE

Non BBC viewers are forced to pay it.

Expensive to collect with wide-scale evasions.

Regressive, the poor pay as much as the rich.

Does not provide a necessary service such as health or defence.

The only media financed in this way; newspapers, cinemas, etc. must be commercially viable.

A BBC financed by voluntary subscription would make the BBC truly independent of Government.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE T.V.LICENSE

Many people pay taxes that do not benefit them, the fit pay for the unfit, the educated pay for student grants for higher education.

Without the license fee, TV would succumb to the lowest common denominator as American TV does. Non-commercial programmes would not be produced.

CONCLUSION

On strict Utilitarian grounds, it is difficult to justify the BBC license fee. At the present time TV channels are financed in four ways: firstly by direct subscription, such as Sky TV; with this method, evasion of the subscription fee is practically impossible. If the subscription is not paid, the transmission cannot be received. Thus, problems of freeloading are abolished. Secondly, by advertising, the advertiser pays the full costs of the TV transmissions. The viewer therefore, pays nothing to view but pays indirectly through purchasing the goods advertised. There is therefore the illusion of "free" viewing, which makes this form of TV transmission highly popular. Thirdly, levy is imposed on the commercial channels to finance another channel, which although it accepts advertising produces programmes, which are not commercially viable. Channel Four is financed in this manner. The difficulty is that the commercial channels are reluctant to pay the levy and must be forced to do so by Government fiat. The amount paid is subject to protracted wrangles, with the government being the final arbiter. Thus, indirectly the Government can control the output by threatening to reduce the levy. Thus, Channel Four cannot be said to be truly independent. Fourthly, a tax is imposed on all owners of TV sets. This is the method used to finance the BBC.

RECOMMENDATION

The BBC should be financed by voluntary subscription. This method is the only one that renders the BBC truly independent of the Government. No advertising should be allowed. The BBC would then not have to compete with the commercial channels on the ground that it takes the "Peoples" money and therefore must provide programmes that are popular with the people. i.e. banal soaps, cretinous quizzes, bland "human interest" stories *et alios*.

The Arts Council would be expanded to include the distribution of funds to any TV channel that applied to it and was deemed to produce programmes of artistic or other merit. Thus the BBC would have to compete for these additional funds.

RESULT

The BBC would become leaner and more focused on what it does best, the production of important news and programmes of artistic merit. It would be much smaller in content but much better in quality.

From :- Peter Windle,

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To :- BBC Charter Review Consultation,
Department of Culture, Media and Sport,
2-4 Cockspur Street,
London,
SW1Y 5DH