

March 31st 2004

BBC Charter Review Consultation  
Department for Culture Media and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
LONDON SW1Y 5DH

Dear Sir

My wife and I are approaching retirement. We have spent most our working lives abroad. We have lived in Europe, the Far East and more recently the Middle East. During this time we relied on BBC World Service Radio for news, current affairs and entertainment. When BBC World TV appeared we watched that too.

It appears to me that the BBC's problems are twofold; funding and political interference. I have a couple of suggestions. Since the worldwide service of the BBC serves such an important function in broadcasting impartial news to countries everywhere and in so many different languages it has actually come to serve a global purpose. There is a real sense in which this service has outgrown the place of its birth.

I would therefore suggest that this arm of the BBC is separated from the national service and negotiations begun to place it under the auspices of an appropriate agency of the UN such as UNESCO who would be responsible for its funding. In effect the BBC World Service would become the UN World Service. Inevitably such a service would become a focus for political interference. As ever the key to protecting an institution or the individual from political abuse is the separation of powers. To this end the new service should be governed by a Chairman who is responsible to international council with a small number of permanent members, supplemented by a number of rotating members. Membership of the international council should be reviewed periodically so as to preserve a fair reflection of the realities of global power. At the same time the impartiality of new service should be monitored by a committee appointed by national broadcasters with a long history of public service such as the Australian Broadcasting Service, the BBC in Britain, the American PBS and so on.

These days, global issues affect us all and people around the world have a right to an impartial assessment of world affairs, wherever they live. Funding for public broadcasting is no longer solely a national issue. It has become one of international importance. The difficulty arises because funding is a way for those who pay to attempt to influence the way the news and current affairs are presented. Money frequently translates into influence and I suspect that it is not only the BBC, among respected public broadcasters, that is short of money and

worried by the potential for interference to occur if financial control is placed in the hands of government. To prevent this from happening the same principle, the separation of power should be adopted. The funding for public broadcasting, wherever it takes place should be split. A simple solution might be a quarter from advertising revenue, a quarter from the population of the country in which the broadcasting takes place, for example in the form of an electronic TV licence which has to be paid before the set can be activated, a quarter from the national government and a quarter from the UN agency which oversees the UN World Service.

Perhaps this kind of reasoning is a bit radical for those currently responsible for governing the BBC but nevertheless we need to recognise that the time has come for us to prise the issue of public broadcasting around the world out of national politics and place it on an international footing. People everywhere have a right to impartial news and the right to a global institution dedicated to ensuring that that service is provided and moreover, one which is designed in such a way as to make certain that it remains free from political interference.

Yours faithfully

*Martin Wood*

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