

Stop
BBC
Bias

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15th December 2003

Rt Hon Ms Tessa Jowell, MP
Minister for Culture, Media & Sport
2-4 Cockspur St
LONDON
SW1Y 5DH

Department for	
DATE:	19 DEC 2003
Due	20.01.04.
By	Office Reply
BP	Information only
PCU REF:	02/1815

Dear Ms Jowell,

GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF THE BBC

I refer to a press report by Reuters which said that the government has launched a public consultation on the future of the BBC. Please note we wrote to you some time ago and proposed that a Royal Commission to investigate the affairs of the BBC would be far more appropriate and acceptable to the major stakeholders, i.e. the British licence fee payers. We are disappointed that this suggestion, which would have eliminated any charges of government bias, has not been adopted. We believe that a Royal Commission should still be established, but failing that, the "Stop BBC Bias Campaign" expects to be fully involved in the review being set up next year by your department.

However, whilst announcing this review you stated, "The one certain outcome of the review will be a strong BBC, with the courage to be editorially autonomous and independent from government". Could we remind you, that this is what the BBC is SUPPOSED to be already! Hence we believe that this is an admission by you, the Minister responsible for broadcasting, that currently the BBC is anything but autonomous and independent from government. Clearly you, the BBC and its governors have all failed miserably to comply with your responsibilities. In addition, your comment that the BBC set a "gold standard" in its news coverage "that people trusted" is considered to be far from the truth by a very large proportion of the population. This statement confirms your mind is already made up on the news coverage aspects of the BBC. It therefore appears that you have already compromised the fairness and impartiality of your review. Accordingly we have serious doubts about the independence of any review of the BBC sponsored by the government and in particular, by your department.

Finally, we would point out that in your statement you clearly take it for granted, ("The one certain outcome ..."), that there will still be a BBC after the review, whatever the outcome of the evidence submitted. We believe this further confirms your unsuitability for running this review. Whether we the public need, or even want the BBC, must be the first fundamental question for the review to consider. There is evidence to show that large sections of the public are totally dis-satisfied with the BBC and would much rather keep their licence fee money than have it legally extracted from their limited means to pay for a BBC they do not want anyway. You are obviously prepared to ignore the views of this section of the public in advance. This is an untenable position for you to assume in what is supposed to be a democracy. Could we therefore have your guarantee that the views of this section of the public will be fully considered by the review body? Could we also have your guarantee that the views of the majority of the remainder of the public, which definitely do not want the BBC to continue as currently configured, managed, financed, operated and governed will not also be ignored?

Yours sincerely

J.G. Wraith
Hon Sec
Stop BBC Bias Campaign