

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

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I welcome an opportunity to set out my concerns with respect to the BBC, which, as an ordinary viewer unaffiliated to any political or social organisation, has proven impossible when dealing with the 'smoothwall' of the BBC viewer-complaints service, and the impervious and almost imperious manner in which it refuses to accept comment or criticism, instantly categorising every viewer issue as belonging to some defined group pushing an agenda.

I shall not however comment on the issues raised by the report of Lord Hutton. I may touch on matters which reflect on those issues his report raised, but I do not intend in any way to predicate my comments on those of the Hutton Inquiry nor any aspects of the BBC/Gilligan Affair which are tangential to my immediate concerns, and post-date them..

PERCEPTION OF THE BBC

Since watching the BBC as a child where I was particularly satisfied with a series entitled '*British Film Comedies*' at 7.30pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, which allowed me to be acculturated to Ealing Film Comedies; *Dr. Who* on Saturday evenings, preceded by Laurel and Hardy films at 11am on Saturday mornings; I note the output is today markedly different.

I felt part of a defined and shared 'culture'. I could listen to Tom Fleming narrate on public occasions, watch Raymond Baxter in '*Tomorrow's World*'; and watch cricket or rugby, or even see the streets cleared on a Monday evening as '*Fawlty Towers*' sucked every student into the JCR to watch. After years of living in the USA, where I found I could only watch PBS without cringing; and Germany where I found ZDF wooden but good and *Panorama*, or *Spiegel TV*, or *Sabine Christiansen* to be good quality programmes; I returned to find BBC absolute dross..

I can watch broadcast theatre-plays on BR, see documentaries, watch floor-shows (as *Black & White Minstrel Show* or Val Doonican once in the UK); see Orchestras perform or Skiing, or even watch French comedies, and the excellent German romantic comedies now being produced - far superior to Hollywood. I can watch German TV provide me with a cultural offering way above BBC; and I can learn so much from programmes showing European cultural heritage, and plays by Schiller or Goethe....when was last a Shakespeare play on BBC, or one by Webster ?

German television has become so much superior to British television which is essentially

“*Prolekult*” and in an era when mass-production has left the factories to be superseded by individualised product, it has entered the service sector with a vengeance. German TV is also far better at covering Brasil and South America where German investment is significant; it is however very poor on breaking news; and has displayed a breathtakingly biased approach to George W. Bush and the United States worthy of broadcasts in Moscow at the height of the Cold War. German television across the board has pursued a slanted campaign of vilification of the United States in its News and Current output which was far more hateful than ever during the 1991 Gulf War, and highly politically motivated from a 1968-generational standpoint.

It is clear that a standard formula is used to stamp out programmes on the basis of a set theme and that they are bought in by the bucket-load from production companies who churn out repetitive themes in different packages. The onslaught of ‘reality’ TV, house-decoration, travel, cooking, Webcam videos, Police video¹, US-celebrity TV, have all the same origins in cheap, pre-packaged soma. The 1970s appear to be a period of creativity in contrast, although dross hit the screen even then; but actors were developed and good series created, which are now recycled ad nauseam on UKGold etc. Humour was not coarse or foul in the mainstream.

The word ‘mainstream’ is the one I should like to use. I believe the BBC was once mainstream but is now polarised. Radio 4 is dominated by personalities from, interviews with, and values derived from *The Guardian* newspaper. There is no other newspaper with such a predominant influence upon the output of the modern BBC that it might well replace ‘*Ariel*’ as the house newspaper.

There is in so much of BBC output a sneering contempt for the mainstream and an elevation of the esoteric and peripheral to the status of majority opinion. The interviewing of politicians is often clumsy and rude. It is clear that stonewalling is practised by the politicians, however the brusque manner in which they are cut off with “Okay” or “That’s enough” is an insult to me, the voter, when an elected representative is curtailed for some inanity that follows. Brian Redhead once had a run in with Nigel Lawson on 18th March, 1987, it was sharp and Redhead offered a short pause for Lawson to “*compose an apology for daring to suggest you know how I exercise my vote and I shall reflect on the death of your monetary policy.*”that was perfectly in order. Brian Redhead was a very good presenter, Humphrys is merely a terrier with no great mind.

On the issue of politicians, Gordon Brown turns the interview into a rehearsed monologue whereas Hans Eichel in Germany can debate with businessmen and economists, and Opposition politicians, before a live-TV audience in Germany, and it is amazing how Sabine Christiansen encourages real debate as opposed to the Soviet-style declarations that are evidenced in the UK. This refusal of British politicians to debate issues openly has resulted in a broadcast media which has sought to provoke and speculate to flush out

¹ With some many CCTV cameras in use it should be illegal to sell footage to broadcast media unless in connection with a criminal inquiry.

a reaction; and the reclusive politicians have lost contact with the general public.

RADIO:

Radio 4 has been debased over the years. Once *Afternoon Theatre* was a gem, a real play with content and quality. Now every hour has reserved slots for internal BBC adverts and trailers which are nauseating, and after hearing trailers I tend to forget to hear the program having heard so many snippets already. This happens very often, as yesterday with a radio programme by Jonathan Miller on the 1918 Flu Pandemic..

The repetitious relaying of News headlines every 15 minutes on Radio 4 *PM* or *Today*; or Radio 5 *Up All Night*, is mind-numbing; especially as after reading out headlines they repeat the story contained in the headlines. On Radio 5 Live they take 'Wake Up To Money' and cut it in pieces to plug in News, Sport and Travel so that what was once a full 30-minute slot becomes akin to Radio 1 with its bite-sized content. The introduction of more and more pop music into Radio 4 whether as items at 5.20pm usually, or as background *muzak*; there seems to be some agenda to render Radio 4 a music channel; and it is almost *never* classical music..

When my old schoolfriend Roger Mosey ran *PM* it was a tight, quality programme, it is now lax and tabloid with a fringe agenda of London art galleries to keep Nigel Wrench happy, and other issues irrelevant to those of us outside the London village.

No-where is as provincial as London !

The World At One was super when 45 minutes long, but tiresome with spluttering James Cox who is 'inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity' as Disraeli would have put it. It is now a bit theme-based, hunting out some headline for the later news; and pressuring interviewees for the required soundbite; even to the point of phrasing statements as questions so as to put words into the interviewee's mouth. This is fundamentally dishonest, and blatantly so. *Speculation replaces Fact*, as on 2nd February, 2004, when for 4-5 hours the station speculates on an announcement from Downing Street and Mark Mardell stands outside Downing Street under floodlights at 10 pm gesticulating with his hands and extemporising: this is not News, it is filler. The hand-movements make me feel the correspondent is inarticulate, for that is my experience with those who gesticulate.

The recurrent theme of BBC Radio is repetition. The same stories are pushed throughout the day from 4am until 11pm. This is just like Germany where every radio station carries the same News exactly. With John Birt pooling the Newsroom BBC World Service has the same reports word-for-word as Radios 4 or 5, and it is frustrating to get no diversity. Why cannot each station have different emphasis in its News coverage, why always the same ? Why cannot they operate independently of each other instead of being spigots on

the same barrel ? I should like more depth in News coverage, more clarity, less a rushed gabble of 'red top' headlines: I have to go the Net and read the foreign papers or the Blogs to get real News: BBC News is for the un-informed.

Radio 5 was supposed to be a rolling-news station but is not. Instead it rolls the same news package ad nauseam, and fills in the gaps with items from Australia or Canada or USA ignoring non-English speaking countries of Europe. The coverage of primaries in the USA is deemed more important than of elections in Spain, Poland, Russia, Germany....Germany has a year of regional elections in 2004. From BBC Radio one has the distinct impression that Britain is a Caribbean Island and European Mainland is thousands of miles away. They do not highlight the anger in Germany about the European Constitution, that the Greens proposed a referendum across Europe. There is always an interview with a German journalist who agrees with the BBC contention, but I never recognise the Germany I know in BBC broadcasts; it is presented as monolithic and dissent from the party line is never covered. We hear nothing of Schily's attempt to centralise police powers in Berlin, the demand for the Secret Service to move from Munich to Berlin, or the Army General Staff to move from Bonn to Berlin; or the anger across Poland because of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* reviving anti-German feelings in Poland; nor that the only country which can build trust between Poland and Germany, is Britain because of its wartime links; and that Schroeder's policy towards the US brought Germany into a diplomatic isolation with Britain, US and Poland, unparalleled since 1940.

There is no analysis, but always a sentiment that Germany and France are always right and Britain always wrong. That you cannot espouse British values without being 'out of step' and that France and Germany have no national interests, but 'European' goals. It is risible that the BBC is so one-dimensional in subscribing to an apparatchik view of Europe at variance to the real countries in which people live and work; I do not believe I get anything more than a propaganda construct from the BBC News coverage and it is rather like the view the Soviet citizen got from Radio Moscow given by Russian correspondents in London in the 1970s.

BBC World Service Radio

Although this is an FCO-funded service I feel the changes introduced by John Birt under Bi-Media policies were detrimental. The World Service is a shadow of its former self with the jungles "*This is BBC in Kingali*" etc being nauseatingly repetitious and far inferior to *Lillibulero* which had significance, as did the Beethoven "V" Call-Sign with Fate strumming at the door; and made it exciting rather than bland as nowadays.

The diction has deteriorated also into regional dialect and non-British accents, including Australian ! This is peculiar for a British 'window on the world'. The use of domestic programming for an international audience produces quiz shows barely comprehensible to the UK population going out around the world. There is a lack of global coverage in

contrast to earlier days and a sense of the News output being less authoritative than before when the World service had its own newsroom. Many years ago John Tusa had complaints about some changes, and I wonder if he has thoughts about improvements? I believe the BBC World Service should be enhanced and developed throughout the world, so we can build influence in every nation through a reputation for quality and truth; and to provide an 'education' for those unable to afford a formal one.....it should be the light of the world.....especially as the service costs relatively little.

In the 1970s this station had big problems with bias in the Portuguese Service with output in favour of the Portuguese Communist subversion, and there were investigations. The declining standards have been proceeding over several decades, but are now in a terminal phase and we must decide what it is we want. I should like to return to the top-flight BBC World Service we once had.

TELEVISION:

BBC2 used to be a cultural channel with foreign films, opera, and documentaries. I especially miss the Open University, as a non-scientist I learned much from the programmes and found the one on Liquid Crystal Displays particularly revelatory. Yet I understand the OU must pay to broadcast on BBC2 nowadays; although the BBC *pays Camelot* for the privilege of transmitting the National Lottery !!!!!

Thus the BBC "taxes" Education but "purchases" Gambling ! A bizarre set of circumstances to my mind.

BBC programmes seem to be made on a 50-55 minute length which leaves 5 minutes for advertising each hour. Satellite TV seems to have 7-8 minutes each hour of adverts, and I believe ITV is regulated to 6 minutes each hour. If the BBC is reserving 5-minute slots for advertising in its schedules, and filling this gap with nonsensical and irritating messages, does this imply Advertising of the commercial variety should be introduced ? Perhaps on BBC1 and Radio 1. There has been a manifest attempt by the BBC to strip the word "British" from all its outward displays, and I believe it has repeated the Ailing Error at British Airways, and is in danger of appearing unanchored as some sort of Global Citizen linked only to this nation by the annuity extracted from licence-fee payers.

The rise of the celebrity presenter is also nauseating. Specialists are so much better. David Starkey is a presence on his specialist area of Tudor history, as AJP Taylor was in his ability to present history as living events. Bronowski was brilliant as was Kenneth Clarke with Civilization, or Patrick Moore on Astronomy, or James Burke on the Apollo Space Program. Today we get pop stars or authors or celebrities covering every serious subject badly, very badly and in such a superficial manner as to be trash.

I am sufficiently well-educated to feel I can learn nothing from television or newspapers today. So many of the presenters/journalists are ignorant, unversed in the subject, and

without historical grasp. Once you could respect correspondents...as I do Mark Tully or Alastair Cooke..... I tend to watch German TV as friends now watch Polish TV or other satellite channels. Only in this way do you get real coverage of Europe, the Baltic or Russia rather than recycled US footage of Britney Spears or Janet Jackson, or boring recycling of Michael Jackson scandals..

We are members of the European Union however there is less European coverage than 20 years ago. The BBC has moved far closer to US outlets and shifted the perspective towards the English-speaking world. Do you recall language-programmes on BBC like "*Kontakte*" or "*Deutsch-Direkt*" teaching people German, or Spanish ? Nowadays languages are not at all supported and films in other languages, even dubbed or with subtitles are not shown. I want French comedies with Louis de Funes and German films like *Dr Mabuse*, or *Mann für Jede Tonart* or the new film *Luther* about Martin Luther; or that when we have programmes about the wars or the Bismarck that we have German veterans speaking. I watch very interesting German programmes with veterans never shown in Britain, which focuses entirely on the British standpoint. I am pleased I speak other languages, I should hate to be trapped in the BBC Ghetto.

There is no European Press Forum with journalists from other countries, and there is no coverage from the EU Parliament so we know what goes on. There was no *Panorama* looking at the EU Constitution; no *Panorama* to look at the Single Currency or the situation in Russia. We inhabit a fish-bowl today and are completely isolated from the European mainland.

Watching Polish or German television opens up a whole new world - reports from Poland or the Baltic. History programmes about the Prague or Estonia or Germans living in Poland...a sense of a European identity. In contrast the BBC seems to focus on the unintelligent and the semi-educated; it talks down and not up; it reviles education and learning and employs presenters with poor English skills and accents like rasps. It is not an organisation which presents itself well and appears embarrassed by its past and heritage.

I understand that the average age in Britain is around 40, and that 20% population are pensioners. Why then does the BBC pursue a youth-cult and tailor its offerings to apparently drugged and disaffected teenagers who do not buy a licence ? It is strange how the pensioners are ignored and sidelined, and the family is treated with disdain while catering to a single clubbing youth group which are unlikely to be watching the station anyway. Why is television not family-oriented ? Do the BBC executives have such dysfunctional families they imagine everyone else does ? Family films outsell violence and weirdness from Hollywood, but in a sort of counter-culture the Media seems to insist on rejecting the audience in favour of producer-interest in the esoteric and offensive. The use of slow-motion camera shots, weird angles, and pop-video type filming might be 'creative', but they suggest a coke-head behind the camera. I wonder sometimes if random drug-testing should not be introduced into the BBC.

Satellite TV is an escape from mediocrity and monotony, but uneven in quality itself; it is merely that the jam has been spread very much thinner and now you must browse in breadth to make up what you lack in depth as regards content. The BBC has no diversity, variety, or culture. It is hard to tell whether it is ITV or BBC that is on the screen as you enter the room. I have ceased watching the station as I feel so disaffected; I am the despised audience that Gavyn Davis fatuously told us was the one the BBC wished to shed, ie. “white” and “middle class”. *I do not believe I should pay for a Channel which gratuitously insults me, and which is a cultural wasteland.*

Just why did the BBC pay Vanessa Feltz such a huge retainer and where is she now ? Is this a suitable use of licence-fee income ?

I have recently purchased a CD of the Russian opera-singer Anna Netrebko. I heard about her not from the BBC, but from German TV where she was interviewed. I subsequently saw her in a concert for the 300th Anniversary of St. Petersburg....again on German TV. I believe my tastes would be condemned by the BBC as “elitist”, possibly even “deviationist” and certainly more elevated than the BBC output. German Television is middle-class; British television is Orwellian *Prolekult*. There is a complete absence of Culture and a preponderance of Sub-Culture; there is absolutely no diversity. Every programme gets pop-music overlaid as soundtrack; everywhere it is silly video-shots or music-video type presentation; there are no intelligent people talking. I am so pleased I can watch German TV; and my friends say how wonderful it is to watch Polish TV on satellite.

German TV covers so much on Poland, on Russia and it is fascinating to see the team that rebuilt the replica Amber Room; or to see the beauty of the Polish castles and scenery; or to be given an insight into the Danube or Lithuania.....I am never going to see such things on British television unless it is a cheap package tour being promoted. The culture of Europe is totally ignored in favour of The Simpsons or Reality TV. Yes the Germans have rubbish too, they also have people sitting in Australia in some place being monitored by the same people....I presume this is another Endemol production across Europe.....but there is so much more choice on German TV because the ARD/ZDF channels are regionalised with differing output.

CONNECTIONS:

At University a contemporary applied for a position with the BBC; his reference was written by Edward Heath, MP. He was rejected. Many years later Jeremy Mayhew worked as an Adviser to Peter Lilley, MP; and subsequently moved to the BBC Strategy Unit under John Birt; I believe the BBC paid for his MBA in 1987.

When I read that a Minister, Ben Bradshaw has a partner working within the BBC; that the Chairman of the Board of Governors has a wife working for Gordon Brown, MP; or that Lance Price was a BBC journalist preparing to join a Labour Government, as was Ben Bradshaw, Bill Bush inter alia; or that Caroline Thomson at the BBC is married to Roger Middle in the Downing Street Policy Unit; I wonder if the BBC is not really a Department of State and an integral component of Government as was British Rail, British Gas, and the CEEB. The incestuous relationships between government and BBC make me very concerned with respect to impartiality, and which stories it suppresses to avoid embarrassment to its friends, or which it develops to discomfort those outside its charmed circle.

Too often on Radio 4 for example one has the impression in the North of England that one is eavesdropping on a kitchen-table conversation in North London; as so much seems to be focussed on Hampstead or Notting Hill rather than the nation. So often London's particular obsessions, problems, or attributes are extrapolated as if they are national traits which they are not. Watching a TV politics programme one feels an outsider, merely the voter, as politician and commentator chat animatedly about the Westminster Village to the exclusion of the broader electorate; and one senses they share the secret of the dinner party, the cocktail reception, perhaps even the bed they shared, the night before. It is incestuous and the Media-Politics-Nexus is as vibrant as Eisenhower's Military-Industrial-Complex; with insiders almost contemptuous of the outsiders they imagine to be the great unwashed. In short the BBC as currently constituted is the nexus of a Cabal.

WEBSITE:

The BBC Website is extremely good though I fail to make fullest use of it. It is a national and international resource and I do not think it would be as good in other hands. It is actually what the Post Office or BT should have built; as Britain had the only Telco without a Website - the Deutsche Telekom site is also very good, but the BBC site is outstanding and an example to British business as to how a Website should be built.

I think however, the Website should be expanded and in each region carry the full details of Council Meetings, and integrated/shared with local government. Bradford Council for example is pitiful in displaying lists of candidates prior to elections, or in displaying results following that election; and the Council is remote, perceived to be incompetent, and lacking in transparency; and its Website moribund. The BBC could teach them so much: the BBC Website is the acme of attainment, please do not destroy it.

NEWS:

The BBC has a poor quality News service, inferior to SkyTV in every respect. My school-friend of yesteryear Roger Mosey is now Head of TV News, but I doubt he can be proud of its current reputation.

There is an innate bias in BBC News, a tendency to pursue a Guardian line, and be anti-American, sceptical towards anything from Britain, and almost fawning towards terrorists and fringe groups. I do not want the BBC to act as Fox TV but to be balanced which I believe it not to be.

This was evident during the Falklands War when Peter Snow debated tactics with a relief map of the islands almost providing up-to-date information for Argentina about “The British”; or the horrific scenes of reporters door stepping bereaved families of the dead sailors on HMS Sheffield for lachrymose interest. It was revolting.

In Northern Ireland there was a sycophancy towards IRA and INLA terrorists but contempt towards Unionists or Security Forces which bordered on the perverse. The tendance towards calling terrorists “militants” is most curious and I wonder about the status of “militant trades unionist” or in the traditional liturgy of “Church militant” in this context. I find the language inappropriate.

Too often the News is used as a forum for PR firms. Richard Branson never pays for advertising but gets a TV News slot to promote himself and his wares. Packages arrive on videotape or CD-ROM for the cheap insertion into the News. If a major event occurs, or a composer dies that is given cursory treatment whilst David Beckham or some pop star is feted to the skies. Health issues are slotted in so long as they concern women rather than men, and one is left believing breast-cancer is the biggest killer of women, not lung cancer; and also that cancer does not affect men, only women.

The use of the News to change perceptions is interesting. Too often we receive slanted reports from locations which only recourse to the Internet can ameliorate or the use of Blogs. There is a distinct loading in the editorial cut presented on TV. I am not sure whether the reporter in the field is guilty of the bias or the news editor in London, but it is distinct and clear. Terrorists are not “militants” they are terrorists. There is no point in focussing on pictures if they are not the whole picture; and using an angle to focus on one spot whilst cutting out the surroundings is mendacious but did occur in Baghdad when demonstrators were shown outside the Rashid Hotel, but panning to the whole square showed them to be a minority enlarged only by the zoom lens.

I do not like the BBC trying to manipulate: German TV News has done a very crude job of stimulating anti-Americanism through loaded images and persons such as Michael Moore. This is not the purpose of TV to instigate racial hatred or demonise particular

people: it is not to engage in the 3-Minute hate to which Winston Smith was subjected in '1984'.

Mohammed Al-Baradei was reported recently in *Der Spiegel* as saying the threat of nuclear war was great and he had been astounded at the extent of circumvention of Non-Proliferation Treaties; yet nowhere is this reported on BBC TV. There is so much on the Internet in foreign newspapers or sites that is never reported on the BBC which repeats the same stories all day as if no other occurrences have taken place on earth. The BBC treats News as a product and like the supermarket it is shrink-wrapped and served up like a standardised product; it does not bring out new wares as events move on. There was a Syrian journalist's report in a Dutch newspaper with maps of WMD in Syria, but this was never reported; there is a distorting prism which does not allow news to be broadcast but hammers away at the line selected by the editor, firing the same ammunition without recourse to new supplies. The audience can watch the News at 6am and switch off for the rest of the day in effect.

On 1st February, 2004, in an item preceding an interview with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport with Janes Cox on Radio 4, "*The World This Weekend*", Will Hutton, a former *Guardian* journalist stated how vital it was to maintain the BBC as a licence-funded broadcaster because it "*supports the Centre-Left*" and "*Labour would appreciate this when in Opposition*". I found this statement frightening and no justification for taxpayer-funded television or radio. Will Hutton acknowledged a bias, outlined its polarisation, and stated how politically useful it could be to one particular political party and outlook. This is a prima facie reason for privatisation of the BBC to prevent the political bias Will Hutton seems to believe should be funded by licence-payers. Like many British Citizens I wish a neutral broadcaster without discernible party-political bias.

POLITICAL COVERAGE:

The Politics Show with Jeremy Vine is candy-floss. He cannot be bothered even to wear a tie, this showing his contempt for his guests, who do. The programme is the old Birtian *Weekend World* format with idiot presentations as if the audience is educationally subnormal and needs serious issues presented as comedy in bite-sized chunks. this programme shows the futility of the medium needing pictures rather than words.

The bloated Political News & Current Affairs department with the huge expansion by John Birt has rendered coverage boring. There are so so many political correspondents, and they recite the old mantras with little new. I used to like Michael Brunson on ITN he at least did not go on ponderously, and was concise. Today it is rather like a TV reviewer commenting on *Neighbours*, rather than a succinct encapsulation of a political issue; and background is rarely presented via *Panorama* or *Horizon*.

In the beginning I believe politicians were happy to have serious Current Affairs removed from the schedules. Some say Margaret Thatcher wished to punish the BBC and so brought in the 1990 Broadcasting Bill; anyway Current Affairs disappeared and now politicians feel bereft and isolated as the public has switched off completely. The political manipulation of information by the government, and the BBC speculation and hearsay reporting from leaks and innuendo, has led to a complete severing of links between government and governed; and a disdain for the condescending [to the viewer] coverage by the media on the lines of “*this will not register with the morons outside the Westminster village.*”

The BBC has an editorial opinion on any and every subject and it shows, it is didactically propounded repeatedly and without cessation. The BBC is *positive* on Gay Rights, *negative* on Christianity, *fearful* of Islam, *contemptuous* of Catholicism; *despises* George Bush, *loves* Bill Clinton, seeks a Democrat it can endorse for the US election and so scours the Primaries for its choice candidate. How much of this is policy and how much a mutually-reinforcing ethos of a self-selected clique is not immediately clear. I hear the BBC wishing to reflect society with ethnic mix, but it is wholly unrepresentative with regard to mainstream opinion, or even the regional makeup of the country; and seems to see itself as London Broadcasting Corporation whose signal just happens to be received in the far reaches of Yorkshire or Cumbria.

It has an uneasy relationship with European countries, but is positive on the EU preferring the deconstruction of the United Kingdom to its national identity; yet it is extraordinarily weak in its coverage and background on Germany, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, Russia etc and never has programmes highlighting their domestic politics nor their institutional arrangements, reporting only on natural disasters or murders. It never covers German concerns on EU policies, nor the feelings of citizens in Europe about events, always some interest group or lobby interest.

The BBC is prone to presenting seemingly impartial sources without revealing their background. Dr Heaven Crawley is presented as being from the IPPR but rarely is her previous incarnation in the Home Office revealed, and so the manipulation of public opinion is attempted. Even on Radio 4 we have *Any Answers* and the number of times a certain Rita Bowen from Liverpool is heard to comment on any issue, usually with a particular slant, makes one feel it is statistically significant for a supposed ordinary member of the public to get through the switchboard so frequently.

The frequency with which certain guests in an audience appear during programmes like *Question Time*, or even on different channels makes it appear there are professionals who make up the opinion range the station requires. There is a sense that when watching television one is peering into a private world riddled with nepotism and secret affiliations. *Any Questions* is more often than not a forum for Jonathan Dimbleby’s dinner-guests; and it is patronising in the cast of politicians and church politicians, but rarely ordinary people; and usually one has the feeling that the questions are pre-screened and the whole affair choreographed in a way that did not seem so evident in former times when

Marghanita Laski or Russell Braddon were on the panel. It is in short a 'politically-correct' session directing the masses what to think on each issue, and part of the glass-fronted BBC which allows the audience to look in but screens their views out. I visualise a BBC audience as being selected by questionnaire like jury-vetting with views on social issues, political affiliations, social class and ethnicity being the key factors: I switch off at such manipulation.

The Board of Governors of the BBC seems to have at least 8 of 12 with political connections. I fail to see why Pauline Neville-Jones should be representing me as a viewer when she has no career past making her responsive to the public. The Governors backgrounds show the BBC is a State Broadcaster financed by a tax which since the 1949 has been backed by criminal sanction. I fail to see why I as a taxpayer should finance prosecution of persons who do not pay to watch TV; let the BBC pay such costs. I understand Capita targets housing estates and single-mothers, students, and care homes where it can swoop on several offenders and meet targets. *I do not believe as a taxpayer I should pay for anyone to be in jail for non-payment of a TV licence.*

Further, when a pensioner under 75 years receives say £70 a week pension, I cannot understand why she should pay £2/week to the BBC so it can pay a newsreader £140.000 a year, or bonuses to men like Gavin Davis or Greg Dyke. This is an affront to public decency. Pensioners are an abused group within the media, but ironically are a core audience and it seems highly regressive that such high salaries are paid in the BBC based upon the pennies extracted from the poor under threat of prosecution. If you watch German TV there are excellent programmes with Inge Meysel who is 94 years old playing in TV series even today, where she is a pensioner with charm, wit and elegance. There is none of the condescending truculence towards someone who 'has lived too long' as our youth-obsessed TV portrays. It is amazing how well these programmes with Inge Meysel are constructed....truly excellent in every respect.

There are some quite extraordinary salaries paid within the BBC for quite ordinary performers; and the lack of transparency is ridiculous: the corporation should answer to Parliament not the Government. I fail to see why *Have I Got News For You* was paying such ridiculous sums to Angus Deayton; I cannot understand how these salaries are derived for quite average persons. In a country where the taxpayer funds a Consultant Surgeon with £80.000 and expects 100% success rate, I fail to see why John Humphrys should be paid £300.000 a year plus writing a column in the *Sunday Times* for a further £1000/week. This is a Public Corporation that is out of control.

I should have preferred a programme maker to be in charge of the BBC, and not the continual import from the commercial sector who have destroyed the uniqueness of the organisation. *I have no wish to destroy the BBC, but also no wish to subsidise it dragging ITV down-market. If it produces truly commercial output it should be privatised.* The licence fee is there to produce quality programming and remove the drive to lower cost production and cheap programmes; instead the excess has been siphoned into enormous

salaries at the expense of quality programming. We get few original plays. *Panorama* with John Ware, only last week provided a proper quality production as we used to have with Robin Day; and it was the first I have watched in 10 years.

RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING

There has been a conscious attempt on all TV Channels to downgrade and where possible to eliminate religious broadcasts, even to the point of secularising the output. This is offensive to a great swathe of the populace, and undermines the central cultural binding values of the society and its history. There is a pronounced anti-Christian bias in BBC programming and the selection of an atheist as head of Religious Broadcasting is evidence enough.

There should be a core set of values respecting religion, and while comedy programmes like "*Father Ted*" on Channel 4 were humorous as regards the Catholic Church, I doubt the programme was offensive, and was excellent in its light-hearted critiques. What is offensive is the BBC showing comedies where ethnic minorities make fun of the Communion wafer and treat it like a pappadam, which is a real affront to Christians and makes one ask just how Muslims would react or Jews if the core of their rituals was openly mocked on broadcast television. We could never imagine the BBC producing '*Satanic Verses*' on television, but almost certainly they would try to dilute, denigrate, or dismiss Christianity in some programme, or format such as *The News Quiz*. Religion should be treated with respect and treated seriously. Why there is no slot where a representative of each faith cannot state for 45 minutes or so on radio or television what it is that draws him to his/her faith I do not know.

Why there are no religious discussion programmes talking for example about Mel Gibson's new film; or why not round table slot with Jews, Muslims, Christians discussing ethical issues like abortion, euthanasia, marriage etc. With the BBC there is an attempt to set up Television as a replacement Church and to displace organised religion as a fringe activity.

Jews and Muslims view their religion as integral to their secular life; Christians have started to treat it as a coat to be shed when they leave the church after prayer; and the purveyors of media try to marginalise it as a form of superstition or witchcraft and belittle those adherents they know will not respond with violence; ie. Christians in what is a most supercilious and condescending manner which makes the journalists seem childish and immature. Most journalists on television or radio are not especially intelligent, few have any real appreciation of the subject matter they pronounce upon, and a stridency of approach more often than not masks a paucity of knowledge. There is no reason however for the increasingly abrasive and impolite behaviour; there is no mandate, and no requirement for personal rudeness or snide commentary.

At Christmas 2003 the festival was totally denuded of any Christian symbolism by the Market in the form of supermarkets; by local authorities; by your own Department of State; and by the BBC which turned it into a back-to-back film orgy. There was no comparison with German TV which had a Circus from Monaco; Carol Services in the mountains; festivities and local *Christkindlmärkte*; and the celebration of a Christian Festival was attractive and satisfying with the Vienna Christmas Carols Festival, and the story of *Silent Night*. In contrast the BBC and British TV in general was grunge, low-class, proletarian Soviet or East German style Materialism....there was nothing spiritually uplifting at any stage. *Were I to watch British television, not just the BBC, I should think I would be a depressive before too long. It is soul-destroying and probably inspires people to thoughts of suicide.* I think British television must drive people to despair and drugs, but I know many people who stock up on DVDs on a Friday to avoid live television. With children many parents are frightened to let them view live television and record programmes rather than run the risk.

Programmes like *The Moral Maze* are, I am informed, under Religious Affairs, yet are so secular in approach as to be facile. Clare Fox is a fixture on BBC guest-lists presumably from her days at *Living Marxism*, but she is intellectually under-powered compared to David Starkey or Janet Dailey, or Melanie Phillips; and the programme has died since the acerbic David Starkey left the studio to the snide Steven Rose..

Perhaps there should be a religious advisory council within the BBC structure, and a science advisory council ? We could then have more focus on natural sciences and the good work of Adam Hart-Davis could be developed into an educational strand.

What is really lacking on TV is DIY-programmes, those to inspire action rather than encourage passivity. Years ago gardening programmes and woodworking were showing how to do it yourself, now it is how to hire contractors and passively watch it happen.

Why are there no programmes showing how to set up a small business ? Or how to build a Personal Computer and to understand the workings ? We have so few real programmes to encourage people *to get out and do things, to give a positive inspiration to life rather than induce despair and lethargy.* The book *'Britain On The Couch'* by Oliver James shows the dispiriting effect of TV on the populace by enervating their desire to better themselves. there are no programmes on diet, healthier eating, or exercise but instead almost pornographic cooking programmes where celebrity chefs make instant meals and the audience is passive.

There is no drive to make people DO but simply to sit passively and BUY.

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION:

I find children's TV on Saturday morning to be grunge. It is pure '*Prolekult*' encouraging young girls to wear make-up, date boys, and eroding the value of childhood. A visitor from Brazil, a country with awful television, thought the Saturday morning offering was inducing girls to be 'sluttish', to dress as "prostitutes" and it is an observation I have heard about English teenage girls that they have no idea how to apply make-up or dress.....the BBC does little to steer them in a different direction. The same output encourages stereotypical 'laddish' behaviour with an anti-academic bent.

There are few children's adventure series and the Harry Potter books show a thirst for such amongst children. There was once a good strand of children's TV now replaced by soaps pushing a dysfunctional family agenda as if it were mainstreamit is amazing how many see TV soaps as prescriptive in the way they should live their lives.

BBC WORLD:

I cannot receive this station, and so I merely relay the fact that friends overseas in Japan and USA have commented on the poor quality output and repetitive broadcasts. It is not a licence-fee service and so I presume it should suffer the dictates of commercial discipline for poor performance.

DRAMA:

BBC Drama was once good. I now cringe if I hear they will film a classic, convinced we shall have the story spiced up for the US audience and rendered salacious to attract viewers. In the days when Anthony Hopkins got his first major role in BBC '*War & Peace*', it was phenomenal; but today we have had the absolute disaster of 'Rhodes' which had much the same premise as the 1970s disaster '*The British Empire*'; an attempt to cast in a poor light major figures or events of British history rather than relaying fact for the viewer to decide; instead it is directed and polarised propaganda. What happened to *Poldark*, *The Onedin Line*, *Play for Today* ?

I am afraid when the BBC proposes a remake nowadays and do not watch. They make such a mess of drama, they have no real feeling for it any more. Where once they painted with oils, now it is a collage of pictures stuck together without regard to texture, language, or colour, merely meretricious enough to attract viewers in Peoria; who after all get to view the production before the licence-payer in Britain ever does.

SUMMARY:

The BBC receives a levy on the general public enforced since 1949 by law. This levy allows it to rise above the commercial requirements of advertisers and the need to produce low-cost standard programme sets; it can be a 'job-shop' producing tailored series and building a bank of quality programmes. Instead it has taken the low-road of banking films on a weekend as if it is a multiplex cinema on the small screen. It has gorged itself on salaries and perks and failed to invest in core areas such as floor shows, theatre, arts, DIY programming and rarely uses the orchestras it sponsors to good effect.

The system is too London-based and should be regionalised much more....it is like peering into a London Club where the insiders have private jokes at the expense of the 'masses' outside especially in Northern England.

The system of governors has been abused by governments repeatedly. Clement Attlee did not continue with Philip Snowden's widow as a BBC Governor in 1945 and we know why. The current governors represent not the viewers but their loyalty to the political machinery. I always thought David Dimbleby would have been a better choice than Gavin Davis, and that the organisation must cease to be subjected to outsiders parachuted in, or it would cease to be distinctive.

Why Melvyn Bragg was removed from 'Start The Week' where he was so superior to Andrew Marr is confounding. ostensibly because he was a Labour peer, and yet the Chairman and Director General were also thus connected. It struck me as most strange. The curious episode over Peter Mandelson's 'sexuality' was likewise Soviet in the curious manner in which the subject was made off-limits by Birtian diktat in a heavy-handed manner; though well-known otherwise. Actually, such private matters are not really appropriate for broadcast television; but to assert the 'emperor' has clothes is flying in the face of the 'little boy's' public observation. The manner in which certain subjects are discussed ad nauseam and others are 'politically sensitive'; is very much what one would assume to be common in Slovakia or Bylorussia..

The BBC has been very duplicitous on race. It has avoided discussions on key matters of national interest and strait-jacketed open discussion. That Robert Kilroy-Silk wrote a silly article in *The Express* is known, but why was he not interviewed by Paxman or in a discussion forum to explain himself, rather than being banned from the State broadcaster for being out of kilter with its *idée fixe*? There is an inability to face issues squarely and have an open forum, and such 'conversations' have migrated to the Internet. The BBC has become a 'conveyor-belt' to the masses in true Stalinist form, impervious to criticism and increasingly bereft of good taste. It is to be expected that with local government elections on the horizon we shall be bombarded with *Agitprop* on the British National Party in a concerted campaign from Church, State, State Broadcaster, and affiliated newspaper columnists.....it is hard to know if these onslaughts on the public are coordinated or concurrent. The effect is merely to subject the voter to an advertising blitz such that he feels he has voted a thousand times before the polling station opens, and on the day just

cannot be bothered to go through it all for the 1001st time in the one poll that matters as Harry Truman commented.

We are deluged with MORI, ICM, Gallup, Populus, YouGov in an effort implicitly telling us which way we *should* vote, in much the same didactic manner we are told which washing-powder washes whitest. It is propaganda and seen to be so. Opinion polls should be banned in the week preceding elections to give voters a rest from incessant *Agitprop*. The BBC will not accept contrary opinion; and polarises by allowing radical Muslims to preach an anti-West message on television (esp. Channel 4) as if this is mainstream thought; but tries to stop Nick Griffin being interviewed as if afraid that the BNP represents mainstream thought, which again, it does not. This may be recognition that the broadcast media is so out of touch with real people in real places as to believe their ability to make minority opinion appear majoritarian.

Should the Licence Fee continue ? Only for a high-quality public broadcaster which is committed to the highest standards and not in pandering to the lowest common denominator. It should have a high content of in-house productions in The Arts, theatre, Orchestras etc and the kind of programmes the commercial sector will not/does not make. At one time Granada made superb programmes in competing with the BBC, of which Jewel in The Crown was perhaps the ultimate; but now the headlong rush is downward and the audience is fragmenting. The level of repeats or “another chance to see” and the back-to-back films shown symbolise a managerial class too lazy to bother, happy to milk the viewer but not to serve him.

Where the BBC spends £2.500.000.000 each year is baffling. It does not appear to be on programming. Channel 4 has followed this lead and sunk into a torpor no longer competing for excellence but pushing out purchased trash. there are two features nowadays “Tabloid Television” and “trash television” - one is sensationalist and meretricious and the other is akin to effluent. I have come to believe the medium is dead; that there is no creativity in the organisations and a sterile mechanistic culture of profit-making has replaced the desire to create quality of lasting worth.

The BBC mocks its own heritage, yet I find the past of John Snagge or Richard Baker eminently civilised though a generation before mine....it gives a reassuring sense of being as opposed to a raucous, poorly educated, semi-literate presenter or newsreader who should take a Use of English examination. The BBC World Service is particularly prone to incomprehensibility and whatever Mark Byford did there at John Birt’s instigation has been disastrous.

In the past when you listened to a Mark Tully, you felt you were being invited into a world he knew intimately and guided through each room. Other reporters make you feel they only arrived five minutes before you did and have not quite reward the briefing document. Or else they have no background whatever and are stringers on contract without real affinity for the Channel or audience. Orla Guerin gives me this sense, and

Ben Brown in Chechnya made my blood boil he was so clearly partisan. I find the way the BBC tried to boost Rageh Omah in Baghdad into a Christiane Amanpour farcical; one because I think Amanpour hopeless and another because I do not want 'star' reporters or 'star' newsreaders; they are a medium and I should prefer them behind a curtain if necessary.

The BBC coverage in Iraq was miserable. I know my coin on Ark Royal was one who saw the feed switched to Sky, which did a far better job than Fox. BBC is weak on breaking news - io always go to CNN or Sky. BBC TV News is pitiful. I thought the BBC pursued a churlish anti-Anglo-American line and highlighted every setback, feeding the anti-war lobby groups and being snide about British soldiers. I do not believe the BBC should ever actively try to cast British forces in a bad light; they should highlight egregious failures but not as an editorial line.

The Editorial Line is the problem. I may or may not be in favour of homosexual activity; but others are of a different opinion. just why the BBC should have an editorial line which pushes its standpoint forcibly and didactically that this is the true path and all those who disagree and unimportant reactionaries, is not the reason we finance the BBC. There should b e no consistent editorial line across the range of programming; there may be within a programme but certainly not a uniform line across the output. At times I think of the BBC as a political party with its own manifesto.

John Birt pursued an agenda to give journalists an advocacy role and to gesticulate using hands before the camera: both aspects turn me off completely. I do not want to identify any editorial or political agenda as a consistent theme within the BBC output. Unless we start identifying each journalist by his political affiliation, and introduce random drug-testing into the organisation; then we should establish ground-rules that the BBC will not propagate advocacy of illegal drugs; nor push a particular party-political line; nor the kind of anti-Americanism evident in their output, as for example with Eddie Mair and his Saturday morning Radio 4 programme where he tried to ridicule Donald Rumsfeld and merely made himself seem puerile. Or the campaign waged by Radio 4 and other programmes to denigrate George Bush as President of the united States, by following Democrats through primaries finding one for the BBC to endorse before November 2004; or interviewing Democrat-inclined or pseudo-academics who will deliver an anti-Bush or anti-US line.

It is the consistent fishing for items to cast the Us or the US President in a bad light which i object to; I do not expect sycophancy or support for Us policy or the US President, but io do expect balance and respect for the office. Intelligent criticism is worth listening to, but childish tantrums and Michael Moore type spasms of infantilism do not impress me, and might have been funny when I was a child. I expect the highest standards and i get the lowest.

It becomes an obsessional neurosis like student politicians who bang on about the same thing with out regard to their monomania being boring to the audience, and a sign that the speaker might in fact be borderline insane. I do miss Brian Redhead; and the women on PM on Radio 4 are a complete and utter flop engaging in trivia and insubstantial gossip in place of real discussion with grown-ups.

I just wish the BBC would be what it once was; a broadcaster catering for an educated and informed audience, and bringing knowledge and showing a path. forward to self-education and learning. To inspire people to do for themselves and to be active citizens rather than passive consumers, to encourage optimism through doing rather than depression through inertia.

The BBC is run by a self-perpetuating clique, drawn from a narrow group in society, recruiting in its own image, and far too wedded to the PR boutiques and advertising sectors where it would appear many have jobbed or had careers prior to entry into the BBC. It has a superficiality and a glitz which contains no substance, no depth, and little talent, yet is rewarded by relatively, some of the highest salaries in the land. There are favourites - Jeremy Vine, Fiona Bruce, Andrew Marr as once it was Jonathan Ross under John Birt, who collect programmes as if they are 'stars in the firmament' for whom the audience is transferable. Michael Buerk is a similar character as is John Humphrys.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

German Channels *ARD/ZDF* are financed with a mix of licence revenue and advertisements. The quality of these two channels is today, but was not in the distant past, superior to BBC1. It seems reasonable therefore that the slots already prepared each hour for advertising and used internally for BBC messages be used to sell advertising space externally on BBC1 only.

The same principle to be applied on BBC Radio 1; Radio 5 which are in essence commercial radio stations without advertising.

Radio stations, 2, 3, 4 to remain without advertising; and Radio 4 to be the premier discussion station with quality plays, discussion, and educational programming. Radio 3 to return to being a classical radio station without the recent 'pollution' of its output by low-brow and middle-brow programming and presenter accents.

Radio 4 Long-wave to be enhanced and devoted to more cricket coverage; or through multiplexing to use some of the available sidebands for Radio 4 FM to develop cricket coverage during Test Matches.

BBC output both radio and television has become increasingly metropolitan and regionalism has disappeared save in Scotland or Wales. The Birtian era led to a marked concentration of resources in London, and in the North of England trapped between BBC Scotland and BBC London, one gets the feeling of being somehow in the waste and tundra at least in the mind's eye of the BBC Directorate. It is a highly-centralised structure with no regional variation - low-quality local programming such as "Look North"; and local radio stations which relay national programmes at certain times of the day, such that is hardly worth listening to.

The BBC structure in England should be regionalised and the centre should accept regional baronies with a coordinating centre, and a federal structure. Germany seems to have a multiplicity of regional stations such as WDR as the powerhouse, and BR, HR, MDR, NDR etc as local affiliates which often show tailored programming but emphasise the region; something the BBC does not.

Radio interviews will be conducted in North London, probably where the journalists live; and the phrase "North of England Correspondent" makes one think of Ulan Bator and some poor woman on survival rations in the Frozen North ! I should like to see a postcode analysis of BBC reporters, BBC executives, and BBC ancillary staff and technicians...it would be interesting to see just how clustered these groups are and isolated, in the case of reporters, from the broad swathe of British citizens through their exclusive residential areas. In short, it is probably true that many of these BBC journalists propound a *Weltanschauung* which is hypocritical; that their obsession with youth is based upon their own personal disconnection from their children; and that they are middle-aged affluent trying to relive their 1968 student radicalism in an attempt to re-connect with their disaffected teenage children, whereas they are in fact money-obsessed bourgeois and living in Hampstead or Primrose Hill or Notting Hill Gate and holidaying in a French *gite* or a Tuscan village; and pretending to be 'professional proles' as Marie-Antoinette liked to be a shepherdess. *These are the persons that make television, but would not deign to watch it !*

The Board of Governors should no longer be a sinecure for retiring Civil Servants, superannuated politicians; or persons selected to fulfil some quota or another. Instead there should be a regional component representing the North of England; and BBC Scotland should be hived off into a separate BBC federation. There should be a skills grid for Governors so some have business expertise from the Arts; some having a Science background and one representing a recognised listener/viewer group. The Chairman should be appointed after interviews by a selection committee drawn up by the BBC itself, and the selected candidates interviewed by a House of Commons Select Committee with equal representation for all political parties; or through a Committee of the House of Lords. The Government should have no direct role in selecting the Chairman.

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