

BBC Charter Review

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

2-4 Cockspur Street

London SW1Y 5DH

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29th March 2005

Dear Charter Reviewers,

I am pleased to have the opportunity of contributing my views about the BBC in the run-up to Charter review.

The BBC is one of the great institutions born of this country, given to the world, and respected widely for the integrity of its programmes. Unfortunately the organisation is coming under increasing and more virulent attacks from political and commercial interests whose platform is nothing like as altruistic as that of the BBC itself. Whilst I welcome the recent decision to maintain the licence fee for the next ten years I no longer trust politicians to do anymore than to hang licence fee review and Charter renewal over the head of the BBC like some sword of Damocles. Give the BBC independence and a guarantee of funding and allow it to get on with the job! There are sufficient of those who believe in the merits of public sector broadcasting and recognise the qualities of the BBC to form a governing body outside of the control of Government and able to resist the pressures of Government to manipulate broadcasting in pursuit of some short term political advantage. The clash between the BBC and the Government over Iraq was not edifying, just or deserved. It was a disgrace.

Let us be in no doubt that the licence fee gives value for money. It buys a multiplicity of radio and television channels as well as symphony orchestras. There is something there for every taste. The contribution made via shopping bills to commercial broadcasting is far greater. In this context I view the move by the BBC to drastically reduce staff numbers with a great deal

● of suspicion. Will blood-letting of this magnitude not seriously weaken the body corporate?

I trust the BBC does not feel under pressure to demoralise and weaken itself as one further act of appeasement towards its paymasters.

The dictate now emerging that the BBC should not chase ratings but concentrate on the non-commercial areas of broadcasting is a grave danger to the survival of the organisation as a major force in broadcasting. High ratings give legitimacy to the licence fee and this alone enables the BBC to provide creative, experimental and minority interest programmes. The organisation supplying Radio 1 is therefore also able to provide Radio 3.

In summary let there be encouragement and admiration for the world's best respected broadcaster. Let there be a system of governance put in place to keep the BBC out of the hands of Government. Finally recognition that the licence fee gives good value for money. Give the BBC the security necessary for it to get on with its jobs at which it has performed well for the last eighty years.

Yours sincerely



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RALPH AINSCOUGH