

18 March 2005

Your BBC, Your Say.

I have at least a hundred things I hate about the BBC, but here are seven to be going on with:

1. **Arrogant.** We all know that Blair, Bush, Howard, Putin, S-G Erikson, Adams, Rumsfeld, Elizabeth II, etc are not perfect, but they have all reached the top by perfectly legal means. To follow a news item about one of the above (and lots of others) with an invitation to Andrew Marr or some other BBC dipstick to give his *opinion* of it is ARROGANT. It suggests that somehow Marr is the highest court of appeal in the land, and that Blair, Bush etc. have to meet with his approval. We (that is, I and everybody I have talked to on this subject) would far prefer the BBC to give us the news, i.e. what has happened, and to leave us to form judgements about it.
2. **Patronising.** This criticism is aimed far more at BBC East than at the whole organisation. Local news is completely unwatchable because the people behave as if they are talking to a bunch of complete morons. The weather-girls are the worst of all. Is it not enough to say "It will be cold tomorrow"? Why do they have to add "so wrrrrrap up warm if you're going out"? And what does a broadcaster mean when he says "See you tomorrow"?
3. **Trivial.** Also aimed at BBC East more than the whole organisation. It may be that very little real news happens in East Anglia, but an endless diet of stories about pets that can open doors or children who have raised £17.46 for some local charity is not very nourishing.
4. **Unrepresentative, statistically dishonest.** "We sent Bill Smith to find out what people thought of the new arrangements." And Bill asks two people, one of whom says it's lovely and the other of whom says it was better as it was before. Is that a sample? Is it useful? No. It's just a 'nice' way of filling time.
5. **Wasting the opportunity to set an example to the young.** The BBC is, for better or worse, in a position to influence the young very strongly – far more so than their teachers. It is irresponsible, therefore, to give us people whose use of English is so appalling. This is not, of course, a blanket criticism, but most of the sports people, especially the 'expert' summarizers, have no idea how the language works. Children's programmes are especially important from this point of view, but the grown-up kids who front children's programmes seem almost as bad as the footballers.
6. **Self-serving.** Somehow real life has been subsumed by broadcasting. There are now news stories about the BBC. Worse, however, is that journalists who

are sent to amenable foreign watering-holes to cover a story try to slant their broadcasts in such a way as to suggest that the story is not over yet ... please can I stay here for a few weeks more? Thus, as the peace-treaty is signed or the election speech is made, the broadcaster asks "But for how long will this uneasy peace last?" Stories of BBC journalists actually creating the news for their own benefit are legion, and most are probably apocryphal, but I have it on good authority that the one from Belfast about a broadcaster paying kids to throw stones at soldiers was true. It would certainly not surprise me: I regard such pragmatism as a *sine qua non* of today's broadcasters.

7. Formulaic. It should be possible, with the wealth of highly-paid talent at the corporation's disposal, to come up with some ideas. Instead, we have a kind of treadmill, with the same dreary stuff churned out day after day – stuff which requires almost no preparation, skill, or expense. I refer specifically to programmes like Ready Steady Cook, where exactly the same thing happens every day – just different dishes. Or The Weakest Link, where again exactly the same thing happens every day – just different questions. Antiques Roadshow, all those gardening and house make-over programmes. And then occasionally someone comes up with a new idea, and before you know it, there's a whole series of thirteen almost identical programmes. Brainless!

I can see very little justification for the householder being instructed to fork out for an organisation which sets itself such dismal standards. It's no defence to say that ITV and Channel 4 are even worse: of course they are; they have only commercial justification for what they do. Only if it were in some way 'improving' – in the way that Lord Reith envisaged – would a publicly funded licence-fee payable to the BBC be appropriate.

If you would like the other ninety-three, you can have them any time.

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