

13th March, 2005.

Dear Sir,

I write to you in answer to your advertisement in the press of March 7th, inviting people to express opinions about the BBC.

I am sure you do not wish to read an essay of several thousand words and I have, therefore, attempted to be brief. Consequently I ask you to be aware that these are, so to speak, 'broad brush strokes'.

One newspaper said that if the BBC responded to the government's promptings it would mean '*more culture and less fun.*' Of course, words such as *culture* and *fun* beg the question of definition and, anyway, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, my own immediate response is *Why not?*

I do not intend to be bludgeoned into buying a 'box' for more 'free' channels that are not free, since the apparatus must be purchased. Furthermore, I am informed the quality of reception on this facility varies considerably according to geographical location.

However, even without 'Sky' and/or a 'box', my television and radio 'diet' of BBC1 and 2, ITV, Channel 4, Radios 1,2,3,4 and 5 and commercial stations to which I have access provides such a plethora of what many regard as superficiality and banality that to beg the BBC to use the vast majority of time on just ONE television channel (and perhaps two radio channels) to provide something more intellectually challenging and stimulating seems neither an unreasonable request nor a disproportionate allocation of time.

Two points, as briefly as possible:-

- a) I feel the BBC has done itself and many of its erstwhile admirers a great disservice by allowing itself to become embroiled in a 'ratings war' that inevitably compels a descent to the lowest common denominator of taste if the Corporation is to compete successfully with commercial television and radio.
- b) I believe the BBC really must not succumb to the seductively plausible 'we live in a democracy' argument. The last programme in what I thought the excellent *Judge John Deed* series examined, amongst other issues, the postulate that if sado-masochism and, ultimately, murder proved popular with

audiences, then a 'democratic' broadcasting service must show these things. The extrapolation of this argument, of course, is an evening with television cameras at Auschwitz, watching the gassing of Jews, gypsies and homosexuals. (Please note that I know a good many people who are sometimes gay but always heterosexual!!) Similarly, if enough people demand it, welcome to sixty hours a week of *Eastenders*. (*Eli, Eli, lama sabacthani?*).

I looked through the *Radio Times* for week beginning March 5th. Not one symphony concert on television (Polish Television broadcasts one every Sunday morning, yet the BBC manages, from memory, about five televised Promenade concerts a year). On neither radio nor television is it easy to find works by, or discussion of, such giants as Shakespeare, Tolstoy or Titian and these names are randomly chosen, though, of course, many, many others could be added to this list. I trust that, without labouring it, the point is limpid. Allow me to add, though, how much I, and others, continue to miss the broadcasting of *Compline*, *The Brains' Trust* and *Round Britain Quiz*, to name but three of many.

I recall a style of BBC broadcasting exemplified by Richard Dimbleby, John Snagge, John Arlott, Freddie Grisewood and others whom today's BBC employees cannot even emulate, let alone surpass. I recall people on the BBC who, even when speaking without a script, emphatically did NOT confuse *frequently* and *regularly*; who knew that *nostalgia* really means *homesickness* (as only a smattering of Greek will confirm); who knew when to use *that* (a demonstrative adjective or subordinating conjunction) and when to use *so* (an adverb).

Consider the unmitigated horror of *Never in the field of human conflict was THAT much owed by THAT many to THAT few*. Winston and the great BBC broadcasters of yesteryear could speak English.

I willingly and impenitently admit to every single pejorative point my detractors *might*- not, please, the frequent solecism *may*- thrust at me> austere, priggish, pompous, elitist, donnish, reactionary and so forth. However, I know that I am by no means alone in holding my views; I know that chess and bridge programmes have disappeared; I suspect, without having done the arithmetic, that over 90% of *Learning Zone* language programmes and Fine Art programmes are 'repeats', some (e.g., *Buongiorno, Italia*) being over twenty years old and I know, above all else, how many people would endorse the Biblical plea: *Give us the old paths wherein is the good way*.

For those who want such things all broadcasting would still comprise several 'popular' television channels, as well as the populism of Radios 1 and 2 and, more or less, 50% of Radio 4, together with 'Sky', other extra-terrestrial offerings, commercial television and so forth. The majority taste would thus undeniably be catered for, since far and away the vast majority of broadcasting hours would be devoted to it (which strikes me as a reasonable application of the Mill/ Benthamite principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number) but the 'dinosaurs' like myself would, given my suggestions, be fairly catered for, which, at present, we feel we ain't!!

You might wish to afford me the courtesy of an acknowledgement but the greater delight would be to see some of my suggestions implemented and I thank you for having read a letter whose length was far greater than I ever intended. It was augmented by a passion and indignation that, I assure you, so many licence holders have but, all too often, are not invited to express.

Thank you for being encouraged by your advertisement to make my views known

I have, Sir, the honour to be

Yours &c.,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'R.J. Marshall'.

R.J.Marshall (Mr.)