

Mark Bunting
OFCOM,
Riverside House,
2A Southwark Bridge Road,
London, SE1 9HA
email: mark.bunting@ofcom.org.uk

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Dear Mark,

I am writing to you in relation to the debate about the future funding of Channel 4 and in particular about its public service remit.

A brief word about my own background. I have worked in the broadcasting industry for 30 years. This began with 5 years at the BBC where I was a news journalist and TV news presenter. Later I joined ITV and was a producer and then editor of the World In Action series. I graduated through a number of programme and then management roles, finally going on to become Chief Executive of ITV.

Five years ago I left ITV to start my own independent production company. Liberty Bell has produced a very wide range of factual programmes for all UK terrestrial broadcasters – mostly for the BBC but also for ITV and Channels 4 and 5.

It goes without saying that broadcasting in Britain is at a crossroads. Convergence, which we seem to have been discussing for 15 years, is finally here in earnest and is causing havoc to traditional commercial models. The diversity of channels, and the mushrooming of outlets competing for advertising spending, has left every commercially funded broadcaster in difficulties. All of the predictions show the funding situation getting worse, as technology delivers more and more ways for content owners to reach the public.

This has led to an apparently inevitable plunge of standards, as broadcasters struggle to continue to fund expensive production-values against tumbling audiences. We have already seen many of the consequences of this. The demise of investigative current affairs on ITV – series such as This Week and World In Action – has left our media impoverished. These series used to range widely over the globe, often reporting on important but little known or understood stories in countries we seldom hear about. These programmes played an important role in our democracy, and informed us of aspects of the world outside of our own back-yard which we otherwise would have gone unreported. One

thinks of John Pilger's long-term reporting of the various scandals in East Timor as just one of very many examples.

However the only reason that we miss such programmes, or indeed know that they are possible on television, is that we still see them from time to time on other channels. New and younger viewers of ITV might well believe that "Tonight with Trevor McDonald" or the ".....from Hell" brand – laudable though they sometimes are – are all there is to current affairs. It's only when a programme like "The Secret Policeman" comes along on the BBC that we are reminded of what used to be part of the regular diet on ITV.

However, with ITV having more or less evacuated this important territory, this vital role cannot all be left to the BBC. From time to time in its recent history, the BBC has also travelled the "current-affairs lite" route, and with its own perceived funding crisis kicking in, there must be a continuing risk that it will do so again. Once these programmes disappear from our screens, they are never coming back. They will be gone and new generations of viewers will not even be aware that they were possible.

In this situation, the role of public service broadcasting on Channel 4, both in its own right, and in "keeping the BBC honest" is more important than ever before. In a fast-changing world, Channel 4 has continued to produce what is actually an astonishing range of worthwhile topical programming, from parts of the globe which are seldom if ever noticed by other broadcasters. It has also shown itself to be capable of sustaining a series of important journalistic campaigns which seem to have gone out of fashion altogether along other terrestrial broadcasters.

In saying this, I want to make clear that I am by no means a fan of everything that Channel 4 does. Some of its programming, especially in the last months, has in my view been misguided and lacked judgment or editorial justification. However, I'm guessing that they see upsetting people like me from time to time as part of their remit, and while not welcoming it, I can see the point.

My fundamental point is that public service broadcasting can not be left to the BBC, and the totally free commercial market – especially in a relatively small market the size of the UK – will not deliver the competition that the BBC requires. It is the responsibility of the regulator to identify and to maintain an environment in which important and worthwhile news and current affairs, and topical documentaries, can flourish and expand. It sounds like a pompous thing to say, but I believe that our democracy requires it.

So please add my voice to those asking you to intervene to establish a regimen which will encourage, enable and oblige Channel 4 to continue this very important part of its remit. These are complex matters, and the alternative approaches to funding PSB are many. I'm sure you would not welcome me going

into them all here. However If I can assist in this discussion in any further way, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Prebble