

05 AUG 2013

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Dear Sirs;

CHANNEL 4 FRANCHISE RENEWAL

Channel 4 is a British public-service television broadcaster, which began transmission on 2 November 1982. Although largely commercially self-funded, it is ultimately publicly owned; originally a subsidiary of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, the station is now owned and operated by Channel Four Television Corporation, a public body established in 1990, coming into operation in 1993. With the conversion of the Wenvoe transmitter group in Wales to digital on 31 March 2010, Channel 4 became an entirely UK-wide TV channel for the first time.

It set a trend for television companies to out-source their productions to independent production companies, nearly all of which are situated in the Greater London area. The result of which is that both the BBC and ITV companies have downsized their production departments in the regions, closed their studios and moved their commissioners to London. This has led to a there now being very few jobs in the regions. Most people who want to work in film or TV have to move to London or risk being considered "provincial" in the worse meaning of that term. Much of the best in creative ideas comes from the regions but there is no longer the money there to make quality productions. Even Granada Television (which has long been associated with Manchester) has their main offices near the National Theatre on the South Bank of the River Thames. This had the unintended consequence of moving employment from the regions to the metropolis. This in turn has changed the focus of the UK media from a variety of productions being made in the regions by the regional broadcasters, which employed people in the regions, to one of London and the Home Counties. The result being that anyone who wants top work in television has to move to London.

The renewal of the Channel 4 franchise gives the opportunity to repair the damage done in the Midlands. Birmingham had Pebble Mill Studios, which had at its peak one TV drama studio, one radio studio converted as a TV studio, a further studio in the former foyer plus news and radio studios. ATV/Central TV had four studios and workshops in the centre of Birmingham just off Broad Street. These have all closed as production was moved to studios in and around London that were more conveniently situated for the companies that now gain the lion's share of the drama and light entertainment productions, which are the most expensive to produce. This has led to a huge disinvestment in the regions in general and in the Midlands in particular. Now Stornoway in the Outer Hebrides has better TV production facilities

than Birmingham. Midland producers have to do low-budget productions with unpaid workers as all the money is now largely spent within in the M25 (plus Pinewood Studios, which are just outside.

Insisting that Channel 4 moves from its present premises (which are between Victoria and the Thames) to premises in Birmingham, Britain's Second City is effective in redressing the present imbalance. Salford (though much publicised) is only a small symbolic operation. Most of the BBC's income is still spent in and around the capitol. It is now recognised in Government circles that concentration of investment in London and the Southeast has led to a decline in the economy in the regions in general and the West Midlands in particular. Relocating Channel 4 to Birmingham would help to reduce the dependency on London as a "one stop shop" for film and TV to the detriment of the development of talent and investment in the Midlands.

Birmingham has proved that it was artistically advantageous for one of the main stations in the broadcasting system to be situated in the heart of the industrial Midlands. From among the workers in gold and silver and precious stones and iron and steel and coal has been drawn material with which programmes of an exacting standard have been constructed – programmes sought and appreciated all over the country."

An encouraging quote taken from the BBC Handbook, 1928.

As part of the Government's policy of decentralising investment and industry from London and the Southeast to the rest of the country, the new franchise should go to a company that is willing to be based in or near Birmingham which is currently striving to grow its film and television sector after years of neglect. The BBC has space in the Mailbox; Birmingham City University has state of the art productions facilities at its Millennium Point Campus and The Custard Factory has an unused news studio with a view of the city's landmarks.

A state-operated TV station should be based in the regions and not remain in Pimlico. As Channel 4 has done so much damage to regional broadcasting by instigating the move of broadcasters from making productions in the regions using regional talent to hiring companies based in and around the metropolis to make their screen content, it is only fair that a state-owned broadcaster should be based in the largest regional city Birmingham.

Alternatively, the franchise should go to another company that is willing to make the move to the region, which is much cheaper for filming than London and should therefore give better value for money.

Yours Faithfully

John West