

24 February 2016 – Supplement to February’s emailed news update for Prospect members

Information and draft letter for Prospect members who would like to contact their MP regarding media and entertainment union BECTU’s “BBC Love It or Lose It” campaign

BECTU believes that pressure on local MPs by their constituents is one of the most effective ways to alter ministers’ views and we urgently need to alter the views of John Whittingdale, the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport who is heading up the attacks on the BBC. This pressure will be invaluable in addition to the mix of online petitions, lobbies, demonstrations and press stunts that BECTU and other entertainment unions have been organising in defence of the BBC since last year – see

<https://www.facebook.com/bbcloveitorloseit/>

BECTU says if the attacks by the government on the BBC are not stopped they will have a direct effect on the thousands of its members who are employed by the BBC and thousands more members who work there on a freelance basis. The BBC is a major employer in broadcasting and it is facing a drastic reduction in funding, which will mean dramatic cuts in programme making and therefore less work for BECTU members, staff and freelance.

The second reason concerns the wider role of the BBC as a provider of news. Millions of people in Britain turn to the BBC for their news and information about what is happening in Britain and across the world. Whatever people may think about some of the BBC’s recent coverage, its existence as an independent source of information is an important part of our democracy. Unlike other news providers in the United Kingdom, the BBC is required to provide balanced news coverage, which does not depend on the personal prejudices and foibles of media moguls or on commercial pressure to appease shareholders.

BECTU’s campaign, “BBC Love It or Lose It”, has attracted a lot of support and thousands have signed the petition. If you haven’t signed it yet you can do so here

<http://bit.ly/loveitorloseit>

The government review of the BBC Charter seems to have been set up to provide the answers it wants to hear since the panel consist of people who are on record criticising the

BBC. BECTU needs your help – would you be happy to write or email your MP? It won't take long. Below is a list of reasons you can include in your letter about why the BBC needs saving. Your letter will have more impact written in your own words, of course, but, if you haven't the time, BECTU has also drafted a full letter below.

Here is the link to email your letter to your MP www.writetothem.com

MAIN POINTS

Your email will have the most impact if you use your own words to explain your concerns but here are the main points of BECTU's campaign.

- **Backdoor deal on the Licence Fee.** In BECTU's view the licence fee was set for the next five years, in haste and without consultation. Crucially, the process excluded consultation with licence fee payers, which is unacceptable for such an important decision.
- **Licence Fee Deal Is Crippling.** Again without consultation, Lord Tony Hall, the Director General, has agreed to bear the cost of free licence fees for those over 75, costing the BBC about £750 million a year by 2020. Even with other changes, including online viewers having to pay for a TV licence, there will still be a £350 million shortfall, which means further cuts to services and jobs. Lord Hall has made it clear that more cuts will mean that services will have to close e.g. BBC 2 or local radio.
- **Value For Money** BECTU believes that the BBC licence fee is excellent value for money. The cost to UK households is £2.80 per week for 9 TV channels, 10 national radio stations, a network of local radio stations and an internationally acclaimed website.
- **Review Outcome Is Preordained** The review panel set up by Culture Secretary John Whittingdale seems designed to reach a predictable conclusion as it has a majority of panel members who are already on the record criticising the BBC. The review of the BBC's charter needs to be fair and even handed.
- **Balanced News** A democracy depends upon its citizens hearing a range of arguments

and opinions in order to participate. The BBC plays a major role in presenting balanced, impartial news coverage, which does not depend on the personal prejudices and foibles of media moguls or commercial pressure to appease shareholders.

- **BBC Is Very Popular.** The BBC is very popular; 97% of the UK's adult population use BBC services at least once a week. The BBC's worldwide audience is 308 million people. It seems that only the government and some newspapers owners and broadcasters want to see the BBC reduced in size. There is no popular groundswell or political mandate to cut it back.
- **An Independent BBC** BECTU wants the BBC to be strong, independent of government and well-funded so that it can continue to make high-quality drama and arts programmes, including content for the Proms, Open University and children's channel, support music through its orchestras and broadly inform, educate and entertain the nation, producing output which can also be sold abroad.

FULL LETTER

Dear X,

I am writing to you because I am very concerned about the government's intentions toward the BBC. Despite having set the licence fee until 2020 they have announced a full review of the BBC's Charter. A majority of people on the review panel are on record as having criticised the BBC so a negative outcome seems to be a foregone conclusion.

The last licence fee settlement in 2010, reached behind closed doors with no consultation with the licence fee paying public, resulted in the licence fee being frozen for 6 years. In addition the BBC was made financially responsible for both the World Service and S4C, both historically funded by government. This cost the BBC £350 million per year.

This time, again without consultation, Lord Tony Hall, the Director General, has agreed to bear the cost of free licence fees for those over 75, costing the BBC about £750 million a

year by 2020. This is around 20% of the current licence income. A licence fee linked to the Consumer Price Index, and charging those viewing the BBC online along with the return of money spent on digital roll out, will bring in no more than £300 million per year so the BBC will be considerably worse off. It means at least £350 million a year of licence fee payers' money will not be available to be spent on programmes.

The BBC's Director General, Lord Tony Hall, has made it clear that further cuts will mean that services will have to close: BBC 2 or local radio, for example.

There is no evidence to support the suggestion that cutting the BBC's programme budgets would lead to a corresponding increase in production by other broadcasters. In fact media pundits believe that further cuts at the BBC would lead to an overall drop in spending on UK audio-visual content, undermining a successful UK industry that also exports programmes & formats worldwide. Let's not forget that every £1 of licence fee spent generates £2 in the wider economy.

The BBC plays a major role in presenting balanced, impartial news coverage, which does not depend on the personal prejudices and foibles of media moguls or commercial pressure to appease shareholders. A functioning democracy depends upon its citizens hearing a range of arguments and having equal access to information and opinions in order to participate. The BBC has its funding set by governments who all equally have a combative relationship with the corporation due to its critical role as an impartial broadcaster.

The BBC is very popular with the general public and opinion polls show that the majority want it to continue to make popular entertaining programmes. 97% of the UK's adult population uses BBC services at least once a week. The BBC's worldwide audience is 308 million people. It seems that only the government and some newspapers owners and broadcasters want to see the BBC reduced in size. There is no popular groundswell to cut it back. We need to protect the BBC as we are in danger of losing a broadcaster which sets the standard for Radio, Television and online. The BBC provides great value for money, costing £2.80 per week, which is very competitive compared to other broadcasters.

I am worried that some of the services I now have access to under the BBC licence fee will be closed, only then to be provided, worse and at a greater cost to me by private companies. What I want, as a licence fee payer, is a strong, independent, vibrant and properly-funded BBC so it can carry out its duties as a public service broadcaster; protecting quality journalism and programming, the World Service and the important cultural role it plays.

The world's most respected broadcasting organisation should be celebrated not hobbled. I want a BBC that can continue to provide quality news and current affairs at a local, national and international level. I want the BBC to continue to provide high-quality drama and arts, the Proms, Open University, children's programmes, orchestras and to inform, educate and entertain the nation as was its original intention.

With the vast amount of information available it has never been more important to have a provider I can trust – the BBC is that provider to millions of people in the United Kingdom and worldwide. The BBC is something of which we should be proud.

I would like to know what you are going to do, as my representative in parliament, to protect the BBC. I am supporting the campaign <https://campaign.goingtowork.org.uk/petitions/love-it-or-lose-it-save-the-bbc> . The media and entertainment union BECTU can provide further information and briefings.

Yours sincerely