

BCR 19

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee
Ymchwiliad i'r Adolygiad o Siarter y BBC

Inquiry into the BBC Charter Review

Ymateb gan: Julian Ruck

Response from: Julian Ruck

Introduction

My submission wishes to concentrate on BBC Wales and S4C, however by way of introduction the following should be noted:

The BBC uses its mission and core values of impartiality and independence to demand money without having to acknowledge the public's desires and complaints. If it was a private company, its shareholders could force out the Board.

If it was a government body, the public could have their say every 5 years. Being neither, we are asked to put up with the BBC helping itself to 3.7 billion of our hard earned cash, prosecuting over 200,000 of our peers and indirectly sending between 30 and 50 people to jail, for about 20 days each no less, every year:

<http://lettersfromwalesuncut.com/2015/08/22/why-the-bbc-should-be-subjected-to-serious-reform/> by Caroline Levesque - Legal Editor, Reuters

Some facts:

S4C has received £2.2bn of taxpayers' money since 1982. It enjoys less than 1% of the viewing audience and for some of its programmes this is zero.

BBC Radio Cymru receives £13m pa and BBC Radio Cornwall £1.3m - both stations have the same audience numbers.

NB A couple of weeks ago Radio Cymru's audience figures dropped to their lowest level ever (119,000 listeners per week), according to respected Radio Joint Audience Research (16.5.13).

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-33794230>

<https://twitter.com/iaindale/status/624147215011987456>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2049513/BBC-spends-TEN-times-Welsh-radio-English-station-number-listeners.html>

As reported in Westminster's Labour Uncut (and in the national press), a good number of its presenters and a journalist or two – not to mention its previous controller – have either received personal taxpayer hand-outs for their autobiographies amounting to many thousands of pounds (although not so much of the 'auto' hazard, most of these books have been written by ghosts) or their Welsh 'publishers' have received grants to publish them – in many instances the public purse has been nobbled twice. A pay-out to the author *and* a pay-out to the Welsh publisher to publish them.

And there is more than meets the eye at the studios of BBC Wales' flagship television news programme BBC Wales Today.

Derek Brockway its ebullient weatherman, has had his books about walking around Welsh mountain tops etc, paid for by the taxpayer too.

And what about taxpayer funded royalties to all these BBC Wales presenters?

The BBC's press office response? Here it is word for word:

Dear Mr Ruck,

Thank you very much for your contact with the BBC Press Office on Thursday 8th May and again on Monday 12th May.

Firstly, I should make you aware of the fact that the BBC should not disclose confidential information relating to individual commercial and/or contractual matters and transactions, unless required to do so by law. More specifically, the matters which you enquire about appear to be regarding contractual arrangements between third parties not involving the BBC and in such cases the BBC would not be privy to such terms or information.

Thank you again for your enquiries.

It should also be noted here, that a BBC Wales journalist, one Brian Meechan, has also received £4000 from the taxpayer for his own unwritten, let alone published, 'book'?

Karen Owen, former Producer of Religious Programmes at BBC Cymru, has just received £6000 from Literature Wales, I assume to 're-imagine' a bit of rhyming verse, as has yet another BBC Wales former Assistant Editor of Welsh Current Affairs, one Catrin Geralt, who has just been given £3000 – M/s Geralt is on the very Literature Wales Management Board that makes these awards.

And the BBC Trustees didn't want to know about any of this, everything is as it should be according to them.

<http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2014/06/08/letter-from-wales-a-welsh-bonfire-of-vanities/#comments>

<http://www.nydailynews.com/blogs/pageviews/welsh-writer-welsh-writing-sucks-blog-entry-1.1638844>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2256403/Taxpayers-England-spend-millions-pounds-Welsh-books-sell-handful-copies.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/wales/9774410/Taxpayers-fund-millions-of-pounds-in-grants-to-keep-Welsh-authors-writing-books-no-one-reads.html>

Rob Gittins, who lives in Carmarthenshire and is an award-winning screenwriter for such programmes as *EastEnders*, *Casualty* and *The Bill*, has had the publication of his two books, 'Gimme Shelter' and 'The Poet and the Private Eye' subsidised by public funds –

[http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2014/06/21/letter-from-wales-new-evidence-of-how-the-welsh-media-has-effectively-been-nationalised/!](http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2014/06/21/letter-from-wales-new-evidence-of-how-the-welsh-media-has-effectively-been-nationalised/)

<http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2014/01/22/letter-from-wales-nothing-is-independent-in-the-crachach-run-welsh-media/>

Overall, BBC Wales receives £167 million pa of tax-payers' money for Welsh language broadcasting, which some might feel is fair enough. After all, in

any civilised society minorities should be respected and their views always accommodated where possible; but here's the rub, none of this money has resulted in any kind of increase in Welsh speakers, indeed the opposite obtains.

<http://labour-uncut.co.uk/2013/05/31/letter-from-wales-despite-the-cuts-the-welsh-media-establishment-keeps-pouring-public-money-down-the-welsh-language-drain/>

Last April at the Celtic Media Festival, BBC Wales controller Rhodri Talfan Davies was heard to muse upon this tricky conundrum of loads of tax-payers' money going into Welsh language broadcasting.

Lest we forget, Rhodri Talfan Davies is the son of Geraint Talfan Davies and previous controller – his auto-biography *'At Arms Length'* was paid for by the taxpayer, number of copies sold? 147 – Nielsen Book data.

He's the boss of BBC Wales' political editor Betsan Powys, daughter of R Alun Evans, previous Head of BBC in North Wales. She works with BBC Wales Welsh affairs editor Vaughan Roderick, son of Selwyn Roderick, previous BBC Wales programme maker.

In his Celtic Media Festival turn, Talfan Davies Jnr was of the view, and this really is worrying, that programmes on Welsh English language stations should have more Welsh language in them. More Welsh language?

Some further examples of taxpayer handouts to BBC Wales presenters:

Mal Pope – £4000 (WBC) for his autobiography 'Old Enough to Know Better.' Well, that's debatable!

Owen Money – £6000 (WBC) for his auto biography 'Money Talks' – doesn't it just!

Chis Needs, £7,500 (WBC) for his auto biography 'And there's more'. There certainly is.

Finally by way of more detailed history:

BBC Wales as we know it was created in 1964 and prior to it 'our' regional services were provided by a 'division' of the BBC at a national (UK) level. Presumably all the regions of the UK had similar arrangements prior to 1964 and clearly the roles of BBC Wales/CYMRU have expanded since 1964.

The Talfan Davies' have clearly had a profound influence on the BBC for the last 70 odd years at senior management levels and I wonder if any other family (no matter how distinguished) has had a similar history in the BBC?

Mr. Aneurin Talfan Davies was Head of Programmes (Wales) before 1964, however one cannot find exact dates that he worked for the BBC, either a) before 1964, or b) after 1964.

Mr Geraint Talfan Davies (son of ATD) was the Controller of BBC Wales from 1990–2000. The position was then held by Menna Richards February 2000–February 2011.

There was no family connection here, however Ms Richards was very closely involved in senior positions in Welsh a) financial, b) cultural life as a non-executive director for Welsh Water and picks up about circa £67,000 p a for part time post. She is also on the Board of Welsh national Opera (Geraint Talfan Davies is its Chairman).

In 2011 the Head of BBC Wales/CYMRU was appointed, Rhodri Talfan Davies (son of Geraint Talfan Davies). One would be forgiven for concluding that the Talfan Davies' have made BBC Wales their own personal fiefdom. It should also be noted that the family is also associated with companies that generate work out of BBC/S4C.

Recently a programme presented by Geraint Talfan Davies was about his uncle's life in Berlin prior to 1939. It was called *'The Girl In The Diary'*. The 'family' connections within BBC Wales seem to be prolific' as both a) Betsan Powys, b) Vaughn Roderick had fathers who held senior positions in the organization and whilst this is not 'illegal', or 'underhanded' in any way shape or form it does seem to explain how the current culture' which is

remote from most English only speakers seems to have come about, without any public scrutiny/knowledge.

It is therefore apparent that BBC Wales/CYMRU and S4C of which both are funded by a form of a)poll tax b) taxpayers' money have no 'body' which REALLY represents ordinary people and which allows oversight of top level management.

The reality is that Wales is not like the regions of England, in that local news/comments are provided in a level, impartial manner, whilst the Welsh speaking/nationalist fringe seem to be hugely overrepresented, and given 'air time' far in excess of its viewing/listening popularity.

The 'solution' is to create a 'subscription' model for both the BBC and S4C, and charges based upon proper costings and accountability of management to the people who pay their salaries.

Julian Ruck