

From: Vic & Felicity Say [REDACTED]  
Sent: Monday, 6 August 2001 12:42 PM  
To: ecita.sen@aph.gov.au  
Subject: Plea for the A.B.C.

I'm writing to express my despair over what is happening to the A.B.C. and to plead that steps be taken before this most treasured institution disappears altogether from our landscape, leaving the nation sorely diminished.

The A.B.C. must be independent from Government interference and the starting point must be an independently appointed board of management. A system must be introduced which ensures that it's members are appointed on the basis of merit and commitment to an independent and comprehensive broadcaster, without political allegiance.

It's no secret that Labor in government had issues with the A.B.C. and when it raised situations unpalatable to government, that is as it should be - it's about doing a job that needs to be done. Likewise, when it makes a Coalition government unhappy.

My understanding is that what the Coalition is currently doing, is exactly what it planned to do, long before it came to government in 1996. People have short memories, but my recollection is that the Coalition planned to take \$50 million out of the A.B.C. budget prior to the 1993 election. By the 1996 election, they realized that the A.B.C. could be an election issue, so they said they'd actually increase the budget. Well, we know what happened on winning that election. Disaster.

The A.B.C. is a unique institution, multifaceted in the wealth of information and ideas it offers, providing food for the mind and the soul. It is indeed, essential to Australia's culture and democracy.

Jonathon Shier is doing his best to destroy the A.B.C. and I fear that the results of his need, or rather the Government's need for change in the philosophy of it's culture, may be irrevocable, given the great haemorrhaging of talent in recent times.

It seems to me that advertising, on Radio National, at least, has reached absurd levels. It's not just the information given but the frequency, the tone and upbeat nature of it - are we perhaps not far away from the volume even, being raised for ads. as surely happens on commercial stations and channels.

And I truly felt despair on viewing the new television programme, "Insiders", and witnessing a quite extensive film sequence of a truck driver blandly expressing his view about "the apology" and his fear of compensation. This was followed up, not by intelligent discussion and debate but rather a slanging match, dominated by the overbearing Piers Ackerman. This then was cut off abruptly to move onto another topic! So why the lengthy film sequence, if not to be followed by rational discussion? What indeed is going on here?

So, my plea is for:

1. a new system of appointment to the board of management, devoid of political interference.

2. a new approach to funding which ensures that the A.B.C. is a well-resourced and comprehensive broadcaster, independent from commercial and political interference. It must be allowed to fulfil its charter and aspire at all times to excellence. As that well-known late night R.N. broadcaster put it recently, if the ratings get too high, ask the question, "Are we challenging enough?" Must say I like that.

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