

Jeremy (DG), Jim Hacker, Humphrey, Bernard, Claire

Jeremy Burnham, the DG, enters

Humphrey The Director-General, Prime Minister.

Jim Jeremy!

DG Jim!

Jim Drinkie? I'm on Scotch.

DG Fine. Thanks.

Jim I'm afraid we're a bit rushed. Do sit down. *Jim sits the DG down, unceremoniously. Claire brings whiskies for the DG and Jim, and sits. Bernard takes notes*

Jim But I'm glad you're here. I'd like to take the opportunity to talk about this TV programme.

DG What programme?

Jim The programme you're running on Sunday, rubbishing me.

DG Are we?

Jim Please, let's not play games.

DG Look - It's urn ... not about you specifically, it's - er, it's part of a broad, measured look at the state of the nation.

Jim Rubbishing me, in fact.

DG No, no. Fair. Balanced. Responsible.

Jim Humphrey?

Humphrey Perhaps, Jeremy, you don't realize the full extent of this financial crisis?

Jim Anything that destabilizes Britain at this juncture would be grossly irresponsible.

DG Obviously we don't want to destabilize Britain, as you put it, but we're not the government information service either. We have a duty to reflect all shades of opinion. We are journalists. It's our job to keep the public fully informed. You refused an invitation to appear on it, I understand. That would have ensured that your opinion was represented.

Jim This may come as a big surprise to you, Jeremy, but I don't want to be pre-recorded, edited, quoted out of context and made to look an utter wally.

Humphrey Why don't you postpone this programme at least until the outcome of this Lancaster House Summit is clear?

DG *(putting down his glass)* I hope you're not putting political pressure on the BBC?

Jim Political pressure? Good heavens, no!

Humphrey Most improper. I'm not even political, just a humble civil servant.

Jim And we truly value the independence of the BBC.

DG I'm glad to hear it. But I'm afraid we can't possibly postpone at such short notice, and I can't interfere with content. I'm only the Director-General.

Jim (*as if a great light has dawned*) Oh. I see.

DG The producers would smell a rat. And they'd leak it.

Bernard Urn - just to clarify - a rat can leak, but you can't leak a rat.

DG (*irritably*) What?

Bernard A rat -

Humphrey Thank you, Bernard. Most helpful.

Jim So the BBC's smug and self-satisfied pundits are going ahead with their biased and scurrilous attack on the democratically elected government. Got that, Bernard?

Bernard (*writing*) "... democratically elected government."

DG (*calmly*) No, our team of professional journalists are going ahead with their fair and balanced review of the current political situation. Got that, Bernard?

Bernard nods, still writing

Jim (*standing*) Let me stop you right there. Humphrey has just come up with a really interesting idea. Haven't you, Humphrey?

Humphrey I, er, I -

Jim He says that in these straitened times making even more cuts in expenditure will be necessary.

DG Impossible. We've already cut to the bone. There's just no more we can do.

Jim Humphrey says that you could sell your digital channels, your websites, BBC Two, Three, Four, Five ... Six, Seven, Eight, Nine ...

Claire All the radio stations -

Jim - except Radio Four - BBC Publications, BBC Worldwide, the BBC Symphony -

Claire And the other *three* orchestras -

Jim - then we could cut the licence fee by eighty per cent. That would be such a relief for you.

DG But Humphrey, you've always said-

Humphrey I know! I am a great supporter of the BBC, it's just that-

Jim But you were saying they were overstretched. Weren't you?

Humphrey Well, 1, well of course, in normal circumstances, it would, naturally, be an entirely different

ball-game, but yes, if the nation's under extreme fiscal and monetary pressure it could be necessary *inter alia* to consider measures which under different economic conditions would not have been desirable but-

Jim I couldn't have put it better myself. Humphrey pointed out that only about thirty-five to forty-five hours a week on BBC TV is original and distinctive programming. You could get that all on to one channel, easily. That's what Humphrey is proposing, plus one speech radio channel, Radio Four. Aren't you, Humphrey?

Humphrey Well, perhaps the specifics are not so, not so, not so!

Jim So, that's pretty well it. You'd be able to keep all your quality programmes, and the World Service of course, and all your financial worries would be solved.

DG (*standing*) It's a monstrous idea! The BBC is the great bulwark of civilized values against the tide of commercialism, a beacon of world broadcasting.