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rdian.com/books/2015/feb/20/bbc-war-margaret-thatcher-life-on-earth-grang

War on the BBC: the triumphs and turbulence of the Thatcher years

The story of the BBC in the 70s and 80s is that of Life on Earth, Grange Hill and EastEnders. But, as newly opened archives reveal, it is also a tale of bitter rows and repeated government assaults - not least from the hostile new prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. Jean Seaton shares her discoveries

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BBC Commentaires de texte.

John Mullen mars 2021

BEGINNING in 1923 the B.B.C. made repeated attempts to secure authority to introduce controversial subjects. But the rule against controversy was maintained both under the Company and for the first year of the Corporation. During the régime of the Company, the Post Office exercised an over-riding censorship of subject and material. Arising out of the recommendations of the Crawford Committee on broadcasting, the Government, in licensing the Corporation at the end of 1926, decided to transfer censorship functions from the Post Office to the Corporation for an experimental period. But the prohibition of political, industrial and religious controversy was to be maintained. Apparently the intention of the Government was to test the discretion of the new authority. Six months was the duration of the experimental period originally contemplated. This, however, was extended to fourteen months. Meanwhile the B.B.C. lost no opportunity of emphasising the view that controversial matter should be admitted. Some debates were organised, but the limitations necessarily imposed irritated both the speakers and the listening public. The situation became acute when a series of "debates and counter-debates," organised in co-operation with King Edward's Hospital Fund for London, had to be abandoned before completion. There followed a period of violent Press attacks, most of which were directed unfairly against the B.B.C. These attacks subsided when it became generally realised that the B.B.C. did not agree with the policy of restriction which it was reluctantly applying. It should be noted, however, that the violence of the Press discussion was not discovered to reflect any widespread or deep interest in the subject. On the contrary, the general body of listeners was apathetic.

Late in February 1928 the Government re-considered the position and decided to remove the restrictions. On March 5th the Prime Minister gave the following reply to a question from Captain Ian Fraser, C.B.E., M.P. :—

"The Government have reviewed the decision taken at the time of the constitution of the British Broadcasting Corporation, under which the Corporation has been

prohibited from broadcasting (a) expressions of opinion by the Corporation on matters of public policy, and (b) statements involving matters of political, religious or industrial controversy. The Government have decided that the first of these prohibitions, *i.e.*, that on the issue of 'editorial' pronouncements, must be maintained; but that the second shall be withdrawn forthwith. The Corporation has been informed that the Government expect it to use the discretionary power thus experimentally entrusted to it strictly in accordance with the spirit of the Crawford Committee's Report, and that it is its responsibility to see that this is done."

On the same day the Postmaster-General sent to the B.B.C. a formal communication elaborating the Prime Minister's statement and making the following comment:—

"The prohibition has now been in operation for fourteen months, and the Postmaster-General desires me to convey to the Governors his appreciation of the loyal and punctilious manner in which they have conformed to the obligations thereby imposed."

The effect of the Prime Minister's announcement was to give the B.B.C. freedom to develop controversial subjects in an experimental way in accordance with the spirit of the Report of the Crawford Committee. It is pertinent, therefore, to refer to this report, of which the relevant passage reads:—

"We are unable to lay down a precise line of policy or to assess the degree to which argument can be safely transmitted. In the absence of authoritative evidence, such advice would be premature. But, speaking gener-

THE BROADCASTING OF POLITICS

BROADCASTING played an important part in the General Election of 1929. With its constituency of more than twenty million people, the B.B.C. brought the election issues to at least one house in every three in the country. The election of 1924 had a wireless audience less considerable, although even then estimated as representing one house in every six or seven. There were only three political broadcasts in the General Election of 1924, and of these only one was definitely successful.

With the removal of the ban on political controversy in February 1928, the possibilities of the regular broadcasting of politics became a subject of active interest. The B.B.C. had offered on several occasions to broadcast the Budget speech from the House of Commons. Representatives of the three parties tried to devise a mutually acceptable plan whereby politics would find a regular place in the programmes. The main point at issue was whether the Government should enjoy an advantage. Were there three distinctive bodies of opinion in the country with equal claims to this national rostrum? The Liberals and the Labour Party maintained that there were. The Government, taking the other view, claimed the right to reply to each Opposition address. Eventually, it was agreed—although under protest from the Liberal and Labour Parties—that the Government should give four broadcasts before the Dissolution, and the Opposition Parties two each. Before the series began there was an interesting and successful experiment in a new form of presentation. This was a series of consecutive addresses on one evening on the subject of the Local Government Bill. Even then, however, the Government—on the right to reply—got in the last word. This form of discussion was greatly appreciated. The subsequent election broadcasts also attracted much interest, naturally increasing as the date of the election itself drew nearer. The names of the speakers and the dates of their addresses were as follows:—

April 8th	Sir Laming Worthington-Evans	(Conservative)
April 11th	Mr. Arthur Henderson	(Labour)
April 16th	Sir Austen Chamberlain	(Conservative)
April 19th	Mr. Lloyd George	(Liberal)

May 27th	Sir John Simon	(Liberal)
May 28th	Mr. MacDonald	(Labour)
May 29th	Mr. Baldwin	(Conservative)

The limitation of the time available, and the careful preparation in advance, gave to these political broadcasts a conciseness, a compactness, and a logical order, which on the political platform are rarely possible. More political information from authoritative sources was, in fact, communicated by broadcasting to the mass of the people in the course of this election than on any previous occasion. Another effect of broadcasting on politics was observed in a new mood of close and silent attention at election meetings—a mood which Lord Linlithgow, in a letter to *The Times*, ascribed to the educational effect of the policy of the B.B.C. It would seem that the increased popularity of broadcast talks has fostered concentration and attentive listening, and this reacted upon political assemblages, making them much freer from noisy and irrelevant interruption than ever before.

Finally, mention should be made of the political broadcasts of a non-party nature, the most notable of which was that on Sept. 2nd, 1929, by Mr. Philip Snowden, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, on his return from the Hague Conference at which the Young Plan was revised in favour of Great Britain. The speeches of Mr. MacDonald and others were broadcast from the League of Nations meeting at Geneva a few days later. In the non-party category also must be included Mr. Churchill's exposition of his Budget of April 1929.

ARE TALKS TOO HIGHBROW?

YES: no: it doesn't really matter what you answer. It depends upon the height or shallowness of your brow. It depends upon which talks you mean. A member of the B.B.C. staff was staying with friends some time ago when his host turned on a vaudeville programme on the wireless. After a trial of a few minutes he switched over to the other wave-length to hear the Cesar Franck Symphony. The son and heir of the house at this point unobtrusively but with a very determined look on his face walked out. Now, many people who have come to love music remember doing just that sort of thing, and that in its degree is typical of many people's attitude to talks. Much of the criticism comes from people who have either never listened to a talk or who have never paused to consider what policy might lie behind it all. Broadcasting is very young and there is nothing depressing about all this. The B.B.C. still has a good deal to learn about its own job; listeners no less have a lot to learn about theirs. Few have yet attained to what, after all, is the first state of grace in listening—few, that is, approach broadcast programmes with any attempt at intelligent selection.

The range of interests and of standards of intelligence among listeners creates, of course, an almost insoluble prob-

philosophy of freedom. Many will know of the extraordinarily widespread interest created by Professor Burt's talks on "The Study of the Mind." Philosophy and psychology are fierce words, but through broadcasting they are acquiring a familiarity which breeds not contempt but confidence among listeners.

That is the vindication of the B.B.C.'s policy, the changing, growing interest of listeners. Correspondence proves it. So do the sales of pamphlets and the ascending figures of the Talks Programme circulation. There is only one sense in which the charge of highbrow talks could be admitted. There are those who believe that they know "what the public wants": men, masters of a trick psychology, who know how to exploit the meaner and more vulgar elements in our anatomy. It is easy, and to some profitable, to deprave the public taste in such a way, but it is not a creed, it is irrelevant to life except as it effaces beauty and belies the truth. Wireless preserves the sense of its own adventure. It has its creed. It has no concern with that kind of thing. If to be highbrow is to be in the vanguard of thought, to be curious for new knowledge, to believe in human nature, to press far more wide open the doors of our imagination, then the B.B.C.'s Talks are highbrow. Broadcasters and listeners have great issues at stake. They cannot afford to lay waste their powers to amuse, to speculate, to lose the fine

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DRAMA AND VAUDEVILLE

The case of broadcast drama and vaudeville is more complicated. In music, taste in selecting works and executants, and faithfulness in transmitting the art as it stands, were requirements that, however difficult to meet, were obvious, and success was bound to confer prestige. In "Productions," on the contrary, the old art-forms of the stage proved almost completely inapplicable to the new medium, and a fresh start had to be made. This fresh start involved on the one hand the encouragement of original writing for the microphone and the thoroughgoing adaptation of stories, novels, and stage plays, and on the other the development of a peculiar technique of presentation. On the creative side, considerable strides have been made in this country in the last few years, but broadcast drama has not yet, in general, attracted playwrights with established stage reputations. One consequence of this is the appearance in the B.B.C. programmes of a fairly large number of translations of the work of foreign radio-dramatists. On the side of presentation, on the contrary, British practice is probably the most advanced in the world. Yet these advances have in their turn brought new dangers. At one stage of development, experiments with the machinery of the medium (dramatic control panel, multiple-studio technique and, at an earlier stage, realism in noise effects) occupied all the ingenuity of the dramatic producer. But this stage was as valuable as it was perilous, and happily it was realised in time that the first essential in a broad-

panel, multiple-studio technique and, at an earlier stage, realism in noise effects) occupied all the ingenuity of the dramatic producer. But this stage was as valuable as it was perilous, and happily it was realised in time that the first essential in a broadcast drama is simplicity and that the technique of production must be the servant, never the master, of the material which is to be presented.

Still more difficult has been, and is, the problem of vaudeville. Verbal wit, alone and unsupported, has never greatly appealed to British audiences, and broadcasting cannot transmit to the listener the violent and irresistible appeal that devices such as the false nose, the slipping trousers, the crushed top hat, or the upset chair, possess for the eye, nor yet the grace or the cleverness of dancing. Further, of all artists, comedians probably most need the stimulus of the crowded hall, for which the

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www.americanradiohistory.com

“studio audience” is a poor substitute. Lastly, a great deal of humorous material that is accepted readily enough in the music-hall is out of place as listened to in the home. In the presence of such difficulties, all that variety of items, ingenuity of presentation, and the introduction of celebrities and novelties, can do, scarcely alters the fact that broadcasting is not the ideal medium for the comedian. Here too, then, the future depends on the development of an art peculiar to broadcasting, and this in its turn depends on the discovery of creative writers and artists suited to the purpose.

PROPAGANDA

by

THE HON. HAROLD NICOLSON, M.P.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Information

The British public, I am glad to feel, have a healthy dislike of all forms of governmental propaganda. It may be for this reason that the Ministry of Information (which is our equivalent of the vast propaganda agencies maintained at enormous cost by the totalitarian States) is the most unpopular department in the whole British Commonwealth of Nations. The British public do not want to be told what they ought to think or feel; they much resent any Government Department which seeks to control what they should see or write or read or hear. They wish to express their thoughts freely and to have free access to the thoughts of others. The press also is enraged by the limitations which in wartime must be imposed upon the freedom of news; and I am bound to extend all sympathy to the ardent journalist who snatches a story red hot from the oven of history only to see it become cold and dry and stale upon the censor's desk. In so far as I am connected with the Ministry of Information, I regret of course that our motives should so frequently be misinterpreted, our intelligence be so cruelly underestimated, and our shining virtues and achievements be not merely ignored—which in itself would be hard to bear—but actually denied or turned to ridicule and contempt. Yet as a citizen of the British Commonwealth, and as a person who in times of peace wallows in the liberal point of view, I am glad that this great family of nations should refuse to imitate the subservience of the slave peoples, or to become that 'mutton-headed herd of sheep' which, according to their Führer, the German nation has always been and always will be. If the Ministry of Information were to become a beloved feature of our political life, then I should indeed feel that something had gone very wrong with the mental and spiritual health of my countrymen. The Ministry, like the black-out, is a regret-

PROPAGANDA

table necessity of war. Yet although we never hope, or even wish, to be loved, we should like to be a little less misunderstood. The reason for this misunderstanding is that many people imagine that the Ministry of Information is attempting (in some clumsy, amateurish, and most inefficient manner) to imitate the technique of Doctor Joseph Goebbels. Nothing could be more unfair. We are convinced that totalitarian methods of propaganda are not only foolish as such, but wholly inapplicable to a civilized community. If the British public saw that we were trying to do something quite different from what Dr. Goebbels is trying to do, then the misunderstanding between us might be diminished. I feel, therefore, that it will not be out of place to explain the essential difference between the theory and practice of German, or totalitarian, propaganda, and those of British, or democratic, propaganda.

Herr Hitler's theory of propaganda, as expounded with such a wealth of detail and such disregard for grammar in the pages of *Mein Kampf*, is already well known in this country. His purpose has been to create a mass of uniform and unthinking opinion completely subservient to his dictatorship. His avowed method is to appeal to the lowest instincts in human nature, namely to envy, malice, greed, fear, and conceit. He addresses himself not to the civilized mind of the German nation but to its primitive, and often unconscious, emotions. He seeks from these emotions to create a nucleus of inflamed sentiment which can be lashed to fever-point, now from this direction and now from that, and which in itself precludes the critical or even the rational frame of mind. He aims at constantly maintaining this high temperature of sentiment by the use of symbols and bogies, and by the constant provision of some new excitement or some new hatred. He employs repetition, exaggeration, emphasis, and the distortion of reality as deliberate weapons wherewith to stun and shatter the intelligence of the German people. He mouths fantastic promises, yells out imaginary threats, screams and weeps over fictitious grievances. He

Lord Reith : House of Lords debate on broadcasting policy, May 1952

And could there not be less ambiguity about timing? One reading suggests—and it is intended to suggest—that there will be no sponsored television till the B.B.C. has finished its television coverage and has also introduced V.H.F. So, with money and labour and materials as they are in this country, sponsored television is many years away. But the White Paper does not say that; it only gives the B.B.C. a first claim: that is all. Is it beyond possibility that the Government, urged by some malcontents, might somehow find the finance to enable another claim to be made simultaneously? Why do they say: the radio industry must be given as soon as possible the technical information necessary to enable them to design and produce adaptors. And what did the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the President of the Board of Trade mean by telling the Institution of Electrical Engineers last Saturday: Next year television sets which can be switched to different channels will be on sale to the public. One channel will receive the B.B.C., the second the future alternative programmes. Owners of existing monopoly sets will be able to buy adaptors for about £5. In the last three years the B.B.C. has been allowed £5,500,000 for capital construction. One-tenth of this might be permitted to competitors in the next three. I cannot subscribe to the theory that the B.B.C. can go on developing its system while all others are banned. I have given the noble Earl who is to speak for the Government notice of these matters, so he knows about them. Actually, I gather that this Member of another place never made the speech at all: that is what he would have said if he had had the opportunity to make the speech. I ask the Government: Has he advance information of the Government's intentions? A last question on this point: If sponsoring is to come, what arguments could there be for confining it to television?

§ Now I close. I have never spoken on broadcasting in this House before. I may have done this great cause no good: maybe even harm, because I well realise that, during the years of my association [1297](#) with the B.B.C., I built up for myself an immense unpopularity and dislike which

surrounds me still. And yet what was done was approved. For that I claim no credit. I tried to do as I had been taught in the Manse of the College Church in Glasgow. I believe that I was peculiarly helped in plan and execution, and through every sort of opposition, vehement and powerful and determined though it often were. To-day, thanks to Sir William Haley, and Governors, and a devoted staff, British broadcasting commands the respect and admiration of the whole world; an institution of which England—yes, and Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland—can be proud; one which we should be jealous and quick to safeguard and defend.

§ What grounds are there for jeopardising this heritage and tradition? Not a single one is even suggested in the White Paper. Why sell it down the river? Do we find leadership and decision in this White Paper; or compromise and expediency—a facing-both-ways? A principle absolutely fundamental and cherished is scheduled to be scuttled. It is the principle that matters, and it is neither here nor there that the scuttling may not take place for years. The Government are here on record to scuttle—a betrayal and a surrender; that is what is so shocking and serious; so unnecessary and wrong. Somebody introduced dog-racing into England; we know who, for he is proud of it, and proclaims it *urbi et orbi* in the columns of *Who's Who*. And somebody introduced Christianity and printing and the uses of electricity. And somebody introduced smallpox, bubonic plague and the Black Death. Somebody is minded now to introduce sponsored broadcasting into this country. Two things said Immanuel Kant, fill the mind with wonder and awe, the more often and the more intently the mind of thought is drawn to them—the starry heavens above me, the moral law within me. The stars are somewhat depreciated, and man is losing his sense of wonder in these egalitarian days. But what about the moral law? Need we be ashamed of moral values, or of intellectual and ethical objectives? It is these that are here and now at stake. My powers of persuasion may be feeble, my influence [1298](#)very slight, but with all the earnest and urgent conviction of which a man is capable. I ask the Government—especially the noble Marquess whom the whole House admire and trust—to think again. I appeal to them to do so. And leave this thought with them, because right is right, to follow right were wisdom in the scorn of consequence. I beg to move for Papers.

Meeting popular demand

From BBC Yearbook 1968

Robin Scott

Controller, Radio 1 and 2

Radio 1 on 247. . . . Radio 2 on 1500 and VHF. Anyone who switched on two radio sets separately tuned to the Light Programmes' medium and long (or VHF) wavelengths at 7 am on Saturday, 30 September 1967 witnessed the strident birth-pangs of a much-heralded and rather bouncy new radio network – or, rather, the emergence of two new programmes, one resembling in many respects the old 'Light' (but with a number of new features), the other brand new in style (but sharing some of the most popular features of the other).

Against a background of political and commercial squabbling, confused thinking and often ill-informed controversy, the White Paper of December 1966 paved the way for a Bill to outlaw the activities of 'pirate' broadcasters and called on the BBC to provide a continuous service of popular music from 5.30 am to 7.30 pm and 10 pm to 2 am. This service was to be carried on the Light Programme medium-wave of 247 metres.

The exact nature of this service and its scope were not – nor could be – exactly defined at the time. The 'popular music' label was applied – or misapplied – to a wide variety of types of music.

It was argued, in many ways with justification, that the Light Programme (apart from news and weather summaries) contained less than two and a half hours of 'speech' programmes in the fourteen hours from 5.30 am to 7.30 pm. It was noted that in spite of 'pirate' competition the Monday to Friday average audience during the breakfast period from 7 am to 9 am had increased by over one million since 1964; that if some inroads had been made into the audiences particularly at weekends these were considerably smaller than the exaggerated claims made by the 'pirate' broadcasters – and this in spite of the fact that the unrestricted (and illegal) use of gramophone records made their programme-building tasks comparatively easy.

Even so, there was clear evidence of a demand for a new-style radio programme and the opportunity to provide this was eagerly seized.

It was immediately evident that a new service could not be valid if it was merely to offer a popular music alternative to the speech programmes on the existing Light Programme whilst otherwise relaying the normal pattern of programmes. Nor could it just be an extension of the 'pop' and popular music output of the Light. This had gradually expanded over the years, acquiring at various times of the day something approaching the format of North American radio with

programme 'segments' or 'strips' of two or three hours' length. But much of this output – particularly the mid-morning period – still retained the fragmented planning pattern of former years.

The new network had to be more than an occasional alternative to the 'Light'. As far as was possible with the resources available, particularly in terms of 'needle time' (the permitted hours of broadcasting of commercial records) Radio 1 had to be designed as a programme with an individual style of presentation. Presentation in its widest sense – to borrow a commercial analogy – embraces everything from the promotion to the packaging of the product. To a radio station delivering a constant stream of popular music in one form or another the manner of delivery is all-important. This must be both professional and personal.

There were, understandably, hundreds of candidates for the important jobs of presenting the peak programmes on Radio 1. From all the 'known quantities' and from auditions about forty names emerged. On about twenty of these rested the main responsibility for launching Radio 1 and sustaining Radio 2. Some of those selected had learnt their professions with 'pirate' radios or with commercial radio stations in the Commonwealth, others had acquired their skills with the BBC Light Programme. Most are young broadcasters – but it was quite evident that a few of the 'older hands' commanded a very wide following and had a special appeal to the 9 am to 5 pm audience which mainly consists of housewives.

And what of the 'product' itself – the musical content? The 'pirates' with few exceptions copied North American formats based on permutations of the Top 20, 30 or 40 best-selling records interlarded with the occasional novelty or hit from yesteryear. On to the basic 'pop' format were grafted station identifications of various kinds, jingles and commercials, with the disc jockey carrying the whole format forward at a pretty frenetic pace. A far cry from the days of Christopher Stone!

None of these stations was concerned with covering the whole spectrum of popular music, for this is not considered commercially viable. But the Light Programme continued to have surprising success with its attempts to please everybody all the time. 'Breakfast Special' was – and is – also a 'format' with only about 30 per cent needle-time providing a fairly fast moving pattern of contrasted types of music and interpretations – from brass bands to 'pop'. Its audience has consistently increased, with a peak audience of 5½ to 6 million at 8 am and a considerably higher total 'patronage'.

I Chairman's Foreword

*BBC Chairman
Marmaduke
Hussey with a
bronze bust of
Lord Reith on
the centenary of
Reith's birth*



This has been a year of significant change for the BBC and for the whole broadcasting industry. This might easily have been written in each of my three previous introductions to the BBC's Annual Report to Parliament. But, after so many predictions, much guesswork and some false starts, we have finally seen in the last 12 months the real transformation of the broadcasting landscape.

The BBC began its life as a government-protected monopoly and then, after the arrival of ITV, became part of a government-protected duopoly. Now that comfortable arrangement has gone once and for all, and the BBC is part, albeit the largest and most wide-ranging part, of a multi-national, highly competitive and increasingly market-directed industry. The passage of the

Broadcasting Bill this year and the growth of satellite television and commercial radio channels underscore this sea-change.

The BBC has welcomed this new broadcasting environment. Much has been achieved by everyone in the BBC over the past years and I believe that we are now a more confident and better-managed organisation. Our structures have been rationalised. The Board of Governors and Board of Management work harmoniously together. Our staff has a much clearer idea of the BBC's objectives and they are better equipped to face the Nineties. Last summer's dispute, though, focused our minds on the challenges which confront the BBC. The fundamental issue we face is to reconcile an adequate and competitive staff remuneration with the investment necessary to retain and continually to improve the quality of our programmes. The resolution of this equation, examined in the 'Funding the Future' report published at the beginning of the year, will inevitably affect the way the BBC is structured and staffed. The recommendations of that report are a start, but senior management will have to work hard to maintain the momentum.

The guiding principle of the BBC must be what it always has been – to provide the widest range of quality programmes right across the full range of licence-payers' tastes, interests and enthusiasms, or, as the Charter outlines, to inform, educate and entertain.

In the past year we celebrated an important anniversary – the centenary of the birth of Lord Reith. In 1924, when broadcasting technology was in its infancy, John Reith defined with remarkable prescience the objectives of the BBC in a deceptively simple but telling sentence:

'The BBC's role is to bring the best of

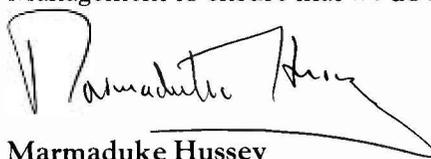
everything to the greatest number of homes.'

I am proud to repeat Reith's words because I believe that BBC programmes in the past year have demonstrated beyond doubt our continuing commitment to his vision. The BBC reported the historic events in Eastern Europe on television, radio and the World Service with unrivalled authority and immediacy. There is still an enormous hunger for unbiased news and information in this country and across the world. The World Service's trusted role in disseminating truth in this year of European revolutions has been outstanding. The time has now come when the World Service should secure the appropriate funds to augment its radio broadcasting with television transmissions. At home we are all conscious of the impact that the successful introduction of cameras to the House of Commons has made to political coverage on television and we welcome it. The World Service equally should add cameras to their microphones.

What makes the BBC different from every other broadcaster is its method of funding. The licence fee is a unique contract between the broadcaster and the public, which listens to and watches BBC programmes for an average of nearly three hours a day, every single day of the year.

That represents extraordinary loyalty and affection for our programmes in all their diversity, nationally, regionally and locally and, equally, extraordinary value for money.

The licence fee, I believe, remains the best system available for ensuring that the BBC retains its courage, integrity and independence – independence from pressure from any source, political, commercial or propagandist. In return for this distinctive form of funding, the BBC must be ever conscious of the privilege and responsibility that goes with it. We must continue to offer licence-payers the highest quality programmes, enabling the nation to speak to itself in a fair and unbiased manner, in news and information, entertainment and the arts. Critical to that is not just quality but the objective and impartial presentation of public issues across our entire output. Every time we fall below those high standards we weaken the argument for the retention of the licence fee. It is the joint responsibility of the Board of Governors and the Board of Management to ensure that we do not.



Marmaduke Hussey
Chairman

From BBC Yearbook 1993

I Chairman's Foreword

The modern BBC is the inheritor of a great tradition of quality, artistic talent, honest accurate reporting and above all independence. We must maintain and enhance this tradition while fitting the BBC for the fast-changing and competitive world into which we have been thrust.

For time does not stand still. The old, talented but rather leisurely BBC simply does not fit into the multi-national competitive business of today. But the ideals and quality which fashioned that BBC are more relevant than ever. They stood like beacons in the old broadcasting world. They will shine as brightly in the new.

The Governors have never doubted that for the BBC to survive in anything like its present form, changes would need to be far-reaching and to affect every area. And they would have to be effected fast. The timetable was set by the rapid pace of change elsewhere in broadcasting and accelerated by the need to replace our Charter, which expires in 1996. As I write, the Government will shortly publish a White Paper outlining the future of the BBC for the next decade.

We have had to demonstrate that our performance justifies a universal service paid for by the licence fee. Our objective has been to create the best-managed corporation in the public sector without sacrificing the historic values of our output. Three recent productions, *Middlemarch*, the bi-media coverage of the Prague Festival, and the events of D-Day, demonstrate that the BBC's flair, skill and inspiration flourish undimmed.

I BBC Board of Governors

Standing left to right:

Sir David Scholey CBE

Lord Nicholas Gordon Lennox KCMG KCVO

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield KCB

Bill Jordan CBE

Dr Jane Glover

Dr Gwyn Jones

Janet Cohen

Seated left to right:

Shahwar Sadeque

Lord Cocks Vice-Chairman

Marmaduke Hussey Chairman

Margaret Spurr

Sir Graham Hills

This last year has seen the implementation of a series of vital and far-reaching policy initiatives. The application has been uncomfortable, but the benefits for the viewer and listener will be increasingly obvious.

A radical examination of our overheads, financial systems and resource base, conducted during the past year, will throw up very substantial annual savings in excess of £100 million. An unsustainable overdraft has already been dramatically reduced. Over the years ahead there will be significant investment in more and better programmes.

There has already been increased investment in our news and current affairs. Over the last two years we have employed 290 more journalists, whereas elsewhere in the media their numbers have been reduced. These substantial improvements flow directly from the programme of reforms. No one has suggested how else they could have been achieved.

The whole media industry is in a period of great change. The ITV companies, following the application of the 1990 Act, are subject to take-over bids. Sky Television, with the cable industry in its wake, bounds forward, competing for audiences and advertising revenue with ITV, Channel 4 and the national newspapers. Major public companies are now fighting to hold or increase their share of a declining market.

As the ITC have already pointed out, quality may suffer.

In an intensely competitive scene, the BBC stands out as the only stable element with clear objectives: independence, quality and value for money. We can therefore approach the Charter negotiations with some confidence. It is a more heartening prospect for the Corporation, both in the United Kingdom and across the world, than appeared likely in the 1980s.

The hard work and difficulties of the last few years now present the BBC with a glittering opportunity to consolidate its role as an international broadcaster.

We have the archives, the brand name and a wealth of talent, and we are already a net exporter. Our name stands high, especially in Europe. When I was in Prague last year, the Chamber of Deputies halted an important debate to pay tribute to the organisation that has "kept alive the flame of truth in the last 50 dark years".

No one disputes that the collapse of the communist empire was fuelled by access to western television and radio, particularly the World Service. Mr Rupert Murdoch was right to say that "advances in television technology have proved an unambiguous threat to totalitarian regimes everywhere. They cannot escape the eagle eye of BBC, ITV, CNN and Sky". It was therefore disappointing when he chose to remove

BBC television news from China and replace it, not with Sky News, but American films.

The world opportunity remains. The appetite for accurate news and quality television and radio is growing fast; we will supply it. We have reorganised the BBC to meet the international challenge. World Service Television will shortly match in coverage and quality the service provided over the years by World Service radio.

In the seven years I have been with the BBC we have often wondered what were our most dangerous threats. There are said to be three.

First, the political. I have never believed in that. Governments of whatever hue will require a publicly-funded BBC to be efficient - of course. Some politicians will always try to influence the BBC editorially - of course. I don't blame them for trying. I only blame ourselves if we give way, and I do not think most people in political life expect us to. Fundamentally they respect the independence of the BBC and wish to retain it.

Second, there is the competitive threat. That is more dangerous. We now have many more competitors. But they are constrained by the need to sell their products, create profitable businesses and pay dividends.

The licence-fee frees us from these constraints and imposes on us the obligation to provide an alternative service to commercial broadcasting -

a service of quality and diversity, with challenging programmes in peak periods. It is an obligation I believe we can meet.

Finally, there is the threat that the BBC will not itself have the determination and strength to face the future - self-inflicted wounds are always the most dangerous.

An historic institution must never let outdated ways and customs clog its joints, lest they become arthritic. If it does not keep in step with the changing world, it inevitably becomes antiquated and of no contemporary relevance.

We have moved fast and we have made some mistakes. It won't be easy, but overall we have created a marvellous opportunity for the BBC both at home and abroad.

I am confident we have the courage and will to seize it.

Marmaduke Hussey Chairman