

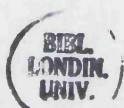
**The Development of Communication Between the
Government, the Media and the People in Britain,
1945-51**

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Ph.D. Thesis: Department of International History

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The Development of Communication Between the Government, the Media and the People in Britain, 1945-51

Abstract

This thesis will argue that 1945-51 was a seminal period in the development of communication between the Government, the media and the people in Britain. The Attlee Government was the first British Government to fully engage with the dilemma of how a Government communicates with its citizens to sustain a credible democracy. To do this it established the modern machinery of Government communication and used the mass media extensively. Its experience, and in particular the crises it faced during its two terms in office, caused it to shift away from an idealistic vision of helping to develop an informed electorate towards the pragmatic use of information as a means of persuasion and a tool for engineering consent. The period laid the framework, in other words, of modern information management.

In order to demonstrate this the thesis will show how the Government's attitudes changed over its period in office, and how its approach towards communication altered. It will start by examining how and why the Government established the machinery of communication in 1945. It will then seek to explain why the Government's relationship with the Press deteriorated so far and so fast, and with what consequences. It will try to demonstrate that there was the genuine possibility of radical reform of the Press and that it is important to understand why this did not happen. The thesis will go on to consider the closeness of the Government-BBC relationship after the war and how that closeness seriously damaged the credibility of the Corporation's monopoly. It will assess the Government's major experiment in film-making and why it found it so difficult to use film as a means of informing the public. And, it will show how the Government ignored, alienated and eventually collaborated with the newsreels. The thesis will end by assessing the distance the Government had travelled in its use of communication.

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Abbreviations Used in the Text

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

COI – Central Office of Information

DG – Director General

EIC – Economic Information Committee

EIU – Economic Information Unit

IRD – Information Research Department

MOI – Ministry of Information

PEP – Political and Economic Planning

PRO – Public Relations Officer

Abbreviations Used in the Notes

CAB – Cabinet Records, Public Record Office

EIU – Economic Information Unit

FO – Foreign Office, Public Record Office

HO – Home Office, Public Record Office

IH – Home Information Services (Ministerial) Committee

IH(O) – Home Information Services (Official) Committee

IH(O)(E) – Economic Information (Official) Committee

INF – Central Office of Information, Public Record Office

IS – Information Services Committee (Ministerial)

MH – Ministry of Health, Public Record Office

NRA – Newsreel Association

PC(O)C – Prosperity Campaign (Official) Committee

RCP – Royal Commission on the Press

ME-RCP – Minutes of Evidence to Royal Commission on the Press

RG – Social Survey, Public Record Office

Introduction

This thesis will argue that 1945-51 was a seminal period in the development of communication between the Government, the media and the people in Britain. The Attlee Government was the first British Government to fully engage with the dilemma of how a Government communicates with its citizens to sustain a credible democracy. To do this it established the modern machinery of Government communication and used the mass media extensively. Its experience, and in particular the crises it faced during its two terms in office, caused it to shift away from an idealistic vision of helping to develop an informed electorate towards the pragmatic use of information as a means of persuasion and a tool for engineering consent. The period laid the framework, in other words, of modern information management.

In 1945 the Labour Government did not think too much about the dilemma of how to communicate within a democracy. It had much else on its mind. The war was ending and there was the huge task of making the transition to peace. Moreover, the Government had plans to overhaul the entire economic infrastructure of the country.

Yet it is important to recognise that Labour was in a distinctly different position from its predecessors as regards to communication. Pre-1914 Governments had not engaged with the dilemma because they had not needed to. Before 1918 less than a third of the adult population, under eight million people, could vote.¹ This rose to 30 million, just under the whole of the adult population, by the 1930s.² Prior to the Second World War the civil service, though growing, was still limited.

¹ Electorate 1910: 7,694,741. Electorate 1931: 29,960,071, Butler & Sloman, *British Political Facts* (Fifth Edition, 1980), p.208.

² Ibid. By far the largest increase was in 1918 itself.

And before the 1920s, it was not possible to deliver a similar message to virtually the whole population simultaneously.³

By 1945 this had all changed. Not only did almost the whole adult population have the vote but they had been politicised by the war. Everyone had a more immediate relationship with the state at the war's end than at its beginning. This was not surprising since the 'bureaucratic empire' had, in Richard Crossman's words, 'been both enormously enlarged and dangerously centralized during the war'.⁴ Between 1939 and 1947 the total number of civil servants jumped from 397,570 to 722,294.⁵ In addition, the penetration of the contemporary news media was approaching saturation point. The national daily press, whose circulation had jumped from 3.1 million in 1918 to 10.6 million on the eve of World War Two, was now read by 87% of the adult population (its circulation would continue to rise to its all time peak in 1950).⁶ Over 30 million people went to the cinema, and saw the newsreels, each week.⁷ Almost 10 million homes had a radio.⁸

The significance of these structural developments should not be underestimated. For the first time it seemed as if the democratic ideal, of 'common information' for the whole community, could, theoretically, be fulfilled. Walter Lippman wrote in 1922, that whereas 'the pioneer democrats did not possess the material for resolving the conflict between the known range of man's attention and their

³ Thanks to the introduction of radio broadcasting in the 1920s and cinema sound in 1930 the inter-war period was 'the point in British politics at which the medium and the message became inescapably intertwined', John Ramsden, *Appetite for Power* (1999), p.256.

⁴ Richard Crossman, 'The Lessons of 1945', in Perry Anderson et al., *Towards Socialism* (1965), p.155.

⁵ Cabinet Paper, CP(47)150, 'The Number and Cost of the Civil Service', 15-5-1947, CAB 129/18.

⁶ Murdock and Golding, 'The Structure, Ownership and Control of the Press' in Boyce, Curran and Wingate, *Newspaper History from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day* (1978) p.130. Hulton Readership Survey (1947).

⁷ Perilli, 'Statistical Survey of the British Cinema Industry' in Curran and Porter, *British Cinema History*, (1983), p.372, Table 1.

⁸ The number of households paying a BBC Radio Licence Fee passed 10 million in January 1946. See Programme Policy Meeting minutes, 29-1-1946, R34/615/4, BBC-WAC.

illimitable faith in his dignity', the material, in the form of the mass media, was now available.⁹ By 1945 it was therefore possible for a Political and Economic Planning broadsheet to state that 'it is high time, in consonance with democratic principle, that fuller and simpler explanations be given to the great majority of people, who have a right to know why and what their government has done, is doing, and wishes to do'.¹⁰

In addition to these structural changes, Labour's attitude in 1945 was fundamentally different from its pre-war predecessors. Communication, if not at the forefront of their mind, was implicit in much of the new Government's thinking. The war had generated a huge confidence in the potential positive influence of the state. Peter Hennessy has said of the new Ministers in the administration that, 'They really did think that Jerusalem could be builded here'.¹¹ But it could only be built if the Government organised it, planned it, and led it. This was what ministers believed the war had shown and was what the electorate had voted for in July 1945. As Hilary Marquand, the Secretary for Overseas Trade, said in a speech in autumn 1945, 'The verdict of the election was unmistakably in favour of planning'.¹² Communication would be vital in translating planning into action.

Labour was also committed to a much closer partnership with the people. The Party's legitimacy was based very consciously on its belief in its role as the representative of the people's interest, as compared with the Conservative representation of 'Big Business' (according to the Labour manifesto). Nationalisation meant an unprecedented alliance of the people with the state. The war and the election landslide gave Labour the confidence that such an

⁹ Walter Lippman, *Public Opinion* (1922), 1997 Edition, p.165

¹⁰ PEP Broadsheet, No.230, 'Government Information Services', 2-2-1945.

¹¹ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again – Britain 1945-51* (1992), p.118.

¹² Marquand, 'Our Production Plan', essay based on lecture given in the autumn of 1945, re-printed in *Forward From Victory! Labour's Plan* (1946), p.52.

alliance was both necessary and attainable. Just as the war 'persuaded Government that victory hinged upon a frank and acknowledged partnership between the Government and the people' so too, they believed, would success in the peace.¹³

Therefore it was with idealistic intentions and democratic principles in mind that, at the end of the war, the Government decided to establish the machinery of communication (the Central Office of Information, the departmental press offices, and the Prime Minister's public relations adviser). At this point Ministers assumed that packaging the information would be simple, that channelling it to the public via the mass media would be straightforward, and that ensuring it was seen, understood and acted upon by the public would not be a problem. All these unexamined assumptions would be challenged over the following six years.

1945 was, therefore, a critical turning point in the history of Government communications. It was the moment at which the Government recognised the need for communication within a democracy, though not yet the obstacles to it or the difficulties of achieving it.

The subsequent experience of this administration proved instructive for subsequent Governments. It learned, over the course of its first term of office, how disruptive the mass media could be to the process of communication, how difficult it was to produce effective Government information without resorting to persuasion, and how hard it was to make people 'informed'. In the process of trying to resolve some of these difficulties it began to think of presentation as distinct from policy making. It began to consider how it could and should relate to the independent mass media within a democracy and then how to use these media to its advantage. And, for the first time, it began to systematically measure

¹³ Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (1979), p.281.

the public's attitudes to its policies, not just to inform policy making, but also to make the presentation more effective.

Ministers within the administration were convinced that they were justified in taking such action. They were simply trying to gain the consent of the people to plans which they were persuaded would be to everyone's benefit. Indeed the period is characterised by sincere politicians and earnest officials struggling to deal with overwhelming economic and social adversities as best they could. Therefore it was only when Ministers like Herbert Morrison felt their policies were being undermined by what they saw as gross misrepresentation in the newspapers, in mid 1946, that they considered altering the structure of the Press. It was only when the Cabinet saw the failures of Government communication in the wake of the 1947 fuel crisis that it sanctioned its centralisation and the employment of communications specialists. And it was only when Ministers began to realise the constraints on their original ambitions regarding information that they sought to infiltrate their messages through the existing media. But the effect was that in trying to find solutions to these difficult situations, Ministers and officials began to devise and institutionalise the techniques of modern information management.

The term 'information management' has been much used recently. It is a broad and complex concept. Although many writers have endowed the phrase with sinister significance, here it is used in a non-pejorative sense to mean the ways in which a state exercises editorial control over the flow of information from Government. Governments have always sought to control information to some extent but this period, it is argued, was materially different from previous ones. This is partly because of the development and wide diffusion of the mass media, and partly because of the establishment of Government information services.

In an article published in 1987, Robins, Webster and Pickering argued that 'propaganda and information management are normative aspects of modern democratic societies'.¹⁴ Without the sophisticated use of both democratic governments would, they suggested, be unable to ensure cooperation. This thesis will attempt to show how the post-war Labour Government came to believe this was true. It will do so by examining how this administration was first presented with the dilemma of how to inform the public once it had accepted the responsibility to do so. And, by showing that in trying to resolve this dilemma, Labour developed many of the methods and mechanisms of information management that have since become integral to the operation of modern governance.

In order to do this the thesis will show how the Government's attitudes changed over its period in office, and how its approach towards communication altered. It will start by examining how and why the Government established the machinery of communication in 1945. Chapters Two and Three will then seek to explain why the Government's relationship with the Press deteriorated so far and so fast, and with what consequences. It will argue that there was a genuine possibility of radical reform of the Press and that it is important to understand why this did not happen. Chapter Four will go on to consider the closeness of the Government-BBC relationship after the war and how that closeness seriously damaged the credibility of the Corporation's monopoly. Chapter Five will assess the Government's major experiment in film-making and how its difficult experience altered its ambitions and encouraged it to work more pragmatically with the contemporary news media. The thesis will end by assessing the distance the Government had travelled in its use of communication.

¹⁴ Kevin Robbins, Frank Webster and Michael Pickering, 'Propaganda, Information and Social Control', in Jeremy Hawthorn (ed.), *Propaganda, Persuasion and Polemic* (1987), p.8.

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on this period, most of it does not deal with Government communication. The few exceptions approach it in quite a different way from this thesis.

On the 1945-51 period specifically there is one published volume about Government communication, by William Crofts, and two unpublished PhDs. Crofts' dense and valuable book, *Coercion or Persuasion?*, examines Labour's economic publicity campaigns, such as 'Work or Want', women to work and Lancashire cotton. Using the original campaign material and official papers Crofts gives a very good illustration of how extensive Government economic propaganda became in these years. 'No former Government of the United Kingdom had allocated so great a proportion of its resources to the tasks of informing and cajoling its citizens'.¹⁵

The publicity surrounding social legislation was more limited but still widespread, as Thomas Wildy has shown in his 1985 PhD thesis. Wildy examines this publicity, setting it in the context of the introduction of the information services, in order to demonstrate 'the effectiveness with which the COI and other information services were absorbed by the Civil Service Establishment and generally accepted by politicians and public alike'.¹⁶

Both these accounts represent essential background for this thesis. However, both of them concentrate on the publicity campaigns themselves. This thesis will look at the campaigns as part of the Government's overall relationship with the contemporary media. More importantly, this thesis will assess how the Government's relationship and understanding of communication evolved over this formative period.

¹⁵ William Crofts, *Coercion or Persuasion? Propaganda in Britain after 1945* (1989), p.250.

¹⁶ Thomas Wildy, 'Propaganda and Social Policy in Britain 1945-1951: Publicity for the Social Legislation of the Labour Government', PhD, Leeds, 1985.

The other PhD thesis on domestic Government communication at this time is by John Dwight Jenks. Jenks' well-researched study looks at how the state used the media to build and sustain a Cold War consensus between 1948 and 1953. It is particularly useful in illustrating the growing links between the overseas and domestic agendas of the information services as the Cold War deepened. His is also one of the few studies which connects some of the developments in Government information to the evolution of the state's relationship with the media.¹⁷

There are two more general studies on the history of Government Information Services in Britain, by Marjorie Ogilvy-Webb and Thomas Fife Clark, but both are quite dated and suffer from being official accounts. The first is the more useful, describing, in slightly Whiggish terms, the progress of information services up to the mid 1960s.¹⁸

Mariel Grant has written the only study of the development of Government communication up to 1945.¹⁹ She is joined in the late 1930s by other writers who look at the preparations, or lack of preparations, for the use of information in the Second World War.²⁰ These works show how reluctant Whitehall was to create information machinery, and its distaste for propaganda, given the criticisms of its use in the First World War and its abuse by the contemporary Governments of Germany and the Soviet Union.

It was not until just before the outbreak of war itself that the British were able to overcome these sensibilities and set up the Ministry of Information (MOI). The

¹⁷ John Dwight Jenks, 'Hot News / Cold War: The British State, Propaganda and the News Media 1948-53', PhD, University of California, 2000.

¹⁸ Marjorie Ogilvy-Webb, *The Government Explains: A Study of the Information Services* (1965), Sir Thomas Fife Clark, *The Central Office of Information* (1970).

¹⁹ Mariel Grant, *Propaganda and the Role of the State in Inter-War Britain* (1994).

²⁰ Philip M. Taylor, 'If War Should Come: Preparing the Fifth Arm for Total War 1935-39', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.16:1 (1981), pp.27-53, Temple Willcox, 'Projection or Publicity? Rival Concepts in the Pre-War Planning of the Ministry of Information', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.18:1 (1983), pp.97-117.

subsequent experience of the war was decisive. As Ian McLaine has described, in his enjoyable and informative account of the MOI, though the initial years were chaotic and confused, the Ministry eventually became useful and effective.²¹ James Chapman has recently argued the Government went through a similar process in its use of film.²² From the perspective of this thesis these accounts are particularly important because they illustrate how much the Government learnt during the war and how much the conflict influenced its attitudes and approach towards communication.

There are a number of books and articles on specific sectors of the media which are also relevant to this thesis. On the press, Stephen Koss has provocatively suggested that 1947 represents the 'ultimate destination' when newspapers broke free from political parties. Equally intriguing is James Margach's claim that that this newfound independence led to 'an unbridled campaign of screaming irresponsibility, in my experience the worst period for the reputation and standards of journalism'²³. And yet neither these nor other authors go into detail about the behaviour of the press or how its relationship with the Government reached such a nadir that Aneurin Bevan was to call it 'the most prostituted press in the world'.²⁴

Only Tom O'Malley has focused on an aspect of this problem in two interesting articles he wrote in 1997 and 1998.²⁵ O'Malley believes the importance of the Royal Commissions on the Press has been underestimated, especially that of 1947-9, and even calls for someone to look at this one in the broader context of

²¹ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, op.cit. (1979).

²² James Chapman, *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-45* (1995).

²³ James Margach, *The War Between Downing Street and the Media from Lloyd-George to Callaghan* (1978), p.8.

²⁴ Aneurin Bevan to a pre Labour conference rally in Blackpool, May 1948.

²⁵ Tom O'Malley, 'Labour and the 1947-49 Royal Commission on the Press', in Bromley and O'Malley (eds.), *A Journalism Reader* (1997). O'Malley, 'Demanding Accountability: the Press, the Royal Commissions and the Pressure for Reform 1945-77', in Stephenson and Bromley (ed.), *Sex, Lies and Democracy* (1998).

Labour's relationship with the media. Hopefully this thesis will respond to that challenge.

On broadcasting, the most comprehensive study remains Asa (Lord) Briggs' fourth volume of his massive *History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (1979, revised 1995). Briggs' work is very detailed, but written from the perspective of the BBC rather than that of the Government. Briggs also tends to emphasise the constant vigilance with which the BBC protected their independence. That eternal vigilance has since been questioned. In *Power without Responsibility*, Jean Seaton and James Curran write that the reason 'the BBC could claim independence [during the war] was at least partly because it suited the Government that it should do so'.²⁶ Sian Nicholas' absorbing history of the BBC during the war also highlights its close links to the Coalition Government.²⁷ Briggs' comment is more applicable after the war but even then the BBC's position in relation to the Government remained ambiguous and open to abuse, as will be illustrated in this thesis.

On films and newsreels there is a quite distinct historiography. A number of writers on film have commented on this period because it represents the sunset of the celebrated British documentary movement. But this has led to a slightly imbalanced focus on the vicissitudes of this movement as compared to the use of official films for information and propaganda. This gap has been partially filled by Albert Hogenkamp's useful PhD, but given that the Government made over 600 films during these years there is still ample room for research.²⁸ On the newsreels, by contrast, there is virtually nothing published on the post-war period.

²⁶ James Curran and Jean Seaton, *Power without Responsibility – The Press and Broadcasting in Britain*, (5th Edition, 1997), p.147.

²⁷ Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War: Home Front Propaganda and the Wartime BBC 1939-45* (1996).

²⁸ Albert Hogenkamp, 'The British Documentary Movement and the 1945-51 Labour Governments' (PhD, Oxford, 1991).

Even now some seem to consider communications peripheral to the practice of governance in Britain, despite the remarkable explosion in media interest in 'spin' in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. But there has been a significant increase in writing devoted to the subject over the past decade. The vast majority of this is focused on the recent past. Some books go back to the Margaret Thatcher-Bernard Ingham partnership of the 1980s, but few venture earlier than this. One of the main functions of this thesis is to argue that to understand the use of communication by the Government now, one has to look back at least as far as the Second World War.

Government communication does, however, have to be distinguished from political communication. The latter mainly denotes electioneering and Party political communication. It is characterized by books such as Norris' *On Message: Communicating the Campaign* (1999).²⁹ While fascinating, political communication is outside the scope of this study.

This thesis is based as much as possible on primary source material. Since it is a study of the Government and the media, these sources have necessarily had to be broad. To gain an understanding of the Government perspective the study makes extensive use of the official papers at the Public Record Office. These have been supplemented by private and Party papers where possible. These include the biographical papers of Herbert Morrison, the papers and correspondence of Clement Attlee, Francis Williams, Patrick Gordon Walker and Thomas Fife Clarke. The official reports and evidence of the various contemporary commissions, such as the Royal Commission on the Press, have also been used.

To gain an understanding of the Government's relationship with the media and the perspective of the media itself, the thesis has naturally had to rely on

²⁹ Pippa Norris et al., *On Message: Communicating the Campaign* (1999).

contemporary newspapers, journals, newsreels, broadcasts and films. Trade journals such as *World's Press News* have been particularly helpful in giving an insight into the attitude of the press, especially since the individual newspaper archives hold very little of relevance. It has been possible to view many official films and newsreels thanks to the NFTVA at the BFI and the Imperial War Museum Archive. And, it is now even possible to watch Pathé News online within the ITN archive. The chapter on the BBC benefited considerably from the use of the diaries and papers of the Director General at that time, Sir William Haley. I would like to thank the archives for giving me access to the material and all the archivists who have helped me in my research. I am also very grateful to the AHRB for helping to support my research.

Chapter 1: Establishing the Machinery and Methods of Government Communication

This chapter will assess the establishment and use of the information services by the Government between 1945 and 1951. It will argue the Government moved from an unexamined confidence that the communication of information was a straightforward task, to a growing realisation of its complexity, and an eventual willingness to deal with that complexity by managing information.

The first section will look at how and why the Labour Government established the machinery of communication after the Second World War. It will argue that Herbert Morrison, who was in charge of the organisation of post-war information services, believed that communication was a responsibility of modern democratic government. He also thought it was a simple technical function which could be performed on behalf of the departments by a common service unit.

The second section will show how Morrison's assurance of the simplicity of communication was dispelled during the course of 1946. By the end of that year he was becoming convinced that the Government had to think more carefully about how it presented itself and how the communication of policy affected its successful execution.

Morrison's concerns were catapulted to the forefront of the Government's thinking by the fuel crisis of February 1947. The crisis triggered a major review of the importance and manner of communication, examined in the third section. It led to the establishment of a powerful central unit, the Economic Information Unit (EIU), which was responsible for initiating and co-ordinating the communication of economic information. Due to the continuing difficult circumstances with which the Government had to deal, most notably the 1947 currency crisis and the descent into Cold War, ministers such as Morrison and Cripps felt justified in

using the machinery of communication not just to inform but to persuade. As a consequence the more calculated approach to communication characterised by the EIU spread to other areas of Government.

The fourth section examines how the Labour Government drew back from the centralisation of economic information policy. This was as a result of the reactions of the departments, the opposition, and the media, and due to the budgetary constraints imposed by Sir Stafford Cripps. The final section will show how these constraints did not lead to a retreat from information management, but to a shift to a more cost effective and sophisticated usage.

This chapter is focused on the Government's approach to communication. As such it concentrates on structural and attitudinal developments within Whitehall. Future chapters then look at specific areas of the media – the press, the BBC, films and newsreels. A detailed examination of the Government side is a prerequisite, however, before these areas can be properly assessed.

SECTION 1: Rationale for the Creation of Information Services

Herbert Morrison and the Establishment of the Information Services

On the 4th September 1945 Sir Edward Bridges, the Cabinet Secretary, distributed a memorandum by the Labour Minister of Information, Ted Williams, to members of the Cabinet. Williams wrote that 'A decision is urgently required on the post-war organisation of Government publicity at home and abroad'.¹ The memorandum elicited a number of responses.² The Prime Minister formed a small committee to discuss these on the 18th September. As a consequence, Attlee invited Herbert Morrison, the Lord President, 'to review, in consultation with

¹ GEN 85/1, Memorandum, 'Post-War Organisation of Government Publicity', Minister of Information, 4-9-1945, CAB 78/37.

² From Lord President (GEN 85/2), SOS Dominion Affairs (GEN 85/4), and SOS India (GEN 85/5), CAB 78/37.

the Minister of Information, the technical publicity services which ought to be continued in peace; and to submit a report... clarifying the issues involved and recommending how Government publicity services as a whole should be organised if the MOI were abolished'.³ Morrison's task was, as Mariel Grant has commented, 'quite monumental'.⁴

However, Morrison was the natural candidate to fulfil the role. He had always been interested in press and publicity, dating from his job with the Labour run *Daily Citizen* in 1912. In 1949 he even said "Of course, if I had not got to where I am in politics, I believe I could have been a good newspaper editor".⁵ He also 'first pioneered Labour's use of volunteers from the professional advertising world' in 1934.⁶ As his biographers, Donoughue and Jones, wrote 'He was in advance of his time in his awareness that Governments of the twentieth century must communicate to the people and that public relations had become an essential instrument of modern mass politics'.⁷

Morrison wrote up a plan and sent it to other Ministers on November 14th 1945. He recommended that individual Departments should retain responsibility for their own publicity policy. The Ministry of Information (MOI) should be dissolved, but some of its Production Divisions should be retained to form a central publicity unit. This would include poster advertising, exhibitions, photographs, publications and films, and a central channel for the distribution of Government news. The Departments would employ the central agency to produce their information (to become the Central Office of Information). Four Committees would coordinate

³ GEN 85/2nd, Minutes, Post-war Organisation of Government Publicity, 3-10-1945, CAB 78/37.

⁴ Mariel Grant, 'Towards a Central Office of Information: Continuity and Change in British Government Information Policy 1939-51' in *Journal of Contemporary History* 1999, Vol. 34, No. 1, p.60.

⁵ From Donoughue and Jones, *Herbert Morrison* (2001), p.28. 1949 quote referenced in *The Guardian*, 8-3-1965.

⁶ Dominic Wring, *Media Messiahs*, *Tribune*, 5-4-1996.

⁷ Donoughue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.359.

overall Government publicity, two Ministerial (Home and Overseas) and two Official (composed of members of the civil service). Responsibility for overseas information services would return to the Foreign Office. There would be no Minister of Information but there would be a Minister of Cabinet rank who would head the Committees and oversee broad policy. The new Central Information Office would be funded on a Treasury vote.⁸

Factors Informing Morrison's Plan

Morrison's plan was informed by three factors. First, by the belief that communication had now become a responsibility of modern Government. Second, by his conviction that communication was simply a functional task. Third, by his awareness that Government communication was still a politically sensitive issue as a result of its use by fascist and communist Governments over the previous two decades.

A Responsibility of Modern Government

Morrison's belief that communication was now a responsibility of Government was due mainly to the experience of the war, bolstered by his own Party political views. 'The war', Morrison wrote in 1944, 'has shown the need for it [communication] and pointed the way to its proper development in peace'.⁹

Up till 1939 there had been intermittent, sporadic development of Government information services. In 1931 there were only 45 people employed wholly or partially in Government publicity.¹⁰ Though this number grew throughout the 1930s there was significant discomfort with the use of Government publicity and

⁸ From Lord President's Report, later to become CP(45)316, CAB 124/987.

⁹ MG(44)12, Memorandum, Home Secretary, 'The Future of the Ministry of Information and Government Publicity', 2-6-1944, CAB 87/74.

¹⁰ According to replies to Treasury departmental inquiry of civil servants deployed on publicity work 1930-31, cited in Mariel Grant (1994), p.45.

propaganda. So much so that the Ministry of Information was put on hold until the onset of war made it absolutely necessary.¹¹

The war provided a massive learning experience. At its start, the MOI was considered incompetent and unnecessary. By its end the Government had 'built up an organisation, and developed a technique, which are [sic] impressive in the extreme'.¹² Francis Williams, the MOI's Controller of News and Censorship during the war, echoed many when he said 'The Government information services proved their value many times in war'.¹³ And, as another Treasury Study group wrote in 1944, the 'experience of war-time conditions has shown the need for much more extensive and continuous information'.¹⁴

This newfound need for continuous information was confirmed in the recommendations of an official committee, asked in 1944 to examine the post-war role of the MOI and its functions. 'We started our study', wrote the chair, Sir Alan Barlow, 'on the assumption that a Ministry of Information would not in any event be retained as part of the permanent machinery of Government. In the course of it, however, we have been driven to the view... that, purely on the grounds of organizational efficiency, there is a strong case for retaining a permanent Ministry'.¹⁵

This change of viewpoint may have been driven partly by self-interest. By January 1944 there were 3,999 Government staff employed by the MOI and by the departmental press offices on home information services.¹⁶ There were

¹¹ See Philip M. Taylor (1981), Temple Willcox, (1984), and Mariel Grant (1994) in bibliography.

¹² MGO(47), Official Committee on the Machinery of Government, 'Distribution of Government Business', 24-4-1944, CAB 87/74.

¹³ Francis Williams, *Press, Parliament and People* (1946) p.81.

¹⁴ Treasury Study Group 1944 – original memorandum date unknown, re-circulated to Home Information Services Committee in July 1947, IH(O)(47)35, 1-7-1947, CAB 134/356.

¹⁵ MG(O)47, Report by Official Committee on Machinery of Government, 24-4-1944, CAB 87/74.

¹⁶ IS(48)6, Cost of Government Information Services, 12-4-1948, figures for 1944-45, CAB 134/458.

another 1,661 people working within Britain on overseas information services.¹⁷ From early 1945 many of these public relations advisors were manoeuvring to hold onto their positions in Government. Self-preservation helped some of them to find justification for their services. An anonymous civil servant felt it necessary to report to the Treasury that there was 'active "jockeying" for permanent positions... among various PROs [Public Relations Officers]'.¹⁸

But the Barlow report also represented an increasingly common view within Whitehall that communication had become integral to the process of modern Government. This is illustrated by a broadsheet published by the think tank, Political and Economic Planning (PEP), in February 1945. There is evidence that this PEP report, and subsequent ones, helped inform the new administration's belief in the need for the permanent machinery of communication.

PEP had been formed in 1931 to emphasise the importance of planning to the country and the responsibility of the state in developing plans. Its principles were based on those laid down in an article by Max Nicholson, 'The National Plan for Great Britain'.¹⁹ It published regular pieces on issues ranging from the control of national utilities to the state of the Press. Its reports were written by committees of between three and ten people and then published anonymously. During the Thirties its 'inquiries played a vital part in the emergence of what has been called a "consensus on social responsibility"'.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid. Figure for those working abroad on overseas information services at this time is not given.

¹⁸ Letter from Civil Servant (who chose to conceal identity) to Treasury, undated – by implication January-February 1945, T 213/404.

¹⁹ 'The National Plan for Great Britain' supplement to *Week-End Review*, 14-2-1931, cited by Max Nicholson in prologue of John Pinder (ed.), *50 Years of PEP – Looking Forward 1931-81* (1981).

²⁰ Cook and Stevenson, *The Slump* (1977), p.29.

Throughout its history PEP had consistently championed the cause of greater information.²¹ And in February 1945 it published an in-depth report on Government Information Services in Britain. The report gave a detailed rationale on why information services should be retained and highlighted how some of the dangers of Government information could be avoided.²²

Though the reports were written anonymously, we know from a letter sent to Edward Bridges in 1955, that the Committee that wrote the report on information services was chaired by S.C. (Clem) Leslie.²³ Leslie was Herbert Morrison's Principal Private Secretary, as well as being a close friend. They had first been introduced in 1935 when Morrison was preparing to fight his campaign for London. Leslie was a successful advertiser at the time, known for the creation of 'Mr. Therm' for the gas industry, and he and Morrison 'immediately became very attached to each other'.²⁴ In 1940 Morrison took Leslie from the Ministry of Supply to head up his public relations team at the Home Office (setting a precedent for high salaries that would raise the profile of public relations in all Government Departments²⁵). Leslie remained there until 1943 after which time he became Morrison's Principal Private Secretary (till 1945).

Therefore Leslie's PEP report was informed both by the Barlow report and by his previous work with Morrison. We also know, by the fact that PH 'Puck' Boon, Morrison's Public Relations Officer, refers to the report in the Lord President's files, that the broadsheet itself fed into Morrison's plan in late 1945.²⁶

²¹ For example, 1936 Planning Broadsheet, 3/71, quoted in Mariel Grant (1994), p.54.

²² PEP Broadsheet, 'Government Information Services', No.230, 2-2-1945.

²³ SC Leslie to EE Bridges, regarding new PEP Press committee, 25-5-1955, T 273/20.

²⁴ Donoughue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.209.

²⁵ Correspondence to JIC Crombie at the Treasury 1939-41 from range of Ministries requesting sanction for employment of Chief Information Officers and Press Officers, T 213/404.

²⁶ PH Boon to Morrison, 10-9-1945, 'A Broadsheet on 'Government Information Services' was published by P.E.P. in February 1945 – I have a copy if you wish to examine it', CAB 124/985.

The findings of the report, even in its minutiae, reflect this. For example, the report is uncomfortable with the term 'Public Relations' and recommends that it be abolished in favour of 'Information'. Morrison tried to institute this change consistently throughout the late 1940s, even though quite a number of Departments objected. Similarly, the report constantly emphasises rights, both those of the Government, which has the 'right to make its purposes and methods effectively known', and those of the people; 'it is high time, in consonance with democratic principle, that fuller and simpler explanations be given to the great majority of people, who have a right to know'. Both these 'rights' are also referred to by Morrison, who said it was 'the right and indeed the duty of the Government to inform the public of the facts necessary for the full understanding of its actions and decisions...[and] the people have a "right to know"'.²⁷

The links with PEP actually go much deeper than just this report. Max Nicholson, the founder of PEP and 'a man of mercurial intelligence', was also the head of Morrison's office.²⁸ Michael Young, a frequent contributor to PEP, wrote the Labour manifesto for the 1945 election with Morrison. A series of PEP reports on the Press in 1938 formed the basis of the research done by the Royal Commission on the Press formed by Morrison in 1947 (see next chapter). And, PEP Planning Broadsheets litter the Lord President's files throughout the mid to late 1940s.²⁹

Though he might not explicitly express it, Morrison's belief in the need for greater communication was also influenced by his Party political perspective. Implicit within Labour's plans in 1945, for nationalisation and for universal welfare, was the idea of a much closer partnership with the people. Communication was

²⁷ GEN 85/2, Memorandum, Morrison, 14-9-1945, CAB 78/37.

²⁸ Donoghue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.350.

²⁹ PEP's July 1947 report, 'The Plan and the Public', was also important and will be discussed later. See also 'Men, Management and Machines' No. 260, 3-1-1947, in CAB 124/908.

critical to the success of this partnership. Morrison expressed this in a speech to the Fabian society in the autumn of 1945. His vision was of, “the people, the Party, the electorate... steadily reasoning out the Government programme as it goes along, in partnership so to speak with Parliament and Government itself. That” Morrison said, ‘would be true democracy’.³⁰

Though there may be a growing belief that communication was a responsibility of modern Government, there were considerable differences of opinion about how this responsibility might be fulfilled. Many politicians, especially Conservatives, saw no justification for a central office of information. Chamberlain had made this very clear in 1939 and Brendan Bracken, the Minister of Information from 1941, reiterated this view throughout the war.³¹ Even some of those within the Labour Cabinet, such as Aneurin Bevan, thought the same in 1945.³² Other Conservative politicians went even further, believing that there was not even any need for departmental press offices, except ‘in departments with something to sell’.³³

Morrison brushed over some of the differences of approach. ‘I am convinced of the importance of the right kind of Government publicity’ he told the Cabinet committee on information’.³⁴ Like the Prime Minister he was persuaded that ‘Every Government must present to the public the facts necessary for an

³⁰ Morrison speech, ‘The Labour Party and the Next Ten Years’, Autumn 1945 to Fabian Society, *Forward from Victory! Labour’s Plan* (1946) p.16.

³¹ Chamberlain, *Parliamentary Debates*, Vol.348, col.1501-02, 15-6-1939. Bracken, response of Minister of Information to PM’s Directive WP(43)476, ‘With regard to the Ministry of Information itself the Minister proposes that it should be dissolved at the conclusion of the war with Germany... In the Minister’s opinion it is inevitable that, as a general rule, Government Departments should resume responsibility for the conduct of their individual activities in the field of publicity’, BCS, 11-11-1943, INF 1/941.

³² See letter from Ministry of Health (signature illegible) to WS Murrie regarding Bevan’s views, Cabinet Offices, 10-9-1945, CAB 21/2011.

³³ MG(44)13, Memorandum, Postmaster General, ‘The Future of the Ministry of Information and Government Publicity’, , 6-6-1944, CAB 87/74.

³⁴ Morrison to Attlee, 14-11-1945, CAB 124/987.

understanding of the Government's activities'.³⁵ At this time they did not question which facts would be necessary or whether the public would seek to understand them.

A Purely Functional Task

Morrison believed that communication had become a responsibility of Government, but in 1945 he was convinced it was purely a functional task. Once again the war was critical in helping to lead Morrison to this view.

The idea had become prevalent during the war that the MOI, after an 'unfortunate start', had, by late 1941, 'relapsed into being little more than a convenient funnel through which news and publicity was passed to the Press and the public'.³⁶ This idea of a 'convenient funnel' was attractive to those worried that the Ministry might be perceived as Machiavellian.

By 1944 Cyril Radcliffe, the director-general of the MOI, was so converted to the functional idea that he was able to tell Sir Alan Barlow's committee that 'a small central organization with projections in each of the Departments' would be adequate to channel information to the public. News could be distributed to the Press, for example, 'by a small Government office in Fleet Street, connected by teleprinter with Government Departments'. The need for other wartime aspects of information services, such as home intelligence (public opinion testing and the Social Survey), would, Radcliffe thought, be 'extremely limited'.³⁷

Barlow's committee followed Radcliffe's lead and suggested that the peacetime job of communication was essentially mechanical, representing simply a 'dissemination of facts'. The MOI could therefore be replaced by a 'common

³⁵ GEN 85/1st, Minutes, Post-war Organisation of Government Publicity, 19-9-1945, CAB 78/37.

³⁶ 'Unfortunate start' from Barlow Report, MGO(44), April 1944, CAB 87/74. 'Relapsed into...', Michael Balfour, quoted in Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p.250.

³⁷ MGO(44)41st, Minutes, Official Committee on the Machinery of Government, 8-2-1944, T222/68.

service unit' which would fulfil all the production functions on behalf of the departments.³⁸

Morrison read the Barlow report and agreed with its essentials. Although he saw the peacetime job as 'more difficult and delicate' it was, Morrison believed, 'a largely technical one'.³⁹ The primary function of the machinery would be to 'convey to the public the facts, pleasant or unpleasant, which are necessary for the understanding of operative Government policy'.⁴⁰

Morrison's conviction that communication was functional is borne out by his plan for restructuring the information services. He could 'see no justification for it [the new central information office] being under the charge of a separate Minister'.⁴¹ He thought 'it should be kept on a light rein, free from over meticulous Ministerial control'. He made it clear that it was the responsibility of the Departments to initiate campaigns, not the central office. And, the limited amount of attention Morrison subsequently bestowed on the information services in 1946, despite being head of both Ministerial Committees to oversee them, indicates that he was convinced that the process of communication was simple and straightforward.⁴² The Prime Minister's statement to the House regarding the formation of a new central information service, which was drawn up by Morrison's office, stated unequivocally, 'this is merely a technical organisation'.⁴³

Our knowledge of Morrison's character also suggests that he believed the task would be straightforward. He was, in his biographers' words, 'practical, detailed, direct and clear' and had 'a passion for efficiency, tidiness and order, and for

³⁸ Barlow Report, MGO(44), April 1944, CAB 87/74.

³⁹ GEN 85/2, Memorandum, Lord President, 14-9-1945, CAB 78/37.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The Ministerial Committee on Home Information Services (IH) met only twice in 1946 and three times in 1947, CAB 134/354.

⁴³ Attlee, Hansard, 7-3-1946, Vol.420, Col.522.

business-like enterprise'.⁴⁴ In an interview after Morrison's death Christopher Mayhew said that 'He had a simple trust and belief that if one put the facts in a reasoned way, in a common sense way, the people would come round'.⁴⁵

There were a number of people who questioned the premise that communication was such a straightforward task. Leslie himself, after reading the Barlow report in May 1944, wrote to the chairman to tell him that after the war information would be much more important than the Committee realised.⁴⁶ Leslie objected to 'this limited come-and-go approach to public relations'.⁴⁷ The Committee sympathised with Leslie's position but did not think he had taken account of the political context. They regarded him as too much of an 'enthusiast with no inhibitions'.⁴⁸

Ted Williams, the Labour Minister of Information, also questioned the premise, believing that without a Minister the new information service would lack unity and coherence and would be unable to attract good recruits. Morrison assuaged Williams, 'As you know', he told him 'I have a great deal of sympathy with your point of view and I am anxious that, so far as is practicable, we shall continue to secure that unity in British publicity policy which is so clearly desirable'.⁴⁹ But privately Morrison dismissed the charges, agreeing with his Private Secretary that Williams' 'real quarrel is with the basic assumptions which have already been decided against him'.⁵⁰

Others suggested that far from simply being functional, information machinery could be a positive force for political change. Stephen Taylor was one of these.

⁴⁴ Donoghue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.34.

⁴⁵ Interview with Christopher Mayhew, 3-7-1968, Morrison Biographical Papers, Section 6-3, Interviews L-R, BLPES.

⁴⁶ Leslie to Barlow, 'A Note on the Future of Departmental Public Relations', 15-5-1944, T222/68.

⁴⁷ Leslie to Barlow, follow-up letter, 18-5-1944, T222/68.

⁴⁸ BD Fraser to Barlow, regarding Leslie's letter, 22-5-1944, T222/68.

⁴⁹ Morrison to Ted Williams, 23-11-1945, CAB 124/988.

⁵⁰ E.M. Nicholson to Morrison, 20-11-1945, CAB 124/988.

Taylor had been head of Home Intelligence and championed the cause of public opinion surveys after the war. He was elected to Parliament in 1945 and later became Morrison's Parliamentary Private Secretary. His 1945 article, 'The Future of Government Information Services', printed in the *Fabian Quarterly*, provided another aspect to the debate on the continuation of the communication machinery. The article is also contained within Morrison's correspondence for November 1945.⁵¹

Taylor tried to offer comfort to those who feared information services would be used as they had been in the fascist states. Information machinery was just a tool of Government, he said. If the Government was fascist then it would promote fascism, if democratic then it would promote democracy. He argued this was a natural development emerging from the growth of mass communication and commercial advertising, 'Sooner or later it was inevitable that those with ideas to sell, rather than toothpaste, would enter the field'. This connection of politics and commercial advertising appeared to cause him no concern. 'The war', Taylor argued, 'has provided a large scale demonstration that the ideas and ideals of democracy can be successfully handled in the same way'.⁵²

A Politically Sensitive Issue

For the same reason that Taylor was excited about the ideological potential of Government communication, others were very concerned. These anxieties represented the third factor influencing Morrison's plans for the information services.

⁵¹ Stephen Taylor, 'The Future of Government Information Services', *Fabian Quarterly*, No.48, December 1945, filed in CAB 124/988. Also in LP's correspondence for November 1945, CAB 124/988.

⁵² Ibid.

Goebbels' shadow hung over the idea of Government sponsored information machinery. Captain Harry Crookshank, Coalition Postmaster-General, responding to the Barlow report in June 1944, wrote that he was concerned that the machinery proposed by the Barlow Committee would tend towards 'too great Governmental power over public opinion' and set it on 'the road all the dictators have travelled'. Therefore he recommended that after the war the information services be cut back not by the 'pruning hook' but by 'the axe'. By this he meant restoring 'Public Relations Departments to their pre-war scale' and closing down the MOI entirely.⁵³

In addition to Conservative politicians like Crookshank, most of the Press were strongly against the perpetuation of any central machinery of information. When news leaked out about the Government discussions on the MOI on 17th September 1945 it immediately led to articles accusing Labour of trying to create a totalitarian style propaganda machine. The Press speculated that Cabinet was conspiring to keep the MOI and pointed to Morrison as the 'leader of the survivalist group'.⁵⁴ The *Daily Express* said that 'if the Ministry is not wound up there is sure to be a first class rumpus. The Opposition will insist that it is improper for Party Government to use for propaganda a Ministry financed by public money'.⁵⁵

The Lord President was well aware of these political sensitivities. As well as being a pragmatic politician, Morrison was also a very sharp one.⁵⁶ Francis Williams, in 1945 the public relations advisor to the Prime Minister, said Morrison

⁵³ MG(44)13, Memorandum, Postmaster General, 'The Future of the Ministry of Information and Government Publicity', 6-6-1944, CAB 87/74.

⁵⁴ *Evening Standard*, 18-9-1945, "Who wants the MOI?", "Leader of the survivalist group is Mr. Herbert Morrison". Clipping in LP's files, CAB 124/985.

⁵⁵ *Daily Express*, 'Keep the MOI – Socialist Demand', 17-9-1945, p.1.

⁵⁶ His biographers called him the "The maestro of cunning", Donoughue & Jones, *Morrison*, p.150

had that 'instinctive awareness of the political consequences of unpolitical events which is the mark of the genuine man of politics'.⁵⁷

He predicted the new Department would attract far less hostility without a Minister, and said as much to Attlee: 'There would be the advantage under this scheme that, having abolished the Minister of Information, you would not have to say that you had appointed another Minister to give whole time attention to Government information work'.⁵⁸

Similarly, he knew that home information services were far more controversial than overseas ones, and made sure it was the overseas services which were emphasised in the Prime Minister's statement to the House on 7th March (which his office drafted).⁵⁹ Kenneth Grubb, from the MOI, put this clearly to his Minister the previous September: 'It comes to this. We cannot justify the Ministry solely by reference to its past work as a central agency of home publicity. The case rests on arguments in favour of greater activity and initiative on the fringe of political controversy. These arguments are the crux of the whole issue and are debatable. But we are spared this stormy passage if our craft has already reached permanent moorings through the calmer waters of overseas publicity'.⁶⁰

This also helps to explain why Morrison excised the Social Survey from the final version of his plans. He knew that public opinion testing during the Second World War had been one of the most unpopular measures instituted by the MOI (the

⁵⁷ Francis Williams, *The Triple Challenge* (1948) p.87-88.

⁵⁸ Personal Note on 'Government Publicity', Morrison to Attlee; 'My dear Clem, I have been trying my hand at helping you in connection with the Government information problem. Result is enclosed which is not for the Committee but for your own information' 2-10-1945, CAB 124/985.

⁵⁹ Preparation of PM's statement, JAR Pimlott to Bamford, Rowan et al, 5-3-1946, CAB 124/990.

⁶⁰ Grubb to Williams, 10-9-1945, INF 1/942.

surveyors were referred to as 'Cooper's Snoopers'). Therefore, despite his own belief in it, he removed it from the original remit of the COI.⁶¹

The Eventual Plan

The conflicting pressures on Morrison meant that there were significant contradictions in the eventual plan that emerged. Morrison had removed the Minister of Information only to replace him with two Ministerial policy-making Committees. He wanted the Central Office of Information to be a purely technical agency servicing the needs of the Departments but he also wanted it be an 'instrument for infusing vitality into the Government's information services as a whole', staffed by people 'of lively imagination' – in other words, a creative agency.⁶² He was determined that the Government should project a 'common line' so that 'publicity at home is consistent and overlapping and conflicts are avoided'.⁶³ Yet the Departments were supposed to commission their publicity independently and there was only limited machinery to coordinate action. He thought that the service would be limited and controllable and even called for 'drastic cuts in expenditure'.⁶⁴ But then in the first committee meeting used open-ended language to encourage its use. 'Ministers and Departments' he said 'should feel that it [the COI] belonged to all of them and should make the fullest possible use of its officers and the help they could give'.⁶⁵

Even so, Morrison's plan was presented to Cabinet on 6th December 1945 virtually unchanged.⁶⁶ Ted Williams was the only Minister to object to it, arguing

⁶¹ Comparison of draft plans for organisation of post-war Government publicity, October 1945, CAB 124/987.

⁶² 'Government Publicity Services', Morrison draft, 14-11-1945, CAB 124/987.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ CP(45)316, 'Government Publicity Services', Annex 1 by Lord President, 23-11-1945 CAB 129/5.

⁶⁵ OI & IH(46), Overseas and Home Information Services Joint Meeting, Minutes, 8-4-1946, CAB 124/990.

⁶⁶ Cabinet Papers, CP(45)316, CAB 129/5; discussed at CM(45)60, 6-12-1945, CAB 128/2.

again that the department needed a Minister. The Prime Minister replied briskly that “it seemed to him politically dangerous that there should be a minister with no other responsibility but the conduct of publicity”.⁶⁷ The rest of the Cabinet ratified the plan and Morrison was invited to organise a committee of officials to work out the details of a new central organisation.

On December, 17th, in the pre-Christmas lull, Attlee read Morrison’s text to the House, concentrating on the less controversial overseas information services.⁶⁸ Two days later Barlow met with his new official Committee that would draw up the structure of the new Central Office that would replace it – based on Morrison’s plan.⁶⁹ By February 11th most of the Ministries had responded to Barlow’s draft. Though there were criticisms, particularly from the Department of Health and of Labour and National Service, the Cabinet approved the plans almost unchanged on Monday 18th February.⁷⁰ At the end of March 1946 the MOI was dissolved. On the first of April the Central Office of Information (COI) took over.

SECTION 2: Communications Machinery Does Not Run Itself

In 1946 the Government approached communication with a blithe sense of assurance. It assumed that it could still act as though it were a coalition Government during wartime and enjoy the same benefits. It thought that the objectives of communication were straightforward. It believed that it could create messages that were consensual and apolitical. It assumed that it could continue to distribute information through a compliant media towards grateful workers. And it thought that people would demand information to the same degree as in

⁶⁷ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(45)60, 6-12-1945, CAB 128/2.

⁶⁸ Attlee reply to Maurice Webb, Hansard, Vol.417, Col.916-917, 17-12-1945.

⁶⁹ First meeting of Official Committee on Government Information Services, GIS(O)(45)1, 19-12-1945, T219/38. Report of the Official Committee on Government Information Services, CP(46)54, CAB 129/7.

⁷⁰ W. Douglas, DoH, 6-2-1946. Ministry of Labour, ‘Semi-detached Departments always land the Government in trouble’, 8-2-1946, INF 1/958. Cabinet (46)16, 18-2-1946, CAB 128/5.

wartime. As Morrison said in a speech in January 1946, "I think the years immediately ahead will see a great increase in public interest in our national economy, and an enlivened public opinion which will insist on having the facts".⁷¹ It was set for a rude awakening.

The Challenge to Functionalism: Publicity Free-for-All

Even before the Central Office was set up the Labour Government had embarked on a major programme of information and publicity. There were two main reasons for this. First, there was momentum as a result of the Second World War. Most of the domestic controls, like rationing, still existed in 1945. While these still survived the Ministries saw no reason to curtail information about them. Also, the end of the war led to an enormous dislocation of the population.⁷² Information was seen as a means by which to reorient people and help them settle back into peacetime life.

Second, the war had convinced Government of the continuing need for extensive publicity. Government had grown to such a size, and society had become so complex, that it could not operate without Government sponsored information. This attitude was apparent in a Treasury report to civil servants written in 1944: '...in the past there was insufficient attempt except on the political side to sweeten the pill of Government. The war has meant that the pill has swollen to something very large, and, unless care is taken, difficult to swallow. This in turn has made it clear that the public must not only be told what to do, but also why and how'.⁷³

⁷¹ Morrison speech to *News Chronicle* Centenary dinner, 21-1-1946, Labour Party Archives, Manchester.

⁷² There were still 5 million men in the Services – most to be demobilized. 500,000 homes had been destroyed, and a further 250,000 severely damaged. 5 million people were working in civil defence or munitions – from Peter Hennessy, *Never Again* (1993) p.99.

⁷³ Treasury Report 1944, exact date unknown - re-circulated at meeting of Home Information Services, IH(O)(47)35, 1-7-1949, CAB 134/356.

Each Department was also hungry for the chance of more publicity. Thomas Fife Clark, the Public Relations officer for the Ministry of Health, sent a letter to his Minister, Aneurin Bevan, before the end of August 1945 telling him that 'The full and proper presentation of news and policy to the general public must be an essential factor in administration during the post war period. It was never so important to have a good publicity organisation'.⁷⁴ This was, he asserted, a new start. Although there had been an office since 1935, 'to the beginning of the war very little was done in the way of mass publicity on health education, apart from a single and abortive campaign'.⁷⁵ Even during the war 'we have had to deal with health education in a piecemeal way'. Only now, he suggested, was there an opportunity for 'a much more planned and long term approach'.⁷⁶

Therefore the Departments launched into campaigns with no sense of guilt and were engaged in publicity from the start of the administration. The Ministry of Food continued to publish regular 'Food Facts' giving advice and recipes for rationed food.⁷⁷ The National Savings Committee placed ads urging people to save.⁷⁸ The Ministry of War Transport still earnestly urged people to 'Keep Death off the Road'.⁷⁹ Many other Departments maintained or increased their wartime communication. By the time the COI was set up they had been working on their own propaganda for eight months. They were very loath to concede any of their autonomy to the new central office and before it was even launched ten Departments tried to claim 'special treatment' to avoid using the service. There

⁷⁴ Fife Clark, 'Public Relations Policy', 20-8-1945, forwarded to Aneurin Bevan 27-8-1945, MH 151/62.

⁷⁵ Fife Clark to Neville, 10-9-1945, MH 151/62.

⁷⁶ Fife Clark, 'Public Relations Policy', 20-8-1945, op.cit., MH 151/62.

⁷⁷ E.g. *The Times*, 20-11-1945, 'This Winter its Vital not to Waste Bread', p.7.

⁷⁸ E.g. *The Times*, 24-12-1945, Santa Claus, 'And thank you, Savings Workers; May your energies never flag, you shorten my road, you lighten my load, and put savings in the bag'.

⁷⁹ E.g. *Manchester Guardian*, 18-12-1945 ('Remember, 'A second spent in looking is worth weeks in hospital').

were certain functions, they wrote to Barlow, which they thought 'could better be performed by them'.⁸⁰ They took exception on 32 specific issues, and followed these with another 11 'suggestions that may require further consideration' in the relationship between Departments and the Central Office.⁸¹

There is little evidence of a planned or long term approach in the actions of the Departments in 1946. Even once they started using the Central Service they pelted it with campaigns and campaign ideas without any regard for overall strategy. The Central Office was quickly overwhelmed. The Official Committee on Home Information Services (IH(O)) was supposed to oversee publicity and arbitrate when disagreements arose. The minutes of their first meeting look more like those of a media buying company than a Committee on Government communication. The 23 attendees spent most of it arguing over the distribution of advertising space in the national press.⁸² By the third meeting they were trying desperately to secure some additional space, a gap in the newspaper advertising programme that could be saved for emergency information or fast turnaround campaigns.⁸³ But Sir Eric Bamford, the acting head of the COI until Robert Fraser took over said 'the demands of Government advertising were so much greater than the space available that it was impossible to leave a margin for contingencies'.⁸⁴

In an attempt to create some sort of plan the Official Committee started setting up sub-Committees and working parties. These too proliferated quickly. By the

⁸⁰ Meara's summary of 'Points arising from correspondence between the Treasury and the Home Departments in connection with the constitution and functions of the COI', 1-3-1946, attached to letter from Bamford (acting DG) to Fraser, INF 1/958.

⁸¹ Ibid. Also following Barlow Report on Structure of Information Services sent to Ministerial Meeting of Home and Overseas Information Services, February 1946, INF 12/308.

⁸² IH(O)1st, Minutes, 11-4-1946, CAB 134/355.

⁸³ IH(O)3rd, Minutes, 19-6-1946, CAB 134/355.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Eric Bamford.

spring of 1947 there were 27 of them co-ordinating inter-Departmental publicity, plus a further 11 ad hoc groups that met irregularly.⁸⁵

It was quickly becoming apparent that not everything could be communicated at once. Yet each department found it difficult to accept that its own information was less important than that of another. The COI also lacked the authority to distinguish between them. There were therefore increasing demands for more Ministerial management and direction.

Responsible for What? Defining the Limits of Communication

As the departments were busy pursuing their own publicity agendas it was also becoming clear that not only did these need some coordination, but they required some guidelines. For example, in the communication of legislation. One of the original objectives of the post-war information services was that legislation should be popularised in order to make it comprehensible to the masses.⁸⁶

Morrison reiterated this at the end of 1946. He 'thought it might be useful to issue a series of pamphlets explaining important new Acts of Parliament so soon as these received the Royal Assent'. But this raised a number of questions, including which acts should be defined as 'important', and how they should be popularised. The COI tried to define some criteria to limit its involvement by restricting this to major legislation or 'wherever there is need for a practiced editorial technique, for popularising through the simplification of the text and the

⁸⁵ List of standing committees and working parties, IH(O)(47)29, CAB 134/356.

⁸⁶ In 1943 a decision was taken under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Acts that explanatory material be issued along with subordinate legislation (and instructions issued in TC7/43). After these expired, 'the Legislation committee had decided that explanatory material should be issued with all subordinate legislation and that central machinery should be established to supervise their form and scope'. IH (O)(46)2, Minutes, 16-5-1946, CAB 134/355.

use of visual material, and generally for investing the pamphlet with “sales appeal” and “reader interest” by an active editorial approach’.⁸⁷

But this still left many questions unanswered. The Ministry of National Insurance, for example, wanted to know how access to information altered a citizen’s responsibilities. In the past it had been assumed, the Ministry wrote, that “Ignorance of the law is no excuse” but, in a democracy, during an intensive legislation period, can the onus be said to shift to Government?’. Similarly, how far does the Government’s commitment extend, ‘Is a piece of legislation which affects the whole adult population to be explained in a publication that costs money?’. If so, then surely the audience will be restricted; ‘Is the group’ he wrote ‘represented by these purchasers likely to be the group most in need of enlightenment?’.⁸⁸

Equally, it was not clear why the Government should stop at legislation. What about the other roles and responsibilities of the Government and the citizen? In January 1947, for example, Robert Fraser remembered a request from Morrison ‘that something should be done to explain the social purpose of taxation. He thought that an effective approach to the problem could be made in the form of a 15 minute cartoon type film’.⁸⁹

The Committee eventually fudged the issue by agreeing ‘that information officers should automatically consider the publication of an explanatory memorandum or a pamphlet whenever their Department was involved in legislation leading to the passing of an act’.⁹⁰ But the discussions illustrated that only when the

⁸⁷ IH(O)(47)3, Memorandum, ‘Pamphlets on new Acts of Public Importance’, 4-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

⁸⁸ IH(O)(47)6, Memorandum, Ministry of National Insurance, 20-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

⁸⁹ PC(O)C(47)3rd, Minutes, Robert Fraser, 16-1-1947, CAB 124/908.

⁹⁰ IH(O)(47)4th, Minutes, 2-4-47, CAB 134/356.

Government committed itself to communication did its repercussions begin to become apparent.

Challenge to Ambitions: The Prosperity Campaign, 1946

When a department committed itself to an information campaign it had to define that campaign's objectives. The experience of the Prosperity Campaign of 1946-7 showed that in defining these objectives the Government might have to compromise its ambitions. The campaign was launched in February 1946 because Morrison, as head of economic planning, had calculated that there would be a manpower shortage of 1.3 million people by the end of 1946 which would seriously effect production.⁹¹ He wanted to appeal to industry to increase output. If people could be moved more quickly out of the Services back to industry and encouraged to put in extra effort now, then, the idea was, they could be assured 'employment for all' and 'fair shares for all'.⁹²

Francis Williams, who had been head of News and Censorship at the MOI, was asked to head a committee to translate this appeal into action. Williams' wartime experience had given him the confidence that the public had both the appetite for information and the common sense to comprehend it. He decided, therefore, that the Prosperity Campaign should be based on a 'simple presentation of the facts' without exhortation.⁹³ 'The only thing that seriously upset the British people', Williams wrote in 1945, 'was to withhold facts from them'. His committee therefore settled on a slogan they believed was free from political sensitivity and

⁹¹ Cabinet Papers, CP(46)32, 'Economic Survey for 1946', memorandum by Lord President, 30-1-1946, CAB 129/6.

⁹² Report of Douglas Jay, 28-5-1946, CAB 124/905.

⁹³ Original meetings of PC Committee not minuted. Reference from IH(O)(46)2, Minutes, 16-5-1946, CAB 134/355.

because 'it had not the character of an exhortation'; *Extra Effort Now Means Better Living Sooner*.⁹⁴

Consistent with the idea of steady reasoning, the campaign was due to run in long phases. The first phase, running from March to October 1946, would include Ministerial speeches, national production conferences and a 'large scale approach to the masses' (the publicity was not to be targeted yet).⁹⁵ The second stage would see the campaign broaden out to a regional level with local meetings and discussions in factories. The Committee believed it was key to keep it factual and be meticulously consensual. 'Let us all be quite clear' Robert Fraser wrote, 'that we are concerned to present the successive stages of progress factually as steps forward in a national effort, not politically as feathers in the Government's cap'.⁹⁶

It might have been non-controversial, and, as an observer wrote to Williams 'It can hardly be faulted by the economists, the statisticians or the historians who are always ready to pounce if the Government puts a comma out of place'. But, as the same writer continued, 'oh! It's cold!.... cold and impersonal... Cannot there be found something warmer, more human, more tangible to offer?'.⁹⁷

In addition to its remoteness, the campaign had perilously high hopes of the electorate. For its second stage, due to start in October, the Committee had grand visions of 'a campaign for economic literacy'. 'This is a very large order', the members wrote on 1st October, 'involving in the first place mass education in

⁹⁴ PC(O)C meeting, 1-5-1946, CAB 124/904.

⁹⁵ 'Central Office of Information – National Production Drive Publicity', Note by DG, 16-7-1946, CAB 124/906.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ A.G. Millikin to PC(O)C, 14-1-1947, CAB 124/908.

elementary mid-twentieth century economics'.⁹⁸ The ambition, it would appear, was to teach the population Keynesian economic theory, since, in the Committee memorandum's words, 'the mass of the nation suffers from a mixture of economic illiteracy and a litter of economic half-truths'.⁹⁹

The memorandum went on to define in more precise terms the Committee's thoughts on national re-education. It need not be over-complicated, it argued, the Government 'can merely hammer in the salient points such as:

1. the dependence of standards of living on production;
2. the need to export in order to import;
3. the need to adjust industrial practice to the prospect of full employment and to sweep away restrictionist attitudes and arrangements both on the employers and trade union side;
4. the need to maintain controls where shortages of supplies persist or fair shares are essential;
5. the need for relating wage policy to the required distribution of manpower; and
6. the need for balancing consumption against investment'.¹⁰⁰

It is remarkable that the Committee members did not see this plan as over-ambitious and patently political. It only seems explicable if we accept Paul

⁹⁸ PC(O)C(46)25, Memorandum, 'Prosperity Campaign – Future Arrangements', 1-10-1946, CAB 124/906.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Addison's thesis that there was an unquestioned Keynesian economic consensus after the war, especially within Whitehall.¹⁰¹

It took an outsider to suggest that the Committee might be being unrealistic. Clem Leslie, who was now working for the Council of Industrial Design, found out about the Committee's plans (probably through his friend Robert Fraser who supported Leslie's observations). He wrote a memorandum diplomatically suggesting that the Government 'must be on guard against over-intellectualising the problem'.¹⁰² He felt a long term programme of adult education was 'unfeasible'. Referring back to the war he cited the National Savings Committee's "Save to Buy Guns" campaign which, while not sound economically, got its point across without requiring any knowledge of supply side economics. Leslie's appeal to limit ambitions would soon be reinforced by surveys indicating persistent low levels of economic understanding amongst the people.

Reaching the People: the Problems of Distribution

Only once the administration had committed itself to producing information did it begin to grapple with the consequent problems of distribution. During the war it had made agreements with the newspapers to provide advertising space, with the cinemas to screen Government films, with the BBC to allow the Government airtime, and with industry to appeal to factory workers via posters, exhibitions, speakers and films.¹⁰³ At the end of the conflict the justification for these agreements ended. But the production of information by the Government

¹⁰¹ Paul Addison, 'Keynesianism... was so deeply embedded in Whitehall that it had to come and, whether they realized it or not, the party leaders were proto-Keynesians already', *The Road to 1945*, p.289

¹⁰² PC(O)C(46)30, 'Publicity for Production (Notes prepared by Mr. Leslie)', 11-10-1946, CAB 124/906

¹⁰³ During the war the newspapers agreed to allow the Government paid for advertising space as part of a 'gentleman's agreement'. The Cinema Exhibitor's Association (CEA) agreed to screen Government short films and trailers free of charge. The BBC gave the Government airtime each week and Ministers access to broadcast. Factories agreed to put up posters and allow speakers, exhibitions and film screenings (see IH(O)(46)12, 16-7-1946, CAB 134/355).

continued. By late 1946 departmental information officers were desperately unsure how their material would find an outlet.¹⁰⁴

Without help or direction from senior Ministers, officials tended to cling onto any channels that remained available to them. Their retention did not, therefore, represent a considered policy, but an attempt to retain the privileges negotiated during the recent conflict. Though at the time their resolution often did not seem overly consequential, some had a fundamental impact on the subsequent practise of Government communication.

News distribution is an illustration of this. During the war each of the newspapers and the agencies had kept reporters at distribution points to collect Government news announcements. Once the war was over they were unwilling to make this commitment since they did not feel it was 'economic or worthwhile'.¹⁰⁵ Rather than revert to the haphazard pre-war method when each of the Departments had been wholly responsible for issuing their own news to whichever media outlets they wanted Robert Fraser thought 'we could consider... whether some new system might not work more satisfactorily from the point of view of the user and from the point of view of the issuer than either the pre-war or wartime systems'.¹⁰⁶ He suggested that all Departments send their news to a central news distribution unit which would then, having made sure there was no duplication, send it to the newspapers. This was agreed and was later to become the 'celebrated "COI Run"', by 1984, 'known to all journalists for its transfusion of Government announcements, processed and packaged in story form by the press officers of

¹⁰⁴ E.g. 'Memorandum on Issue of Trailers', IH(O)(46)11, 12-7-1946, and 'Memorandum on Works Relations', IH(O)(46)12, 16-7-1946, CAB 134/355.

¹⁰⁵ COI Meeting Minutes, 9-4-1946, INF 12/135.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

the Government Information Services. For most newspapers and broadcasters it forms the spine of each day's news agenda'.¹⁰⁷

Questions Raised by the Adoption of Government Communication

By the autumn of 1946 senior officials were becoming increasingly aware that Government communication was not as straightforward as it had been in the war and that the provision of information, as a separate function of Government, was a genuinely new departure that required reflection and attention.

In 1938-9 the Government had spent £495,045 on home information services.¹⁰⁸ This was already a considerable increase on the previous decade.¹⁰⁹ By the end of the war the Government was spending £4,889,848.¹¹⁰ Despite Morrison's calls for cuts this figure remained stubbornly over £4.5m.¹¹¹ There were over 1,600 people working at the COI in 1946 and about another 800 working on communication within the departments, the vast majority of whom had only been employed since 1936.¹¹² And yet, there had been remarkably little discussion about their role and responsibilities.

In September 1946 Robert Fraser was concerned enough to write a letter to DJ Wardley (Treasury). 'When you come to think of it', Fraser wrote, 'the growth of the Government information services, even leaving the Ministry and the Central Office of Information out of the picture, is a large and dashing administrative

¹⁰⁷ Cockerell, Hennessy and Walker, *Sources Close to the Prime Minister* (1984), p.59.

¹⁰⁸ From 'The Report of the Committee on Cost of Home Information Services', Cmd.7836, November 1949.

¹⁰⁹ The Report of the Treasury Select Committee on Estimates 1938 calculated that the amount spent on staff wholly or partially employed on press, intelligence and/or public relations in 1931 was £18,650. T162/479/36055 cited in Mariel Grant (1994), p.225.

¹¹⁰ Op.cit., Cmd.7836, 1949.

¹¹¹ Figure for 1947-48, according to Cmd.7836; £4,537,883.

¹¹² Annual Report of the COI, 1949-50 reports that that there were 1,601 staff at the COI in 1946 (p.31). The figure of 800 departmental staff is from letter from Fraser to Wardley, 30-9-1946, INF 12/29. In 1931 there were 44 people employed wholly or partially on publicity work (Treasury report 1938 cited in Mariel Grant (1994) p.45).

event. In 1936 they hardly existed. Now all of the Departments have information divisions, some of them 60-70 strong, with a total membership, it seems, of some 800. In less than ten years that is, the Government has acquired and accepted a new function, and the Civil Service a new branch'. And yet, Fraser pointed out, 'we are without anything that any of us, I think would care to call a policy'.¹¹³

In addition to failing to define information policy, Labour Ministers had not properly considered the significance of the adoption of communication as a separate function of the State. If anyone was to blame for this it was Morrison, and Fraser wrote to the Lord President, as Minister responsible for information, about his concerns, hoping to organise a regular weekly meeting to overcome what Fraser thought was a dangerous drift in information policy and to come to terms with this major extension of governance. 'War as a simple non-controversial subject, and the political cover of the coalition are both gone' Fraser wrote, 'Our topics are drawn from domestic problems and some of them are subject to controversy... I don't believe any Government in the world is attempting something similar'.¹¹⁴

But Morrison was still more worried about the existing means of communication than the new apparatus. He was busy trying to push an enquiry into the Press through Cabinet. Other Ministers were even less interested in communication than Morrison. Indeed Attlee often suggested that his Cabinet be careful of the media. In a number of Cabinet directives he recommended that 'Ministerial broadcasts should be kept to a minimum', and that articles should only be written 'in order to supplement the means already used for enlightening the public in regard to measures before Parliament and other administrative questions

¹¹³ Robert Fraser to DJ Wardley, 30-9-1946, INF 12/29.

¹¹⁴ Fraser to Morrison (via JAR Pimlott), 28-9-1946, CAB 124/1017.

affecting the work of their Departments'.¹¹⁵ Attlee's own uncommunicative nature was infamous. When he asked Williams to be his public relations advisor he said, "As you know, Francis, I am allergic to the Press".¹¹⁶ It was not just modesty either, Williams himself wrote that 'Attlee is one of the most difficult men in the world to publicize and possesses fewer of the political arts of self-presentation than any public man I know'.¹¹⁷ The new information services were, for some Ministers, a means of avoiding the media rather than communicating through it.

Therefore throughout 1946, though there was significant amounts of publicity emerging from the COI, it lacked cohesion, organization, or focus. Where, one newspaper asked, 'is that co-ordination and toning up of press facilities that was looked for by the appointment of Francis Williams to be PRO adviser at 10 Downing Street? And, further, what balanced coordination obtains between Downing Street, the other departments interested and the newly-fledged COI?'.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile, the opposition maintained its attacks on the information machinery. Churchill attacked the premise for the new services. 'Is it not a fact' he asked, 'that during the war we had a national coalition Government, officially representing all parties, and that the use of publicity in those days was for the essential purpose of national survival? Now that we have a two party system again it is very questionable how far public funds and public money [interrupted]... it is a different situation altogether'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Cabinet Papers, CP(49)95, 'Questions of Procedure for Ministers', 29-4-1949 (collection of notes issued since 1945), CAB 129/34.

¹¹⁶ Quoted by Francis Williams in his autobiography, *Nothing So Strange* (1970), p.215.

¹¹⁷ Francis Williams, *Press, Parliament and People*, p. 100.

¹¹⁸ *World's Press News*, 29-8-1946, p.9.

¹¹⁹ Winston Churchill, Hansard, 17-10-1946, Vol.427, Col.1054 (Oral Answers).

Even the Government's own supporters were lambasting Labour's information policies. Although their complaint was that the administration was not nearly vocal enough. JB Usher (Education) thought the Government positively supine in the face of growing criticism of Labour policies and offered his own diagnosis: 'Permit me to indulge in teaching my grandmother how to make daisy chains. I know that between the Party in the House, the bright boys at Transport House and the Fabians, you can muster a fair opinion on public psychology but it does seem to me the Labour Government is missing one terrific thing: it is not telling the people about itself and its work' (his underlining).¹²⁰

A Review of the Government Approach to Communication

In November Pimlott wrote a draft Cabinet memorandum on behalf of Morrison trying to address the problem. There had, he pointed out, 'been a good deal of criticism in Parliament and outside' of the way in which the Government had presented its policy. His assessment was that 'There is not a sufficiently close link between policy and publicity'. The memo then went on, in considerable detail, to describe the way in which the Government should approach both Departmental and Government wide publicity.¹²¹

Success in the presentation of policies relied, it said, 'upon the publicity aspect being kept in mind from earliest practicable stage in their formulation'. This included 'steps which may not seem directly related to publicity'. But the initial announcement itself was critical: 'the way it is handled by the press and the BBC at the very start may make all the difference to the reaction upon the public and to subsequent publicity'. This meant the information division had to be integral to the process. The Minister should work with them on timing, ('in relation, for

¹²⁰ JB Usher to Leonard (Hornsby? CIO at Ministry of Labour), June 1946, CAB 124/1004.

¹²¹ John Pimlott, first draft to Nicholson and Boon, sent 28-11-1946, to become IH(47)2, 'Some Observations on Information Policy', CAB 124/1004.

example, to the desirability or otherwise of the first appearance of the news in the evening papers'), date, ('What, too, is the most advantageous date of publication?'), explanation ('Should there be a summary for the press?'), delivery ('Should there be a press conference? If so, should the Minister take it personally, and who should be invited?'), and support material ('should the announcement be printed as a leaflet?'). Equally they should have asked the same questions of themselves about the follow-up. Particularly if they wanted to make a film or use other publicity that required significant lead time.¹²²

The memorandum put particular emphasis on relations with the established mass media. 'I attach special importance to Press relations' Pimlott (as Morrison) said, 'Too much care can hardly be given to the establishment of good contacts with Fleet Street and Broadcasting House'. The Chief Information Officer as well as the Press Officer should be alive to this relationship, and should ask the advice and help of the Number 10 PR advisor if necessary.

The memorandum recognised that one of the continuing frustrations of Morrison and his team was 'how to get over to the public the general background against which the activities of the various Departments should be seen and a picture of Government policy as an integrated whole'. The individual, they believed, could not understand his or her role without a sense of the national situation. This was however, very difficult given that most publicity policy emerged from the Departments. Though the memorandum encouraged Departments 'not to be shy about throwing up ideas for general Government publicity' it did not propose a solution. That would have to wait for a few months.¹²³

Pimlott sent the memorandum to Nicholson and copied it to Boon. Both agreed with his sentiments and even extended them. Boon re-emphasised the need to

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

draw out the wider picture, saying to Pimlott ‘you are shooting at too small game. What the public needs is more of the wide general picture. If people are given a simple and easily understood explanation of what the Government is aiming at as a whole I think they will quite readily fit into the general picture domestic and departmental events’.¹²⁴ With minor adjustments it was then sent on to Morrison, Robert Fraser and Francis Williams. Fraser accepted that there was ‘a certain deadness in the relations between the Government and the people’ at the moment, but argued this was the fault of Ministers, not machinery.¹²⁵ His response implied that Ministers had abdicated their responsibility for communication, expecting the new systems to do their job for them.

At the same time as Pimlott was adapting the draft to reflect Morrison and Fraser’s thoughts, circumstances were conspiring to propel the change in attitudes towards communication. The economic situation was worsening. Immediately before Christmas Morrison had received the 1947 Economic Survey and the draft White Paper. They made depressing reading. To make sure the Government remained stable he believed it would have to convince people that there was a plan to see them through their current hardship. The idea of giving people a sense of the broader perspective and using communication as a deliberate weapon in the Government arsenal seemed even more necessary.¹²⁶

An article printed in *The Observer* shortly after Christmas substantiated this link between positive communication and the success of Labour policies. The article caught Morrison’s attention for this reason and he sent it to the Prosperity Campaign Committee ‘to consider and report on the problems raised’.¹²⁷ The

¹²⁴ Boon to Pimlott, 29-11-1946, CAB 124/1004.

¹²⁵ Fraser’s comments to Pimlott, Boon, Nicholson & Morrison, 2-1-1947, CAB 124/1004

¹²⁶ Reference to Morrison’s Christmas reading in Donoughue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.390

¹²⁷ Morrison to PC Committee, quoted in PC(OC)(47)1, 31-12-1946, CAB 124/908.

article, by Charles Davy, argued that there was a malaise, and that there were genuine national anxieties with the way things were going. Planning and social welfare encouraged passivity, he suggested. 'If they are not to lead to the Servile State they require the counterbalance of positive steps to foster initiative and responsibility among the workers – bolder steps than Socialist doctrine usually admits'. Davy asserted that there was an aspect of the Labour programme which had not yet been addressed. 'So far' he wrote, 'the Labour Government has paid much more attention to the technique of planning than to its psychology'.¹²⁸

The article confirmed for Morrison the urgency of his communications memorandum. He quickly had it drafted in order to send it to Ministers and officials on the Information Services Committees. 'Some Observations on Information Policy', dated 10th January 1947, was an explicit appeal to Ministers and their departments to renew their information policies. The move towards a new attitude had begun.

However, on 12th January Morrison fell ill with a blood clot in his left calf. When his condition worsened the following week he was admitted to hospital. He continued to deteriorate throughout January and February. By March he was finally beginning to improve but was still not allowed to do work and in April was dispatched for a fortnight to the south of France to recuperate. He did not return to Government until the end of that month.¹²⁹ While he was away 'his Department came to a standstill'.¹³⁰ Stafford Cripps, the Secretary of the Board of Trade, took over information and publicity while the Lord President was ill.

Morrison's timing was unfortunate for the Government. As his health declined, so did the country's. Coal supplies were fast running out. Despite his confidence in

¹²⁸ *The Observer*, Charles Davy, 29-12-1946. Copy in CAB 124/908.

¹²⁹ Donoghue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.391.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* p.393.

1946, Emmanuel Shinwell, the Minister for Fuel and Power, had failed to secure enough coal to last the winter. Then, on the night of 23rd January 1947, 'the cold weather and the fuel crisis fused in a cruelly malign fashion'.¹³¹ Snow started to fall and for the next four weeks Britain was caught in one of its worst winters on record, without heat or power.

SECTION 3: Imposing Direction and Control

The Fuel Crisis as Catalyst for a Change in Attitudes to Information

The fuel crisis seemed to make a mockery of the idea of Government planning – how could a Government whose rhetoric centred on forecasting the nation's health have failed to prepare for such an obvious emergency. The newspapers leapt on the Government's failure with alacrity. A.J. Cummings wrote in the *News Chronicle*, 'Ordinary people blame, not the hostile weather, but the Government in general and the Minister of Fuel in Particular. They think they have been misled, or kept in the dark, and (rightly or wrongly) that reasonable foresight would have mitigated, if not entirely avert [sic], the crisis'.¹³²

The *Daily Mail* was even more critical about the Government's lack of communication: 'Now they [the Labour Party] are in office, and those who won through to the high places by means of their silver tongues have nothing to say. The so-called "People's Government" are further away from the mass of the people than any administration of modern times'.¹³³

But the most painful censure came from the *Daily Herald*, the Labour supporting newspaper which had stood by the Party up till then. It called for the Government

¹³¹ Peter Hennessy, *Never Again*, p.277.

¹³² *News Chronicle*, A.J. Cummings, 'Spotlight', 11-2-1947.

¹³³ *Daily Mail*, Editorial, 'Why be Afraid of the British People', 11-2-1947.

'to attend to its duty of informing the public about the difficulties which confront the nation'.¹³⁴

A member of the IH(O) committee looked at the headlines and commented prophetically, 'The national calamity – for it was a calamity – would erupt violently into the pattern of publicity in the forthcoming year'.¹³⁵ Even Attlee was quoted as admitting his administration currently had 'no sense of public relations' and that there is 'something wrong with our publicity'.¹³⁶

Attlee's comments were reinforced by the findings of a Mass-Observation survey the following week. The survey assessed the degree to which people understood the economic situation, as explained by the Government's 1947 Economic Survey and its popular version, 'The Battle for Output'. It concluded that both were incomprehensible to the average citizen and that there was 'a wide gulf still existing between the languages of leadership and of the general public'. There were also indications, according to Mass-Observation, 'that the language – indeed much of the approach – of politics is somewhat out of gear with modern mass mentality'.¹³⁷

The pressure for radical change was mounting, particularly amongst the Government's own supporters. One of these, Ritchie Calder, was so convinced of the need that he wrote a lengthy memorandum in April, titled 'The Place of Information in Democratic Planning'.¹³⁸ It is apparent that this fed into the Government's plans and helped accelerate change. Calder was a close friend of Francis Williams, having worked with him at the *Daily Herald* in the 1930s.

¹³⁴ *Daily Herald*, 10-2-1947.

¹³⁵ IH(O)(47)2nd, Minutes, 28-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

¹³⁶ *Daily Mirror*, 11-3-1947, p.1.

¹³⁷ FR 2462, 'The language of leadership', 20-3-1947, Mass-Observation Archive. Attlee responded to survey in the Commons, 24-3-1947, see March correspondence in T 273/299.

¹³⁸ Memorandum from Ritchie Calder, 14-4-1947, T 245/2.

Though now a journalist at the *News Chronicle* he had worked in the Political Warfare Executive during the war, planning subversive propaganda against enemy forces in Europe.¹³⁹ His memorandum is particularly useful since its diagnosis and recommendations closely reflected the Government's subsequent actions.

Calder started by directly linking democratic planning with communication. If Labour wanted to be successful, he wrote, 'it means not only the endorsement of the electorate of the need for planning... but the rational and imaginative realization by the individual worker, the housewife and so on of his or her part in the scheme of things'. Like many others at the time Calder then criticized current Government communication. There was a 'lack of consistency' and no 'coherent policy' amongst Departments. He proposed that the administration should make the information services much more integral to Government. At the moment 'they have usually been left to explain things once they have happened. They have not had... any effective say in the development of plans, or any influence on Departmental policy'. Therefore 'we have a static information service in a dynamic situation'.

For this reason he called for a 'drastic re-evaluation of its [the Government's] information policy.' His model of comparison was the European Service of the BBC during the war which, though 'no-one could doubt its veracity... was much the servant of the Chiefs of Staff'. Its effectiveness, he claimed, was based on two important elements – intelligent use of the facts, and a detailed understanding of the audience. The BBC insisted on facts, but 'facts were marshalled to ensure the right response'. And the "'Stimmung'", or the

¹³⁹ Entry for Ritchie Calder, 1982. Calder also wrote Francis Williams' entry in the DNB.

atmosphere, mood and circumstances of the recipient, was as important as the facts delivered'.

This, he believed, was directly applicable to the current situation: '...in a fast moving peace-time situation fraught with opportunity as well as difficulty, facts can be made to "work for their living"'. Not that Calder was recommending manipulation, 'It is a question of discretion and never of suppression'. Depending on which audience you were addressing, 'the presentation and the selection is different'. This, he ended, 'is the human aspect of "Democratic Planning" aimed at making the individual a willing party and active participant in the plans'.

This was clearly in radical contrast to the previous idea that a literal translation of the facts to the whole population would enable them to come to rational decisions. Calder's approach did not suggest involving people in shared decisions but directing them towards the Government's objectives through the selective use of information.

There was further pressure to adopt a more dynamic approach to communication at the 46th Annual Conference in Margate in May. Labour MPs, searching for a reason why the crisis came with such suddenness, came round to the view that it was not the Government's fault for not having planned, it was the Government's fault for not having explained the situation, and for not putting it in the context of the Government successes of the past two years. It was the surprise more than anything that they took issue with. In future, the Government had to take the people into its confidence and reconcile them to the situation.

E. Castle (Hornsey, DLP), who had brought forward a motion to 'tell the people the facts', knew where the blame lay and suggested a simple solution: "In these last 22 months things have gone pretty badly with the public relations machinery of the Government. What we are asking for from the Government is not Socialist

propaganda – that is the job of the Party – but a recital of the facts of what the Government has done”.¹⁴⁰

And yet the Government thought this had been what it was trying to do since it took office. That was part of the problem. Maurice Webb, chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party and a friend of Morrison, was much more astute and tapped into the views already expressed by the Morrison memorandum: “What is important is that our debate today should lead to one definite and clear conclusion, the conclusion that adequate instruction in the meaning and purpose and consequences and applications of public policy is an indispensable part of democratic Government . It is important that it should be understood by us and by the Government that the presentation of policy is just as important as the content”.¹⁴¹ In addition he was advocating a more flexible attitude towards information, “We cannot coerce in a democracy, we cannot direct: we have to persuade and coax and win co-operation”.¹⁴²

The ideological link between communication and ‘democratic planning’ was reiterated by a PEP document published in July 1947. ‘The Plan and the Public’ criticised the haphazard use of the phrase ‘Democratic planning’ – ‘an important ideological term that should not just roll off the tongue’, and said that to be effective this must consist of three elements: consultation, communication, and execution. Consultation, the equivalent of Calder’s detailed understanding of the audience, had, according to PEP, been formalised and expanded during World War One, and confirmed as a recognised and essential instrument of Government in World War Two. But in peace time its use was still improvised rather than integral to Government. Communication, PEP believed, meant

¹⁴⁰ E. Castle, 46th Labour Annual Conference, 29-5-1947.

¹⁴¹ Maurice Webb, 46th Labour Annual Conference, 29-5-1947.

¹⁴² Ibid.

situating the individual in the larger plans of the Government. This too was like Calder, who recommended making the worker realise their 'part in the scheme of things'.

The Broadsheet recommended the Government use information and communication in a more sophisticated way to help the people understand what to do. To engage in '... a sustained and intensive attempt over a period of time, with a clearly thought out strategy, to raise the level of public understanding and to change the attitude of ordinary people towards their social and economic responsibilities'. This was the nub of the socialist endeavour. And, in PEP's view, it was the responsibility of the Government information services to 'work out a comprehensive policy of public information in light of the facts of the situation and the Government plan'.¹⁴³

The authors of this PEP Broadsheet are not known but it must have reflected thinking within Government because Robert Fraser distributed it to all the members of his Home Production meeting of 8th August 1947.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the actions of the Government at this time show that the recommendations were taken to heart.

A New Approach to Information - The Formation of the Economic Information Unit

Calder brought home to the Government their previous naïveté. Combined with the Morrison memorandum, the criticisms of Labour's own supporters, and enhanced by the prevailing sense of emergency, it helped affect a sea change in the Government's approach to communication. From now on the administration would seek to integrate communication to policy-making and use information in a much more dynamic way. Central to this change was the formation of a small,

¹⁴³ 'The Plan and the Public', PEP Broadsheet, No.269, 25-7-1947.

¹⁴⁴ Home Production Conference Minutes, 8-8-1947, INF 12/66.

central Economic Information Unit (EIU) explicitly dedicated to considering, coordinating and commissioning economic publicity.

The creation of this unit followed the reorganisation of the central economic planning machinery. The fuel crisis had finally convinced the Cabinet that the current machinery was inadequate. In early March Attlee had therefore endorsed Sir Edward Bridges proposals to enhance it.¹⁴⁵ A fortnight later Francis Williams, Stafford Cripps and Robert Fraser agreed that to make this more effective the machinery of economic publicity also needed to be overhauled. They suggested to Attlee that the solution may be the formation of a new inter-departmental unit.¹⁴⁶ The Prime Minister endorsed their plan at the end of March.¹⁴⁷

The new unit was established over the following three months. It was to work within the office of the Lord President (subsequently shifted to the Treasury) and alongside the enhanced Central Economic Planning Section. It would be small, high-powered, and staffed by communications professionals (from journalism, advertising, and other departmental press offices). Morrison drafted in Clem Leslie, at a salary 50% higher than the DG of the COI, to run it.¹⁴⁸ It would be directed by an Economic Information Committee (IH(O)(E)), also run by Leslie, and comprising many of the familiar names from the Home Information Services Committee.¹⁴⁹ Though technically a sub-committee to the IH(O) this Committee acted in concert with, and often led, its official parent. It was empowered to plan and coordinate economic publicity, and, to commission its own publicity for

¹⁴⁵ GEN 169/2nd, Minutes, Ministerial Economic Planning Committee, 7-3-1947, CAB 130/17.

¹⁴⁶ Williams to Attlee, 25-3-1947, T 273/20.

¹⁴⁷ EE Bridges, note regarding Cripps authorisation, 1-4-1947, T 273/20.

¹⁴⁸ Leslie's salary would be £3,750 a year compared to £2,500 for Fraser. Dalton agreed the figure 'with great reluctance', Dalton to Morrison 15-5-1947, T 273/20.

¹⁴⁹ IH(O)(E)(47)1st, Minutes, CAB 134/361. For members see Appendix A.

themes 'beyond departmental limits'.¹⁵⁰ In practise Leslie and Robert Fraser worked closely to ensure the primacy of economic themes. Its objective would be to make people understand the seriousness of Britain's economic situation and persuade them to take action to alleviate it.

Like Calder, Leslie immediately drew on the experiences of the war to inform the new approach. In a note to Morrison at the end of June he wrote that 'the work of economic information is in many ways like "psychological warfare" when this is conducted on a basis of truth. In each the task is to project, and win acceptance for, news information and ideas about a complex and changing situation'.¹⁵¹ The 'basis of truth' idea represented a new willingness to separate policy from presentation and to use the basic aspects of policy simply as a foundation, from which the Unit could build persuasive arguments and direct their distribution through the mass media.

The EIU also sought to gain a much greater understanding of public attitudes than currently existed in order to target audiences more effectively. The current means of intelligence was, Leslie complained, sparse and inaccurate. 'The time honoured tradition of hearing the people through the "feeling of the house" has', he said, 'within fairly recent memory shown itself capable of wide divergence from the feeling of the country'. By comparison, the newspaper press 'holds up to the mind of the nation a series of mirrors that may be concave, convex, tinted or partially blacked out'. But Leslie saved his most scathing words for the senior civil servants who based their ideas on 'their own and their neighbours' wives and conversations in first class carriages from the outer suburbs'. Therefore there

¹⁵⁰ EPC(47)14, Economic Policy Committee, Memorandum, 'Economic Information Unit, Functions Of', 10-11-1947, CAB 134/215.

¹⁵¹ SC Leslie to Morrison, 30-6-1947, T 245/2.

was 'an increasingly opaque barrier between the mind of the centre of government and the mind of the mass of the people'.¹⁵²

Leslie intended to rectify this by overhauling the Government intelligence service: 'The proposal which I wish to put forward is for a continuous systematic survey of public opinion about economic affairs, with monthly reports'.¹⁵³ This was approved by Ministers at the end of July and from December 1947 the COI began doing extensive monthly surveys into public attitudes towards economic affairs.¹⁵⁴ These continued throughout 1948 before becoming bi-monthly in 1949. The surveys were especially useful for identifying who was resistant to economic policies and for what reasons. The EIU could then tailor the message to those groups through the media in the way most effective for overcoming that resistance.

This was particularly useful for targeting women. Leslie believed that a different approach was required for women. This perception was consistently supported by the economic surveys which suggested that women were much less well informed than men.¹⁵⁵ The EIU therefore developed a communications strategy directed at women. It prepared talks and discussions for women's groups.¹⁵⁶ It worked with the editors of women's magazines.¹⁵⁷ And it produced 'Report to the Women of Britain'. This information advertisement was carried in most of the national press and other relevant journals. The information contained in these

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ IH(47)1st, Minutes, 31-7-1947, CAB 134/354. Subsequently called the 'Survey of Knowledge and Opinion about the Economic Situation'.

¹⁵⁵ IH(O)(E)(48)8th, Minutes, 7-5-1948, CAB 134/364.

¹⁵⁶ IH(O)(E)(47)13th, Minutes, 31-10-1947, Economic Information Programme – included 'special material for women's organizations', CAB 134/361.

¹⁵⁷ IH(O)(48)26, Memorandum, 20-4-1948, report on meeting with Group of Editors of Women's Magazines. Unlike the actual material produced by the Government for women's organisations, these editors had actually initiated the meeting with the Home Information Services Committee, CAB 134/357.

reports, and the manner in which the information was presented, was aimed to appeal specifically to women. "I'd give anything for more clothing coupons", report No.9 read, 'But would you? Of course you're tired of having to manage on four coupons a month – we all are. But would you be willing to give up your own food, or your children's, to get more?'.¹⁵⁸

As well as measuring public attitudes, the EIU started to collate and distil intelligence for Ministers to use in set pieces or to add substance to their arguments in the media. For this reason the EIU set up a 'briefing section', according to Leslie one of the most important parts of the Unit. The section accumulated information from official sources, Government economic studies and 'a good deal of material from outside sources'.¹⁵⁹ It soon had 'a continual stream of information of every kind' which was organised by a 'librarian' or 'intelligence officer' and then passed on to a 'briefer'. The briefer would then use this material to prepare briefs for Ministerial speeches, broadcasts, press conferences, for an economic and industrial bulletin for opinion formers, and ad hoc briefs for publicity.

By October the EIU was preparing a fortnightly economic *Bulletin* 'designed solely to help Ministers in their speechmaking by providing material and suggesting topics'.¹⁶⁰ It organised an economic press conference twice a month with press packs for the media containing the Minister's speech and statistics to help them in their reports.

¹⁵⁸ 'Report to the Women of Britain', No. 9, CAB 134/365.

¹⁵⁹ IH(O)(49)18, Memorandum, 'On the Work of the EIU Briefing Section', SC Leslie, 1-3-1949, CAB 134/358.

¹⁶⁰ 'Crisis Publicity', Note by the EIU to EPB, October 1947, T245/2.

So effective was the briefing section that it soon became a model for other Departments.¹⁶¹ This was important because it was this section which was able to reverse the natural dynamic and influence the preparation of policy as well as its presentation. In a memorandum reviewing the work of the briefing section in 1949, Leslie said that it 'safeguards the Unit against the risk of becoming a passive recipient or routine transmitter of information, enabling it to deal constructively with its material, and to take initiatives with its own Department on a basis of some mutual understanding of function and aim'.¹⁶²

The EIU was also supposed to coordinate the release of economic information. This meant controlling its timing and choosing its outlet. It was particularly concerned that unpopular information was timed so as not to damage the Government. For example, when considering the economic information film programme the EIU suggested that 'in regard to the films on the National Health Service and National Insurance it was felt that these films should be produced as explanatory films against the time when pay packets were docked for these services'.¹⁶³

Morrison re-emphasised this issue to Ministers in 1948. He wrote that 'when a Minister had an unpopular announcement to make he [Morrison] thought it important that the Minister should consider carefully and, if necessary, consult his colleagues about both the timing and terms of such an announcement'. As a rule he suggested that when a Minister was seeking authority for a particular course of action 'he should, as a regular practice, give some indication of how the

¹⁶¹ Ibid. 'It is for other information divisions to decide whether and how far its [the briefing section's] methods, and its relation to the operations of the Unit as a whole, contain any lessons for them'.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ IH(O)(E)25, Memorandum, 6-8-1947, CAB 134/362.

publicity would be handled... bear in mind the publicity value and, where appropriate, to consult with their publicity experts'.¹⁶⁴

This consciousness of context illustrated a growing awareness of the media agenda. For example, the EIU emphasised the importance of 'all public utterances by all ministers, senior and junior', especially speeches and broadcasts. These were, the EIU told ministers, 'the most powerful single method of reaching and influencing the public, and they have powerful secondary effects in their influence upon the scale of news values adopted by the press'.¹⁶⁵ This concept of establishing news values was not present in the earlier advice of the information services and indicates an increasing appreciation of news management.

Though some of the functions carried out by the EIU had been done before, the difference was the degree of autonomy the EIU was given, its development of information management (timing announcements, selective use of facts etc.), its systematic use of intelligence to inform publicity (via its briefing section), its speed, and the explicit use of information to persuade rather than simply to inform. Due to the economic circumstances, it felt it was justified in taking radical action. Working during a crisis constantly compared to a war situation which called for a revival of the 'Dunkirk spirit' the Unit had the authority to initiate publicity campaigns, to work with any Department, and to report directly to the Minister for Economic Affairs and Cabinet Committees. It was also, for the first time, trying to plan and execute publicity policy in the light of public opinion surveys. It was, in Calder's words, trying to gauge the 'mood and circumstances of the recipient' before it decided which facts to deliver and how. And, it was

¹⁶⁴ IS(48)1, Memorandum, Morrison, 21-1-1948, CAB 134/354.

¹⁶⁵ Leslie to Fraser, Memorandum, 'Economic Publicity Policy', 27-1-1949, T245/3.

targeting its message at specific audience groups, like women, and trying to consider its content and tone in respect to that audience.

The EIU was very ahead of its time, as the American Government Administrator Mr. Hoffman told Morrison in 1949, "I thought I knew something about informational activities. I want to say that having spent the morning with the Economic Information Unit, having learned something of their plans to try and impress all the people of Great Britain with the importance of productivity, I think, to a certain extent, we in America are amateurs. In other words, when it comes to resourcefulness and ingenuity, I take off my hat to ... his [Morrison's] organisation'.¹⁶⁶ It was so advanced that many of its methods did not initially gain acceptance and it was hampered by the less highly developed attitudes of most Ministers.

The EIU was the most visible, but certainly not the only way in which the Government began to use communication in a more deliberate and calculated fashion. Also in 1947 the Government decided to try to raise awareness of, and increase national confidence in, the British Empire. The Empire Publicity Committee (EPC) had been set up in October 1946, but it was not until the following year that Ministers instructed it to 'consider ways and means of overcoming the prevailing ignorance at home and overseas about the Commonwealth and Empire and to initiate energetic action for the achievement of this purpose'.¹⁶⁷ A small unit, the Empire Advisory Unit (EAU), was set up to act on behalf of the committee.

¹⁶⁶ Mr. Hoffman (American Government European Aid Administrator) to Morrison, 1949, quoted by Morrison in the Commons Supply Debate, 23-5-1949, Hansard, Vol.465, Col.1009.

¹⁶⁷ Empire Publicity Committee: 'The EPC was set up in October 1946 as a sub-committee of the Home and Overseas Information Services Committees and reports to both these' Back of file hand written note, 9947/181/950, EPC(48)7, 25-10-1948. Quote from EPC Memorandum, 'Schools Broadcasting on Empire Subjects', 3-2-1948, FO 953/132.

In contrast to the EIU the EPC decided to focus its attention on convincing younger minds, particularly through schools curriculum.¹⁶⁸ Children needed to be told, the Committee said, 'that this free company of nations is no self-centred and self-seeking society but a positive force for peace and a vital element in the solution of economic problems affecting Europe and the world today' and that 'The peaceful evolution of the Colonial Dependencies towards full nationhood provides an outstanding example of the progress of the human race towards maturity along democratic lines'.¹⁶⁹ It might be argued the curriculum was slightly premature.

Even less visible, but arguably more influential, was the Information Research Department, set up by Christopher Mayhew, ex-PPS of Morrison, at the beginning of 1948. The purpose of this secret unit was to 'selectively gather, package and publicize facts about the Soviet Union and its friends that would lead to a negative conceptual framework at home and abroad, which would support British foreign policy'.¹⁷⁰ There is already an extensive literature on the IRD but of particular interest here is the timing of its launch, immediately subsequent to the EIU, and that Leslie was corresponding with its originators even before the unit had officially started work.¹⁷¹ On the 8th January Leslie congratulated CFA Warner on his new position (as head of the IRD) and wrote that we must 'meet some time soon to exchange background information about our work and to explore possibilities of mutual help'.¹⁷² Discussing the IRD with the Chancellor the previous day Leslie wrote that, 'So far as the unit requires data about economic and industrial achievement at home, some provision should

¹⁶⁸ 'Schools Broadcasting on Empire Subjects', op.cit.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ John Dwight Jenks, *Hot News / Cold War*, p.131.

¹⁷¹ In particular, Paul Lashmar and James Oliver, *Britain's Secret Propaganda War* (1998). For fuller list see bibliography.

¹⁷² Leslie to CFA Warner, 8-1-1948, T245/2.

perhaps be made for proper liaison from the outset with the EIU'.¹⁷³ In mid-1948 Morrison recommended that Warner attend meetings of the information services committee.¹⁷⁴

Given the astonishing problems that Britain faced in 1947 it is not surprising that the Government sought to cope as best it could. Domestically, the fuel crisis and subsequent currency crisis threatened to undermine any credibility the Government had for managing the economy. Internationally, relations with the Soviet Union were deteriorating quickly and in the autumn the newly established Cominform began to target propaganda against Britain. This was combined with the fissiparous tendencies already latent within the British Empire. India gained its independence in 1947, Burma and Palestine in 1948.

To deal with these problems the Government chose to try to adapt the machinery of communication and use it much more effectively in order to persuade people of the need to work harder, of the evils of Communism, of the benefits of social democracy, and of the magnanimity of the Government's policies towards the colonies. This represented a major shift from the original intentions behind the establishment of the information services and a transformation in attitudes towards information within Government. The EIU was at the forefront of that change.

However, there were problems associated with coordination and centralisation. First, the departments had information agendas of their own and were not happy to see them sacrificed on behalf of a small, non-departmental unit. Second, centralisation and co-ordination created higher profile campaigns and attracted the criticism of the Opposition and the Press. Third, in the context of the Cold War, when repressive socialist Governments were monopolising media outlets,

¹⁷³ Leslie to Cripps, 7-1-1948, T245/2.

¹⁷⁴ Norman Brook, 'Note for the Record', 4-6-1948, CAB 21/2219.

promoting a single message across all media began to make Labour look dangerously authoritarian.

SECTION 4: Reaction Against Centralisation

Centralisation and the Departmental Reaction

Robert Fraser approved of the 1947 shift to bigger campaigns and broader themes. He believed these had a greater impact on 'public enlightenment' and on morale. However, he was also conscious that this required the COI Divisions to turn down the smaller requests of departments. He encouraged the Division heads to do this. 'The only way of counteracting an inordinate number of trivial requests' he told them, 'was by filling the divisional programme with big projects'.¹⁷⁵

This suppression of smaller projects in favour of larger themes did not make the COI popular. By the end of 1947 the departments were angry enough to take remedial action. One of them (or possibly more than one) spoke to Frank England, an investigative journalist from the *World's Press News*, and offered to give him an exclusive scoop on the inner workings of the Government's information services.¹⁷⁶ It resulted in a five part exposé run in weekly instalments from 4th December 1947 to the 8th January 1948. The main purpose of the articles was to rubbish the COI. England accused it of being 'the refuge of third class brains', 'home of delays', 'duplication', 'extravagance of useless material'.¹⁷⁷ This was particularly serious, he felt, because Britain needed inspiration and encouragement to help pull it out of its dire economic situation. But, with an interesting twist of logic, England also accused the Central Office of a sinister

¹⁷⁵ Fraser, Home Production Conference, 19-6-1947, INF 12/65.

¹⁷⁶ After the first article was published on 4-12-1947, Morrison began a search of the Information Divisions to find out who leaked the information, CAB 124/992.

¹⁷⁷ Frank England, *World's Press News*, 4-12-1947.

policy of 'expansion by infiltration' and 'excessive and increasing centralization' such that 'if carried to its logical conclusion, must result in the complete "Goebbelisation" of the Government's information services'.¹⁷⁸ The 'suspiciously powerful' EIU was evidence both of this dangerous centralization and this creeping infiltration.¹⁷⁹

England maintained this contradictory dualism throughout the articles. On the one hand the COI was a bureaucratic mess that had 'allowed the MOI machine to go rusty' and caused 'interminable delays' to Government information and publicity. Yet on the other hand it was over-powerful and bent on national domination. 'There is an increasing feeling' England wrote on 1st January, 'that the ground is being prepared, willy-nilly, for the day when a still more weakened Press, faced by a more centralized and strengthened Government propaganda machine, will tempt some Government to carry the process to its logical conclusion and "Goebbelization" will become a fact'.¹⁸⁰

The articles fuelled the paranoid fears of those on the right that Britain was building towards a Nazi or Soviet superstate with an Orwellian propaganda machine. Yet at the same time they managed to criticize the British machine for not being any good. England's answer was to dissolve the COI and redistribute responsibility amongst the Departments. This tidy solution was not the only clue as to the source of England's articles. They also contained information that was only known to those within Whitehall. For example, England knew that the Ministerial Committees on information services had not met often.¹⁸¹ And, he made uncannily accurate estimates of the cost of the Central Office, its number of

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. There was even a photo of a suitably enigmatic-looking Leslie beside one of the articles, *World's Press News*, 1-1-1948.

¹⁸⁰ *World's Press News*, 1-1-1948

¹⁸¹ *World's Press News*, 4-12-1947.

employees, and the membership of its Committees. Morrison had no doubt that the source was internal: 'It is quite clear that (a) the articles could not have been written without access to documents which could not properly be shown to anyone outside Government information services, and (b) that glosses on these documents unfavourable to the COI have been supplied by someone with intimate knowledge of the current workings of the information machine'.¹⁸²

The Departmental source of the leaks was never found (despite the questioning of each Public Relations Officer), but their wrecking operation had significant repercussions. Morrison called a meeting of the key figures in the Government Information Services for 12th January 1948.¹⁸³ Its agenda suggests Morrison was ready to take a back to basics approach. The first point was 'what is the function of the information services?'. They were then to discuss the relationship of the central services with the Departments, particularly the roles of Clem Leslie and Philip Jordan (who replaced Francis Williams as public relations advisor to the Prime Minister in late 1947). Followed by the relationship of home and overseas information, and finally 'teamwork amongst Ministers'.

In the meeting itself, the minutes suggest an unfortunate lack of clarity as to the purpose of Government information services: 'Little doubt or difficulty arose as to the general conception of the purpose and object of Government information services. These were to inform and educate the public' (these words are crossed out in the minutes).¹⁸⁴ They also struggled to determine the difference between partisan and non partisan information: 'in theory the dividing line between party and Government publicity was tolerably clear. In practice differences of opinion

¹⁸² Morrison to Nicholson, 14-1-1948, CAB 124/992.

¹⁸³ Included Patrick Gordon-Walker (Morrison's assistant in charge of Information Services), Stephen Taylor (Morrison's new PPS), Max Nicholson, Robert Fraser, Philip Jordan, Puck Boon, David Stephens, CAB 124/71.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

arose only in those cases where the Government deliberately went beyond information (as it had every right to do) in order to create an attitude in the public mind and to persuade the public to act in some particular way'.¹⁸⁵ Despite this confusion, Morrison left the meeting confident in the continued need for the COI and information services. At the end of the month he merged the Ministerial home and overseas information services committees in order to share learning and meet more frequently.¹⁸⁶

The High Water Mark of Ideological Debate on the Information Services, 1948

However, the articles sparked a public controversy that led to questions in the House throughout January, February and March 1948, and culminated, on 13th May, in the most significant debate on information services since the war. This debate was significant for a number of reasons. It represented the high water mark of ideological dissent with the information services. After this point the debate shifted to efficiency and cost reduction. It identified the increasing tendency of the Government to manage information, for example by selecting facts that supported its objectives. And it highlighted the continual problem inherent to Government communication – how to explain Government policy without creating a rationale and justification for it.

As Harold Macmillan, who opened the debate for the opposition, said: "I have no doubt that the temporary civil servants in charge of this vast machine try to be objective... Nevertheless, the analysis of a problem, whether positively or negatively, almost invariably tends to be one-sided. The Central Office is a Government agency. It cannot very well attack or criticize the Government it serves. It can make no reference to its failures and it must pass lightly over its lack of foresight. The fuel crisis must be represented not as a failure of the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Minutes also in CAB 124/992.

¹⁸⁶ See Morrison to Attlee, proposal for amalgamation of committees, 6-12-47, PREM 8/723.

Minister but as an act of God... What happens is that all the facts are emphasised which are favourable to the Government, who are represented as a kind of band of heroes struggling bravely against adverse conditions and events outside their control'.¹⁸⁷

Though he does not refer to it, it is likely Macmillan had in mind publications like the 'Battle for Output', written in early 1947 by Max Nicholson. This popular version of the Economic Survey began by explaining that it was 'the plain story of Britain's production in the first full year of peace. It is the story of a great beginning towards recovery, against heavy odds'.¹⁸⁸

The determination of the Government to overcome this one-sidedness by only presenting 'the facts' was equally fraught with difficulties (as they had already found). The Conservative John Boyd Carpenter pointed this out: "The Lord President has talked of factual statements. I am not going to suggest that, on the whole, these statements are not factual, but the question is which facts. No information service in the world can disseminate all the facts about the situation in the world today. Even the Government's present lavish expenditure of paper cannot carry that. So we are driven to the conviction that the officials of this Department have to select between one fact and another'.¹⁸⁹ And the illusion of objectivity was perhaps one of the greatest dangers of the information services since the patina of truth added to their power. This could, Macmillan argued, lead to the 'sapping of individual judgment and substitution of the state machine'.¹⁹⁰

In a similar way, if the Government tried to promote its cause through its machinery, 'as it has every right to do', it necessarily compromised the objectivity

¹⁸⁷ Harold Macmillan (Conservative), Information Services Supply Debate, Hansard, 13-5-1948, Vol.450, Col.2295-6.

¹⁸⁸ 'The Battle for Output', February 1947, CAB 124/909.

¹⁸⁹ John Boyd Carpenter (Conservative), op.cit., Col.2319-2320.

¹⁹⁰ Macmillan, op.cit., Col.2300.

of that machinery. The Labour MP S. N. Evans admitted as much when he said, 'Today we are engaged in the greatest experiment of all time; one to abolish without, at the same time, abolishing liberty... It is in the service of this experiment that the COI has a great part to play'.¹⁹¹ As Kenneth Lindsay (Independent) commented, 'Implicit behind the whole of the arguments [presented by the Government information services] was that a very important change was going on in this country, and it was important that the people here and abroad should know about it. But supposing they do not agree with the change?'.¹⁹²

The opposition also argued that the information services were leading Ministers to bypass the constitutional route of communication – Parliament - and go directly to the media. "Ministers are detaching themselves more and more from the House of Commons. They are proceeding far more by method of Press Conferences, broadcasting, and now this Central Office of Information".¹⁹³ The importance of the fortnightly economic Press Conferences were evidence of this, as was the high number of broadcasts made by Ministers as part of the production drive in 1947.

On the larger point of the justification of information services, Labour had argued that the world was much more complex than it had been in the past, and it was the duty of the Government to explain that complexity to its citizens.¹⁹⁴ However, as Kenneth Pickthorn, a professional historian, responded, 'the past looks easy only because it is not here, and because, comparatively speaking, we do not

¹⁹¹ SN Evans (Labour), *op.cit.*, Col.2351.

¹⁹² Kenneth Lindsay (Independent), *op.cit.*, Col.2388.

¹⁹³ Gurney Braithwaite (Conservative), *op.cit.*, Col.2353.

¹⁹⁴ See Patrick Gordon Walker, 19-3-1948, Hansard, Vol.448 Col.2541.

know anything about it', hence, 'the notion that things are infinitely more complex now than they used to be is an illusion'.¹⁹⁵

Unfortunately the Labour responses to some of their counterparts' challenges did not engage with the fundamental difficulties of Government communication raised. They were so prepared to counter the charges of Party politics that they did not connect with the overarching dangers of Government control of information. 'It is not a question of party politics' as Kenneth Lindsay unsuccessfully tried to make clear, 'We have had too much of party politics here today... Suppose a Conservative Government get into power and they have these creative civil servants, what is the position? ...they would focus its propaganda on the legislation which they were going to put through. That is inherent in a domestic propaganda service'.¹⁹⁶

But the Government benches refused to take on the complexities or nuances of the debate. They told the Conservatives their evidence of Party propaganda was unconvincing or petty (Morrison, Granville and Driberg), that the justification of information services in a democracy was straightforward (Gordon Walker), and that given the level of commercial advertising the Government had to shout to get itself heard (Driberg). Their only criticism was that the information services were not powerful enough given the growing Communist threat (Woodrow Wyatt).

The single aspect of debate on which the Conservatives could properly engage with Labour was expenditure. This was the original focus of Macmillan's speech. 'Expenditure has grown year on year' he said, and was now 'impressive' and 'extravagant'. His own calculations had given him a figure of £7.5 million on home information services and £9 million abroad. The cost of this 'vast machine of Government information' could easily be cut back, Macmillan said. Frederic

¹⁹⁵ Kenneth Pickthorn (Conservative), Vol.450, Col.2375.

¹⁹⁶ Lindsay, Hansard, 13-5-1948, Vol.450, Col.2388-2389.

Harris accused it of 'wanton extravagance'.¹⁹⁷ Though Gordon Walker, the deputy information head, defended it, saying it saved as much as it cost thanks to preventative healthcare advice and recruitment campaigns, this was the one aspect of debate that the Government took seriously. With Stafford Cripps as Chancellor and Economic Overlord constantly exhorting people to austerity, the Government could not be perceived to be spending profligately. Therefore, in the autumn of 1948 the Treasury appointed a Committee of enquiry, headed by Sir Henry French, to examine the costs of the Home Information Services.

SECTION 5: Save Money and Simplify the Message

Austerity

Even before its appointment, Morrison had been aware of the rising costs and had started to think about cutting back. He was conscious that after the immediate post-war reductions, costs had been rising since 1946.¹⁹⁸ The estimates for 1948/9 were only 8.5% below the level of 1944/5 (the wartime peak in spending) despite Attlee's assurances in December 1945 and March 1946 that post war information services would be significantly reduced. For the information services meeting in April Morrison prepared a memorandum showing the total cost of the information services now amounted to about 6/- per head of the population.¹⁹⁹ This equated to over £13 million, a figure estimated to rise to over £16 million for 1948-49. Even still, Morrison told the Committee he was not looking for large scale cuts, just for more care in departmental spending.

However, in his memorandum Morrison also outlined three major reasons why information had now become so critical to Government. The reasons indicate the

¹⁹⁷ Frederic Harris (Conservative), op.cit., Col.2347.

¹⁹⁸ Correspondence with Robert Fraser, from 25-2-1948, CAB 124/1029.

¹⁹⁹ IS(48)6, Memorandum, Cost of Government Information Services, 12-4-1948, CAB 124/1029. Attlee to Commons 17-12-1945 and 7-3-1946. This did not even include Food and National Savings publicity which was substantial.

importance of the change in the nature of governance and the significance of this change happening while this particular Government was in power. 'Before the war', Morrison wrote, 'the Government Information Services were in their infancy. During the war Departments learned the value of publicity and information work. They are now great believers in its efficacy and importance'. There had also been, since the end of the conflict, a 'great flow of post-war social and economic legislation' which needed to be explained to the public. Finally, there was 'the continuation, and indeed intensification, of the nation's economic difficulties' which meant the information services had the task 'not only of persuading the public to act in a certain way' but also explaining the reasons for the economic difficulties.²⁰⁰

After the Supply debate in May the Government sought to make further cuts in the budget for the information services. In October the Chancellor told Cabinet that any expenditure on new services or increase in existing services had to be taken from the existing budget.²⁰¹ In December Morrison wrote that 'the time has come to call a halt' in rising costs, and, if possible, try to reduce the estimates for 1949-50 below the total figure of £16.7 million.²⁰²

But the reduction in spending and consequent cancellation of many of the Government's campaigns disguised the most important aspect of the debate and its aftermath. The principle of Government information had been upheld. After 1948, the arguments against information services dwindled. The Government had successfully defended the practice of communication and the machinery that went with it. And it continued to develop its techniques of communication. By May the following year (1949) Robert Fraser was able to write to Morrison, 'I do not

²⁰⁰ IS(48)6, op.cit.

²⁰¹ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(48)66, 25-10-1948, CAB 128/13.

²⁰² Morrison letter on 'Cost of Information Services', 15-12-1948, T245/6.

think this [the need for information services] is seriously questioned now. Among the newspapers it is only the Express Group that occasionally clamours for abolition' and Boyd Carpenter was now the sole voice in the Commons.²⁰³

The French Committee confirmed this the same month: 'The justification for some Government information services is beyond question. The citizen has a right to be told, and the Government has a plain duty to tell him, what it is doing in his name and with his money, and why'. Though the French Committee identified areas in which the Government could make savings on the cost of the home information services, most notably press and poster advertising, they also ratified the responsibility of the Government to use information services to communicate with the people.²⁰⁴

The Impact of Austerity

Other than upholding the concept of Government information, there were three principal effects of the austerity cuts. First, they pushed the debate further away from politics and ideology towards expenditure. Second, as a consequence, they made the Government reduce the use of expensive publicity campaigns as an aspect of policy and led it to be more creative in its use of free or inexpensive media. Third, they ensured the continuation of the public opinion research as a 'a valuable adjunct to the information services' and means by which to measure the success of publicity.²⁰⁵

The shift away from ideology to cost was apparent in the 1949 information services debate. There were some echoes of the six and a half hour session of a year earlier, but these were sporadic, repetitive and half hearted ('the first step towards dictatorship' etc.). Instead, Brendan Bracken, then David Renton, and

²⁰³ Fraser to Morrison, 23-5-1949, CAB 124/995.

²⁰⁴ Report of the Committee on the Cost of Home Information Services, Cmd.7836, 1949.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

Edward Keeling, all complained about the 'costly absurdity' of the COI, and that 'Government publicity is too expansive and too expensive'.²⁰⁶ The Government was also very studious in seeking to reduce information services costs. It cut expenditure on all campaigns – including food and Services recruitment.

However, the consequence of austerity was not the abandonment of communication, but simply the reduction of most Government paid publicity. Information officers were told they had to show more initiative in accessing free media to get their message across. Morrison said just this to the Information Services Committee in 1950: 'It seems to me... that we should give further thought to methods of economizing in Government publicity without detriment to its effectiveness. Indeed in some cases it may be possible to get better results by cheaper methods'. He was thinking particularly of the mass media – Press, newsreels and the BBC. 'This form of publicity is all the more effective' he said 'because it does not come from official agencies'.²⁰⁷

The EIU had already been using 'free' media whenever it could. Indeed its briefing unit was 'the main basis on which effective exploitation of "free" media rested'.²⁰⁸ Leslie's team listed many of its methods and outlets to the French Committee. They included; the preparation of briefs as background material for Ministers, the Press and the BBC; special feature material for popular magazines; stories for newsreels ('Unit had six Production "Credit Column" stories used during first six months of 1948'); BBC broadcasts (e.g. industrial features and

²⁰⁶ 'Costly absurdity' – Brendan Bracken, Hansard, 23-5-1949, Vol.465, Col.972, 'Government publicity is too expansive and too expensive' – Edward Keeling, 23-5-1949, Vol.465, Col.1004.

²⁰⁷ Morrison, Memorandum to Information Services Committee (Official), 16-11-1950, CAB 124/81.

²⁰⁸ IH(O)(49)2nd, Minutes, 3-3-1949, CAB 134/358.

radio newsreel), and the development of commercial advertising themes.²⁰⁹ Other departments were now encouraged to do the same.

Morrison's office also explored alternatives to excessive spending on newspaper advertising. 'It might be possible', Stephens wrote to Morrison, 'though it would be more trouble and would take more staff, to achieve something like the same results [as newspaper advertising] by "penetration" of the news and feature columns of the newspapers – at no cost whatever to the taxpayer'.²¹⁰ At the end of January 1949 the Economic Information Committee agreed that 'one of the most important means of publicizing economic information was through news and the presentation of it in such a way as to influence editorial comment'.²¹¹

Moreover, the Government found that if it was amenable to the approaches of commercial companies, then it could integrate some its own themes into private advertisements. At the beginning of 1949 the IH(O) Committee was approached by the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA) and asked if they were interested in closer cooperation between the information services and advertising. After initial nervousness they concluded that, as long as they were careful it should not cause any harm. Pimlott wrote, 'I should have thought, as a rough and ready goal, the aim should be to make reductions in Government advertising broadly corresponding to the contribution received from outside interests'.²¹² According to this plan, Government publicity would not diminish but be replaced by commercial coverage.

Similarly, it would be easier to enhance relationships with the newsreel companies and point them towards stories, than to try to publicise them oneself.

²⁰⁹ 'Note for French Committee – 'Free' Publicity for Home / Economic Production Themes', HI Kitchin, 11-1-1949, T245/6.

²¹⁰ Stephens to Morrison, 2-12-48, CAB 124/1029.

²¹¹ IH(O)(E)(49)3rd, Minutes, 28-1-1949, T245/3.

²¹² Pimlott, Note on advertising, 17-2-1949, CAB 124/1005.

This was one of the reasons why Robert Fraser hired Fred Watts, head of Pathé news for 25 years, to head up a newsreel desk at the COI. Watts was supposed to smooth some of the relations with the newsreels which had become strained, and ensure an 'appreciable increase in newsreel coverage for Government themes' (see Chapter Five).²¹³

A third consequence of the austerity drive was the perpetuation and promotion of the Social Survey which measured people's attitudes. The survey was critical, the French Report said, in evaluating the success of Government information. 'Whenever practicable' Sir Henry French therefore recommended, 'the results of publicity should be measured'.²¹⁴ Indeed such measurement had already had a substantial impact, although not perhaps in the way intended. Research appeared to be showing that many of the Government information campaigns were a failure. Or, at least, that campaigns which sought to educate and inform the public were only marginally effective. Most people either saw the information and failed to digest it, saw it but did not connect it to their own situation, ignored it, or missed it entirely.

This came across vividly in some research done on behalf of the Economic Information Committee by Dr Mark Abrams in 1947. Abrams had been asked to test the public reaction to *Report to the Nation* – a series of Government information advertisements placed in the national press. In October 1947 his company interviewed readers of the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*. The readers were asked whether they had read the recent *Report to the Nation* advertisement completely, had read it partly, had only glanced at it, or had missed it entirely. 45% of *Daily Mail* readers said they had read the ad completely whilst only 18%

²¹³ IH(O)(49)2nd, Minutes, 3-3-1949, CAB 134/358. The Government relationship with the domestic newsreel companies is examined further in Chapter Five.

²¹⁴ Report of the Committee on the Cost of Home Information Services, Cmd.7836, 1949.

had missed it entirely. By comparison, not one *Daily Mirror* reader had read the ad completely. 84% had missed it entirely.²¹⁵

This type of finding was combined with other broader survey results which showed that much economic information was having little discernible effect. The economic survey report for March 1948, for example, reported that 'there is no appreciable change in public knowledge or opinion about the manpower problem and exports'.²¹⁶

These reports discouraged those with idealistic expectations of a new democratic dialogue based on shared knowledge. Though they did not give up hope of eventually raising the economic understanding of the nation, they shifted towards simple publicity intended to elicit a specific reaction. In March 1949 the Ministerial committee on information services decided, 'that the time had come when the emphasis should be more and more transferred to specific "action" publicity, telling the citizen what he himself might do in particular directions'.²¹⁷ Not only was this more straightforward and easier to measure, it was also cheaper.

²¹⁵ Mark Abrams wrote to Robert Fraser, 27-10-47, regarding recently completed interviews with readers of the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, RG 40/25.

²¹⁶ 'Survey of Knowledge and Opinion about the Economic Situation', NS 502, January 1948, circulated as IH(O)(E)(48)61, 25-3-1948, CAB 134/365.

²¹⁷ IS(49)1, Minutes, 25-3-1949, CAB 134/459.

Conclusion

Paul Addison noted that in the 1930s 'Both Marxists and progressives became obsessed by the problem of communicating with the mass of the public'.²¹⁸ In 1945 this progressive obsession was institutionalised by the Attlee Government. Its initial attitude is best summed up by a quote from William Beveridge made in 1944; 'Ignorance', Beveridge wrote, 'is an evil weed, which dictators may cultivate among their dupes, but which no democracy can afford among its citizens'.²¹⁹ Morrison thought Labour could and should commit to informing the public about what was being done in its name. It was for this idealistic reason that he established the Government Information Services.

Within 18 months he and other Ministers were made to realise that information services, and the commitment to comprehensive communication, was much more complex than they had imagined. Indeed it was an entirely new aspect of governance that required definition, direction, and management. As Robert Fraser told a Home Production Conference in June 1947, professional communication 'was an entirely new function not previously discharged by the government or by any other government in a free country in any part of the world'.²²⁰

When, in 1947, the Government became more aware of this complexity, it decided that its problems, which were legion, had to be addressed by a combination of forward planning coupled with much greater management of information. Hence the formation not only of the powerful economic information unit, but later of the EAU, and the IRD. There was no intention to mislead the public, but to use the machinery of information now available as an aid to the

²¹⁸ Addison (1994), p.143.

²¹⁹ William Beveridge, 'Full Employment in a Free Society', Part 7, 1944.

²²⁰ Robert Fraser, Home Production Conference, June 1947, INF 12/65.

execution and acceptance of government policy. In the difficult circumstances of the time it was considered legitimate to marshal the facts and shape them into a form that would be most convincing. But the effect was to shift the purpose of Government information from a general democratic responsibility to an important adjunct of policy – a means by which to persuade rather than inform.

This Government's use of communication was not sophisticated by later standards. But this was a period of experimentation which established the apparatus of communication, introduced new methods and created important precedents. As Clem Leslie said to the Institute of Public Administration; 'We know well that we are not finished practitioners, but experimenters. It is not usually given to those who have to explore new territory to find the best route at the first attempt and go straight to their objective. We have to feel our way toward the best methods, and to content ourselves meantime with a good deal less than complete achievement'.²²¹

By the end of the administration information professionals were permanently established within Government. The Treasury finally accepted the findings of the Crombie Committee (initiated by Fraser's concerns in 1946) and, by the end of 1949, instituted civil service positions, remuneration and recruitment criteria, and career paths for information officers.²²² The EIU continued to function, although it was the organisation most directly effected by the cuts recommended by the French Committee. It was integrated into the Treasury shortly afterwards and

²²¹ SC Leslie speech to Institute of Public Administration on 'The Work of the Economic Information Unit', 1949.

²²² This report was not published but was issued as an appendix to a Treasury instruction (Establishments circular 5/45 of August 20, 1949) - Whitley bulletin, October 1949, pp.176-82.

renamed.²²³ Leslie continued to head it during the Conservative Government of 1951-54.

The scale of Labour's communications efforts vividly illustrated both the potential and constraints on Government communication. In particular, it became clear that the Government would have to use established channels of communication more effectively, and rely on them to translate its message to the population. The most important contemporary channels of political communication were the newspapers. Labour's attempts to ignore, avoid, reform, marginalize and eventually come to terms with the press are assessed in the next two chapters.

²²³ IH(O)(E)(51)1st, Minutes, 12-1-1951, 'On 4th December 1950, the EIU was renamed the Information Division of the Treasury. The duties of the division remain unaltered', CAB 134/373.

Chapter 2: The Government and the Press 1945-47

As outlined in Chapter One, in 1945 the Labour Government thought that in order to strengthen democracy it had to make it inclusive and participatory. Free and fair information was a prerequisite to this. Since most of the population already received most of their political information via the newspapers, these seemed the most natural channel through which to communicate. But Morrison, and many others on the political left, came to believe that the role of the newspaper as the channel of free and fair information had, by 1946, been compromised by the overweening power of a few, politically biased proprietors, by commercial imperatives which dictated the agenda of the papers, and by the lack of professionalism amongst journalists and their limited commitment to accuracy.

For this reason the Government appointed a Royal Commission on the Press in 1947. This was the first ever full investigation of the press by a British Government. It lasted two years, asked over 200 people 13,239 questions, and analysed the coverage of all the major newspapers of the period. But its importance has sometimes been dismissed by historians.¹ This is because its recommendations, not to introduce regulatory legislation of the press in favour of self regulation, were seen, at the time and since, as modest and timorous. What has been overlooked is how surprising they were. Appointed at the high point of nationalisation and during a period of increasing Government control an important question is why the Commission did not propose some sort of Government intervention in the press, positive or negative. Morrison had given it a very broad brief partly in the hope that it might devise some alternative means of protecting the press from owners and

¹ See Stephen Koss (1984) p.641, AJP Taylor's *Beaverbrook* (1972) p.585, and Curran & Seaton *Power without Responsibility*, p.297.

commercial pressures. As he wrote in a confidential paper before its appointment, the object of the inquiry should be 'a general review of the place which the press should occupy in a democratic community'.²

The press was, understandably, uncomfortable about being the subject of such close scrutiny. By 1945 most of those within the press were very keen to free themselves from the strict Government control that had characterised the war years. They felt they had, through their conduct between 1939-45, proved their responsibility and should now be trusted. Even Churchill, always highly aware of the press, praised it in 1943, "our vast influential newspaper press has known how to combine independence and liveliness with discretion and patriotism".³ For some of those within it the experience of the 1930s and of the war had heightened their sense of independence. *The Observer*, for example, put this into its statement of principles in 1942.⁴ In 1944 the press baron Lord Beaverbrook set up an independent body to oversee the *Express* Group of newspapers.⁵ And the election of a new Labour Government enhanced their impression of a new era free from the unhealthy Tory-Press Baron collusion of the late 1930s. But the different newspapers' interpretations of independent coverage and impartial reporting conflicted, over time, with those of the Government. The more they did so, the more the Government came to question their commitment to free and fair communication.

² Cabinet Paper, CP(46)360, 27-9-1946, CAB 129/13.

³ Quoted in Derek Hudson, *British Journalists and Newspapers* (1945), p.7.

⁴ 'Amid this chaos the transient nature of existing Parties and alignments becomes obvious, while the permanence of principles is plainer and more precious than ever. *The Observer* should not be a Party paper. It must be tied to no group, no sect, no interest. It should belong to no combine of journals. Its independence must be absolute' Ivor Brown, *The Observer*, 1942, quoted Koss (1984), p.621-22.

⁵ London Express Newspapers, reply to questionnaire of Royal Commission (NC1) 1947, B.S.77/3(1), Part 3, 'Since November 7th 1944 a committee consisting of members of the managerial and editorial staffs has determined the policy of these newspapers'.

This chapter and the one following will examine how these differing interpretations led to a fundamental reappraisal of the relationship of the Government and the press within a democracy. This one will look at how the relationship deteriorated between 1945-46 and how that deterioration led the Government to question the entire role of the press within society. It will show how Herbert Morrison pushed through the appointment of a Royal Commission, even though he tried to hide his involvement. The chapter will end with the appointment of the Commission. The following chapter will look at the progress of the Commission in the context of developing Government policy towards the media and assess how and why it came up with its recommendations.

That there was no clear resolution to the problem (of how a Government relates with its press without compromising its freedom) was, in itself, a very important outcome. Due to the almost continual friction between the Government and the press they both came to examine their roles much more closely than otherwise they would have done. In the process they clarified and matured these roles and this then had a major effect on their subsequent development. Though Britain did not choose to impose regulatory legislation on the press as in many other contemporary nations, they did use hostile tactics to influence the press and they flirted with alternative measures of control. That they came to settle for more diverse and covert methods of information management was by no means pre-determined in 1945.

These chapters show how the Labour Government became frustrated with the existing means of political communication and attempted to restructure them, while, at the same time developing alternative channels of communication. The attempt to develop alternative channels will be examined further in Chapters Four and Five.

SECTION 1: Communicating Through the Press

Why the Government Wanted and Needed to Communicate

As discussed in Chapter One, Labour had a theoretical commitment to communicate with the people. Everyone had a part to play in Labour's plans for Britain. The plans were, ideologically and pragmatically, universalist. The National Health Service and comprehensive National Insurance were being introduced to cater for everybody. The plans to nationalise coal, gas, electricity, transport, communications, and iron and steel would affect each person, regardless of age, status or wealth. No-one was exempt and therefore everyone needed to be told how they would be affected and what they were expected to do. As Stephen Koss has written 'the triumph of the Labour Party symbolized a revolutionary spirit that demanded nothing less than a reappraisal of national institutions'.⁶

Attlee spelt out the implications of this at the Scarborough conference in 1948. "Socialism is a way of life, not just an economic theory' he said, 'and in the process of achieving Socialism we have got to be good citizens of the Socialist state. Socialism demands a higher standard of civic virtue than capitalism. It demands a conscious and active participation in public affairs".⁷

It was at the moment that these new plans were being introduced that there would be the greatest need for communication. The Government was critically responsible for providing information and support for the new legislation as well as for shifting millions of people from a war to a peace footing.

⁶ Stephen Koss, *Political Press Vol.II* (1984), p.632.

⁷ Clement Attlee, Labour Conference, Scarborough, 19-5-1948.

Stephen Taylor, who had been head of Home Intelligence during the war and was voted into Parliament as a Labour MP in 1945, wrote to *The Times* in October 1945; 'It is clear that in the next five years the calls which the Government will make on the ordinary citizen are going to increase. If he is to know what Parliament has done in his name, and what part he has in the post war social structure, he must be told and told repeatedly in language he can understand. This is not Socialist propaganda, but simply a condition of the survival of democracy'.⁸

The Importance of the Press in Britain as a Means of Communication

The press was integral to the Government's plans to communicate. It had to be. Exposure to the press was practically universal. In 1947 the Hulton Readership Survey calculated that only 13% of the adult population did not read a daily paper, and only 7.5% did not read a Sunday paper.⁹ The total weekday newspaper circulation was over 15.5 million for nationals and almost 13 million for provincial dailies but the readership was even greater.¹⁰ Since paper rationing meant that newspapers were restricted in numbers of copies as well as in size, each paper would almost certainly be read by more than one person. The Hulton Survey estimated, for example, that each copy of the *Daily Telegraph* was read by an average of three people.

The post-war administration, like those before it, expected people to gain their understanding of politics from society and via the news media. It had, as the contemporary editor of the *New Statesman* wrote, 'deliberately left the job of political

⁸ Stephen Taylor, letter to *The Times*, 5-10-1945, p.5.

⁹ *Hulton Readership Survey*, Hobson, Henry, Abrams (1947).

¹⁰ Circulations for four weeks up to 29-6-1947 (Cmd.7700, p.12): 15,567,883 for national dailies, 12,982,099 for provincial dailies. The figure for national dailies in May 2004 was 11,055,258 (UK, Audit Bureau of Circulation).

education to be a by-product of the business of news-selling'.¹¹ The press was the most convenient and natural means of communication for the Government. Morrison put it even more strongly during the debate on the Press in October 1946, "in our subtle British way the press of this country is, so to speak, an unofficial part of our Constitution".¹²

Some newspapers took this responsibility much more seriously than others. *The Times* would print by far the most political news and comment, normally publishing verbatim important speeches from the House and Government statements. In the severely shortened papers of this period *The Times* devoted about 18% of its space to Parliamentary reports and international political news. The *Telegraph* also carried political news, although with fewer direct transcripts and more features.¹³

Of the popular press the *News Chronicle* covered the most political news while the rest of the tabloids had a broader agenda which included politics but also general home news, sports, features, finance and of course photographs and cartoons. The *News of the World* made it very clear that its agenda was not driven by politics. 'We have never claimed to take a very prominent part in the political life of the country' its editor told the Royal Commission in 1948, 'We think that a newspaper will fail (I am looking at it from a circulation point of view) if it does not deal with entertainment'.¹⁴

The *News of the World* was the biggest selling Sunday paper, selling over 7.5 million copies each week in 1947. Its readership was estimated to be over 16 million. There

¹¹ *New Statesman and Nation*, Editorial, 5-4-1947.

¹² Herbert Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, Press (Ownership and Control), Vol.428, Col.556, 29-10-1946.

¹³ Figures taken from an analysis done by the *World's Press News* in June 1947 (5-6-47). Based on one week's coverage.

¹⁴ Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on the Press (ME-RCP), *News of the World*, Day 22 (19-2-48) q.7411 & q.7425, Cmd.7398.

were six other national Sunday tabloids or 'picture papers' – The *Sunday Express*, the *People*, the *Sunday Dispatch*, *Reynolds News*, the *Sunday Graphic* and the *Sunday Pictorial*. Two 'class' (the contemporary term for broadsheet) papers competed with one another, the *Sunday Times* (not linked to the daily paper) and *The Observer*. Their circulations together added up to less than one million.

There were 112 daily newspapers published in Britain.¹⁵ Nine of these were general national morning papers. The biggest selling daily newspaper was the *Daily Express*, selling almost 4 million copies (when its circulation was pegged in June 1947). It was closely followed by the *Daily Mirror*. The *Daily Telegraph* was the best selling class paper, hitting one million sales in mid 1947, while *The Times*, the newspaper of record, sold approximately 270,000.¹⁶ The *Manchester Guardian* was only now making the jump from a regional to a national paper.¹⁷ There were six significant national political periodicals: the *Spectator*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, *Tribune*, the *Economist*, *Time and Tide*, and *Truth*. Combined, their circulations totalled just over 200,000 (compared to the *Radio Times* which, by mid 1947, was selling over 6 million copies a week).¹⁸

Politically, contemporaries classified the *Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Sketch* and *Telegraph* as right wing. The *Mirror*, 'the people's paper', was considered left wing, while the *Herald* had its political affinity to Labour written into its Articles of Association. *The Times* was simply the paper of the establishment (although had

¹⁵ Includes all 'general interest' daily newspapers in 1948, (Cmd.7700, p.7).

¹⁶ Circulations for four weeks up to 29-6-1947 (Cmd.7700, p.12).

¹⁷ At the prompting of Laurence Scott, the grandson of CP Scott. See David Ayerst, *Guardian, Biography of a Newspaper* (1971), p.596.

¹⁸ Cmd.7700, p.14, paragraph 47, and *World's Press News*, 11-9-1947, circulation for first 6 months of 1947.

seriously angered the Conservatives during the war). The *News Chronicle* was sympathetic to the Liberals.

Though radio was increasingly important for straight news, it was not considered the means by which people made political judgements. As Wilson Harris wrote in 1943, 'In spite of the wireless... the newspapers may properly be described as the eyes and ears of every man and woman in the land... through the papers they form their estimates of public men, of political issues, of foreign countries'.¹⁹ Moreover, the BBC still held the monopoly for radio broadcasting and was bound, by its charter, to remain apolitical.

Television had yet to be restarted, having been suspended during the war. And since so few people had a television set it was virtually ineffectual as a means of mass political communication before 1950.²⁰

The Economics of the Press in the 1930s vs. the 1940s

The economics of newspaper production in the 1930s were entirely different to those of the late 1940s. This difference changed the dynamics and extent of influence of different forces acting on the papers. The first and most important difference was in the cost and availability of the raw materials. Since there was no wood pulp produced in Britain all of it had to be imported – either as raw pulp and then converted to newsprint in British mills, or as finished newsprint. Before the war most of the pulp came from Scandinavia, and the newsprint from the US and Canada.²¹ The war cut off the supply of pulp from Scandinavia. British newspapers banded

¹⁹ Wilson Harris, *The Daily Press* (1943), p.1.

²⁰ By 1950, 343,882 television licences had been sold. Perilli, in Curran & Porter, *British Cinema History* (1983).

²¹ PEP, *Report on the British Press* (1938).

together and formed the Newsprint Supply Company to ensure that they could maintain imports from the US and Canada and keep printing.²² After the war it took a long time for Scandinavian industry to revive so newspapers continued to import most newsprint from across the Atlantic. Though this was expensive, it was also so strictly rationed that the average paper was a sixth of the size of its 1930s predecessor. And yet, they were selling at the same cover price. This made each paper sold that much more profitable.

They were made more profitable still by much lower staff costs. In the 1930s, due to the aggressive circulation battles, most papers employed armies of canvassers to knock on people's doors, offering all sorts of gifts and enticements to convince people to subscribe to their newspaper. By 1938 40% of the staff on a typical national morning newspaper were canvassers.²³ In 1945 the interest in news was so great and the supply of newspapers so limited (in both pagination and circulation due to paper rationing) that almost every national newspaper sold all the newspapers they produced. Plus, since the 'no returns' policy was still in force (ie. the newsagent had to pay for and could not return any of the papers they ordered) all newspapers distributed corresponded to guaranteed income. There was therefore no need for many canvassers. Similarly, it took far fewer journalists to write a four page paper vs. a twenty-four page paper. Again, this reduced wage bill added to the profitability of the paper.

Advertising revenue could not, however, be maintained at pre-war levels. Even though papers could charge more for space in the much depleted post-war newspapers, the increase could not make up for the enormous reduction in size.

²² ME-RCP, Lord Layton and F.P. Bishop, Newsprint Supply Company, Day 24 (4-3-1948), Cmd.7409.

²³ PEP, *Report on the British Press* (1938), p.132.

Therefore where advertising income made up almost 60% of the revenues of the pre-war paper, by 1943 this had dropped to 31% and stayed low while the newspapers remained so small.²⁴ However, the other increases of revenue made up for this loss.

Reappraising the Ability of the Press to Fulfil Its Political Responsibilities

By the late 1930s the ability of the press to fulfil what many saw as a necessary political function – of informing – was being questioned in a series of books, pamphlets and studies. This was mainly as a result of three factors. The first was an increased concentration in ownership, particularly of the provincial press. It was thought this might lead to a narrowing representation of political views and a restriction of the freedom of editors and journalists. In the 1920s Allied Newspapers, run by the Berry brothers, had competed with Lord Rothermere in a frantic buy-out of national and provincial newspapers. Shortly afterwards, in 1931, they had used these newspapers in a failed campaign to destabilise the Opposition, attacking the leader of the Conservative party Stanley Baldwin (leading to his famous attack on them and their willingness to use power without responsibility, “the prerogative of the harlot throughout the ages”²⁵). The fear grew, as the *Economist* noted in 1943, that ‘a handful of newspaper proprietors are themselves able to... impose upon the public the newspapers that they (the proprietors) think they ought to read and to stereotype public opinion in a few primitive and not always very sightly moulds’.²⁶

²⁴ Net advertising revenue as a percentage of total net revenue, calculated by *The Economist*, 28-2-1948, ‘Newspaper Revenues and Earnings’, pp.350-351.

²⁵ Baldwin speech at Queen’s Hall, Langham place on 17-3-1931 (reported in *The Times* the following day).

²⁶ *The Economist*, ‘The Government and the Press’, 11-9-1943.

The second factor was the commercialisation of the newspapers, as characterized by the circulation wars of the 1930s. The *Daily Herald*, trying to nudge its way into the handful of mass circulation dailies, began offering a series of promotions to attract readers. These ranged from the complete works of Dickens to free life insurance. So successful were these that all the other popular dailies did the same. Once circulation reached a certain point advertising revenue increased significantly. It was due to this escalation in advertising revenue that the financial structure of the national newspaper actually changed fundamentally at this time. By the start of the Second World War many national papers had come to rely for over 50% of their revenue on advertising. This search for circulation and advertising revenue also led, it was believed, to the sensationalisation of news and the suppression of political and economic coverage.

The third factor was the use of the press for partisan political objectives in other countries. On the continent the fascist parties were successfully using propaganda and the national press to gain and maintain power. In Germany, Italy and Spain the Government and the press worked closely together. So much so that commentators in Britain saw them no longer as a check or balance to the actions of the Government, but as a prop and sop to the established powers. Some writers felt that Britain was moving in the same direction (with the press owners, rather than the Government, as the key power brokers). Wickham Steed, in his book *The Press* published in 1938, went so far as to write that 'the British Press has – with one or two notable exceptions – made further progress on the road that leads to totalitarian servitude'.²⁷

²⁷ Henry Wickham Steed, *The Press* (1938), p.249.

All these factors, it was feared, tended to suppress free and fair political coverage. Politics was either being drowned out by non-political, 'human interest' stories designed to boost circulation, or the undiluted voice of Parliament and the Government was being replaced by opinion and comment. As the circulation of newspapers grew, it was believed, more and more it was the voice of the individual newspaper people were hearing, not the voice of their political representatives. This compromised the position of MPs as the representative political voice of specific communities, and the position of Parliament as the most important forum for the discussion of politics. Wilson Harris worried about this in his 1943 book *The Daily Press*, arguing that the newspapers had begun to replace Parliament and that since Parliament's proceedings were now 'so inadequately reported... it is in the leader columns and correspondence columns of the press itself that the great debate must be mainly conducted'.²⁸

PEP wrote the most comprehensive of a number of critiques of the press between 1938 and 1945. 300 pages long and written over the course of three years, its report set the agenda for debate on the press until the Royal Commission was appointed.²⁹ There were others by Wickham Steed, Wilson Harris – already briefly mentioned – Lord Camrose, and Ivor Thomas.³⁰ All these publications, and a growing number of articles in weekly journals, sought to examine similar issues: whether the control of the media by a small number of men was inherently detrimental to Government, society and democracy; how a Government ought to relate to its press and the degree and type of control it ought to exert; whether the shift of the press from a

²⁸ Wilson Harris, *The Daily Press* (1943), p.16.

²⁹ The report was edited by Max Nicholson. SC Leslie was also one of the members of the PEP Press group (Pinder, *50 Years of PEP*, p.26).

³⁰ Ivor Thomas, *The Newspaper*, Oxford Pamphlets on Home Affairs No.H2(1943), p.12.

'calling' to an industry which consciously sought profit and influence should be prevented or at least moderated by Government support for minority voices (for example by subsidising minor presses). By the end of the war these publications created a mood of underlying discomfort amongst some within the Establishment about the role of the newspaper within contemporary democracy.

Labour and the Press

There was also, in 1945, a widely held belief amongst Labour politicians that the press was Tory dominated. This was not surprising given the four right wing Press Lords who overshadowed the newspaper world. The first, Lord Camrose – 'industrious, thrifty, sober, serious' – owned the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Financial Times* and 80 periodicals.³¹ Camrose was a close friend of Winston Churchill's and the *Telegraph* was unstintingly loyal to the Conservatives (Camrose even threw the biggest Tory party on the night of each election).³² He had been so worried about the cataclysmic financial effects of a Labour victory that in July 1945 he sold the *Financial Times*.³³

The second, Lord Kemsley (Camrose's brother), owned the *Daily Sketch* and *Sunday Graphic*, the *Sunday Times*, two smaller national papers, and seventeen provincial papers.³⁴ Kemsley had been particularly close to Chamberlain and Halifax

³¹ 'A Private Enquiry into the British Press', in *The Public's Progress*, Contact Publications, June 1947, contained in Morrison Papers, Part 1, Section 1-3, BLPES.

³² Duff Hart-Davis, *The House the Berry's Built – Inside the Telegraph 1928-86* (1990). He was still throwing these parties for the Conservatives into the 1970s.

³³ Ibid. 'Camrose later confided to one of the FT's managers that this was the greatest mistake he ever made', p.120.

³⁴ The *Daily Sketch* was an amalgamation of the *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Sketch* and changed its name from the *Sketch* to the *Graphic* and back again.

before the war and was outspokenly rightwing.³⁵ His *Daily Sketch* could be considered a shriller tabloid version of the *Telegraph*.

The third, Lord Rothermere, was a more reluctant press Lord.³⁶ He owned the *Daily Mail*, *The Sunday Dispatch* and the *Evening News*, as well as 16 provincial dailies and weeklies.³⁷ Unlike his father, one of the pioneers of popular newspapers, Esmund Rothermere was polite and accommodating. Partly as a result of his political quietude, and due to the overbearing influence of his wife, Lady O'Neill, the *Daily Mail* was perceived to have lost much of its political influence.³⁸ However, it still had a readership of over five million people.³⁹

The fourth right wing press Lord was Lord Beaverbrook, owner of the *Daily Express*, the *Sunday Express* and the *Evening Standard*. Beaverbrook was perhaps the most influential because of his previous Government positions (he was in the Coalition Cabinet during the war), the circulation of the *Daily Express*, and his role in the 1945 election. Beaverbrook's role as the planner and architect of the Tory campaign had already, by 1946, acquired mythical proportions. So much so that the political magazine *Truth* could talk about 'the now hoary legend that he [Beaverbrook] lost the election for the Conservatives'.⁴⁰

³⁵ This went so far that he met with Hitler for an hour, six weeks before the outbreak of war, to discuss how the British Press could promote Anglo-German accord, from Charles Wintour, *The Rise and Fall of Fleet Street* (1989), p.41.

³⁶ Reference to S.J. Taylor's biography, *The Reluctant Press Lord – Esmund Rothermere and the Daily Mail* (1998).

³⁷ Under Associated Newspapers, of which the new Lord Rothermere became chairman in 1937 (Lord Camrose, *British Newspapers and their Controllers*, 1947, p.54).

³⁸ Stephen Koss, *Political Press Vol.II.* (1984), p.621.

³⁹ Hulton readership survey (1947).

⁴⁰ *Truth*, 18-1-1946.

The potentially damaging role of the proprietors appeared to be borne out by their behaviour in the late 1930s. By that point many of the owners had become very intimate with the Conservative Government. Chamberlain, Halifax and Hoare cultivated them and encouraged them to support their policy of appeasement and play down their criticisms of Germany. They willingly did so and consequently became associated with Cato's 'Guilty Men' after the war. The only newspaper to denounce the Munich agreement, *Reynolds News*, 'was the one paper which had absolutely no contact with the Government'.⁴¹

There were other press barons who cast less imposing shadows. Lord Layton, who in conjunction with members of the Cadbury family, ran the *News Chronicle* and the London evening paper *The Star*. Lord Southwood, who acquired the *Daily Herald* from the Labour party in 1929 in order to increase investment in the paper and to ensure there was at least one pro-Labour, pro-Union popular newspaper in Britain. And Colonel J.J. Astor, who bought *The Times* from Lord Northcliffe in 1922. The other national papers had no individual owners but were within a larger holding or part of a trust.⁴²

The influence of these proprietors could be over-emphasised. Even in the election of 1945 there was a mixture of viewpoints and a reluctance within each newspaper to toe the Party line.⁴³ Only the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Herald* maintained doctrinaire positions. Others, like *The Times* and *The Observer*, went out of their way

⁴¹ Richard Cockett, *Twilight of Truth* (1989), p.83.

⁴² The *Daily Mirror* was part of Daily Mirror Newspapers Ltd. With approximately 10,000 shareholders. *The Observer* was held by the Astor family but ownership was transferred to a trust by David Astor at this time. The *Manchester Guardian* was run by a trust.

⁴³ McCallum and Readman, in their 1947 study of the 1945 election, first took issue with the idea that the newspapers were highly skewed to the right in *The British General Election of 1945 (1947)*. Since then, Koss and others have further questioned the partisan political consistency (*Rise and Fall of Political Press II*). Roy Greenslade has recently called McCallum and Readman's analysis 'badly flawed', underestimating the level of Tory support (*Press Gang*, 2003, p.34).

to prove their independence. And, perhaps more significantly, the coverage of the election was limited due to the quantity of other news at the final stages of the war.

And yet there was an ingrained belief within some of the Labour party that the press in Britain was owned and controlled by a group of men who were categorically set against them. The belief was even written into their manifesto: 'In the years that followed [WWI], the "hard-faced men" and their political friends kept control of the Government. They controlled the banks, the mines, the big industries, largely the press and the cinema'.⁴⁴ Of these same 'hard-faced' men Beaverbrook, Camrose and Kemsley were still around in 1945.

Therefore after July 1945, before the newspapers had said anything, there was concern about how the press Lords might act towards a Labour administration. In these circumstances Labour was highly sensitive to their actions and open to the opportunity of reappraising the role of the press.

A Very Different Perspective – the Press's View of Itself

At the same time that Labour was preoccupied by the right wing dominance inherent within British newspapers, the newspapers themselves were congratulating themselves on their patriotism during the Second World War and looking forward to being rewarded with much greater freedom and independence.

'The public spirit of the press during the war has been exemplary', William Redfern, president of the Institute of Journalists, said in his annual address in November 1944.⁴⁵ In this and in his articles for the industry publication, *The Journal*, he praised the behaviour of the press who played 'no mean part in the mammoth fight for

⁴⁴ The Labour Party Election Manifesto 1945, 'Let us Face the Future'.

⁴⁵ Annual Address of William Redfern to the Institute of Journalists, 'Unfettered Press is Vital for World Peace', printed in *The Journal*, November 1944 (monthly publication).

freedom. It [the press] has made its stand for truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'.⁴⁶ He looked forward to the end of the war and the quick 'restoration of all our liberties'.⁴⁷

For some of the newspapers the Second World War was a watershed in the growing autonomy of the daily press and independence from the influence of the proprietor. The *Observer's* statement of principle in 1942 has already been mentioned, and the paper followed this up by converting ownership into a trust after the war, explicitly so that it could remain free from overt influence.⁴⁸ The *Express* Group's Policy Committee, formed in 1944, met monthly and laid down 'the broad lines of policy' which governed all newspapers in the company – 'Lord Beaverbrook has never made the slightest attempt to override the decisions of the Policy Committee', the General Manager claimed in 1948.⁴⁹ Even *The Times*, so profoundly a newspaper of the establishment that abroad it was considered the voice of the Government, asserted its individual voice during the war. E.H. Carr, the left leaning leader writer, promoted the Russian cause and later that of Greek independence against pressure from the Coalition. According to Stephen Koss, by the end of the war 'Of the major dailies, only the *Telegraph* adhered to a discernible party position'.⁵⁰

The aspiration to independence was the same for provincial newspapers as for national ones. Shortly after the end of the war more and more regional newspapers

⁴⁶ '1944 Calls Journalists to Great Tasks', *The Journal*, January 1944.

⁴⁷ *The Journal*, December 1944.

⁴⁸ Arthur Mann, the *Observer*, 'The primary purpose [of the Trust] is to secure independence from Government or Party control, and from being brought into a combine" ME-RCP, Day 9, (26-11-47), q.2756, Cmd.7339.

⁴⁹ ME-RCP, interview with E.J. Robertson, General Manager of Express News, Day 16 (8-01-48), q.4834 & q.5062, Cmd.7364.

⁵⁰ Stephen Koss, *Political Press Vol.II* (1984), p.616.

were defining themselves as independent. As the Institute of Journalists told the Royal Commission, 76 out of 134 said they were unconnected to any political party.⁵¹

This was partly because while the war was going on the newspapers had no need to worry about circulations (which were rising constantly), they did not have to worry about political allegiance since there was a coalition; they only had to think about their readership. This motivated some editors to look to introduce a broader news agenda at the end of the war. Tom Hopkinson, editor of the *Picture Post*, thought that his readers had been through so much they wanted more realism and coverage of more of 'the subjects people talked about and argued about amongst themselves', like life in a mental hospital or life as a prison officer.⁵²

Therefore the Government and the newspapers were, at the close of conflict, coming from diametrically opposed positions – the former thinking that they had to be very wary of the press and remind it of its responsibilities, the latter thinking that they had earned the right to enjoy as much freedom as they chose.

SECTION 2: Labour's First Year

High Hopes - The Situation When Labour Took Office

When Labour came to office in August 1945 there seemed a chance that they might maintain a productive relationship with the press. Despite the vitriol that characterised some of the coverage of the election, certain right wing newspapers called a truce and claimed they would judge Labour by its deeds, not its words. The *Sunday Express* wrote, 'Let us all give the new team the fairest chance, a candid

⁵¹ ME-RCP, Institute of Journalists, Day 6 (30-10-47), q.1663, Cmd.7328.

⁵² From Tom Hopkinson's autobiography, *Of This Our Time – A Journalist's Story 1905-50* (1982), p.243.

criticism, an unstinted approval where and when it is earned, and a firm support for all good causes and courses'.⁵³

Less partisan newspapers were still more optimistic about the possibilities inherent in a Labour victory. Some were hopeful that Labour would introduce a new openness to Government. *World's Press News*, the trade paper of the British press, felt that since Labour was dependent on popular appeal, 'It is likely therefore that the Labour government will make it its business to see that the electors get a better flow of governmental information on policy and practise than ever before'. Newspapers, it suggested, would be the means by which Labour would transmit this information, which could only have a positive impact on the press: 'we consider it likely that the change of Government will intensify the importance of the press and the regard which the press can establish for itself in the public mind'.⁵⁴

Ernest Jay, shortly to become President of the National Union of Journalists, was brimming with confidence about the effect of the new Government. 'I happen to know' he wrote on the front page of *The Journalist*, 'that the new Government is anxious and ready to introduce a new era in the relations between the Government and the Press, and in return it will expect fair treatment in the presentation of its attempts to implement the policy it was elected to carry out'.⁵⁵

Thanks to the war there was also the machinery in place to facilitate a fuller relationship. All the Government departments now had press offices. The Ministry of Information still existed, although most expected it to disappear soon. In 1944-45

⁵³ *Sunday Express*, 29-7-1945, opinion column, 'Our hopes', p.4.

⁵⁴ *World's Press News*, 2-8-1945, p.1 & p.19.

⁵⁵ *The Journalist*, Ernest Jay, September 1945, p.1.

there were still approximately 4,000 people working on home information services, either in the departments or at the MOI.⁵⁶

There were other reasons to believe the relationship would be happy and constructive. Herbert Morrison, the information director of the Labour Government, had good relations with many of the editors and proprietors. He had even reversed some of the damage done by his actions as Home Secretary during the Second World War (when he closed the *Daily Worker* and threatened to close the *Daily Mirror*). Before the election he had met and charmed Guy Bartholomew (Editorial Director of the *Mirror*) and used the *Mirror's* cartoonist, Zec, to draw some of Labour's election posters.⁵⁷ He befriended Percy Cudlipp, editor of the *Daily Herald*, Maggie Stewart at the *News Chronicle*, and Kingsley Martin at the *New Statesman*, as well as other journalists, editors and all the Parliamentary Lobby correspondents.⁵⁸ David Keir, a journalist on the *News Chronicle*, remembered how Morrison knew 'most of the Lobby men and took trouble to cultivate them... He courted journalists and earned a reputation as a man who talked to the Press'.⁵⁹

This was also a Labour Government and Parliament packed with journalists. There were over 40 accredited journalists and editors elected to the House in 1945, 20 of them members of the National Union of Journalists.⁶⁰ This included: Michael Foot (Labour), previously editor of the *Evening Standard* and shortly to be editor of

⁵⁶ From 'Cost of Government Information Services', 12-4-1948, IS(48)6, Home Information Services: number of staff 1944/5 – 3,999, CAB 124/1029.

⁵⁷ Donoghue and Jones, *Morrison*, p.335.

⁵⁸ Interviews with Ernest Jay, James Griffiths and Kingsley Martin. Ernest Jay said 'Herbert was very close to Percy Cudlipp, always playing around him'. Morrison Biographical Papers (Jones/Donoghue), BLPES.

⁵⁹ Interview with David Keir, Morrison Biographical Papers (Jones/Donoghue), BLPES.

⁶⁰ *The Journalist*, 1-9-1945. 'Union has 20 MPs. NUJ Form 3rd Largest Group in New House'. 19 of the 20 were Labour (the twentieth, Vernon Bartlett, was an independent). The total of 40 journalists was calculated by Eric Harrison, a Parliamentary reporter for *The Times*, cited in Koss, p.636.

Tribune; Ernest Thurtle (Labour), regular writer for the *Sunday Express*, Wilson Harris (Independent), editor of the *Spectator*, Gary Allighan (Labour), columnist for the *Daily Mail*, Vernon Bartlett (Independent), Tom Driberg (Labour), Jennie Lee (Labour), Hector McNeill (Labour), and Maurice Webb (Labour). This was reflected in the number of MPs writing regularly for the papers throughout this period.

Moreover, in late September, Attlee appointed Francis Williams as Public Relations advisor to Number 10. This was a significant step. Williams had considerable journalistic and Government experience. He had edited *The Daily Herald* between 1936 and 1940, then headed the Ministry of Information's News and Censorship division during the war. In 1945 he acted as the head of public relations for the British delegation at the first conference of the United Nations in San Francisco, with great success. When Attlee asked him to coordinate Downing Street's political communications, on a salary of £2,000 a year, the Prime Minister sent a signal to the newspapers that media relations were going to be taken seriously.⁶¹

The importance of Williams' appointment was accentuated by the book which he had just finished writing when he agreed to take the post. *Press, Parliament and People* is an examination of the way in which a modern Government can and should communicate with its people. The central problem is how to secure continuing power to the people given the 'inevitable extension of the authority of central government in economic and social matters'.⁶² Williams concluded that 'modern Government increasingly requires the knowledge and understanding of the mass of the people if it

⁶¹ Though all the newspapers reported Williams' salary as £2,000 a year, the original offer from Attlee was for £1,700 (Francis Williams Private Papers, letter from Attlee 27-9-1945). It is not clear whether this was increased after negotiations.

⁶² Francis Williams, *Press, Parliament and People* (1946), p.85.

is to be effective'.⁶³ This was especially the case with the current Labour administration which, 'pledged to the kind of policies that the present one is, cannot afford not to use to the full every possible channel of public information and education available to it'.⁶⁴ Therefore the new Government information services were necessary and justified, and it was imperative that the Government use the press as much as it could. At the same time Williams was scrupulously conscious of the freedom of the press and the dangers of Government control. It was this dilemma, the need to inform without impinging on press freedom, that Williams raised in his book and sought to resolve in his subsequent two years at Downing Street.

The book was widely reviewed and well received. Kingsley Martin, editor of the *New Statesman*, saw it as recognition of the extended role of the 'positive State'.⁶⁵ If Government was to take a much more active role in economic and social affairs, it made sense that it should do the same with publicity and information. Wilson Harris, Martin's opposite at the *Spectator*, was interested in the book but disagreed with it. He worried that in Williams's world, the Government would seek to determine the news agenda.⁶⁶

Once in his new position, Williams acted almost immediately to increase the amount of information released to the press and the public. He introduced daily lobby briefings for the first time.⁶⁷ He sought to professionalise the public relations officers within each department. And he spoke about opening up Government to public

⁶³ Ibid. p.116.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p.129.

⁶⁵ Review of *Press, Parliament and People*, *New Statesman and Nation*, 2-2-1946.

⁶⁶ Review of *Press, Parliament and People*, *The Spectator*, 1-2-1946.

⁶⁷ Jeremy Tunstall, *The Westminster Lobby Correspondents* (1970), p.94, 'Regular daily briefings [from No.10] ... only began in 1945'.

scrutiny.⁶⁸ 'These decisions mark the end of secrecy and understatement' *World's Press News* wrote, 'and the determination adequately to interpret to the world the plans and purposes of the British people'.⁶⁹

Therefore it seemed as though there was potential for an extended constructive relationship between the Government and the press. However, within ten months almost a hundred Labour MPs were calling for a Royal Commission on the press, members of Cabinet were regularly lambasting the press in public, and much of the press itself was alienated and remote from Government. The next section explores the reasons for this deterioration and why it was important in provoking a formal examination of the role of the press in a democracy.

August 1945 to July 1946 - The Deterioration of Government-Press Relations

The reasons for the deterioration of relations in this period can be found partly in the actions of the press and the Government and partly due to factors out of their control. These factors included certain practical problems that prevented the free flow of information through the press. The first, and most important, of these was paper rationing.

The shortage of newsprint after the war meant that the average popular newspaper was only four pages in length (folded to tabloid size this made eight). The average 'class' newspaper was eight pages. *The Times* was ten. Even if they reduced the size of their font, reduced the number of advertisements, reduced the number of photographs and increased the number of columns per page – all of which the newspapers did – there was only a limited amount of news they could fit inside each

⁶⁸ *World's Press News*, credited Williams with slimming down the number of departmental PROs but increasing their professionalism, 8-11-1945, p.14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

issue. Naturally some items had to be covered briefly and some not at all. Parliamentary news was reduced in most papers – although they all continued to print some.⁷⁰ The lack of paper also meant that newspaper circulations were pegged. In other words they were not allowed to sell more than a certain number of copies each day (judged by their circulation when rationing was introduced).

A second practical reason was the sheer quantity of news, much of it not directly related to the Government. For example, in one week in March 1946, Stalin called Churchill a warmonger for his 'Iron Curtain' speech at the same time as he moved Soviet troops south through Persia, Herman Goering entered the dock at the Nuremberg trials, 33 spectators were crushed to death in the worst disaster in the history of British football, the already striking dockers were joined by many of the motor workers, and a Europe-wide emergency food conference was called as many countries on the continent spiralled towards starvation. At the same time the issues of Indian independence, a Jewish homeland in the Middle East, an American loan, and atomic bomb tests rumbled in the background.⁷¹

The newspapers' difficulty in covering political news fully was increased by Labour's plans to pass an enormous raft of legislation during 1946. During the 1945-46 Parliamentary session, 169 bills and amendments came in front of the House.⁷² To speed the passage of many of these Morrison, as Leader of the House and Minister in charge of Labour's legislative programme, began to use standing committees which would review bills in parallel with the House. Both the pace of legislation and

⁷⁰ A newspaper conference on 'The Press and the Future' in November 1945 explicitly blamed the lack of Parliamentary news on the lack of newsprint. See 'Press and the Future', *World's Press News*, 29-11-1945.

⁷¹ Taken from range of newspapers, week beginning 11-3-1946.

⁷² Based on index of bills, ordered chronologically, January-July 1946, Parliamentary Papers, Vol. XXVII, 1945-46.

these new methods of review made it difficult for newspapers to report bills thoroughly. This led some of them to accuse the Government of deliberately trying to suppress public debate and trying to slip things past the public unnoticed. 'An uninstructed democracy is an unhealthy democracy', the *Daily Telegraph* intoned, 'and a Parliament relegated in practice to semi-secrecy by deficient facilities for publicity abdicates its primary function as the forum of the nation'.⁷³

The press must share some responsibility for the worsening relationship with the Government. They were naturally enthusiastic about the end of the war and the release of Government controls. This led some of them to cover more light, entertaining stories than they had been able to in the last six years. This was not 'an unbridled campaign of screaming irresponsibility' as described by James Margach, but a spontaneous release of some of the pent up emotions of the war years.⁷⁴ As J.J. Astor, Chairman of The Times, explained 'After a war I believe there is always an emotional phase, but that is only transient'.⁷⁵ More often than not it tended to lead to exuberant inaccuracy rather than political irresponsibility. For example, the theft of some of the Windsor jewels caused an enormous sensation in October 1946 and many of the popular papers, without specific information on the jewels themselves or their value, made ill-judged guesses which later proved wildly off the mark.

The worsening relationship was also due to the more ideologically entrenched positions some of the newspapers took which, contemporaries argued, influenced their news coverage as well as their commentary and opinion pieces. From the late autumn of 1945 onwards, animated by the confrontational language of class war

⁷³ The *Daily Telegraph*, Opinion, 1-2-1946.

⁷⁴ James Margach, *The Abuse of Power* (1978), p.8.

⁷⁵ ME-RCP, Colonel J.J. Astor, Day 15, (7-1-48), q.4681, Cmd.7357.

used by front bench Labour Ministers in the House, some of the national press became more and more fixated by the idea that Socialism represented a threat to freedom. In November a *Sunday Times* editorial claimed that 'Socialism is not merely economically dangerous, but morally wrong'.⁷⁶ The *Daily Sketch*, with its rabidly anti-Left commentator 'Candidus', argued that 'Socialism is, by definition, totalitarian'.⁷⁷ The *Daily Express* splashed its political policies across the paper on the 1st January 1946.⁷⁸ These included its faith in freedom for the individual, free industry, and no censorship.

The left wing journal *Tribune* believed these policies had a direct and detrimental effect on news coverage. From early 1946 it kept a record of stories it believed were inaccurate, were unnecessarily emotive, or were simply excluded for political reasons. On February 1st it suggested that the *Daily Sketch* had deliberately kept information regarding the Government's social security scheme off the front page. On the 15th it claimed that the *Daily Express* had tried to create a general food panic by its headline the previous Saturday, 'Rush to Buy Flour – Shops Sell Out'. And on March 8th it claimed that the *Daily Telegraph* misused facts about the housing situation to mislead its readers into believing Labour had under-performed.⁷⁹

Though *Tribune* identified some examples of inaccuracies and might have been right in suggesting the inclusion or exclusion of some stories was politically motivated, it was far from immune from political polemic itself. It called Lord Kemsley's influence on provincial journalism 'profound and deplorable', said the right wing press was

⁷⁶ *Sunday Times*, Opinion, 4-11-1945, p.4.

⁷⁷ *The Daily Sketch*, Candidus, 2-1-1946, p.2.

⁷⁸ *Daily Express*, 'The 1946 Campaign – This is the Policy and Purpose of the *Daily Express*', 1-1-1946, p.2.

⁷⁹ *Tribune*, 1-2-1946, 15-2-1946 and 8-3-1946.

doing its 'despicable worst' to bring down the Labour Government and that all of them were 'professional merchants of falsehood'.⁸⁰ Therefore as objective tools for political communication all the newspapers had distinct drawbacks.

But the Government also had itself to blame for many of its communication problems. Having sought to maintain the machinery of information and having introduced new personnel to coordinate communication policy, it then failed, or forgot, to communicate. There are various possible explanations for this failure. The first is that they were spoilt by the war. Until 1945, with the newspapers almost wholly reliant on Government sources of information, and keen to support the war effort, the Government could normally count on their support. Ministers became accustomed to power and positive coverage. A second is that Government officials and civil servants had an ingrained tradition of discretion and reserve which had been nurtured by the wartime culture of secrecy and persisted after its end (despite the principled rhetoric).⁸¹ The final, and most likely, explanation is that many Ministers were too busy and too distracted to focus enough attention on it. The failure is important since it led to a crisis in Government – press relations and the fundamental reappraisal referred to earlier.

Food and the Politicisation of News

The issue which best illustrates the politicisation of news and the Government's inability to control communication is food. Food rationing persisted after the end of the war in Europe. However, there was some hope that, as time went on, rationing

⁸⁰ *Tribune*, 1-3-1946, 15-2-1946 and 24-3-1946 respectively.

⁸¹ The PEP press report referred to this tradition of anonymity and silence in 1938 (p.199). As for its persistence, *World's Press News* noted in November 1945 that 'It seems about time that Whitehall dropped its wartime habit of "embargoing" every silly little hand-out their P.R.O.s issue', 22-11-1945, p.10.

would be relaxed and eventually removed entirely. Sir Ben Smith, the Minister of Food, had given encouraging hints and signs from the end of 1945 that there may be some improvement over the coming months.⁸² Therefore it came as a stunning surprise when, on January 31st 1946, with no previous warning, he announced that the Government was to end the availability of dried eggs. Though a poor substitute for the real thing, dried eggs had become a staple of most households' diet. 'After six weeks press silence in his [Ben Smith's] department this bombshell is dropped', the *Daily Mail* reported.⁸³ The press objected less to the stoppage of dried eggs than to the manner in which it was done and the lack of public preparation for it.

Though there is nothing in the Ministry of Food files about this episode, from certain newspaper reports and by the reaction of the Cabinet it is possible to work out what happened. According to the *World's Press News*, Smith himself was so nervous and unsure about how to deal with the dried eggs announcement, and so doubtful about the abilities of his Public Relations Officer (P.R.O.), that he wrote a press release himself, waited until after 7pm (when his P.R.O. had left), and handed it directly to a press officer for distribution. So not only was there no prior warning, but all the other Government information about dried eggs (advertisements for them in the papers, and Government pamphlets with dried egg recipes) was not stopped, but was printed and circulated despite the stoppage.⁸⁴

Worse was to follow. The world food situation became more perilous. Britain had barely enough wheat stocks to last the summer and was having terrible trouble

⁸² For example, before he left for Washington in January he said, "During 1946 I shall continue to do my utmost to provide more variety in our diet. We can look forward to some improvements, at any rate", quoted in *The Times*, 15-2-1946, p.4.

⁸³ The *Daily Mail*, Opinion, 1-2-1946.

⁸⁴ *World's Press News*, 'Ministers Don't Use the Press Properly', 28-2-1946, p.10.

importing more. There was a likelihood of famine in India and the Germans in the British zone in Germany were trying to survive on close to 1000 calories a day. At the end of January the Cabinet discussed how they might alleviate the domestic and international situation.⁸⁵ Attlee was to set up an emergency food committee, headed by himself. Morrison was to take over the communication of food policy to the British public: 'The Lord President should supervise the preparation and coordination of this publicity campaign [for food economy]'.⁸⁶ To fulfil his responsibility Morrison planned to launch a 'Save Bread' campaign.

The campaign would be centred around Ben Smith. He would begin by making a statement to Parliament on 5th February 1946 outlining the full gravity of the food situation. This would be followed by a press conference which would, from then on, become a weekly staple. The Lord President recognised that food was an emotional issue and the Government would have to think carefully about how to communicate its policy: 'We must set in motion long-term as well as short term publicity measures' he wrote, 'It is important that these should give the least possible opening for hostile and partisan criticism'.⁸⁷

Unfortunately, Ben Smith's announcement did just that. The opposition and the newspapers, appalled that the situation was so grave and the news so sudden, attacked the Government for its lack of preparation and foresight.⁸⁸ At the next Food Supply Meeting, on the 12th February, Morrison assessed the reaction: 'Since

⁸⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(46)10, 31-1-1946, CAB 128/5.

⁸⁶ According to memorandum WFS(46)1, 2-2-1946, PREM 8/200.

⁸⁷ WFS(46)6, Memorandum, Morrison, discussed at Food Supply Meeting, WFS(46)1, 4-2-1946, CAB 134/730 & 729.

⁸⁸ 'Yesterday was a black day for the people of Britain', *Daily Mail*, 6-2-1946. 'The Government has apparently never had a food policy worth the name', *Daily Sketch*, 7-2-1946. 'Why nation is resentful – not treated with frankness', 9-2-1946, *Daily Telegraph*.

WFS(46)6 was circulated, press comment on the food situation has been very heavy'. There were three main lines of criticism: the 'lack of warning and information', an 'unsatisfactory treatment of priorities', and 'inconsistency in agricultural policy'. But the Lord President was confident that this initial shock had passed and now 'the country is ready for a full and fair factual review of the whole subject'.⁸⁹

The Government tried to give this review in the debate and corresponding statistical paper of 14th February.⁹⁰ But already the issue was heavily politicised, with the Conservatives accusing the Government of ignoring the basic needs of the country in the pursuit of an ideological agenda (the debate was held after the Trade Disputes Act had been discussed), and of being unnecessarily and damagingly secretive.⁹¹ These two charges also characterised newspaper coverage and dominated their headlines. 'Mr. Attlee's Government have been prodigal in their measures and beggarly in their explanations' J.L. Garvin wrote in the Daily Telegraph, 'If the Prime Minister and his colleagues cannot give us more food, at least let them give us more facts'.⁹² The subsequent 'Save Bread' campaign suffered from this politicisation. It also kept the issue of food on the front page, encouraging a constant high pitched discussion that drowned out other political coverage.

For the campaign Morrison adopted the same strategy as the Government had in the early stages of the war – encouraging frugality and discouraging waste. The

⁸⁹ WFS(46)17, Memorandum, Morrison, 11-2-1946, discussed on 12-2-1946, CAB 134/730 & 729.

⁹⁰ 'Statistics and documents relating to world grain position', February 1946, Cmd.6737. This paper was only 10 pages long, provided very few statistics and none related to grain stocks held within Britain.

⁹¹ Anthony Eden; 'It does not seem to us that the Government took the proper steps to inform and warn the House and the country of what was impending, and Mr. Eccles; 'This food debate, and the crisis behind it, is one more proof that what the people really wanted from their Government were first-aid repairs in a state of emergency, and not a revolutionary upheaval in their economic system'. 14-2-1946, Vol.419, Cols.547-548 and 582.

⁹² *Daily Telegraph*, Editorial, 14-2-1946, p.4.

newspaper advertisement campaign began with an earnest, polite plea signed by the Minister of Food.⁹³ This restrained message was overwhelmed by negative headlines in much of the press. The campaign was not, Morrison felt, 'having a big immediate impact on public emotions and it was for consideration whether a more dramatic appeal was now required'.⁹⁴

There had been some thought given to making it much more sensational, for example by using 'illustrations as a contrast between a starving woman and child in India or in one of the European countries with a dustbin containing half loaves of bread wasted by the British public'.⁹⁵ This was too much for Morrison and the Food Supply Committee, however, and they persisted with heavily text based ads imploring the public to 'Join the Crusade Against Bread Waste'.⁹⁶ The campaign was supposed to take precedence over some other Government campaigns but it still regularly had to compete for space and attention with 'Save more Fuel' (Ministry of Fuel and Power), save more money (National Savings), 'Keep Death Off the Road' (Ministry of War Transport), recruitment for the fire service (Home Office) and 'What Exports Mean to Us' (Board of Trade).⁹⁷

From mid March the Government increased its direct appeals to the people. Letters were sent to women's organisations, to the bakery trade associations, and to divisional food officers.⁹⁸ From 15th April there would be a posters stuck on about

⁹³ WFS(46)17, Memorandum, Morrison, 11-2-1946. See, for example, 'Our Bread', in *Daily Express*, 12-2-1946, p.2.

⁹⁴ WFS(46)5th, Minutes, 5-3-1946, CAB 134/729.

⁹⁵ WFS(46)53, Memorandum, Morrison, 'UK propaganda campaign', 4-3-1946, CAB 134/730.

⁹⁶ See *Daily Express*, 19-3-1946, p.2.

⁹⁷ Ads taken from *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail* for February–May 1946. Issue of precedence highlighted by Sir Ben Smith to R.C. Griffiths, 10-3-1946, T223/249.

⁹⁸ Shelton Smith to Edith Walker, Food Advice Division, 'Bread Economy Schemes', 8-3-1946, MAF 84/199.

10,000 sites nationwide. For May and June all letters sent were to be franked by the Post Office with 'Don't Waste Bread – Others Need It'. Food flashes would be screened in cinemas. The BBC agreed to insert references to the Bread Campaign into its talks on food. And five million dustbins labels were prepared.⁹⁹

But despite this escalation of exhortation, the Government did not release factual information on the stocks held within Britain as against the available imports. This fuelled the idea that the Government was still being too secretive. For the next eight weeks newspapers focused on rationing rumours while leader articles kept calling for 'Food Facts'.¹⁰⁰ The situation was made worse by further media mismanagement by the Government. On 21st March, Shelton Smith (no relation to Sir Ben), the hapless P.R.O. in the Food Office, gave a press conference to the food correspondents telling them to expect further cuts in fat rations. But when the headlines broke the next day Sir Ben Smith announced there had been a mistake. There would not be further reductions and his P.R.O. had got it wrong. Needless to say, the following day the papers led with 'Ration Cuts Warning Was Government Blunder'.¹⁰¹

To extricate itself the Government held another debate and released a more detailed White Paper on April 4th.¹⁰² The aim of the White Paper was 'to set out the facts of the present crisis in the world's food supplies, to show how the crisis developed and to trace the steps taken by the Government in the face of it'. Instead it showed, the

⁹⁹ WFS(46)57, Memorandum, Morrison, 8-3-1946, CAB 134/730.

¹⁰⁰ *Daily Mail*, Opinion column – 'Food Facts Wanted', 11-3-1946.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Mail*, Front Page, 23-3-1946. It turned out that Shelton Smith had not been wrong and fats were indeed reduced subsequently.

¹⁰² Debate on World Food Shortage, 4-4-1946, Vol.421. White Paper, 'The World Food Shortage', April 1946, Cmd.6785.

Opposition said, that the Government knew much more than they admitted in December and January.¹⁰³

By this time Morrison had begun to lose confidence in Sir Ben Smith and in May he decided to travel to Washington himself to negotiate more wheat imports from the Americans. Christopher Mayhew, Morrison's PPS at the time, travelled with him. Though Mayhew says Morrison argued hard with the US he was unable to secure more wheat.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in exchange for a US concession to help Britain feed the local population in the British zone in Germany and send food to India, Morrison actually had to commit 200,000 more tons of British wheat abroad. In order to avert a food crisis in other countries Morrison was diverting food away from his own. Unsurprisingly, most of the popular press did not emphasise the magnanimity of these actions: 'Morrison Gives Away 200,000 Tons More' yelled the *Daily Express*.¹⁰⁵ Morrison 'has done a worse stroke of business than Smith ever accomplished' the *Daily Mail* reported.¹⁰⁶ To add further to Morrison's embarrassment, a press officer from the US State Department then flatly contradicted his earlier statement and claimed they had made no such commitment to further concessions.¹⁰⁷

The press coverage of the food situation became more and more vicious, especially whilst the Government continued to fail to give out adequate information. Against Sir Arthur Salter's charge that the Government was not telling Parliament or the people

¹⁰³ Mr. Hudson, 'They [Labour Ministers] knew exactly the same thing as long ago as 4th September', Hansard, 4-4-1946, Col.1417, Vol.421.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Christopher Mayhew, Morrison biographical papers (Donoghue/Jones), Section 6-3, BLPEs.

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Express*, front page headline, 18-5-1946.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Mail*, opinion column, "The "sheer gamble"", 20-5-1946.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Mail*, 'Morrison was Wrong – Say U.S.' 25-5-1946. Winston Churchill referred back to this snub when opening the food debate of 31-5-1946; "There is, I am sure, irony of fate in the right hon. Gentleman being ill-used by a public relations officer. It is rather like the case of the engineer being hoist with his own petard', Hansard, Col.1490, Vol.423.

enough Sir Ben Smith replied weakly that 'we have been thinking of giving quarterly reviews'.¹⁰⁸ But this and other comments that failed to mollify the press meant Smith became the first minister to resign from Attlee's government, at the end of May 1946. He was replaced by Sir John Strachey.

There was another important reason why the British Government did not release more facts and figures regarding the food situation. Economising on food consumption and bread rationing was done partly for negotiating leverage with the Americans rather than to feed directly into export. Since Sir Ben Smith's trip to Washington in January the British had been unable to convince the Americans that the world food situation was not a short term problem but potentially catastrophic. This is what they believed they had to do in order to make the American government adopt compulsory domestic measures to secure higher quantities of wheat for export. When, in early April, after receiving information that international conditions had significantly worsened, the British food mission was still unable to shift the Americans, the Cabinet sent a telegram to Washington and authorised a press statement which they hoped would prompt action.¹⁰⁹ The statement announced that Britain would be prepared to take the radical step of adopting bread rationing 'in the interests of the peoples of the world who are faced with starvation and famine'.¹¹⁰ Though the statistics suggested the actual impact of British bread rationing on the

¹⁰⁸ Sir Ben Smith, Hansard, 22-5-1946, Oral Answers, Vol.423, Col.330.

¹⁰⁹ 'It can scarcely be denied that the long foreseen bread crisis is now upon us', copy of cable from British Food Mission in Washington dated 7-4-1946 to the Ministry of Food, AMAZE 7020, MAF 128/436.

¹¹⁰ The Cabinet approved, on 10-4-1946, 'the despatch of a telegram to Washington, which was prepared during the meeting, instructing the United Kingdom representative to state, at the meeting of the Combined Food Board, that Her Majesty's Government would be prepared to introduce bread rationing in the U.K., if it were also introduced in the U.S.', CM(46)32, CAB 128/5. Press Notice, 10-4-1946, in MAF 128/436.

world situation might be marginal, the Cabinet hoped the proposal would induce the Americans to act.¹¹¹

The statement did have a profound effect on the American government and people. Lord Halifax wrote from Washington on the 13th April, 'The British offer to introduce bread rationing has made a deep impression [on the US] and sharpened the appreciation of the extent of the food shortage in Europe'.¹¹² Just over a week later the US Government agreed to set aside 25% of the domestic millers flour expressly for export. The problem was, having made the gesture, the Americans were very keen that the British see it through. 'I wish you would ask your government if it would regard the institution of this limitation on the domestic consumption of flour to be a comparable step to the one heretofore proposed by your government namely bread rationing' wrote the US Secretary for Agriculture, Clinton Anderson.¹¹³ Though the British Government would not have introduced such a radical measure simply under pressure from America, it was a factor in their decision. But since the statistics were ambivalent as to how much effect British rationing would have, it was difficult to justify the proposition to the British people with facts and figures. So the Government released some, but not all, the statistics. For its persistent lack of candour, and withholding of facts, the Conservative Opposition and much of the British press continued to attack the Government.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Tom Williams to Attlee, 9-3-46, 'Any further sacrifice by us can have but a trivial practical effect on world food supplies. The importance of such a sacrifice would be in the main psychological and political', MAF 84/77.

¹¹² Lord Halifax to F.O., 13-4-1946, MAF 128/436.

¹¹³ Note from Clinton Anderson written up in AMAZE 7091 from British Mission in Washington, 19-4-1946, MAF 128/436.

¹¹⁴ Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has also argued that the Labour Government introduced bread rationing for political and psychological rather than practical reasons, in 'Bread rationing in Britain, July 1946-July 1948', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol.4, No.1, 1993, pp.57-85.

It was at this time that the Government became more generally concerned about the negative influence of the press. Attlee expressed this concern in his opening speech to the delegates of the Imperial press Conference at Grosvenor House in June. He called for all those in the media who reported the news to “do so with a steadfast awareness of the responsibility they bear and of the obligation upon them to place all the facts before the public and not simply those which support one particular case”.¹¹⁵

Francis Williams, speaking later in the week, indicated that he was beginning to give up on newspapers as a means of political communication. He warned against the growing commercialisation of newspapers and their excessive concentration on entertainment value. Due to their excesses they now had, he believed, “less influence [on politics] than at any time in their history” (ironic since they had just precipitated the resignation of a Government Minister). Williams used this argument to justify the increasing use of Government information services which would act as an essential bridge “built on the information world between Government and people”.¹¹⁶

Attlee and Williams were expressing diplomatically what other Labour voices were expressing more bluntly. The *Daily Herald* accused the Conservatives and the ‘Tory Press’ of using food to make political capital. ‘Of all the Tory tricks since the General Election... none has been more blatant, more consistently practised and more repugnant to human decency than the attempt to exploit the world food shortage for

¹¹⁵ Attlee opening address to Imperial Press Conference, 3-6-1946, reported in *The Times*, 4-6-1946, p.4.

¹¹⁶ Francis Williams, speech to Imperial Press Conference, 7-6-1946, reported in *The Times*, 10-6-1946, p.6.

party ends'.¹¹⁷ Food had become explicitly political. The unwillingness of the Government to release the full official facts about the world and domestic situation led many papers to make their own calculations and rely on stories from abroad about full German bakeries and vast untapped stocks of Argentinian wheat. The *Daily Mail*, under the headline 'Planned Famine', suggested that there was no food shortage and that Government rationing was a policy decision to save dollars.¹¹⁸

But no-one was more infuriated by the anti-Government press than Herbert Morrison. Morrison had always had a certain sensitivity to the newspapers. As outlined earlier in this chapter he cultivated journalists and was highly conscious of positive coverage (of himself as much as the Government). But he was also very aware of negative headlines and kept grudges, and clippings.¹¹⁹ Since the end of 1945 some of the right leaning papers had targeted him as the 'evil genius of discord' stage managing Labour policy.¹²⁰ After he took over the communication of food policy and returned empty-handed from the US in May, many other papers joined in the attacks against him. The magazine *Truth* sarcastically referred to 'Morrison's Triumph' and most of the national papers emphasised his personal failure to secure more wheat for Britain from the US.¹²¹ Mayhew, who saw both Morrison's actions and the press' response, recalled later that Morrison 'was very

¹¹⁷ *Daily Herald*, Opinion – 'Food and Faction', 18-6-1946, p.2.

¹¹⁸ *Daily Mail*, Opinion column, 26-6-1946, p.2.

¹¹⁹ "Herbert could not take criticism. He was over sensitive to the press and very much annoyed at the way he was reported. He often complained of distortion. He had an insatiable urge for publicity which presented him in a good light" Ernest Jay interview, Morrison biographical papers (Donoughue/Jones), Section 6-1, BLPES.

¹²⁰ *Sunday Times*, 'The People v. Socialism', 9-12-1945, p.4.

¹²¹ *Truth*, 'Mr. Morrison's Triumph', 24-5-1946. See also references in *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express*.

sensitive about the press. He read them all, everything about himself and had a cuttings book'.¹²²

It is clear that from the spring of 1946 Morrison was becoming concerned by the level of reporting in the press. Shortly after this time he started keeping records of mistakes he found in the papers.¹²³ We have an idea of the level of accuracy Morrison sought from newspaper coverage by his reaction to an article in the *Daily Herald* in June 1946, reporting on his Party conference speech. Morrison wrote an angry letter to the paper telling them that the headline, 'Herbert Morrison tells Conference Delegates the Government has Gone as Far to the Left as is Wise' was inaccurate and irresponsible. 'I think an apology is due to me... Quotes should be quotes and not sub-editorial revised versions' Morrison wrote rather pompously.¹²⁴ Not content with the seven inches the letter took up in the newspaper itself Morrison went round to the *Herald* offices and lectured them on their sloppiness.¹²⁵

It is not surprising therefore, that as the vitriol of the national press reached its peak, immediately after Strachey announced rationing on 27th June 1946, it was Morrison who helped to revive an idea first raised in Parliament by Tom Driberg a few months earlier, for a Royal Commission on the Press.

¹²² Interview with Christopher Mayhew, 3-7-1968, Morrison Biographical Papers (Donoghue/Jones), Section 6-1, BLPES.

¹²³ 'This sensitivity [to Press criticism] was certainly one motive behind his support for setting up a Royal Commission to inquire into the press in October 1946. Over the next two and a half years while the Commission sat he carefully built up files of clippings illustrating press misrepresentations and personally submitted some of the items as evidence, Donoghue & Jones, *Morrison*, p.359.

¹²⁴ Herbert Morrison letter to *Daily Herald*, 12-6-1946, p.2, 'Government of the Left – To The Editor'; regarding headline on 10-6-1946, p.3.

¹²⁵ The staff of the Herald were so appalled by his actions that they passed a resolution, placing on record their 'disapproval of the letter... It resents his [Morrison's] gratuitous advice on newspaper production', resolution from the *Daily Herald* Chapel, WAE Jones (Clerk, NUJ) to Morgan Phillips, 14-7-1946, CAB 124/1070.

SECTION 3: The Decision to Launch an Inquiry

Herbert Morrison and the Appointment of a Royal Commission on the Press

Tom Driberg was a member of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) as well as a Labour MP, and had been a successful journalist in the 1930s, writing under the pseudonym of William Hickey for the *Daily Express*. He had been sacked from the paper in June 1943.¹²⁶ At their 1946 conference in Liverpool the NUJ passed a resolution calling for the Government to set up an independent commission examining the ownership and control of British newspapers.¹²⁷ Driberg sent a copy of the NUJ's resolution to Clement Attlee and, on April 30th 1946, asked the Prime Minister in the House whether he would consider setting up a Royal Commission to study the issue.¹²⁸ Attlee said he would not: "I have given careful consideration to this matter" he said, 'which, however, I do not see my way to adopt'.¹²⁹

Morrison had advised Attlee to respond in this way.¹³⁰ But by early July Morrison was having second thoughts. On the second of the month he received a note from Clement Bundock, General Secretary of the NUJ, repeating the proposal for an investigation of the press within a more 'general inquiry into the channels of public

¹²⁶ Orchestrated by Christiansen not Beaverbrook (see Francis Wheen, *The Soul of Indiscretion* (2001)), pp. 194-195).

¹²⁷ In his evidence to the Royal Commission Maurice Webb of the NUJ, claimed that "The real genesis [of the idea for an independent investigation]... was when, towards the end of 1943, we sat down as a Union to consider our post war problems..." ME-RCP, Day 2 (16-7-47), q.311, Cmd.7317.

¹²⁸ Driberg specifically referred to the preservation of the freedom of the Press in his question, suggesting it be set up 'with a view to establishing freedom of the Press in Britain', Hansard, 30-4-1946, Vol.422, Cols.28-29.

¹²⁹ Clement Attlee, Hansard, 30-4-1946, Vol.422, Cols.28-29.

¹³⁰ From Morrison note to Prime Minister, 4-7-1946. 'The views of the Annual Delegate Meeting of the union were, of course, the subject of the Question by Driberg on 30th April to which, on my advice, you gave a negative answer', CAB 124/1070.

information'.¹³¹ His Private Secretary and personal assistant, John Pimlott, suggested Morrison advise the P.M. to say just what he said in April. But Morrison scribbled a note at the bottom of Pimlott's memo saying, "I'm not sure. I wd like him [the P.M.] to say that he will consider the idea in relation to any enquiry abt the BBC".¹³² So, instead, the Lord President wrote to Attlee saying that there was now strong support for a Press inquiry both from within the Party and from the NUJ and that it might be wise for the Government to reconsider.¹³³

In case there was any confusion as to how Morrison felt about the press, he resolved it in a speech in Lewisham on the 8th July. "The great Tory newspaper combines have been seen at their worst" he said, "Suppressions, misrepresentations, inventions: these things happen day by day and constitute a disgrace to journalism". He was particularly critical of the "Kemsley gramophone chain" where he believed the irresponsible voice of the proprietor was projected throughout his group of over 20 newspapers.¹³⁴

Three days later 91 Labour MPs, led by Haydn Davies and Michael Foot, tabled an Early Day motion in Parliament for a Royal Commission on the Press. It is hard, given Morrison's actions over the previous ten days, not to conclude that the Lord President played a part in encouraging the motion. As John Gordon, editor of the *Sunday Express*, wrote in an editorial on 21st July, 'By an odd coincidence, just at the moment when Mr. Morrison is so deeply concerned about the newspapers, up jump 90 MPs like rabbits out of a conjurer's hat, to demand the very thing Mr. Morrison is trying to think of – a Royal Commission'. Morrison's involvement seems even more

¹³¹ Clement Bundock to Morrison, 2-7-1946, CAB 124/1070.

¹³² John Pimlott note to Morrison, 2-7-1946, CAB 124/1070.

¹³³ Morrison to Attlee, 4-7-1946, CAB 124/1070.

¹³⁴ As reported in *World's Press News*, 11-7-1946, p.4.

likely since at dinner on the night of the 11th, he and his PPS, Christopher Mayhew, were putting together a shortlist of names that might serve on the Commission.¹³⁵

And from that point on Morrison championed the idea of a Commission until, in a free debate on 29th October 1946, Parliament voted in favour of an investigation. In Cabinet on the 15th July he told other Cabinet members that he 'thought that some sort of enquiry on the lines suggested in the Motion might well be useful'.¹³⁶ The following day in the Broadcasting debate (on BBC Charter renewal and whether there should be an inquiry into the Corporation) Morrison deliberately broadened the question from broadcasting to the press and suggested to the House that "All great channels for the dissemination of information to the public – all of them – would, the Government believes, benefit from having their state of health examined by independent inquiry, and I don't exclude the press from that consideration".¹³⁷

On 23rd July, after meeting with a deputation of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) the previous day, Morrison submitted a memorandum to Cabinet in which he personally recommended a Royal Commission on the Press be set up.¹³⁸ It seems as though he was even pressing for the Commission to be announced before the summer break but was held back by a note from Attlee and by the reservations in Cabinet of Stafford Cripps.¹³⁹ What, Cripps asked Morrison, would such an inquiry achieve? If it was supposed to lead to legislation, what kind of legislation? And how

¹³⁵ Note from CM (assumed to be Christopher Mayhew given the context) to Morrison, 12-7-1946. The note also mentioned 'that it [the Royal Commission] should be timed to report before the next General Election', CAB 124/1070.

¹³⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(46)68, 15-7-1946. CAB 128/6.

¹³⁷ Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting, 16-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.1084.

¹³⁸ Morrison memorandum regarding a Royal Commission, CP(46)298, 23-7-1946, CAB 129/11.

¹³⁹ On July 26th Pimlott asked Morrison if he would like a question put forward about the Commission in the Commons so that he could make an announcement. However, on the 28th Clement Attlee sent the Lord President a personal minute (M251/46) telling him action should be postponed till after August, CAB 124/1070.

would you get credible evidence from journalists and editors about their proprietors? Morrison was unperturbed. If nothing else, he said, an inquiry would 'serve a useful purpose in bringing to light undesirable practises which would cease as soon as the light of publicity had been directed onto them'.¹⁴⁰

The summer break did not break his ardour. He brought a revised proposal to Cabinet on 3rd October again encouraging them to appoint a Commission. But some of his colleagues were still unconvinced.¹⁴¹ They felt that the chances of finding hard evidence were low. If none were found the report would then look like a whitewash. Even if abuses were found, it would be difficult to deal with them and would reflect poorly on the Government that they existed in the first place. 'Was it not preferable' they asked, 'to seek a practical remedy for the present state of affairs by improving the presentation of the Government's case through those newspapers which were independent and through other methods of publicity?'.¹⁴² But Morrison was adamant. An inquiry would have the time to consider new ways in which to regulate the press and maintain its independence, he thought. Some of his comments indicate that he had a retaliatory motive. For example, 'The exposure of the facts in an authoritative report would in itself educate the public to a truer judgment of the reliance to be placed on statements appearing in the Press'.¹⁴³ He also made an addition to the original motion, adding 'accuracy' to the list of issues that needed to be investigated. He had not forgotten the *Herald* headline in June. However, the two camps in Cabinet could not be reconciled. After they argued once again on 17th October

¹⁴⁰ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(46)75, 30-7-1946, Morrison to Cripps, CAB 128/6.

¹⁴¹ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(46)84, 3-10-1946, 'in discussion doubts were expressed about the wisdom of initiating such an inquiry', CAB 128/6.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Morrison agreed to give time to the proposal through a debate in the House, after which a free vote would determine whether the Commission went ahead.

Morrison's role in reviving and championing an investigation into the press was, therefore, critical. But it would be wrong to think that Morrison drove the investigation through Government and Parliament single-handed. He had strong support from some other members of the Cabinet. Hartley Shawcross for example, the attorney general, spoke publicly against the press twice in July, condemning their 'selection or misrepresentation of facts to suit opinions'. He did not, however, think their behaviour 'can be stopped by law'.¹⁴⁴ There was also sympathy from many within the Party and their supporters. The left wing *Tribune* had waged a campaign against the calumnies of their right wing counterparts since the beginning of 1946. And there was also, as has been discussed above, a latent anxiety about the state of the press and political communication in general. But it was very difficult to focus this anxiety and pinpoint its cause. Morrison tried to do this through the proposal he brought up for debate in the House on October 29th 1946.

The Parliamentary Debate on the Royal Commission, October 29th 1946

The debate, which lasted six and a half hours, was interesting for two main reasons. It illustrated how difficult it would be to prove who influenced the press and with what effect. And, even if it were possible to identify the source and the extent of influence, how hard it would be to do anything about it.

¹⁴⁴ Hartley Shawcross, speaking in East Ealing, 30-7-1946, reported in *The Times*, 31-7-1946, p.3. He had also, more famously, spoken in Battersea on the 19th, when he referred to the 'gutter Press' and was forced, later, to apologise to Lord Kemsley (letter printed in *Sunday Times*, 11-8-1946).

The arguments fell along quite clear Party lines.¹⁴⁵ The Left were convinced that the press was no longer free or fair. The press barons were responsible for this; they had bought up independent newspapers and created chains in which opinions were dictated from above and policy driven purely by commercial interest (for circulation and advertising). "The process of monopoly is not receding. It is getting worse" Michael Foot said, "During the war newspapers made huge profits. They have built up great financial resources. They have undertaken large advertising campaigns... if no action is taken following this Royal Commission inquiry, these financial resources are going to be unloosed on the newspaper market".¹⁴⁶ However, it was not obvious what action could be taken. Patrick Gordon Walker thought, like Morrison, that the light of publicity would rectify abuses. Mallalieu was in favour of legislation to restrict ownership and advertising. No-one had damning evidence of newspaper vices. Tom Driberg suggested the influence of advertisers was constant but tacit.

The Right were obsessed with understanding the motivation for the Commission. They saw Morrison as the driving force behind the motion, pushing forward the investigation due to his own "wounded vanity" and in reaction to press criticism of Government policy.¹⁴⁷ They could not see what an investigation would achieve and thought it was based solely on socialist self interest. "What is really wanted, and what is behind this Motion, is not freedom of expression at all; hon. Members want to

¹⁴⁵ Although with some notable absences from the Labour benches. Douglas Jay, for example, spoke against the motion, believing that the situation was a lot better than it had been, that the inquiry might be misunderstood by the public and abroad, and that it would not produce any results (Hansard, Vol.428, Col.529).

¹⁴⁶ Michael Foot, Parliamentary Debates, Press (Control and Ownership), 29-10-1946, Vol.428, Cols.469-470.

¹⁴⁷ Derek Walker Smith, *Ibid.*, Col.544.

saddle the country with a number of papers of their own way of thinking” Maxwell Fyfe argued for the Conservatives.¹⁴⁸

Most of the speakers had personal experience of working for the Press. This might, logically, have added substance to their arguments. It did not. They each talked about their own experience and elevated it to an indictment or exoneration of the whole industry. Michael Foot had been a young editor of the *Evening Standard* under Lord Beaverbrook. He talked about the enormous reduction in the power of the editor in favour of the proprietor. Had he worked with Rothermere or Camrose he would almost certainly have had a very different impression. Beverley Baxter, also with the *Express* Group though many years earlier, thought the Motion was “preposterous”.¹⁴⁹ Only once in his experience as an editor had an advertiser sought to influence him and he had told them where to get off. He assumed his own experience was indicative of the industry as a whole.

Both sides tended to caricature the newspaper world. There was a transparent ideological subtext to the Labour picture of small, independent newspapers and idealistic editors in a desperate struggle against greedy, corrupt magnates. Conversely, the Conservatives saw benign proprietors singled out by a mischievous Government bent on revenge. Everything, from the left and the right, was justified as ‘securing the freedom of the press’ – freedom from Government interference vs. freedom from capitalist proprietors, freedom to say what they like vs. freedom of news from opinion, freedom from advertisers’ pressure vs. freedom from state subsidy. The trade paper, the *World’s Press News*, was not impressed by the level of debate: ‘We imagine that the ultimate verdict of history on those responsible may be

¹⁴⁸ Major Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, *Ibid.*, Col.480.

¹⁴⁹ Beverley Baxter, *Ibid.*, Col.488.

a little amusing'.¹⁵⁰ But the debate was not so much amusing as demonstrative of the difficulties to come.

Another Nationalised Industry?

The Motion for a Commission passed by 270 votes to 157. Its passage inaugurated a new phase in the relationship between the Government and the press. Now the newspapers were in the dock. They understandably saw the Commission as 'a Grand Jury or Grand Inquest'.¹⁵¹ And if, as the Government had said in the debate, the press was now an industry, what would stop them being nationalised like any other industry? Indeed, less than two weeks after the debate the Government announced the nationalisation of railways, ports, inland waterways, and long distance road transport.

This led some people to believe that 'the definite development of the full Socialist State is envisaged'.¹⁵² The *Sunday Times*, Lord Kemsley's flagship which had been at the centre of so much criticism, began a series of editorials about the 'Twilight of Freedom' on 27th October 1946. They described how freedoms won over centuries were now being whittled away. 'The course is plainly being set' the editorials stated, 'towards the one-party system'. The remarkable popular response to the editorials indicated that many people shared the same concern. By the 17th November the *Sunday Times* claimed to have received well over 750,000 requests for reprints of the series. By December this had reached a million. For many readers the assault on the press was symptomatic of the growth of state control.

¹⁵⁰ *World's Press News*, Editorial, 7-11-1946.

¹⁵¹ Particularly since this was the intention of some within Government: Gordon Walker to Morrison, 8-10-1946, 'We want a Royal Commission to serve as a Grand Jury or Grand Inquest', CAB 124/1070.

¹⁵² *World's Press News*, Editorial, 5-12-1946.

However, before a Commission could be appointed, and before the Government could congratulate itself on putting the press in its place, the consequences of a very cold winter were about to erode its self-confidence severely.

Chapter 3: The Government and the Press 1947-49

Though some of the papers talked about the threat of newspaper nationalisation in November 1946, there is little evidence that this was Labour's intention at this time. There is, however, substantial evidence to suggest that from mid 1946 to mid 1948 the Government did want to change its relationship with the press, and to alter the dynamics of political communication within Britain. Many within the Government and the Labour Party genuinely believed that overly powerful, irresponsible individuals were controlling the press and that this was a serious threat to democratic participation. Similarly, they thought that the increased commercialism which had characterised the development of the British media in the 1930s, was compromising journalists' freedom to write objectively. There is therefore no reason to believe that the Government appointed a Royal Commission without the intention of taking some action.

Indeed, the way it acted throughout 1947 suggests it did not need the Commission's consent to flirt with much greater regulation and control. The problems within the wider economy (the dollar drain and fast rising deficit) led Labour to impose stringent regulations which had immediate repercussions on the ability of the press to perform its function. The power that these regulations conferred on the Government over the press, an initially unintended consequence, once introduced proved too attractive not to use. Regulatory levers, like paper rationing and control of engagement orders, became an additional means of control, as will be shown below. The Government's simultaneous sustained bullying and belittling of the newspapers suggested that it was creating an environment in which radical change might be possible.

At the same time the Government sought to bypass the newspapers as much as possible. If the press could not fulfil its democratic responsibility the Government felt it must find alternative means of communicating with the population. As a result it centralised some of its direct communication via the Economic Information Unit (see Chapter One), sought to invest more effort in Government publications, films and advertising, and explored how it could use the existing media more effectively.

This chapter will therefore show how the Government sought to alter the nature of democratic communication between 1946 and 1948. It will demonstrate that, by early 1948, most of the press were seriously concerned that Labour intended to enhance its control of the newspapers and their regulation. Had it not been for economic constraints and international political developments, the Government may well have done so. However, by 1948 the political environment had changed significantly. Labour did not have the means to establish and maintain new channels of political communication. Moreover, its attempts to increase its control of the press were beginning to look authoritarian. The members of the Royal Commission had become so anxious of this that they even considered changing their terms of reference to include an investigation of Government influence (but eventually decided against it).

The Royal Commission on the Press is in fact a very useful means of charting the changing political climate of these years. It was appointed when Labour's frustrations with the press were paramount. It began collecting its evidence and hearing witnesses as Labour introduced new measures of control and new means by which to circumvent the press. It was weighing up its evidence when the controls imposed by a newly installed Communist Government in Czechoslovakia illustrated the inherent dangers of a highly regulated press. Therefore the changing views of the

Commission, as reflected in its deliberations, provide an excellent expression of the changing temper of the political landscape.

The Commission's failure to make radical recommendations, and the Government's lack of enthusiasm for instituting even its more conservative proposals, disguises the importance of this period in shaping the future relationship between the State and the press. The Government went through three major shifts in its approach towards the newspapers; from initial acceptance of the situation, through a desire for significant structural changes, to a recognition that it had to work within pre-existing parameters. This eventual outcome came about despite the important parallel changes that were occurring in the machinery of Government communication and in the structure of the press. By 1949, though both had themselves changed massively, their relationship had not altered to take account of this.

But in early 1947 the Government had other problems to attend to. A lack of planning and a harsh winter meant that by late February Britain was, quite literally, powerless.

SECTION 1: Government–Press Hostility Deepens

February 1947 & the Repercussions of the Fuel Crisis

The fuel crisis of February 1947 not only sparked a wholesale review of Government communication, as described in Chapter One, but provoked intense criticism of the Government's behaviour by the press. Much of this criticism was focused, as it was the year before regarding food, on the Government's failure to keep the public informed. Though understandable, this criticism did not endear the press to the Government. Their relationship deteriorated further as a consequence.

The Economist set the tone. After Emmanuel Shinwell made his unscheduled announcement about the drastic power cuts the magazine complained that, 'Even in

default of inspiration, plain ordinary horse sense should have sufficed to keep the public abreast of the facts about fuel, and almost anything short of imbecility would have broken the news of the power cuts otherwise than late on Friday, at the fag end of a vituperative political speech, in a debate that the Government had tried hard to avoid'.¹

Like *The Economist*, much of the press' criticism was of the manner and amateurishness of the Government's communication as much as of the action they took. 'There has not been that cohesion and coordination of policy and interpretation which we expected' *The World's Press News* said.² It even put this in a wider political context saying, 'A bigger issue now emerges, the general standard of public relations between the Government and Press and people'.³

Yet the Government gave no immediate indication that it wanted to solve this by improving its relationship with the press. In fact, in a public relations blunder, shortly after his announcement on the 7th Shinwell gave instructions that all periodicals, without exception, should stop printing to save fuel and power.⁴ This draconian move was an unprecedented curtailment of the modern press in peacetime. Some journals printed part of their contents in daily or weekly papers (at the specific invitation of those newspapers), but most simply followed the instructions and ceased publication for two weeks.⁵ As it turned out, they were under no obligation to do so since though

¹ *The Economist*, 'Mr. Micawber's Crisis', 15-2-1947.

² *World's Press News*, editorial, 13-3-1947.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ 'After February 15 there will be a suspension of publication of "at least" two consecutive issues of all periodicals irrespective of whether they are printed or published inside or outside the restricted area or from what source they draw their paper supplies', *Newspaper World and Advertising Review*, 15-2-1947, p.193.

⁵ The instructions were 'voluntary' but carried out by almost periodicals. Only two defied the ban that there should be no duplicated substitutes, according to *Newspaper World and Advertising Review*, the *British Medical Journal* and *Liberal News* (8-3-1947, p.227).

the Government could have gained legal authority by gaining an Order in Council they had failed to do so.⁶ Shinwell also suspended the BBC Third Programme and television.

Though Shinwell's actions are probably best seen (like many of his at this time) as clumsy and misjudged, Philip Noel-Baker, Secretary of State for Air, cast a more sinister light on them when, a short while after the suspension he made a speech in which he told the press if they did not behave then the Government could 'close down a newspaper at any time, simply by withholding its newsprint supplies'.⁷

Nor did other ministers seek a reconciliation with the press. Though Attlee admitted in March that he had 'no sense of public relations' and that there is 'something wrong with our publicity' he also pointedly remarked to backbenchers that 'the Government was being misrepresented to the country'.⁸ The Government was clearly not going to resolve its communications problems by seeking succour from the newspapers.

The relationship declined still further at the end of March. To the indignation of the House, the MP Will Nally accused MPs of accepting bribes from Lord Beaverbrook in return for news stories. Garry Allighan, another Labour MP and regular columnist, reiterated the claims in the trade press and broadened the accusation: 'Every newspaper in the Street has anything up to half a dozen MPs on its "contacts" list, he wrote, 'Some of the "contacts" are on a retainer, some get paid for what they produce, some are content to accept "payment in kind" – personal publicity'.⁹ Since Allighan had been news editor of the *Daily Mirror*, and wrote regularly for the *Daily*

⁶ *The Economist*, 8-3-1947. *The Economist* was particularly cross at the Government's illegal instruction – 'their "instruction",' it said 'for all its peremptory language, was without legal force', p.313.

⁷ Reported in the *Sunday Express*, 'Threats to Freedom', 6-4-1947, p.4.

⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 11-3-1947, p.1. *World's Press News*, 20-3-1947, p.24.

⁹ *World's Press News*, 3-4-1947, p.3.

Mail, it could only be assumed that there was some basis to his charges. An investigation was announced immediately and rumbled on till the end of the year. But the press claimed that the Government 'pose that they have a monopoly both of political righteousness and of economic know-how' had been severely tarnished.¹⁰

By the spring of 1947, therefore, Ministers were conscious of the failures in Government communication but disenchanted with the press as a means of representation. As a result they explored alternatives. They looked to other media such as BBC radio, feature films and advertising (their attempts to use these are explored in greater detail in later chapters). Though the Government had used many of these already, it used them more extensively and effectively through new bodies like the Economic Information Unit. When it used the press it tried to reduce its mediating influence. For example, with the *Reports to the Nation* which began in October, the EIU booked space in newspapers and filled it with information as and how it wanted. Departments also tried to go directly to the worker, bypassing the Press entirely, via industry journals like *ROF News* (for the Royal Ordnance factories) the magazine *Coal* (for the miners), and *Target* for industrial managers.¹¹

There were already signs, however, that the Government would find direct communication with the people difficult. In March it published its much touted Economic Survey, both as a White Paper and in a 'popular version'. This latter version was supposed to raise awareness amongst a wider audience of Britain's dire economic circumstances and the responsibilities of the public. But a different title ('The Battle for Output'), a different cover, and five new charts did not, as *The Times*

¹⁰ *The Economist*, 15-2-1947, op.cit., p.267.

¹¹ The first issue of the monthly periodical 'Coal' came out 1-5-1947. Its target circulation was 75,000 rising to 150,000. The fortnightly journal ROF News was being planned at the same time (*Newspaper World and Advertising Review*, 5-4-1947, p.6, and 10-5-47, p.150).

pointed out, constitute popularisation.¹² By comparison the *Picture Post* published a straightforward, visual exposition of the survey in April, setting out its key points and its implications for the population. Its clarity demonstrated that the Government still had a lot to learn in terms of popular communication.¹³

The Government Belittles the Press and Undermines its Ability to Communicate with the People

At the same time that the Government increased its means of communicating directly with the people it reduced the capacity of the newspapers to do the same. Over the course of 1947 it took a whole range of actions which, if looked at separately, were clumsily authoritarian. When looked at cumulatively, they suggest the Government was flexing its muscles at the newspapers and undermining their role as the primary means of political communication.

In outline, over the course of the year the Government reduced the press's paper ration and pegged each newspaper's circulation. It introduced new economic and distribution controls that gave it increased executive power over the press's means of production. It went on to threaten to make some papers risibly small (two pages). Where possible it avoided the press altogether or formalised its relationship with them to constrain mediation (with the lobby correspondents, for example). And the whole time it was using rhetoric that seemed calculated to demean newspapers in the eyes of their readers and so make them less credible as tools of political communication. Each of these actions is examined in more detail below.

Since September 1946 some of the wartime controls on newsprint rationing had been relaxed. Penny papers had been allowed to increase to five pages per day,

¹² *The Times*, 5-3-1947.

¹³ *Picture Post*, 'Special Issue on the Crisis. Where Stands Britain?', 19-4-1947.

others by a comparable amount, and the basis of rationing had been changed to tonnage rather than circulation (so papers could sell as many copies as they liked, provided they did not exceed their ration). According to Lord Layton this had an immediate impact on political reporting. By his calculations *The Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* increased the space devoted to parliamentary reports by two and a half times.¹⁴

However, as the dollar drain quickened in June 1947 the Government scoured the country's imports to see what it could cut.¹⁵ It says quite a bit about its current attitude to newspapers but not much for its commitment to freedom of the press that it did not give a second thought to reducing newsprint, despite its marginal dollar impact and despite the recent long term deals the Newsprint Supply Company had completed with Canadian suppliers. The Cabinet discussions were dominated, instead, by the degree to which food imports would be reduced. In contrast, the discussions about paper were fleeting, consisting of one sentence in the minutes; 'the cut proposed for raw materials was very small but it would involve a return to a four-page newspaper'.¹⁶

The announcement to the Commons was similarly unapologetic. "Some restriction(s) of supplies of newsprint is inevitable' Hugh Dalton said, 'which will render it necessary to return temporarily to a four page paper'.¹⁷ He gave no indication that

¹⁴ Minutes of Evidence, Royal Commission on the Press (ME-RCP), Lord Layton, Day 24 (4-3-48), q.8116, Cmd.7409.

¹⁵ As a result of the Government's commitment to the US to return sterling to convertibility on 15-7-1947. For a dramatic account of the parlous state of the economy in the summer of 1947 see Hennessy, *Never Again*, pp.299-305.

¹⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(47)52, 5-6-1947, Chancellor, CAB 128/10. They returned to paper very briefly in the Cabinet discussion of 24-6-1947, only to say 'It was urged by Ministers that, while some cuts, eg. those in paper, tobacco, and films, could be made without serious disadvantage, there was a danger that others, and particularly the proposed cut in food imports, would have an adverse effect on morale, and so on production' CM(47)56, CAB 128/10.

¹⁷ Hugh Dalton, Hansard, 30-6-1947, Vol.439, Col.961.

this was a difficult decision to make, or of how long the reduction would last.¹⁸ In the debate following the announcement the Government also managed to give the impression that the cut was a deliberate punitive gesture. As *The Economist* commented, Ministers seemed 'rather to confirm than to remove the impression that the cut was intended to express displeasure at the use made by the daily newspapers of their occasional extra pages'.¹⁹

Then, just over two months later, after the currency debacle of July and August, there were even rumours that the Government might have to shrink the papers even more, to two pages. The newspapers were stunned. *World's Press News* said that this 'would make a mock of the Government's professed desire to maintain a free press and the democratic way of life'.²⁰ Though this did not happen, the threat hung over the press for the following nine months.²¹

In September the Government introduced the 'Control of Engagement Order' that gave it increased executive power over industry's means of production. This was Cripps' plan for taking control of the economic debacle. From now on the Government would direct labour and would issue licenses for the use of raw materials. Any firm which refused to cooperate would have its license revoked. In Parliament Clement Davies immediately saw the possible dangers to the freedom of the press and urged the Government to give assurances that it would not use its increased powers to close newspapers or to prevent them printing under the guise of

¹⁸ The Chancellor met with the Newsprint Supply Company on the 7th July and said the cut would last six months. It ended up lasting much longer.

¹⁹ *The Economist*, 'What's Wrong with the Press', 26-7-1947.

²⁰ *World's Press News*, Editorial, 4-9-1947, p.8.

²¹ Until Harold Wilson, newly installed at the Board of Trade, told newspapers in May 1948 that they could expect to receive more paper, not less, in 1949.

economic measures.²² Though the Government gave these assurances its behaviour suggested otherwise (for example with the journal *Action* which will be described below).

Despite the decrease in newspaper size the Government still expected significant advertising space in what was left. Indeed the Economic Information Unit launched the 'Report to the Nation' campaign on the 12th October, which was 'the largest space allowed to any one advertiser by newspapers for some years'.²³ Some newspapers initially refused to give this space to the Government, despite the wartime agreement which still existed. But under pressure they eventually gave way.²⁴ This seemed particularly unfair when a few weeks later Hugh Dalton announced in his budget that in future only half of all commercial firms' advertising expenses would be deductible from their profit and loss account. The Chancellor also could not resist an ideological dig, saying, "in these days much of the advertising is a serious waste of money, of labour and of material".²⁵ This measure would directly impact the newspaper revenues and might, MPs argued, cause the closure of some of the smaller, provincial papers whose independence the Government said it so jealously guarded.

Morrison, Cripps, Bevan and Shinwell maintained this hostility towards the press by regularly attacking it in speeches. In September Bevan and Cripps offered the

²² Clement Davies sought to insert an additional sentence to the Bill reading; "Provided that nothing in this Act shall be held to authorise the suppression or suspension of any newspaper, periodical, book, or other publication". Parliamentary Debates, Supplies and Services (Transitional Powers) Bill, 11-8-1947, Vol.441, Col.2093.

²³ 'Report to the Nation Campaign Begins Sunday', *World's Press News*, 9-10-1947, p.30.

²⁴ 'Government's Eleven-Inch Doubles: Press Co-operates', *World's Press News*, 16-10-1947, p.22.

²⁵ Hugh Dalton, Budget Proposals, Hansard, 12-11-1947, Vol.444, Col.401. Stafford Cripps, who took over as Chancellor after Dalton's resignation, postponed the new policy after lobbying by advertising firms. A special committee appointed to examine the tax eventually proposed a voluntary scheme rather than a compulsory P&L tax .

unwanted advice to newspapers that they could easily make room for more news by cutting reports of certain court cases and stopping serial stories.²⁶ On October 19th Emmanuel Shinwell called the *Mail* and the *Express* 'scurrilous rags'.²⁷ The next month, on the 23rd, Bevan said that Britain had the 'most reactionary press in the world'.²⁸ It is not surprising then that *World's Press News* felt 'there is at the present time a very definite campaign afoot seeking to belittle and denigrate the influence of the press'.²⁹

The year ended sourly too. Garry Allighan, whose bribery allegations had been investigated by the Privileges Committee, admitted to being paid by the *Evening Standard* through a fictitious company ('Transatlantic Press Agency') to leak information about the Parliamentary Labour Party.³⁰ Evelyn Walkden confessed to similar charges. As a result, Morrison told the Commons in October that he not only wanted any journalist who tried to bribe an MP for confidential information to be barred from the House, but for every journalist in their group to be barred as well.³¹ Scarcely a week after he said this, Hugh Dalton had to resign after carelessly leaking information about the budget to a Lobby correspondent immediately before the debate. The behaviour of journalists was strongly condemned, and, though Morrison's intended punishment did not pass the House, he was able to draw up written rules to regulate the Government's future relationship with the Lobby.³²

²⁶ 'Newsprint Cut Menace to Free Press', *World's Press News*, 2-10-1947, p.4.

²⁷ 'The Stafford Fiasco', *World's Press News*, 23-10-1947, p.4.

²⁸ 'Bevan Attacks Press: Morrison Wants Bigger Papers', *World's Press News*, 27-11-1947, p.4.

²⁹ Editorial, *World's Press News*, 11-12-1947, p.8.

³⁰ 'Privileges Report – Committee says 'No Evidence to Justify Allighan Charges'', *World's Press News*, 31-7-1947, p.3.

³¹ Herbert Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, 'Confidential Information (Disclosure)', 30-10-1947, Vol.443, Col.1228.

³² See Jeremy Tunstall, *The Westminster Lobby Correspondents* (1970), p.48.

The Press becomes Increasingly Anxious as to the Government's Intentions

The press were understandably anxious about the actions of the Government. They were worried because not only did the actions themselves compromise the ability of newspapers to communicate, they were taken so unapologetically as to suggest that the Government no longer respected the press as the primary means of political communication and therefore no longer thought it needed careful protection. Though the Government frequently said that it was reacting to economic imperatives and would not use its powers to restrict freedom of the press, its behaviour suggested otherwise. A good example of this was its attempted suppression of the fascist newspaper '*Action*'.

Action was the journal of the British Union of Fascists. Though it had been published throughout the 1930s it temporarily stopped printing in May 1940 because most of its contributors were in prison. At the beginning of 1947 it applied to start printing again.³³ Cabinet examined the application on 12th February 1947. Worried about the political difficulties that might accompany the resumption of the journal they discussed whether it might not 'be possible to justify the withholding of facilities to prevent publication'.³⁴ They asked the Home Secretary, Chuter Ede, and the Lord Chancellor, Lord Jowitt, to look into it.

Ede, who put his memorandum before Cabinet in May, could not see how, short of new legislation, the Government could justify suppressing the journal, unpleasant though they might find its politics.³⁵ This was not the answer the Cabinet had been looking for. It was, in the delicate wording of the Cabinet minutes, 'reluctant to accept

³³ From memorandum by Stafford Cripps, on the paper of the British Union of Fascists, CP(47)54, 7-2-1947 CAB 129/17.

³⁴ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(47)21, Paper for Fascist Periodical, 13-2-1947, CAB 128/9.

³⁵ Cabinet Papers, CP(47)135, 'Supply of Paper for *Action*, Chuter Ede, 22-4-1947, CAB 129/18.

the conclusion that nothing could be done'. 'A further attempt should be made' Ministers thought, 'to find means of preventing the publication of this periodical'. Barring all other options, they said, could they not just 'refuse [its] allocation of paper'?³⁶

Stafford Cripps looked into it and, in July, thought he had found a way to "refuse to license the delivery of any paper for the publication of *Action*" through the Paper Control Orders. However, this was not foolproof Cripps said, because it may still be possible for them to secure paper through other means.³⁷ Another possible answer was to amend the paper Orders to 'make it an offence to publish any periodical unless it had been published before 16 August 1940 and in the month of May 1947'. This slightly absurd suggestion was rejected since it would undoubtedly affect other periodicals which were not politically objectionable. Cabinet had no wish to see *Action* printed but left the issue unresolved.

At almost exactly the same time that Cripps was searching for ways in which to prevent *Action* from appearing by denying it paper he was defending the new round of paper cuts to the House of Commons. The cuts were, he explained, only being made out of financial necessity. "I hope" he said, "that [...] the House will realise that this is not an attempt to discriminate against anybody".³⁸ *Action* could justifiably have thought otherwise.

Lacking any clear Cabinet direction as to how to proceed Cripps, and his successor Harold Wilson, chose to ignore all correspondence from the periodical between July 1947 and March 1948, therefore not allowing it to acquire a paper license. In March

³⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(47)47, Paper for Fascist Periodical, 15-5-1947, CAB 128/9.

³⁷ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(47)64, Paper for Fascist Periodical, 24-7-1947, CAB 128/10.

³⁸ Stafford Cripps, Parliamentary Debates, 17-7-1947, Vol.440, Col.690.

1948 circumstances compelled them to review the situation again. The journal, now re-titled '*Union*', had started printing, having gathered together enough paper for which a license was not required. In its first issue it accused the Government of withholding a license and restricting the freedom of the press. The Cabinet denied that it had prevented the paper's appearance and said they "would not use paper control as a method of censorship".³⁹ Clearly this was not true. Although the reticence amongst a Labour Cabinet to allow the publication of a fascist journal may have been understandable, it does not excuse the fact that they attempted to use their control of paper to suppress a periodical that was legally allowed to resume printing.

Therefore Labour's actions during the course of 1947 strongly suggested it was moving towards a different type of relationship with the press. It looked as though Labour was creating an environment in which the press was so ill-thought of by the public, so limited in its ability to communicate (due to its size), and so circumscribed by the executive powers of the Government, that it would be possible to introduce significant changes to the way in which it was managed and controlled. It had also appointed a Royal Commission expressly to inquire into these means of management and control.

SECTION 2: The Inquiry into the Press

What Was The Royal Commission Supposed To Do?

The Royal Commission was asked to examine the influence of the press barons and of commercial pressure on newspapers. The motion before the House read:

³⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(48)24, Paper for Fascist Periodical, 22-3-1948, CAB 128/12.

'That, having regard to the increasing public concern at the growth of monopolistic tendencies in the control of the Press, and with the object of furthering the free expression of opinion through the press and the greatest practicable accuracy in the presentation of news, the House considers that a Royal Commission should be appointed to inquire into the control, management and ownership of the Press'

The attitude of the Government is palpable within this motion. It believed there was a serious problem in the 'control, management and ownership of the Press'. The motion cites 'increasing public concern' – although what evidence there was of this is unclear, and states that there were 'monopolistic tendencies' – a term vague enough to allow for considerable interpretation. This then elides into the 'object of furthering of free expression of opinion... and the greatest practicable accuracy in the presentation of news', suggesting a causal link between monopolistic tendencies and constraints on opinion or inaccuracy in newspapers.

Senior Labour Ministers were even clearer about their opinion during the debate on the Commission in October 1946. Patrick Gordon Walker claimed that 'the standards of journalism are slipping to the point at which the freedom of the press is endangered'.⁴⁰ Morrison asserted that 'Directives come from the back of Gray's Inn Road, in London, to the provincial newspapers, instructing each of the editors on what lines the leading article is to be the next day'.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Gordon Walker, Parliamentary Debates, Press (Ownership and Control), 29-10-1946, Vol.428, Col.484.

⁴¹ Herbert Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, Press, 29-10-1946, Vol. 428, Col.558.

But, as Cripps' had asked Morrison in July, what was the Commission supposed to achieve? Morrison responded to Cripps' by outlining four possible goals.⁴² To begin with it should rectify many current abuses within the press simply by exposing them to public scrutiny. The continued threat of scrutiny, either by future commissions, a council on the press, or by the standards set by a press institute would then 'be a very potent weapon for keeping the press in order'.⁴³ Secondly, the Commission would write an 'authoritative survey' of the press which could then be used for 'laying general principles which should govern the conduct and management of the press'.⁴⁴ Researching and writing this survey would also educate the public about the workings of the newspapers to prevent people being too credulous of them in the future. Third, it was hoped that a Commission could work out some way in which to protect the public sphere. There was a general anxiety that the public sphere was being privatised by media owners and commercial interests, to the detriment of society and democracy. Therefore, given its 'quasi-constitutional position' Morrison felt that 'a general review of the place which the Press should occupy in a democratic community' was long overdue.⁴⁵ Finally, the Commission's supporters thought it might promote accuracy and good conduct by pressing for the formation of a central organisation (such as the National Union of Journalists).

Patrick Gordon Walker, Morrison's staunch supporter and soon to become his PPS, went so far as to suggest that the Commission should not even be required to make

⁴² First in CP(46)298 in July 1946, CAB 129/11. Then in CP(46)360 in October, and finally in CP(46)379, again in October, CAB 129/13.

⁴³ Gordon Walker note to Morrison, 8-10-1946, CAB 124/1070.

⁴⁴ Morrison to Cabinet on 30-7-1946, CAB 128/6, and in CP(46)298, CAB 129/11. He referred back to the PEP report, saying it had given 'a fair idea of the ground to be covered' but was now not an adequate tool for action.

⁴⁵ CP(46)360, 'Inquiry into the Press', Morrison, 27-9-46, CAB 129/13. Discussed in Cabinet on 3-10-1946 (CM(46)84, CAB 128/6).

recommendations. The survey, he thought, would be enough to resolve the problems and make it apparent what the Government should do.⁴⁶

These objectives were still distinctly vague. This vagueness could be interpreted to mean that the Royal Commission was being given a free hand to make its own judgments. But the leading terms of reference belie this. It seems more likely that they were supposed to give the Government *carte blanche*. If the Commission surveyed the press, confirmed the allegations, and devised some workable alternatives of organising the press, this would justify and rationalise Government action to suppress the malign influences and protect the public sphere.

Certain contemporary newspapers and observers thought that this may involve nationalisation. For example the 'Twilight of Freedom' editorials in the *Daily Telegraph* described above. This was always unlikely given the history of the press in Britain. But there were other significant, if less radical, steps considered. Some of these are contained in the initial proposals discussed by the Royal Commission and forwarded to their interviewees. They included: licensing of news groups, a levy to fund experimental publications, the compulsory inclusion of alternative views in each newspaper, or a public corporation newspaper.⁴⁷ It is far too easy to dismiss these proposals with hindsight since these and others were dismissed by contemporary newspapers and eventually by the Royal Commission as well. They were all, however, workable suggestions.

For example, the licensing of news groups was an option which was promoted by many contemporaries. Kingsley Martin was the most eloquent advocate of this

⁴⁶ Gordon Walker to Morrison, 8-10-1946, the Royal Commission 'should not be obliged to make recommendations', CAB 124/1070.

⁴⁷ Each of these proposals was either raised by contemporaries and considered by the Commission and/or included in the questionnaire they sent out to all the news groups. See Questionnaire NC1.

approach. He outlined it in his book, *The Press the Public Wants* (1947) and in contemporary public lectures.⁴⁸ If individuals were not responsible enough to run newspapers, he argued, and if newspapers were becoming commercial concerns which did not “seek to fulfil the function of systematic truth seeking which the early democrats accorded them” then perhaps each paper should be transferred to a public group – political or social – which could be licensed to run it.⁴⁹ ‘I do not see that the cause of freedom’ Martin wrote, ‘need in any way be damaged by insisting that all newspapers should be “public concerns” run by responsible and independent groups, and not by irresponsible individuals’.⁵⁰ Something similar had, he said, already been tried in Czechoslovakia and was working. ‘In May 1945, a decree was issued by the Czechoslovak Government which made it illegal for any individual to own a newspaper’.⁵¹

A second option considered was ‘the compulsory publication in every newspaper of a column of comment by an outside critic or expert’ to ensure some degree of political balance. Most newspapers protested against this as a severe infringement of editorial freedom. ‘No,’ the *Daily Mirror* Group said, ‘compulsion prevents freedom’.⁵² But, given the nature of the Government’s regulation of news and political coverage in commercial broadcasting just a few years later, there is no reason to believe that such a proposal was entirely incompatible with newspapers. The Independent Television Authority, when set up by the Government in 1954 to

⁴⁸ Kingsley Martin, *The Press the Public Wants* (1947), ‘Truth and the Public’, Conway Memorial Lecture, Conway Hall, 17-6-1945 (printed 1945).

⁴⁹ Kingsley Martin, ‘Truth and the Public’, op.cit.

⁵⁰ Kingsley Martin, *The Press the Public Wants*, p.122.

⁵¹ Ibid. p.107.

⁵² Memoranda of Evidence Submitted to the Royal Commission (RCP Memoranda), Replies to Questionnaire NC1, *Daily Mirror* Newspapers & *Sunday Pictorial* Newspapers, (20), response to q.32(9).

oversee commercial television services, had to make sure that its programmes were impartial, balanced and accurate. The Television Bill agreed to allow the new services only if the programmes broadcast by the Authority complied with the following requirements: 'that the programmes maintain a proper balance in their subject-matter and a high general standard of quality', 'that any news given in the programmes (in whatever form) is presented with due accuracy and impartiality', and that for politics, 'no matter designed to serve the interests of any political party is included in the programmes' (unless the programme include discussions or debates which are 'properly balanced').⁵³

A third option, raising a levy to fund experimental publications, was derided by newspapers as a ridiculous proposal. Why should existing newspapers be asked to pay for new ones, the *Daily Mirror* group asked.⁵⁴ 'No other industry has been more fertile of new ideas, more ready to experiment, or prompter to apply the lessons of experience' Kemsley newspapers argued.⁵⁵ 'Who is to decide what experimental publications? This would be dangerous and undesirable' the *Manchester Guardian* said.⁵⁶ However, again there is a valid comparison between newspapers and broadcasting which suggests the proposal was not quite so ridiculous as they made out. When the fourth national television channel was established by the Broadcasting Act of 1980, the original provisions of the license specified that the channel had "to encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes".⁵⁷ Part of this obligation included "catering for the tastes and outlook" of specific

⁵³ Television Bill, No.76, Parliamentary Papers 1953-54, Volume III, p.463, 4-3-1954, Clause 3 (1)c, d, & h.

⁵⁴ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, *Daily Mirror Newspapers and Sunday Pictorial Newspapers (1920) Ltd.* (20), q.32(6).

⁵⁵ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, *Kemsley Newspapers* (44).

⁵⁶ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, *Manchester Guardian and Evening News.* (54).

⁵⁷ Broadcasting Bill, 5-2-1980, Bill 139, Parliamentary Papers 1979-80, Vol. 4, Part II, Clause 3(1)c.

minority groups which were underserved or not served elsewhere.⁵⁸ If it was not beyond the realms of Government, even in the 1980s, to set up and help fund experimental media, neither was it in the 1940s.

A fourth concept, the 'publication by a body independent of the Government of a paper devoted to the objective statement of news and opinion, and possibly of controversial comment supplied or reprinted from the remaining national dailies' amused some newspapers. Berrow's Provincial Group, for example, thought that 'If it attained true objectivity it would qualify for the title of *Celestial Times*. Its staff would certainly have to be God-like'.⁵⁹ While the *Manchester Guardian* thought that if it were too good it 'might kill *The Times*'.⁶⁰ But it had been none other than Wilson Harris who championed the idea in his 1943 book *The Daily Press*. And, the Government were already publishing a range of their own newspapers for specific industries so why not a national one as well? Again there is a more recent comparison which suggests the concept was not so absurd. In 1997 the BBC started to publish a text based version of its news service on the internet, updated regularly. This was, to all intents and purposes, a public corporation newspaper.

The structural differences between broadcasting and the press, especially in terms of content regulation, later became accepted norms. At this point, however, prior to the launch of commercial television and radio, no such norms existed. Therefore while ideas such as Kingsley Martin's for 'lots of BBC's' to replace the contemporary ownership structures of the press may seem unfeasible in retrospect, they were much less so in the environment of the late 1940s.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Clause 4(1)d.

⁵⁹ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, Berrow's Newspapers (3).

⁶⁰ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, *Manchester Guardian and Evening News* (54).

Morrison, as the head of Government Information policy and the Government's 'socialisation' programme, was well placed to think about alternative means of organisation and ownership for the press.⁶¹ He outlined, in the *Labour Encyclopaedia* of 1948, two criteria that qualified an industry for Government intervention.⁶² The first qualification was that the industry 'provides a common service for industry generally or is basic in character'. The press was not basic in character but it did provide a 'common service', indeed it was 'quasi-constitutional' in Morrison's words. The second qualification was that 'it is a monopoly, or that owing to its nature or to the muddle into which private ownership has brought it, the public interest can best be served by its becoming a monopoly'. This second criteria would seem to apply directly to the status of newspapers when the Royal Commission was appointed. The terms of reference even cited 'monopolistic tendencies'. Therefore, if Morrison was following his own rules, Government intervention was warranted.

Moreover, the Royal Commission found, through its investigations, ample confirmation that the press was not properly informing the population. 'In our opinion', the Commissioners wrote in their report, 'the newspapers, with few exceptions, fail to supply the electorate with adequate materials for sound political judgment'.⁶³ The popular papers in particular, did not distinguish between what was 'intrinsically important' from what would simply entertain.⁶⁴ Moreover, the Commission was able to find evidence that showed that 'the political factor in the

⁶¹ Morrison used the word 'socialisation' rather than nationalisation since he thought that the latter was politically loaded and many of his concepts of Government intervention involved public but not Government control.

⁶² Described in detail in *The Economist*, lead article, 'State and Public', 18-9-1948.

⁶³ Report of the Royal Commission on the Press, Cmd.7700, p.154 (paragraph 572).

⁶⁴ Cmd.7700, p.131 (para.483).

selection and presentation of news is apparent in all the national papers'.⁶⁵ Therefore it had both the opportunity and the encouragement to recommend significant changes to the 'control, management and ownership of the Press' and to justify Government intervention.

Why Did The Royal Commission End Up Recommending The Exact Opposite?

Despite being set up by the Government to confirm its suspicions about the malign effect of press barons and the corrupting influence of commerce and therefore justify positive action, the Royal Commission ended up doing the exact opposite. Not only did it decide against recommending radical changes to the industry, when the Commissioners eventually issued their report they had become extremely sceptical about the benefits of any positive action by the Government. They came down heavily on the side of maintaining free market mechanisms. 'In our view' they said, 'free enterprise in the production of newspapers is a prerequisite of a free press'.⁶⁶

They went even further than recommending against restrictive legislation (for example, to limit ownership) and recommended against positive interference as well. Of the idea that the Government subsidise the capital costs of printing to encourage emergent voices the Commission said, 'We do not think the taxpayer should be asked... to bear part of the cost of starting new enterprises over which he has no control'.⁶⁷ It did not recommend the publication of a 'public corporation newspaper' along the lines of a *BBC Times*. Neither did it propose any legal requirements to print certain information since it said this 'in the long run dams the free flow of information

⁶⁵ Cmd.7700, p.109 (para.394).

⁶⁶ Cmd.7700, p.155-156 (para.578).

⁶⁷ Cmd.7700, p.160 (para.597).

and discussion and undermines the independence' of the press.⁶⁸ Virtually their only significant recommendation was the establishment of a General Council on the Press, made up of members of the press (plus one-fifth lay members – and even their inclusion caused a rift within the Commission).

There are five reasons why the Royal Commission came to conclusions so opposite to those for which it was called. Each of these is examined below. The Commission is important because its failure to come up with any means to regulate the press or protect the public sphere discouraged the Government from taking action (there were also other factors acting on the Government which are outlined later). But even more so because its investigations, despite being directed towards the influence of owners and of commerce, led the Commissioners to question the powers of the Government over the press.

Reasons (1): An Untimely Moment to Call a Royal Commission

For two very pragmatic reasons, this was an unfortunate time to appoint a Commission on the press. First, because many of the influences that had motivated the appointment, and had their roots in the developments of the 1930s, were diminished or reversed in 1947. Second, because as a result of newsprint rationing the newspapers could not be made responsible for some of the accusations and assertions aimed at them.

The peculiar economic circumstances of the newspaper industry in the late 1940s have been described in the previous chapter. Essentially, the papers were insulated from many of the competitive demands that characterized the pre-war period by low costs and virtually guaranteed sales. They were free to include what they wanted

⁶⁸ Cmd.7700, p.165 (para.617).

without much to fear from substantial drops in circulation, or due to pressure from advertisers. In such an environment it would be extremely difficult for the Commission to prove that commercial influences were unduly affecting editorial judgment.

Similarly, it would be difficult to prove that the newspapers were deliberately suppressing stories or viewpoints when due to paper rationing, the papers were limited to very few, rather flimsy, pages. Despite their efforts to cram in as much as possible they inevitably had to reduce the breadth and depth of their coverage, and alter the editorial style to make it less verbose and more fact rich. They could, therefore, justifiably claim that any exclusions from their papers were as a result of newsprint shortages, and not made with any harmful intent.⁶⁹ This situation was made worse, and the Government's case weakened, by the reduction of newsprint that came into effect on July 20th 1947.

In the miniaturised newspapers of 1947 it would be hard, if not impossible, for the Commission to pinpoint examples of distortion as a result of commercial influence, or misrepresentation due to politically motivated interference.

Reasons (2): Not a Strong or Experienced Royal Commission

The Commission itself was neither strong enough, nor experienced enough, to recommend major changes to the Press in Britain. This was because Morrison appeared intent on appointing members without any direct experience of the newspaper industry. He instructed John Pimlott that 'newspaper proprietors and active full time professional journalists (although I am not quite certain about the

⁶⁹ Lord Layton told the Commission that 'The British public is definitely becoming an *ill-informed* public' as a consequence of paper rationing. ME-RCP, memorandum by Newsprint Supply Company, Day 24 (4-3-48), Cmd.7409 [*his italics*].

latter) should be excluded but, subject to this, knowledge of Fleet Street may be an advantage'.⁷⁰

It is unclear why Morrison adopted this approach although he might have been trying to avoid anyone with any sympathy towards the Press. This would also explain why he was so keen to appoint a judge to chair the Commission.⁷¹ But whether Morrison wanted objective observers or simply jurors to indict the press, he found it very difficult to find people who fulfilled his criteria.

The Cabinet vetoed the idea of a judge as chair.⁷² It would, the Lord Chancellor said, make it too much like a trial. An academic was sought as an alternative. But few were keen to accept the post.⁷³ Neither were commission members easy to attract. In all, the Government considered at least 17 different chairs and 88 different members.⁷⁴ By January 1947, six months after Morrison had begun writing down potential commission members, he had yet to even find a chair.

At this point the Lord President was taken ill and Francis Williams, from the Prime Minister's office, took over. Williams had already expressed his hostility to Morrison's choices. He was appalled by the current members' lack of 'practical journalism and standing in the profession' and wrote to Attlee that he was 'not very happy about the names suggested'.⁷⁵ But by January it was too late to reverse Morrison's invitations

⁷⁰ Preparation for memorandum CP(46)379, Morrison, 9-10-1946, CAB 124/1070.

⁷¹ A judge was first suggested by Morrison in CP(46)360, 27-9-1946, CAB 129/13.

⁷² 'In view of objections to inviting a judge to preside over the enquiry, we thought it would be wise to abandon the idea of a having a judge for this purpose' CP(46)379, 'Inquiry into the Press', Morrison, 14-10-1946, CAB 129/13.

⁷³ Thomas Johnston, Sir Hector Hetherington and Sir Philip Morris all rejected invitations from Morrison. Johnston to Morrison, 9-11-1946; Hetherington to Morrison 8-12-1946, CAB 124/1071. Morris to Morrison, 11-1-1946, CAB 124/1072.

⁷⁴ Calculated by adding up all the suggested names from the files of the Lord President and the Prime Minister (CAB 124/1070-1071, PREM 5/249).

⁷⁵ Williams to Attlee, 16-10-1946, PREM 5/249.

and instead Williams decided to add a number of names of his own.⁷⁶ This increased the experience of the commission but made it large and unwieldy.

Of the Commission's eventual seventeen members only two had extensive knowledge of the Press; RCK Ensor ('Scrutator' in *The Sunday Times*) and George Waters (editor of *The Scotsman* from 1922-44). The others included lawyers, accountants, and trade unionists.⁷⁷ Opposition MPs were not impressed. 'Who are they?' they shouted when the Commissioners' names were announced in the Commons.⁷⁸ The Commission's weaknesses were shown both in its limited ability to conceive of alternative means of press organisation and in its overly deferential cross-examination of major figures like the press barons or the Government.

Reasons (3): Poor Preparations for an Investigation

Some of these weaknesses were apparent in the Commission's preparations for an inquiry. The Commissioners were not clear on their objectives and this affected the way in which they approached their investigations.

They started by sending out written questionnaires to all those covered by the terms of reference.⁷⁹ These were to be followed up with extensive interviews. The questions within these questionnaires illustrate how unsure the Commission was of its purpose. Some of them were astonishingly academic and went back to first principles (for example, 'In what does the freedom of the press consist?' and 'What is the proper function of a newspaper?'). Others were accusatory and almost

⁷⁶ Williams to Attlee, 17-2-1947, PREM 5/249. Williams wrote that he spoke to the Lord President who recognised that there were weaknesses of the current list and was willing to agree changes.

⁷⁷ For full list of members see Appendix A.

⁷⁸ Reported in *The Times*, 27-3-1947.

⁷⁹ The Royal Commission first sent out a questionnaire with 32 questions directed to the editors of all the newspaper and periodical publishers in Britain (NC1). They sent slightly different questionnaires to proprietors, advertisers (B1) and advertising agents (B2).

predetermined to lead to defensive answers (for example, 'How far are inaccuracy and distortion due to deliberate sensationalism either in the choice or in the presentation of material?'). And though most of them began as open questions they then became very leading (for example, 'What do you regard as a reasonable standard of accuracy? Does it include not merely the correctness of facts stated but also the statement of all relevant facts?'). This made it apparent, to the recipient, what they were 'supposed' to answer. Altogether they added up to a slightly incoherent mishmash, an agenda which, while interesting, was not very focused and not structured to enable direct action.⁸⁰

But even more damaging than the Commission's confused agenda was the lack of preparation by the key prosecution witness, the NUJ. Despite having been confident, ever since it first discussed the idea of an investigation at its annual conference in 1943, that it could prove its allegations about the malign influence of proprietors and of commercialisation, the NUJ failed to produce any damning evidence.

Clement Bundock, the General Secretary of the Union, had written and spoken regularly about this destructive influence. In January 1945, for example, he referred to 'the instructions sent out from the headquarters of a group to the editors of a long chain of newspapers throughout the country telling them whose speeches were not to be reported at all, whose were to be given a good show, whose speeches were to be treated on their news value, and what the leading articles were to be about'.⁸¹

And yet the NUJ did not even start collecting material evidence of this until after the appointment of a Commission in October 1946. Gordon Walker was shocked when

⁸⁰ The questionnaire was so disordered that Odhams Press (owner of *Daily Herald*, *News Review*, *Illustrated*, *The People*, and *John Bull*) re-ordered them under its own headings (RCP Memoranda, No.63).

⁸¹ Clement Bundock in *The Journalist*, January 1945.

he went to an NUJ committee meeting in early November and saw how little the union had done. 'I am rather disturbed by the lack of preparation of the NUJ' he wrote to Morrison.⁸² The Union even resorted to writing to its members requesting information. This was quickly exposed by the *Evening Standard*.⁸³

As a consequence, the NUJ's eventual submission was weak and inconclusive. Instead of hard evidence from journalists about blacklists or directives it provided analysis of newspaper coverage (something the Commission were planning to do themselves) and ominous warnings ('There is inherent in those chain newspapers a public danger').⁸⁴

Without substantial evidence from the most important plaintiff and armed with an eclectic and confused agenda, the Commission was going to find it very hard to collate irrefutable proof of wrong-doing that would warrant Government action.

Reasons (4): Lack of Sufficient Evidence of Dangers of Monopoly

When it came to the terms of reference themselves the Commission found that the situation was more complex than the NUJ and Labour MPs had suggested, and that the value laden charges were not supported by sufficient evidence. As a result the Commission felt unable to recommend significant positive action.

Examining whether the number of newspapers was shrinking and whether ownership was becoming more concentrated the Commission found that though this was true, it was neither consistent nor did it necessarily prefigure a 'tendency towards monopoly'. For example, though the number of newspapers had shrunk from 169 in

⁸² Gordon Walker note to Morrison, 14-11-1946, CAB 124/1071.

⁸³ *Evening Standard*, 'The Londoner's Diary', 13-12-1946, p.4.

⁸⁴ Evidence of the NUJ submitted to the Royal Commission by J.E. Jay (President) and Clement Bundock (General Secretary), 3-6-1947.

1921 to 128 in 1948, the highpoint of consolidation was 1929, since which time some holdings had broken apart.⁸⁵

Moreover, some local papers disputed the idea that their independence had been reduced as a result of being members of a newspaper 'chain'. As Berrow's newspapers, the publisher of a small range of local newspapers around Worcester told the Commission that 'small ownership is no guarantee of higher principles'.⁸⁶

The Commission also became sceptical about the degree to which individual proprietors had an irresponsible influence on their newspapers. First, because the NUJ was unable to produce any material evidence of the infamous 'directives' (despite Beaverbrook having once given out 147 in a single day⁸⁷). And second, because some of the Commissioners did not believe an individual could direct something as complex and multifaceted as a newspaper via a series of short instructions. They sympathised with Kemsley's complaint that 'The notion that I sit at my desk... giving daily direction as to what features or leading articles are to appear in the respective papers is too fantastic to be entertained by any serious person'.⁸⁸

Regarding the broader question of whether newspaper ownership was having a material effect on the free expression of views the Commission found that it was. The influence was more likely to be indirect than direct but, in the case of many newspapers, it was freely admitted. Lord Kemsley said he had no need to issue directives or dictate policy on the *Sunday Times* because he had employed men 'of

⁸⁵ Cmd.7700, p.61 (para.217). Lord Rothermere sold off his controlling interest in the *Daily Mirror* and *Sunday Pictorial* in 1931. Lords Kemsley, Camrose and Illife divided their news empire in 1937.

⁸⁶ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, Berrow's Newspapers (3).

⁸⁷ Curran & Seaton, *Power without Responsibility* (1997), p.45.

⁸⁸ ME-RCP, memorandum submitted by Viscount Kemsley, Day 36 (27-5-48), p.3, Cmd.7503.

sterling character and fine qualities, and men with similar ideas to my own'.⁸⁹ The Commission's own analysis corroborated this, showing that the political views within most papers were relatively consistent, and consistently partisan. The coverage of the Gravesend by-election, like that of coal nationalisation and of bread rationing, for example, was found to be biased and characterised by 'a complete absence of objectivity'.⁹⁰

But the Commission found it difficult to indict the newspapers since they were under no obligation to be impartial. As long as there was a broad spectrum of views expressed across the range of newspapers then the individual partisanship of one was not, the commissioners believed, problematic. If 'divergent opinions are of any importance', the Committee concluded, 'their existence will be news and will be reported as such in the newspapers'.⁹¹ The Commissioners assumed any absence of views would eventually be solved by the market. This seems a remarkably complacent judgment from a Commission set up partly to see that such views were nurtured and promoted. Moreover, the Commission did no primary research with the public to ask if they felt the full range of views were expressed.

Reasons (5): Lack of Sufficient Evidence of Damaging Commercial Influence

On the question of the distorting influence of advertising and commercialisation, again the Commission chose to take issue with the charges laid down in the Commons motion. In its conclusions it argued the direct influence of advertisers was negligible and, as regards indirect influence, 'of the various possible sources of

⁸⁹ ME-RCP, Lord Kemsley, Day 36 (27-5-48), q.12,009, Cmd.7503.

⁹⁰ Cmd.7700, p.118 (para.432). Quote applied specifically to by-election but consistent with report's comments on other cases.

⁹¹ Cmd.7700, p.88 (para.312).

income, the sale of their space to advertisers seems to us to be one of the least harmful'.⁹²

This was despite having heard evidence to the contrary. It was well documented, for example, that all the popular press had resorted to non-journalistic methods to boost circulation in the 1930s. A respected advertising agency, the London Press Exchange, acknowledged that it had colluded with newspapers in the late 1930s to maintain optimism artificially: 'Before the war the vast majority of papers considered, as we did, that it was in the public interest to stimulate the buying of quality goods at reasonable prices, and therefore they took active steps, sometimes of their own accord, sometimes in cooperation with the advertising agents, to produce a frame of mind in the public most likely to achieve this result'.⁹³ And the Commission also heard evidence that papers would add supplements to increase advertising revenues (particularly on gardening, fashion or books).

However, the situation in 1947 was very different to that of a decade earlier. Due to the enormous drop in advertising space available there was a queue of potential advertisers for every vacant newspaper position. The balance of power, which might have favoured the advertiser in the 1930s, had shifted to each individual newspaper. As the President of the NUJ told the Commission, 'the advertisers are begging for space rather than exercising pressure, as was undoubtedly the case before the war'.⁹⁴ And, whilst paper was rationed there was no opportunity to print supplements or substitute genuine news for promotional material.

⁹² Cmd.7700, p.143 (para.528).

⁹³ RCP Memoranda, Replies to Questionnaire B2 (Advertising Agents), London Press Exchange.

⁹⁴ ME-RCP, NUJ, J.E. Jay, Day 1 (16-7-47), q.129, Cmd.7317.

In addition, if the Commission were to accept that a major advertiser could have a detrimental influence on the content of a paper, then, in 1947, it would have to censure the Government. 'If any advertiser could, through sheer weight of expenditure, hope to influence the editorial policy of the newspapers,' the Advertising Association wrote 'that advertiser must now be the Government itself'.⁹⁵ Government advertising, the Association pointed out, was running at around £3 million per year. This was significantly higher than any commercial body. The largest proportion of this expenditure went on the press. Furthermore, the Government could secure more space in the newspapers than any other body, thanks to an agreement it had made during the war which Morrison had been able to prolong.⁹⁶

New Allegations: the Influence of the Government on the Press

It was not in the original terms of reference of the Commission to examine the role of Government influence on the press. But, to the surprise of the Commission many of the respondents, in interview and in writing, complained vigorously about the actual or possible threat of the Government Information Services.⁹⁷ This was despite the fact that, as the Guild of Newspaper Editors crossly reminded the Commission, they had "omitted to ask us what are the responsibilities of public authorities to the press".⁹⁸

⁹⁵ RCP Memoranda, written evidence of Advertising Association.

⁹⁶ On 18th July 1947 Morrison met with the advertising managers of the daily and Sunday newspapers at 11 Downing Street and appealed to them to maintain the amount of space they gave to the Government advertisements, in proportion to the newspaper page reduction, INF 12/13.

⁹⁷ The Commission told the Government that 'twenty-seven organisations have referred in their written evidence either to PROs or in general terms to the Government information services'. Attachment to letter from J.J. Nunn to D.J. Wardley at the Treasury, requesting representatives for interview, 16-3-1948, CAB 124/1073.

⁹⁸ ME-RCP, Guild of Newspaper Editors, Day 4 (16-10-47), q.1061, Cmd.7322.

The criticism fell into three main areas: obstruction, inherent bias, and monopolisation of information. In other words, each of the accusations which had been levelled at the press were now being levelled at the Government.

In addition to the central Government obstruction already described, there were further obstacles at a local level. According to the Local Authorities Act of 1908 all local councils were required to let the press into their meetings.⁹⁹ There was, however, a loophole. If the council said they were meeting 'in committee' they could legitimately exclude journalists. By 1947, by the calculations of the Guild of Newspaper Editors, 867 local authorities were not allowing reporters into their meetings as against 130 which were.¹⁰⁰ Even when journalists were given minutes of the meetings, they were sometimes threatened that "If you publish anything which we say should not be published in relation to particular minutes, then no minutes will be sent to you again".¹⁰¹

Bias in departmental public relations departments was, many newspapers claimed, "inherent within the situation itself".¹⁰² It was inevitable, the Institute of Journalists said, that "the natural ambition of official bodies, national and local, [was] to have their virtues and accomplishments publicised".¹⁰³ Stephen Tallents, the original Public Relations Officer (PRO) and now President of the Institute of Public Relations, acknowledged that as a PRO "you are concerned, of course, to put over the point of

⁹⁹ Ibid. q.1007.

¹⁰⁰ ME-RCP, Guild of Newspaper Editors, Day 4 (16-10-47), q.997, Cmd.7322. Based on results of a questionnaire survey the Guild sent out to all local newspapers and journals.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² ME-RCP, Daily News, Robin Cruikshank, Day 24 (4-3-48), q.8218, Cmd.7409.

¹⁰³ ME-RCP, Institute of Journalists, quoted from submitted evidence, A.T. Penman, Day 6 (30-10-47) q.1725, Cmd.7328.

view of your department; that is what you are there for".¹⁰⁴ In practise, A.L. Cranfield, editor of *The Star*, told the Commission that this meant he received a couple of calls a week from PROs informing him that something in his newspaper was wrong, although, as he protested, it is only "not right from their point of view".¹⁰⁵

The most serious of the accusations was the third, that the Government had a monopoly of information and could retain or release this as it saw fit. Though many newspapers believed that the Government did its best to pass on information, they were aware that it could misuse its power. Geoffrey Crowther of the *Economist* gave a good example of this. Prior to making sterling convertible on July 15th 1947 the Treasury told all the papers that this would not be costly for the country and provided figures to back up this claim. Many newspapers took the Government at its word and used its analysis. As a result, when convertibility sparked off a massive run on the pound, the press was seen to have been 'unanimously ill-informed or unanimously wrong in its judgment'.¹⁰⁶ The danger was even more acute in areas like foreign affairs when the press regularly relied on the Government as its sole source of information. *Tribune* called this 'Gleichschaltung' (establishment of absolute conformity) and thought its effect all the more damaging since, because the papers were not allowed to quote their source, they had to rewrite the stories in their own words.¹⁰⁷ This made them the equivalent of Government sponsored news.

An offshoot of this monopolisation was the Government's use of hand-outs. A hangover from the war, a hand-out would normally be either a transcript of a

¹⁰⁴ ME-RCP, Sir Stephen Tallents, Day 25 (17-3-48), q.8341, Cmd.7415.

¹⁰⁵ ME-RCP, A.L. Cranfield, Daily News Ltd., Day 24 (4-3-48), q.8218, Cmd.7409.

¹⁰⁶ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, *The Economist*, Geoffrey Crowther (27).

¹⁰⁷ RCP Memoranda, Replies to NC1, Tribune Publications (83). *Gleichschaltung* was specifically related to the Nazification process of alignment or coordination within Germany in the 1930s.

ministerial speech or a summary of an official document. Newspapers could use them but not refer to them. 'The sources of these hand-outs must not be quoted,' the Northcliffe Newspapers group told the Commission, 'in other words it must not appear to be official or semi official'.¹⁰⁸ Editors could be forgiven for seeing a parallel between hand-outs and proprietorial directives. Moreover, the hand-outs could sometimes be wrong or misleading. Emmanuel Shinwell was due to give a speech at a rally in Edinburgh on 5th May 1947 to mark the introduction of the miners' five day week. A text of the speech was distributed to the press an hour before it was given. Unfortunately, it did not match the actual speech made.¹⁰⁹ On another occasion in October 1947 the Board of Trade released the newly signed General Tariff Agreement late in the day. Since the document weighed over 8lbs there was not time to read it before going to print. As a result all the papers relied on the 4 page summary written by the PRO.¹¹⁰

The press was partly defending itself from Government attack by raising these concerns, but there was also genuine anxiety amongst many of them that they were being systematically blocked from finding information or were being given skewed information. This represented a significant threat for contemporary and future reporting; as the Institute of Journalists wrote in its evidence, "If the road to the public relations section is the only one left to enquiring journalists, and the newspapers have to take their news solely from hand-outs, a condition approximating to official censorship of official news will have been established".¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ ME-RCP, Northcliffe Newspapers Group, Day 17 (21-1-48), q.5442, Cmd.7373.

¹⁰⁹ NUJ to J.J. Nunn (Royal Commission), 11-7-1947, HO 251/154.

¹¹⁰ Examples cited in letter from Sir Thomas Balogh to Sir David Ross, 3-12-1947, HO 251/155.

¹¹¹ RCP Memoranda, submitted by the Institute of Journalists.

The Commission Considers Extending its Terms of Reference

Before Christmas 1947 the Royal Commission members reflected on their position and discussed whether they should issue an interim report. In general they were disappointed with the quality of evidence against the press ('astonishingly confused, thin and ill-supported' said Sir Geoffrey Vickers) and had trouble sustaining the claims about monopolistic tendencies.¹¹² They were not keen on the sensationalism of the popular press but this, members like Ensor thought, was a case of 'giving the people what they want' rather than through any conscious attempt to distort facts.¹¹³ It was difficult, GM Young argued, to find a direct link between the nature of newspaper ownership or commercial control and restrictions on accuracy of information or freedom of opinion.¹¹⁴

However, they had been affected by the significant criticism of the Government's information services and some of the members of the Commission voiced their concerns about other damaging influences of the Government. Actions such as Hugh Dalton's November tax on advertisers, would do 'more harm than good' they thought.¹¹⁵ And more important still, the Government's strict rationing of newsprint created such unnatural conditions that it made it impossible for the Commission to judge the situation fairly and recommend serious changes. G.M. Young compared the Commission's job with 'trying to prescribe a healthy regimen for the inmates of a

¹¹² Sir Geoffrey Vickers, memorandum on interim report to Sir David Ross, 8-12-1947, HO 251/216.

¹¹³ RCK Ensor, memorandum (Paper 89), 5-1-1948, HO 251/216.

¹¹⁴ GM Young, memorandum (Paper 115), 14-2-1948, HO 251/216.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

concentration camp, not knowing when, or by what stages, they will be discharged'.¹¹⁶

The members thought they could not recommend significant Government intervention given their findings to date and their concerns about Government behaviour. These concerns also, they thought, reflected the prevailing mood in which 'feelings against any kind of Government control over, or interference with, the Press is so strong that Parliament, I am sure, would not entertain a measure for the better regulation of the Press unless the need was demonstrated beyond all doubt'.¹¹⁷

They considered extending their inquiry to include other influences on the press, particularly that of the Government itself. But this would force them to veer outside the original terms of reference. The Commission had been asked to inquire into 'the presentation of news' with the object of furthering 'the free expression of opinion' as affected by the current 'control, management and ownership' of the press. It was not expected to investigate the Government as well. Despite discussion, by March 1948 the members were split on what they should do.¹¹⁸

As chair, Sir David Ross decided. We 'should limit the inquiries to matters plainly directed' by the questions within the terms of reference, he said. 'Matters external to the press such as the influence of PROs would be considered only insofar as they were put forward by the press as alternative explanations of shortcomings which seemed to arise from causes inside the press'.¹¹⁹ In other words, they would ask the Government to be interviewed in respect of the original terms of reference, but not

¹¹⁶ GM Young, memorandum to the Policy Committee of the Royal Commission, December 1947, HO 251/213.

¹¹⁷ GM Young, memorandum (Paper 115), 14-2-1948, HO 251/216.

¹¹⁸ There are 'two main schools of thought among members' Sir David Ross wrote to Commission members, 12-3-1948, HO 251/216.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

with a view to extending the inquiry to a wholesale review of the influence of the Government.

The Government is Called to the Royal Commission

Therefore the secretary of the Commission, J.J. Nunn, wrote to the Treasury on 16th March 1948 and requested that the Government come for interview.¹²⁰ The letter was deferential and apologetic and made it clear that the Commission had little choice. Attached to the letter was a summary of the criticisms, obligingly laid out so the Government could respond.

The letter generated a minor panic within Whitehall. The Treasury tried to push the issue onto the COI.¹²¹ But Robert Fraser felt it was not his responsibility because the departments dealt directly with the Press and the Commission referred explicitly to the public relations officers who were based in each department.¹²² So he suggested Philip Jordan take charge and work directly with top PROs to handle it. Though Philip Jordan was willing to take it on, the suggested PROs were not. Thomas Fife Clarke and Matthew Crosse, from the Ministries of Health and of Fuel and Power, refused to go in front of the commission. It is likely they feared that the ignominy heaped on the information services and on PROs by the press, would fall on whichever poor soul chose to take the brunt of the criticism. Scrabbling around for other names the Government eventually chose James Crombie (Treasury), Michael Balfour (Board of Trade), J.E. Holroyd (Board of Trade), and W.M. Ballantine (Scottish Office) to accompany Jordan.

¹²⁰ JJ Nunn to Wardley (Treasury), 16-3-1948, CAB 124/1073.

¹²¹ James Crombie (Treasury) to Robert Fraser (COI), 23-2-1948, CAB 124/1073.

¹²² Note from Fraser to David Stephens (LP's Office), 31-3-1948, CAB 124/1073.

The officials were still keen to make sure they were not sacrificial lambs. They insisted that, if they were to stand in front of a Royal Commission, they would only act as spokesmen for a Government statement, prepared and submitted before their interview.¹²³ Philip Jordan was made head of a sub-committee to draft this document and to prepare for the interview. All this would, however, take time, and so the Government told the Commission they would not be ready for the proposed interview date on the 1st April. They eventually met on the 26th May.

In the meantime Jordan met with Morrison and quickly prepared a draft which was scrutinized by the official information services committee, the ministerial information services committee, the Lord President's office, and the Prime Minister.¹²⁴ At the same time Boon and Gore from the Lord President's office started collecting evidence of the activities of the PROs from each department (press conferences held, hand-outs distributed, facilities visits, and press inquiries handled).

The Ministers and civil servants went over the Jordan document very carefully, editing it, making sure there were no lines that could be used against the Government. The idea was to make the statement as positive as possible and convince the Commission that the 'information sections were of equal importance as, for example, the accounts department and the typing pool, in the functioning of the Departmental machine'.¹²⁵

¹²³ Note from Stephens to Morrison about Home Information Services Meeting, 2-4-1948: "At this morning's meeting there was strong support for the view that the first and most essential task was not so much the selection and briefing of suitable witnesses as the preparation of a government statement which would describe the work of the Departmental information services in their relations with the press and would also constitute the brief to which the selected witnesses would speak", CAB 124/1073.

¹²⁴ The IH(O) committee initially discussed the request of the Royal Commission and the response on 2nd April 1948. The Ministerial committee discussed the request and a draft response (attached to Lord President's memorandum) on 14th April. Note from David Stephens to Morrison, 20-4-1948, says that 'Mr. Jordan is getting the PM's approval concurrently', CAB 124/1073.

¹²⁵ Point raised at IS(48)4 when they discussed Jordan's memo, 14-4-48, CAB 124/1073.

Many of them had changes and adaptations to make. For example in paragraph 7, which read:

'The Information Division of a department has no view separate from that of the department as a whole. It is merely a section of the department discharging, as do all other sections, a specialist function for its minister. The facts it gives are provided by the department; and in presenting and explaining them, it is expressing its department's well-considered view of their significance'

Patrick Gordon Walker did not like this at all, 'it might well be taken out of context and quoted against us as showing that facts are twisted and presented in a way that we like'.¹²⁶ He therefore removed provocative words like 'present' and 'explain' and 'significance'. It ended up as, 'The information division of a department has no view separate from that of the department as a whole. It is merely a section of the department discharging, as do all other sections, a specialist function'. The irony that Gordon Walker and others were presenting a statement in the way that they liked was not commented on.

The eventual document which emerged had many fewer contentious words than Jordan's – no use of the word specialists, or indication that people were sifting the significant from the insignificant. Only that they were making the dissemination of information more efficient and less chaotic. It was sent, together with appendix giving examples of how the PROs worked (answers to phone queries, a diary of press conferences) to the Commission at the end of April.¹²⁷ Between then and the 26th May when the interview took place, Jordan and the other representatives continued

¹²⁶ Gordon Walker to Morrison, 22-4-1948, CAB 124/1073.

¹²⁷ J.I.C. Crombie wrote to J.J. Nunn, LO.215/06, 23-4-1948, telling her that the Commission would receive the Government response 'in the next day or so', CAB 124/1073.

to receive instructions as to how they should react to the questions and what they should say.¹²⁸

They should not have been so worried. Considering the range of criticisms levelled against the Government their interview with the Commission was very brief and certainly not testing. Altogether the Commissioners asked 130 questions. This compared to the 598 they asked Lord Kemsley and his deputy chairman the following day.¹²⁹ The Commission voiced the main complaints of some of the papers but little more. At one point Sir David Ross even apologised that the questioning was so negative, "We seem to be making nothing but complaints, although, of course, you will understand we are not making them ourselves, we are investigating them".¹³⁰

The official spokesmen accepted that there had been developments in Government communication but disputed the press's interpretation of their effects. There had been a growth in staff numbers which was fully documented.¹³¹ There were more formal mechanisms for dealing with the press which meant that most inquiries were directed to a central source, contact was channelled through this same source, and access to others within that Government department had to be arranged through that source. But, though the press saw these sources and the mechanisms surrounding them as barriers to information and as prisms through which information could be shaped, the Government saw them simply as more effective means of accumulating

¹²⁸ The official information services committee, IH(O)(48)5th, 30-4-1948, talked about what they thought the Commission might ask (for example, about scoops and about attribution of sources). The Ministerial committee then discussed the issues further at its next meeting; IS(48)3rd, 11-5-1948, CAB 124/1073.

¹²⁹ ME-RCP, Government, Day 35 (26-5-48), questions 11,700 to 11,830, Cmd.7500. Interview with Viscount Kemsley and Lionel Berry Day 36 (27-5-48), questions 11,831 to 12,429, Cmd.7503.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, q.11,744, Cmd.7500.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* "There has been a very great development of that over the last twenty years; there was a very rapid development between the years 1939 and 1944; the year 1944-45 represented the peak year", JIC Crombie, q.11,818, Cmd.7500.

and distributing information in a timely manner. Holroyd replied at length to Sir George Waters, for example, about how, over time, each press office could add to its store of information available to the media and then make it easily accessible whenever it was required.

Waters tried to pursue this line of questioning by referring to specific complaints raised by newspapers. He talked, for example, about the papers of South Wales who told the Commission they found it "much more difficult to get information with regard to mines than it was before".¹³² Crombie's response was to shift the blame, "Of course the Coal Board are not Government departments, as you realise sir". But this was Water's point. The growth of Government, whether through nationalisation or bureaucratisation, had seriously reduced the accessibility of information. "More channels are opened than are being closed" Crombie countered.¹³³

The spokesman had been well briefed and were well prepared. They stuck to a positive message about the information services. They did not answer questions which might have political repercussions or that required them to offer judgment. There were not many of these but Reverend Aubrey asked one towards the end of the interview. "Do you feel" he asked, "from your experience of this work, that the public is so much more fully informed and the press is so much helped that the expenditure is entirely justified?". "This is very difficult for me to answer" Crombie replied, "I really think it is for Ministers to give an answer to that question".¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid. q.11,806.

¹³³ Ibid. q.11,799.

¹³⁴ Ibid. q.11,820.

The Commission remained true to the instructions of Sir David Ross. At no point in the interview did it seek to critique the Government for its behaviour or search for specific ways to regulate it.¹³⁵

SECTION 3: The Impact of Circumstances on the Review

International Developments Cast a Shadow over Government Control

The Government's autocratic behaviour towards the press over the course of 1947 might have appeared less ominous to the newspapers had it not been for the very real constraints being placed on press freedom elsewhere in the world. During the period when the Labour Government was berating the papers, increasing its executive powers over them, and considering alternative means of organising the press, the governments within the emerging Soviet bloc and many elsewhere in the world were all enhancing their control of the media.¹³⁶

In Hungary, for example, the acting Minister of Information, Mihalyfi, announced in June 1947 that all journalists would, from that point on, be liable for punishment, including the death sentence, for publishing 'reports which would harm the reputation at home or abroad of the Hungarian Republic'.¹³⁷ In October, following a secret conference of the Soviet Union and its East European neighbours in Warsaw, a Communist information office was to be opened in Belgrade, the centre of a newly established Cominform. And even in pre-Communist China, the Government extended its control of the press at the end of January 1948, to the extent that the

¹³⁵ The Commission did ask if there was a 'more definite code' being drawn up for PROs. Jordan bristled and replied that the 'rules that govern the conduct of civil servants apply to CIOs just as much'. This was not entirely true since most PROs were not yet civil servants. The Commission continued briefly with this line of enquiry then dropped it. Ibid. q.11,757, Cmd.7500.

¹³⁶ Outside the Soviet Union this included Hungary, Rumania, Bulgaria, France, Chile, Argentina, Guatemala, China and India. According to *The Times*, January–March 1948.

¹³⁷ 'Press Threat in Hungary', *The Observer*, 29-6-1947, p.1.

Times wrote, 'a censorship under that name may not exist, but Chinese newspapers which do not conform with Kuomintang views or directives are either deprived of newsprint or suppressed'.¹³⁸

But it was the developing situation in Czechoslovakia in early 1948 which had the most damaging impact on perceptions of the role of Government on the organisation of the press. Czechoslovakia had been seen by many in Britain as a successful marriage of Socialism and freedom. In particular its organisation of the press was held up by many witnesses of the Royal Commission as a model which should be emulated. 'We have heard a great deal about Czechoslovakia and its press', one of the Commissioners, GM Young, said.¹³⁹ Kingsley Martin espoused the system of licensing, outlined above, in his interview and his book *The Press the Public Wants*. The NUJ lauded the single national union which contained all Czech journalists and by whose rules they were all held responsible.

Then, on February 25th 1947, the Czech president, Edouard Benes, appointed a new Communist dominated government. Immediately afterwards action groups started expelling journalists from the national journalists' association. Since all journalists were members and the Government held the licenses of all the news groups it was quite straightforward to exclude dissident voices. Shortly afterwards it went further and threw all foreign journalists out of the country as well.

This came as a profound shock in Britain. Many immediately made direct comparisons with Western left-wing Governments and saw developments in Czechoslovakia as a warning. 'What is a Czechoslovak internal crisis has its

¹³⁸ Reported in *The Times*, 30-1-1948, p.3.

¹³⁹ GM Young Memorandum (Paper 115), 14-2-1948, 'On the Possibility of an Interim Report and Discussion of Progress', HO 251/216.

implications and its lessons for all western countries' said a *Times* editorial.¹⁴⁰ In a similar vein the *Sunday Times* wrote, 'Here too the grim example of Czechoslovakia has lessons for us which we disregard at our peril'. Lord Kemsley's paper went further and said that Socialism was 'a bridge of appeasement, over which the invading forces pass, openly or in disguise, to compel the capitulation of democracy'.¹⁴¹

Though most other commentators were not as pejorative as the *Sunday Times*, they did believe that Labour now had a choice. They could choose Socialism first and democracy second or democracy first and Socialism second. 'On one side lies the territory where power is held in trust for the people, who are free to criticise the Government and to change it. On the other lies the territory where the power is held by a party which allows no rivals and tolerates no criticism of its infallible creed'.¹⁴² Labour recognised that it had to define its position and distinguish itself from East European Socialism. On March 3rd the National Executive Committee released a statement to do just this: 'The issues before us' it said, 'no longer permit of any prevarication. Socialism is meaningless without democracy. Democracy cannot live without freedom of speech, press, and organisation'.¹⁴³

This statement expressed a serious shift in the perceptions of Labour in Britain. 'A great change has come over the party since the Communist coup in Czechoslovakia' the *Observer* said.¹⁴⁴ Opinion had hardened against the Soviet Union and Communists, and there was a heightened awareness of the values of freedom of

¹⁴⁰ *The Times*, 25-2-1948, p.5.

¹⁴¹ *The Sunday Times*, Editorial Comment, 29-2-1948.

¹⁴² *The Observer*, Editorial, 7-3-1948.

¹⁴³ Statement printed in *The Times*, 3-3-1948, p.4.

¹⁴⁴ *The Observer*, Editorial, 7-3-1948.

speech and freedom of the press. As a direct result of the coup, some of the alternative models of press organisation had been thoroughly discredited. The Czech method of licensing specific 'responsible' groups to run newspapers, for example, was no longer tenable. Neither was the idea of enforcing a journalistic closed shop.

These suggestions became even more unfeasible since, from February 9th 1948, the transcripts of the Commission interviews were released. 'The impact of events leading to Communist domination of Czechoslovakia has particular interest for the British press' *Newspaper World* commented, 'as the Czech press organisation has been quoted in Left-wing circles in this country as a possible model for ensuring press freedom'.¹⁴⁵

The coup also had a pronounced effect on some of the members of the Royal Commission. Sir George Waters, the most experienced member of the group, made a speech in Scotland in June 1948 in which he said he was worried about many left wingers' praise of the Czech press system and warned his audience that the freedom of the British press from Government was not necessarily assured.¹⁴⁶

R.C.K. Ensor, the only member of the Commission who still worked for a newspaper, wrote that 'the one good thing about the affair is the extent to which it has opened men's eyes'. 'Journalists [in Czechoslovakia]', he wrote, 'are particularly easy for totalitarians to deal with, owing to the post-war Czech law which made journalism a closed profession'.¹⁴⁷

At the same time that the Czech Government was imposing severe controls on its press a five week international conference on Freedom of Information and the Press

¹⁴⁵ *Newspaper World and Advertising Review*, 'Czech Crisis – Editors Deprived of Livelihood and Newspapers Suspended', 6-3-1948, p.240.

¹⁴⁶ "Freedom of Press Not Assured' says Sir George Waters', *World's Press News*, 17-6-1948, p.3.

¹⁴⁷ Ensor writing as 'Scrutator' in the *The Sunday Times*, 29-2-1948 and 7-3-1948.

opened in Geneva. One of the primary concerns of the conference was how to protect the freedom of the press against the growth of Government control. Discussion quickly polarised into two camps – East and West. The Soviet delegate, Bogolomov, accused the 'reactionary' press of Britain and America of fomenting an atmosphere of hostility and mistrust. The 'purer press' of the Soviet Union had shifted from being "mere disseminators of news" into instruments for the education and enlightenment of the people'.¹⁴⁸

Hector McNeil, the British delegate, roundly condemned the 'dictated thinking' of the USSR and its satellite states. He held the British press up as an archetype of a democracy and independence. 'A supine press is a bad press' he said, and claimed that, 'There is within the British press endless opportunity for the expression of different views'.¹⁴⁹ He also submitted a resolution on behalf of the British Government on freedom of the press which included a clause stating that each national press should have the 'freedom to impart and receive information and opinions without Governmental interference'.

With statements like these the discrepancy between Labour's rhetoric abroad and its behaviour at home became very apparent. 'Was this really a speech by a member of the British Government?' *World's Press News* asked after McNeil's address, 'because if so there must be two Government voices, one for abroad which tells the world what a fine democratic and independent press we have in Britain, and the other for home consumption'.¹⁵⁰ It was not true, for example, that there was endless opportunity for different views when they all had to be fit within four pages. Neither was it true that the British Government had refrained from interfering with the press

¹⁴⁸ Reported in the *The Times*, 31-3-1948, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ Hector McNeil, speaking on 29th March, reported in *The Times*, 30-3-1948.

¹⁵⁰ *World's Press News*, 'Templar', 8-4-1948.

throughout 1947. 'Such resolutions' therefore, 'are mere lip service unless accompanied by practical evidence of concern for a properly functioning press' as *The Times* pointed out on 24th May.

It was becoming much harder for the Government to ignore the parallels between its actions towards the press and those of Socialist or Communist Governments abroad. It was no longer plausible for them to argue that they were promoting a free press at the same time that they were curtailing supplies of newsprint, limiting circulations, increasing costs, and penalising advertisers. The Americans were so concerned at the threat to democracy this represented that, at the beginning of May 1948, they offered to allocate \$22 million in the first years' Marshall Aid in order to buy additional newsprint.¹⁵¹ When the Government rejected the offer the reaction of even the most neutral newspapers showed that the contradictions between Labour's assurances and their policies were becoming politically unsustainable. 'Newsprint cannot be treated on this side of the iron curtain as just another material commodity' *The Times* wrote.¹⁵² 'We are finding it increasingly difficult' *World's Press News* said, 'to draw a real distinction between the objectives of the Communists of Czechoslovakia and the British Government of today in relation to the Press'.¹⁵³

Direct Government Communication No Longer an Alternative due to Political and Economic Constraints

But in addition to the international developments that were making increased Government control of the press politically unacceptable, there were domestic

¹⁵¹ This offer emerged from material published in the US, not in Britain and was raised in the short debate on the loan in the House of Commons on the evening of Monday, 3-5-1948. This was reported in *The Times* the following day.

¹⁵² *The Times*, 6-5-1948.

¹⁵³ *World's Press News*, Editorial, 27-5-1948.

pressures that were making the alternative – mass Government communication – politically and economically impractical, and pushing Labour towards some sort of compromise with the newspapers.

Politically, there had been mounting criticism of the Government Information Services, particularly at the end of 1947 and beginning of 1948 (described in Chapter One). Economically, expenditure on Government communication was only slightly below its wartime peak and, in March and April, MPs were expressing serious unease. 'Disquiet over the Government's information service is not confined to Conservative circles' the *Observer* wrote, 'Many of the Government's own supporters realise that there is something very seriously wrong'.¹⁵⁴ This unease was vented in the Supply debate in May, after which both Cripps and Morrison insisted that cuts be made. Budget cuts in information services were symptomatic of a broader range of spending cuts across Government departments and indicated that the Government simply could not afford to produce all its own information via films, publications and advertising. It would have to rely on the existing channels, primarily the press.

The centralisation of the authoritarian state in Eastern Europe also coincided with increasing political uncertainty amongst some ministers as to further growth in the role of the state in private industry. Morrison led this uncertainty and, at the Labour Party conference in Scarborough in May, suggested it was time to slow the pace of nationalisation and focus on securing the gains reached so far. 'Whilst in the next programme it will be right' he told delegates, 'to give proper consideration to further propositions for public ownership, do not ignore the need, not merely for considering further public ownership but for allowing Ministers adequate time to consolidate, to

¹⁵⁴ *The Observer*, 9-5-1948, p.5.

develop, to make efficient or more efficient the industries which have been socialised in the present Parliament'.¹⁵⁵

Morrison felt Labour needed to draw a distinction between socialisation in Britain and the restriction of freedom by state intervention within other socialist republics. The transparent reduction of the freedom of the press in the Soviet bloc and elsewhere gave a sinister hue to paper rationing and other Government controls. Moreover, the practical need for budget cuts made it unfeasible for the Government to keep spending on the production of its own information. Combined, these two developments made it politically and economically untenable for the Government to justify a reorganisation of the press to fit within a Socialist state or to push Government intervention in newspapers any further.

The Royal Commission's own shift in focus, from the effects of monopoly ownership and commercialisation which it was asked to investigate, to the dangers of Government control and intervention was, therefore, illustrative of a comparable political shift within Britain. Their interview with the Government witnesses in May 1948 was demonstrative of wider anxieties as to the intentions of the Government towards the press and of the ever-expanding role of the State in general.

Morrison's recognition of the limitations of the role of the State at the Scarborough conference coincided with his disillusionment in the Royal Commission. Once it became clear that the Commission would neither come up with alternative means of organising the press nor justify further Government newspaper management he gave up on it as a vehicle for radical change. 'We are credibly informed' *World's Press News* reported on May 27th, 'that only a few days ago Herbert Morrison

¹⁵⁵ Herbert Morrison, speech to the Labour Conference, Monday afternoon session, 17-5-1948, from the Report of the Conference (Transport House, London, 1948).

roundly and angrily turned upon a group of left-wing journalists to condemn them severely for having induced the Government up the garden path in the appointment of that Commission'.

The Government and the Press Agree to Disagree

Neither Morrison nor many within the Government were yet reconciled to working closely with the press. Ministers continued to denigrate it when given the opportunity. Before the 1948 Labour conference Nye Bevan famously called it 'the most prostituted press in the world'. But they began to recognise that it would be impossible to bypass the newspapers entirely and that they were not going to be given the license to institute significant reforms. They therefore began to look for acceptable means of engagement. Generally this meant seeking to influence the press by informal persuasion and direction rather than formal controls.

In 1948 Labour ministers therefore began to tone down their comments and even to defend the British press. In May the Solicitor-General, Sir Frank Soskice, defended the newspapers' role as the public's watchdog, and its willingness to criticise the Government to prevent any abuse of power.¹⁵⁶ In June Morgan Phillips, chairman of the Labour party, told the International Journalists' Club that Labour did not want State control of the press.¹⁵⁷

Even Bevan was forced to subdue his language. He sat virtually silent in the House while, during an adjournment debate at the end of July 1948, the Opposition tried to push him to appear before the Commission and justify his accusations against the 'prostituted' newspapers. The Home Secretary defended Bevan and said the Prime

¹⁵⁶ 'Soskice on Press Role Under Nationalisation', *World's Press News*, 6-5-1948, p.3.

¹⁵⁷ 'Morgan Phillips Says – Labour Does Not Want State Press Control', *World's Press News*, 3-6-1948, p.18.

Minister had stopped the Minister of Health appearing on constitutional grounds.¹⁵⁸ In the words of *The Economist*, 'Having attacked a body whose case is at present sub judice, he [Bevan] was so hopelessly in the wrong that, for once, he had to rely upon others to conduct his defense'.¹⁵⁹

Labour's anger at the press was also mollified by the results of the US election of 1948 which suggested that newspapers had little genuine political influence. Harry Truman had beaten his Republican opponent Thomas Dewey despite the overwhelming support Dewey received from the American papers. Morrison was particularly heartened by this. Speaking in Fife in November he said that "the US has had an even more dramatic indication that the prognostications of the press of the Right are unreliable, and that newspaper circulations are no guarantee that their readers agree with them or vote in the way they urge".¹⁶⁰

The shift towards working informally from within was perfectly characterized by Morrison in a speech he made in London on 16th November 1948. "I am a friend and protector of the press as a great institution" he told his audience, "If I am a critic of the press it is because I feel I am part of the family".¹⁶¹ This mixture of protector and critic began to characterise the new relationship. Hartley Shawcross told an American audience in July 1949 that "we have in Britain an active and vigorous Press, which cannot be bullied or bought, and is vigilant in protecting the rights and

¹⁵⁸ Chuter Ede, *Parliamentary Debates*, 29-7-1948, Vol.454, Col.884.

¹⁵⁹ *The Economist*, 'Shorter Notes', 31-7-1948, p.179.

¹⁶⁰ Herbert Morrison, speech at Fife, reported in *World's Press News*, 25-11-1948, p.9.

¹⁶¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Friend and Protector of the Press', 17-11-1948, p.6.

liberties of the subject', while in November Cripps accused the Press of setting out deliberately 'to mislead and confuse the people of this country'.¹⁶²

The press were similarly conscious of the shift away from institutional reform, but equally aware that the two estates had simply agreed to maintain a mutual distrust. AJ Cummings, the author of the influential 'Spotlight' column in the *News Chronicle* told the Manchester Reform Club in October 1949 that 'it had been a tough fight to keep the British press free, and the fight was by no means over. Perhaps it never would be over'. Though the 'Shinwells and the Bevans were "maintaining a pulsating silence" Cummings said, 'it was a pause in a battle that was never won'.¹⁶³

Conclusion

Between 1946 and 1949 the Government's efforts to promote democratic communication, and its attempts to make the press do the same, had a number of important consequences for relations between the Government and the press in Britain. The first was the confirmation of a perpetual distrust between the two estates that exists to this day. Neither the Government nor the press was satisfied with the conclusion of their confrontation and as a result, they pursued their own ends without any clear resolution of the difficulties.

The Government had to accept that that it could not force the press to be 'responsible' (its interpretation of responsible, of course). However, it still believed that the political education of the public was critical to the health of the democracy. Therefore, it not only had to adopt some of the responsibility for that education itself,

¹⁶² Hartley Shawcross, speaking in Oklahoma, 28-6-1949, reported in the *Spectator*, 1-7-1949, p.4, 'Verdict on the Press'. Sir Stafford Cripps, speaking to East Bristol constituents, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 21-11-1949, p.5, 'Chancellor denounces Tory "Gloom-Makers" – Hopeful Signs in Economic Crisis – Press Accused of Setting Out to Mislead People'.

¹⁶³ *Manchester Guardian*, 'Press Freedom – "Fight by No Means Over"', 22-10-1949, p.3.

but felt it was justified in influencing the press with the means at its disposal. JIC Crombie argued as much to the Royal Commission in 1948; "If you have set up the [information] Division" he said, "it is natural that the contacts with the outside press should be canalised through that Division".¹⁶⁴

The press interpreted the Government's new information services and its clumsy use of its executive powers (paper control, licensing etc.) as methods of managing and censoring news. Many editors and journalists made this clear in their responses to the questionnaire of the Royal Commission. In these they said they believed the Government now had significantly more control over information than before the war. Few of them cited instances in which this control had been misused, but almost all of them emphasised that it had the potential to be. Therefore they sought to preserve their independence from Government influence, a goal not necessarily incompatible with, but certainly not complementary to, the Government's attempts to encourage responsibility.

Indeed, this seems to have had a further detrimental effect. From the inception of the Government information services many members of the press became suspicious of the nature of Government news sources and the way in which news was released. As a result they began to focus disproportionately on the process by which information was communicated rather than on the information itself. The failure of the Commission to question the Government fully or to recommend regulation of the new services helped ensure that this suspicion persisted.

The press' triumphalism, borne out of the its perceived 'acquittal' by the Royal Commission, was also unhelpful. It fostered the impression that the press had escaped regulation by the Government which would necessarily have restricted its

¹⁶⁴ ME-RCP, Government, Day 35 (26-5-48), q.11,727, Cmd.7500.

freedom. And yet the newspapers had consciously and successfully framed the debate about their role according to liberal ideas of nineteenth century press freedom. This obscured the original purpose of the inquiry, to check the growth of monopolistic tendencies in the control of the press and constrain the influence of proprietors, and prevented any realistic consideration of an extension to the definition of 'freedom of the press'.

This raises another major consequence of the Governments' confrontation with the press in the late 1940s. Once it had tried and essentially failed to convict the press of its allegations, it made it difficult for it to re-play the same debate in the future. And since a chief cause of its failure to find sufficient grounds for action was the atypical nature of the period (severe scarcity of paper, dire economic situation and the rise of political authoritarianism abroad), one must assume that had the Government conducted the debate at a different time it may well have had a very different result. Had the Government explored the same issues in the 1930s, for example, when commercial influence was more blatant and proprietorial political aspirations clearer, it would almost certainly have come to very different conclusions. Similarly if it had done the same after paper rationing ended. By conducting the inquiry at such an atypical time, the Government was not only unable to find enough evidence to justify action, it also compromised the ability of future administrations to ask the same questions. For example, it was subsequently more difficult to claim that owning a chain of newspapers reduced the independence of individual newspapers in that chain. Similarly, it was harder to suggest that any specific proprietor could dictate the political policy of his newspapers.

As a third consequence of the experience of 1946-9 the Government learnt that there were serious problems associated with trying to regulate an established

channel of communication. However, this was not true of new channels of communication. So, in 1954, when the Conservatives finally authorized the formation of commercial television services, they made sure that its political responsibilities were included in the requirements of the license. This stipulated that 'due impartiality is preserved on the part of the persons providing the programmes as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy'.¹⁶⁵ It would therefore be impossible for a Beaverbrook or a Kemsley to run a commercial television service according to their own political perspectives without risking losing their license.

Therefore before the end of this Labour administration the parameters of the relationship between the state and the press had been reaffirmed. The Government had been prevented from defining the limits of commercial and proprietorial influence and therefore felt justified in using the means at its disposal to manage the communication of its information through the papers. By the time the Royal Commission reported, the formal and informal mechanisms by which the Government related with the press had been established: the Central Office of Information, the news distribution unit, official civil service grades for public relations officers within each department, written lobby rules, enhanced connections with the BBC, and a growing understanding of the process of communication. By contrast, the press had preserved its freedom to assert its political bias and felt it unnecessary to institute any major reforms. Overall both estates had achieved an unhappy compromise based on mutual distrust. Over time, this mutual distrust would have a corrosive effect on both of them and eventually spread to the people. Although, as

¹⁶⁵ Television Bill, No. 76, Parliamentary Papers 1953-54, Volume III, p.463, 4-3-1954, Clause 3(1)g.

A.J. Cummings said, such inbuilt conflict could be seen as much healthier to the preservation of democracy than collusion.

Epilogue: The Report of the Commission and its Implications

When the Commission finally released its report, in June 1949, the debate had reached stasis. The report tried to fulfil Morrison's criteria by criticising the popular press for its sensationalism and overly emotive political bias. But by balancing this with statements like 'the British press is inferior to none in the world' it ensured that the latter rather than the former made the headlines. Its dismissal of any intervention by Government was understandably seen as a victory for the press and celebrated as such. 'The Press is Vindicated' the headline on the front page of the *Daily Express* read.¹⁶⁶

Conversely, Morrison highlighted the report's criticisms of specific press coverage and quoted the report's warning that some of the journalism in the popular papers was leading to a 'further weakening of the foundations of intelligent judgment in public affairs'.¹⁶⁷ The Lord President's expectation that the report would shine a spotlight on the seamier side of newspaper production was dashed because the newspapers had no intention of advertising their own faults. But the Government also escaped substantial criticism as the Commission did not think 'that up to now any harmful influence is being exerted on the press through the medium of the Government information services'.¹⁶⁸ If anyone had hoped the Commission would suggest preventative measures to protect the freedom of the press from the combined influences of owners, Government or commercial pressures in the future,

¹⁶⁶ *Daily Express*, 30-6-1949, front page.

¹⁶⁷ Report of the Royal Commission on the Press, Cmd.7700, p.151 (para.559).

¹⁶⁸ Cmd.7700, p.147.

they would have been disappointed. The main recommendation, for a General Council of the Press, was accepted by the Government but delayed and diluted by the press, eventually being set up in 1953.

The original promoters of the Commission argued that just by its appointment it had served its purpose. Ernest Jay of the NUJ said that the 'existence of Royal Commission has already had a salutary effect'.¹⁶⁹ It was true that Lord Kemsley had introduced a training plan for journalists, the Institute of Journalists had tried to create a 'code of honour' for the press, and John Gordon, the new President of the Institute and editor of the *Sunday Express*, called on his sub-editors to raise standards of accuracy.¹⁷⁰ But these were relatively minor developments given the initial hopes of the Government and the NUJ.

¹⁶⁹ *World's Press News*, 8-7-1948, p.18.

¹⁷⁰ This seriously backfired. All Gordon's sub-editors resigned en masse and Gordon had to apologise for his criticisms before they would return to work (*World's Press News*, 22-1-1948).

Chapter 4: The Government and the BBC

The previous two chapters sought to show how the Attlee Government became disillusioned with British newspapers and considered alternative means by which to structure the press as well as seeking other ways by which to communicate with the people. This chapter will examine the relationship of the Government with another media, broadcasting. This offers a fascinating contrast since it was structured in a very different way. It was controlled entirely by a licence-fee funded monopolistic Corporation, the BBC. It is a particularly apt comparison since one of the proposals for restructuring the press was that it be made up of 'lots of BBCs'.¹ This chapter will try to illustrate some of the problems inherent in a system structured in such a way, where the State has extensive connections with, and potential control over, the main channels of mass communication.

The extent of research on the BBC immediately after the war is still quite limited. The most significant secondary source remains the fourth volume of Asa Briggs's official history of the Corporation. Historians have tended to focus on the BBC during the war, or jump to the advent of television and the introduction of commercial competition. This is unfortunate since, as this chapter will try to argue, the direction of post-war broadcasting could have been distinctly different without the influence of the Attlee administrations.

Labour and the BBC shared similarly idealistic aspirations after the war. Both were convinced they could help to increase the sum of human happiness. The Government hoped to do this by supporting everyone through domestic welfare and increased opportunities, the BBC by making the highest standards of culture, education and information universally available. Both of them wanted to promote and sustain a politically informed and participatory democracy.

¹ RCP Minutes, Kingsley Martin, Day 10 (27-11-47), q.3222, Cmd.7369.

Both also believed that it was possible to inform the public truthfully, and in a balanced, impartial way. A broadcaster could, they both believed, report objectively and independently without favour to the Government, to the opposition, to pressure groups or to commercial interests. These shared aims and aspirations encouraged the Government to believe the BBC was a model communicator – in stark contrast to the ‘instruments of political warfare’, the newspapers.²

However, as the wartime coalition quickly receded and the differing agendas of the Government and the BBC became apparent, it became more and more difficult to distinguish between partiality and impartiality. The Government’s conviction that it could remain national and not party political was not borne out by its frequent radio pep talks. The access that the Government enjoyed to the airwaves and to the Corporation began to compromise the BBC’s aspirations to independence. And the BBC’s determination to remain non-controversial began to suggest a degree of consensus that no longer existed.

Labour appeared unable to recognise that the monopoly inherently favoured the incumbent Government and promoted the status quo. Its increasingly desperate attempts to stress its own impartiality simply emphasised its own inability to realise that this was not possible. The degree of control and support it enjoyed did, however, become apparent to the Opposition. This led some Conservatives, previously convinced of the merits of the current system, to question the monopoly and to reconsider the structure of broadcasting in Britain.

This chapter is split into five sections. The first section will argue that, at the end of the war, the values and attitudes of the Government and the BBC seemed remarkably similar. This apparent unity of purpose led the Government to believe it should maintain the status quo.

² Peter Hennessy, *Never Again* (1993), p.327.

The second section will describe how the BBC sought to distance itself from the Government but failed. There were too many formal and informal links for the BBC to shed quickly. And, though the BBC wanted to assert its autonomy from Government, the Government did not want to lose its connections with the BBC.

The third section will examine how the Government's use of the BBC to its own advantage triggered loud calls for an enquiry. Many people were concerned about the continued links between the state and the monopoly broadcaster and wanted these links opened to public scrutiny.

The Government's refusal to hold an immediate enquiry and its subsequent behaviour towards the BBC is examined in the fourth section. This shows that Labour was unable to see how its conviction that it could remain impartial and continue to work closely with the BBC compromised the position of the Corporation.

The fifth and final section looks at the repercussions of continued Government control on other broadcasting voices. It shows how broadcasting was restricted to the political mainstream to the almost total exclusion of outsiders.

In the end this chapter will show that the Government managed to undermine the image of the BBC as a model communicator to such an extent that it could neither act as an archetype for other industries nor maintain its monopoly in broadcasting.

SECTION 1: Government – BBC Consensus at the War's End

Shared Values

During the Second World War the Coalition and the BBC worked very closely towards a single shared goal – victory. The Government did not have to impose

this goal on the BBC: it was a goal shared by the people and the nation.³ Early on in the conflict the Government had sought to direct the Corporation but quickly found that it was a much more effective instrument of communication and propaganda if it was given responsibility for controlling and censoring itself. Therefore the Government gave it a degree of independence not enjoyed by the broadcasters of other nations. As a result, 'Over the course of the war the BBC developed from an instrument of official propaganda into a participant in its own right in the propaganda process. It demonstrated a growing self-confidence, and a growing sense of its role in national debate'.⁴

Beneath the overarching pursuit of victory the shared objectives of the Government and the people shifted over the course of the war. There was a move towards state planning and increased equality. This move was entirely understandable given the necessity for wartime planning, the shared privations of war and the enforced egalitarianism of rationing. It was further induced by the ambitions of the 1942 Beveridge report and by the perceived failure of the laissez-faire policies of the 1930s. It led, in Paul Addison's words, to a left leaning 'Whitehall consensus' within Government by the end of the war.⁵

This new consensus was reflected by the BBC. This can be seen in its growing willingness to broadcast discussions about national reconstruction, planning, education and employment. The 1943 programme 'The World We Want', for example, examined the purpose of the state and the costs and benefits of a planned society.⁶ In particular it looked at planning within a democracy and how Britain could achieve 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom from want'. The following

³ For more about the wartime shared goals see Sian Nicholas, *The Echo of War* (1996), Introduction.

⁴ Nicholas, *Echo of War*, p.6

⁵ Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (1994 Edition), p.281.

⁶ Miss Benzie to Vincent Alford, 25-10-43, Talks: Reconstruction (The World We Want), R51/448/2, BBC-WAC.

year 'Jobs for All' looked at the means of achieving full employment in Britain (building on Rab Butler's White Paper on employment). David Smith has analysed these and other programmes and used them to show how much the BBC changed during the war and how by 1945 it exemplified this new consensus.⁷

But though the BBC had changed significantly during the war it already embodied the values of the new consensus long before 1939. As Herbert Morrison pointed out in the debate on broadcasting in 1946, the BBC was one of the first examples of state planning and nationalisation in Britain. Morrison even modelled his London Passenger Transport Board on the BBC when he served as Minister of Transport in 1931.⁸ It was, he said, "an outstanding achievement in socialisation" and, more remarkably, 'a socialised institution for which the nation has to thank successive Conservative Governments'.⁹ This was particularly true of its underlying rationale, which was to safeguard broadcasting in the national interest. Such a rationale closely resembled Labour's argument for nationalising the 'commanding heights' of the British economy. It was also true of the structure of the organisation; a national monopoly intended for universal benefit, paid for by a direct tax, with an independent Chairman and Board of Governors overseeing the executive.

And this was not the only way in which the ideals of Attlee's 1945 Government overlapped with the inherent values of the BBC. In education, both Labour and the BBC were committed to universal access and equal opportunities. As well as being a core obligation within its original 1926 licence, Asa Briggs notes that 'The

⁷ David Smith, 'Politics through the Microphone: BBC Radio and the 'New Jerusalem' 1940-45', PhD, University of London, 1999, Ch.4.

⁸ "I should therefore prefer to contemplate the establishment of a body more on the lines of the Central Electricity Board, or the British Broadcasting Corporation, with a somewhat similar relationship to the Minister of Transport and Parliament' Morrison to Cabinet, CP(29)251, 20-9-1929, cited in Donoughue and Jones, *Morrison* (2001), p.141.

⁹ Herbert Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting, Vol.425, Col.1078, 16-7-1946.

BBC always made much of its “educational” role in a democracy’.¹⁰ But more than that, on an institutional and on a personal level both Labour and the BBC believed in the capacity of individuals to raise themselves up through education and both were firmly committed to helping them do that. 14 members of the Government, including Attlee and Dalton, had been Workers’ Educational Association tutors or executives.¹¹ William Haley, the Director General of the BBC from 1944-52, had left school at 15 and, through hard work and compulsive reading, rose from being a copytaker to being Director General (DG) and later Editor of *The Times*.¹² Once he became DG, Haley believed it was the job of the BBC to bring education ‘to much greater numbers of people than have ever been served before’.¹³

Even in entertainment the BBC and Labour found themselves in agreement. Both had a benignly universalist view which suggested that the BBC could and should provide something that everyone could enjoy. Both believed this would be satisfied by three new national BBC stations. In the words of an editorial in *The Listener* in July 1945, ‘If the horrid but convenient terms can be permitted, high brows, low brows and middle brows will each have a programme to themselves – thereby, one hopes, decreasing mutual jealousies and increasing the general stock of human happiness’.¹⁴ Neither the Government nor the BBC could see why anyone could want for any more than this. When Patrick Gordon Walker asked Morrison why he would not allow an additional commercial station to broadcast, even under the control of the BBC, Morrison replied that he doubted

¹⁰ Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom, Volume IV* (1995 Edition), p.562.

¹¹ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual life of the British Working Classes* (2002), p.292.

¹² Lord Simon, *The BBC from Within* (1953), p.56. Peter Hennessy, *Never Again* (1993), p.177.

¹³ William Haley, ‘Cultural Forces in British Life Today’, British Institute of Adult Education, 20/21-9-1946 HALY 16/52, CAC.

¹⁴ *The Listener*, Editorial ‘New Programmes’, 26-7-1945, p.92.

whether there 'is really a very strong demand in Britain for this sort of programme'.¹⁵

Morrison also had an instinctive dislike for commercial programming. His well quoted comment in the House in July 1946 gives a good flavour of this: "Personally, I find it repugnant to hear, as I have heard [in the US] a programme of beautifully sung children's hymns punctuated by an oily voice urging me to buy somebody's pills".¹⁶ The BBC shared Morrison's dislike and his belief in 'Gresham's Law' that in commercial broadcasting 'The good, in the long run, will inescapably be driven out by the bad'. As evidence of the law the BBC cited the Press. 'The truth of this' it claimed, 'can be seen by comparing those national newspapers which have circulations of over 4 millions with those whose circulations are counted in hundred thousands'.¹⁷

Therefore in July 1945, when Labour was elected to office, the BBC and the Government already had a great deal in common. Labour inherited a Corporation whose underlying values mirrored their own and whose structure reflected their ideal of a socialised industry. The BBC's Reithian attitudes towards education, entertainment and commerce were shared by many Labour politicians. Its programming had shifted leftwards over the course of the war towards a Whitehall consensus. Even more importantly though, they both had similarly idealistic attitudes towards political communication.

Shared Attitudes toward Political Communication

The Government believed that, for democracy to be sustainable, the people needed to be politically informed. As noted in previous chapters, Labour's vision

¹⁵ Morrison to Gordon Walker, 25-6-1946, CAB 124/411.

¹⁶ Herbert Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting, Vol.425, Col.1089, 16-7-1946.

¹⁷ BBC evidence to the Beveridge Committee, cited in Beveridge Report 1950, Cmd.8116, para.163. Morrison's belief in Gresham's Law also appeared to contradict his assertion that there was no demand for commercial programmes.

was of the administration and the electorate reasoning out the Government programme together.

The BBC strongly believed it had an important role to play in keeping the people politically informed. It saw its duty as 'to ensure that the idea of the British nation as an informed democracy shall not merely be an ideal but a reality'.¹⁸ This was particularly true of the DG, William Haley, who 'wrote about the ideals of public service broadcasting more eloquently and persuasively than it had ever been done before'.¹⁹

But both the Government and the BBC thought it was the BBC's job to act as a channel for political broadcasting, not to have a voice of its own. As Haley put it in 1947, 'the BBC has principles rather than policies, and that while we should supply all the ingredients for the informing – and thereby the forming – of public opinion, the actual catalyst should always be outside ourselves. Our task in relation to public opinion is to transmit, not to transmute'.²⁰ This was one of the primary distinctions between the BBC and the newspapers, as Morrison, speaking in the Commons in 1946, said; "It is important to remember that the prohibition that the BBC is not allowed to have opinions, or to express them on air, distinguishes it very much in character from the newspaper Press".²¹

The BBC always had to remain strictly impartial. The BBC 'can conceive that its highest duty is to the disinterested search for Truth. This is a stern concept. Absolute impartiality in all matters of controversy must be its golden rule'.²² When the BBC broadcast on political issues, therefore, it had to ensure not only that the

¹⁸ BBC Memorandum, 'General Survey of the Broadcasting Service', Cmd.8117, 1951, p.5, para.12. Cited in Asa Briggs, *Volume IV* (1995), p.562.

¹⁹ Lord Simon, *The BBC from Within* (1953), p.56.

²⁰ Haley diaries (reference to speech), 16-3-1947, HALY 13-34, CAC.

²¹ Herbert Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting, Vol.425, Col.1079, 16-7-1946.

²² William Haley broadcast, 'The Place of Broadcasting' (Third Programme), November 1947 (25th Anniversary), HALY 16-52, CAC.

views expressed were balanced, but that the voice of the broadcaster itself remained absent. Otherwise - contemporary politicians were concerned - the broadcaster might begin to undermine the position of Parliament by usurping its role as the national debating chamber.

It was this commitment to impartiality that made the post-war BBC, like the post-war Labour Government, determined to deal in 'facts'. The BBC even started a programme on the Home Service in 1945 called 'Facts First'. Each week this 15 (then 10) minute show was supposed to give a 'Picture Post level audience' a brief sketch of the background on current, topical issues.²³ At its heart should be dry facts, without too much illustration or description. As the BBC's Vincent Alford said, 'The 'pictorial' or the 'topographical' should only be introduced when it is relevant to the elucidation of the subject of the talk, and then sparingly'.²⁴

The commitment also turned the BBC into a sort of political accountant. It began to count the appearances of every politician at the microphone and record their political allegiance and the time they spent there.²⁵ That way it could not only try to maintain an exact political balance but could also prove to its detractors that it was maintaining that balance.

However, the war had demonstrated that the BBC need not simply be a common carrier like the national grid but could be much more politically constructive. Rather than simply transmit, it could actively promote the objectives of the state. As well as passing on information, it could raise morale, encourage a sense of shared citizenship, direct people towards specific goals, and provide rationales for Government action. It was not a passive participant in the war but played an

²³ Mrs. Goldie to Miss Quigley, 'Suggestions for Autumn Programmes: "Facts First"', 1-8-1945, R51/158 BBC-WAC.

²⁴ Vincent Alford (Acting Asst Director of Talks) to David Bryson, 4-1-1946, 'Facts First', R51/158, BBC-WAC.

²⁵ See BBC files on 'Political Broadcasting, Lists of Broadcasts by MPs', File 1 1943-46, File 2a 1947-48, File 2b 1949-50 etc. R51/414. Also in Ministerial Broadcasts. BBC-WAC.

active role in winning it. The BBC was aware of this change. As David Smith has noted, its 'wartime experience helped to transform not only how the Corporation saw itself but how it saw its role in the national life and the audience it served'.²⁶ The Government was also aware of the change. Herbert Butcher MP said to the Commons in 1946, over the last six years the BBC "secured a consciousness of its strength and of the part which it played in the winning of the war".²⁷

Not only were the Government and the Corporation conscious of this new role, neither of them wanted to relinquish it. Both now believed that the BBC had a critical part to play in actively sustaining democracy. It should, for example, 'encourage public interest in the working of Parliament' by broadcasting a nightly programme on discussions in the House.²⁸ The microphone could properly be used, Haley said, 'to inculcate citizenship, to [motivate people to] pay proper attention to public affairs, to encourage tolerant discussion'.²⁹ Far from being simply a channel, the BBC should now help to ensure that 'that an informed Democracy shall function'.³⁰ This meant that at the close of the war there was a tension between two concepts of the BBC's role – the constructive, independent voice or the more submissive, silent partner.

However, in 1945 neither the Government nor the BBC saw a discrepancy between the two political roles. Both, they thought, were compatible. Preparing for the July election Haley therefore believed the BBC could both adequately inform the public and remain an impartial channel. To do this the Corporation arranged 24 party political broadcasts of 20 and 30 minutes each – split between

²⁶ David Smith, *op.cit.*, p.13.

²⁷ Herbert Butcher, *Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting, 16-7-1946*, Vol.425, Col.1168.

²⁸ 'Cabinet, Draft Report of the Committee on Broadcasting'. Paragraph 22, in CAB 124/400. The BBC had already started broadcasting a nightly summary of proceedings in Parliament in 1945 which then became an obligation within the subsequent BBC Licence.

²⁹ Haley broadcast, 'The Place of Broadcasting' *op.cit.*, HALY 16-52, CAC.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

the Parties. In each of these a spokesman, nominated by the Party, would speak, in monologue, directly to the nation.³¹ At the same time, as soon as Parliament was dissolved, for the 38 days prior to the election, all discussion of politics outside the Party broadcasts was precluded – this included any mention of politics on comedy or drama shows. Haley was very proud of the result, as he reflected in a memorandum to Morrison the following year, 'This may truthfully be claimed as complete 100 per cent democratic handling of broadcasting' he wrote.³²

The BBC had, however, not solved the dilemma but simply avoided it. By abdicating all responsibility for political communication (bar helping to determine the quota of politicians and giving them access to the microphone) it assumed an almost entirely passive role. This set an important precedent for the incoming Labour administration. It suggested that the Government (sometimes together with the opposition) and not the BBC, could and should control political broadcasting and should tell the BBC what to do. And so throughout Labour's period of office, despite their closely corresponding attitudes to political communication, the Government treated the BBC like a political novice. Given the BBC's increased self-confidence this was bound to generate friction.

Government Keen to Maintain the Broadcasting Status Quo

Given the degree of shared attitudes and values of the BBC and the Government, and the exalted reputation of the broadcaster at the close of the war, it is not at all surprising that in 1945 Morrison believed the BBC charter should be renewed. Indeed he had so few doubts about this that he pressed for it

³¹ These proved remarkably popular with the electorate. The listenership to each broadcast was, according to Haley, between 12.5m to 15m. Haley Diaries, HALY 13-35, 29-7-1945, CAC.

³² Haley brief to Morrison prior to debate on Broadcasting White Paper, 8-7-1946, CAB 124/25.

to be renewed without an enquiry, unlike on the previous two occasions.³³ He had made this decision based on the deliberations of his own Broadcasting committee and its predecessor, the Coalition Committee on Broadcasting.

Shortly after Labour took office Morrison chaired a Labour Broadcasting committee to discuss the future of broadcasting policy. It met three times in total, in August, September and October 1945.³⁴ It was building on the work done by the Coalition Committee on Broadcasting which had met 8 times between May 1944 and April 1945.³⁵

The Coalition Committee on broadcasting had considered the issue of an enquiry and been unable to reach a consensus. Brendan Bracken was the source of disagreement. Bracken was the one member of the Committee who believed there should be an inquiry into the BBC, along the lines of the Ullswater Committee of 1935-36, before the Charter was renewed.³⁶ Therefore though the Coalition Committee wrote a report before the Caretaker Government took over in May, it remained unsigned.

Morrison's Committee had much less trouble coming to an agreement. Prior to the first meeting on 29th August, Martin Flett, Morrison's Assistant Secretary, outlined what he saw as the arguments for and against an enquiry and concluded that 'On the whole I think you will feel that the arguments against a public enquiry outweigh the arguments in favour'. Broadcasting was, Flett suggested, now too 'closely bound up with politics'. An enquiry would cover the same ground as had been covered before and the technicalities had been already been sanctioned by an acknowledged expert. Moreover, since the taxpayer was now forced to pay for

³³ The Crawford Committee in 1925 (Cmd.2599) and the Ullswater committee in 1936 (Cmd.5091).

³⁴ Broadcasting Policy meetings, GEN 81, 29-8-45, 12-9-45, 10-10-45, CAB 78/37.

³⁵ Coalition Committee on Broadcasting; detailed in note from Martin Flett to Morrison 26-6-1946, CAB 124/25.

³⁶ Flett to Morrison, Memorandum, 27-8-1945, CAB 124/399.

part of the BBC, it was the Government's responsibility to make a decision, not the responsibility of a public inquiry.³⁷

This reflected Morrison's perspective and the other ministers on the Committee – E.J. Williams (Minister of Information), Lord Listowel (Postmaster General) and Philip Noel-Baker (Minister of State) – raised no objections.³⁸ They continued meeting to talk about the scarcity of broadcast wavelengths and to discuss when television should start up again after its wartime suspension. Their report, CP(45)293, was completed on 20th November. In its essentials it was the unsigned Coalition Committee's report with some minor amendments. It went before Cabinet on Monday 17th December 1945.

The Cabinet minutes suggest that the paper sailed through Cabinet with almost no debate. The Lord President and his colleagues, the minutes note, 'were satisfied that there need not be any enquiry by an independent committee, on the lines of the Ullswater committee, before the charter of the BBC was renewed and that the BBC should continue to be the sole authority licensed to broadcast in the UK for the further period of 10 years from 1 January 1947, covered by the new charter'.³⁹

At the end of the same week Sir Eric Bamford, acting Director General of the Ministry of Information and present at the meeting, called William Haley to tell him the Broadcasting Report had made it through Cabinet. The Licence Fee would be doubled, from 10s to £1, just as the BBC wanted, the Third Programme could go ahead as planned, and BBC broadcasting to Europe would continue. Also, there

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Broadcasting Committee Meeting minutes, GEN 81/1, 29-8-1945, 'The opinion of the meeting was that there was no need for a public enquiry on the present occasion', CAB 78/37.

³⁹ Cabinet Minutes, CM(45)63, 17-12-1945, CAB 128/2.

would be no inquiry into the BBC.⁴⁰ The Government and the BBC were both happy with the situation as it stood. So happy indeed that Haley was given a knighthood in the New Years Honours list for 1946.

This cosy mutual appreciation would not last. Indeed since the end of the war the BBC had been conscious that it needed to detach itself from the Government and dissociate itself from some of the overlapping values.

SECTION 2: Unsuccessful Separation of the Government and BBC after the War

The BBC Seeks to Establish Some Distance from Government

At the end of the war the Director General was eager to establish some distance between the BBC and the Government. They had grown very close over the previous six years and Haley believed it was important to assert the BBC's independence. He therefore sought greater financial, editorial and political autonomy.

The BBC's financial independence had been suspended for the war. Rather than being funded predominantly by the Licence Fee as it had been since its inception, during the war the BBC's money came directly from the Treasury under grants-in-aid. Not only did removal of the Licence Fee ceiling mean that expenditure increased significantly, but that the BBC grew quite used to having the Treasury as its paymaster. According to Maurice Gorham, editor of the *Radio Times* during the war and head of the Light Programme immediately after it, 'during the war broadcasting was a national service and it was not difficult to go to the Treasury and get more money for staff, studios and equipment... People had got used to the feeling that if new things were needed the money could

⁴⁰ Call noted in Haley's diaries, 23-12-1945: 'I asked him [Bamford] if there was to be a Charter inquiry. He said not but the Govt. would probably issue their findings as a White Paper', HALY 13-35, CAC.

always be found'.⁴¹ As a result the Corporation's expenditure rose by 150% in seven years from £2,675,000 in 1938 to £6,700,000 in 1945.⁴²

Haley was determined to renew the BBC's financial independence. But, given the increase in the Corporation's size, and the investment required in developing the new services and television, this meant a major increase in the Licence Fee. Haley suggested doubling it. The Labour Government agreed. Since the number of Licence holders surpassed 10 million early in 1946 the BBC would now receive yet another increase in income to add to that which it had enjoyed over the course of the war. The rise took effect from June 1946 but it was not until 1947 that the BBC gained full control of its finances once again.⁴³

The BBC's enhanced reputation after the war was mainly the result of the perceived accuracy and impartiality of its news. Its authority was such that by 1945 "I haven't heard it on the BBC" was sufficient justification for popular disbelief.⁴⁴ This reputation was nurtured and protected during the war by separating the BBC's news services from other departments. After the war Haley decided to perpetuate this separation. Looking back on it he described how he "isolated the News Division from the rest of the Corporation, and made the news itself immune from the Programme Heads. Fixed slots, the lengths and timings of which were decided by the Director-General, were imposed on each programme. They could not be varied. What went into them was the News Division's responsibility alone. No programme head was allowed to concern himself with the

⁴¹ Maurice Gorham, *Sound and Fury, 21 Years at the BBC* (1948), p.189.

⁴² Lochhead to Crossley, in response to question in the House of Commons, 6-2-1946, CAB 124/401.

⁴³ And even then only for domestic services. BBC Overseas Services were to continue to be funded by a grant-in-aid. Haley note to Board of Governors (BoG), 31-12-1947, Ga2/48, BoG Papers, R1/84/6, BBC-WAC.

⁴⁴ William Haley, *The Public Influence of Broadcasting and the Press*, Clayton Memorial Lectures, XCV (1953-54), No.2, p.3, HALY 16/52, BBC-WAC.

news audience's figures, or their effect on his programme'.⁴⁵ Haley hoped in this way he could sustain both the perceived and the actual impartiality of the BBC.

Haley also wanted to clarify the BBC's position on post-war Party political broadcasting and make it more transparent. Political broadcasting had always been an issue at the BBC. After granting its first Licence in 1927 the Government stipulated that the BBC could not engage in any controversy nor could it express any political opinions of its own.⁴⁶ In 1928 this stipulation was relaxed so that the BBC could broadcast controversy, as long as it remained balanced and impartial.⁴⁷ However, throughout the 1930s the Corporation was unable to find agreement amongst political parties as to the nature of these broadcasts and remained politically very restrained as a result.⁴⁸ Party political broadcasting was suspended during the war.

In the weeks after Labour took office Sir Allan Powell (then Chairman of the BBC) and Haley began talks with the Government to restart Party political broadcasting within clearly articulated parameters. Haley soon became aware that this would not be straightforward. Labour did not want to give up their current advantageous position. 'We are now talking to Arthur Greenwood [Lord Privy Seal] about political broadcasting' Haley wrote in his diary in November, 'The Labour Govt.

⁴⁵ Haley speech at Columbia University; 'Broadcasting, Government & Freedom of the Press', 1971, HALY 16-54, CAC.

⁴⁶ The Postmaster General, acting under the authority of clause 4(iii) of the 1927 Licence (which stated the Postmaster General may from time to time... require the Corp to refrain from sending out broadcasts) 'informed the BBC on 11th January 1927 that he required the BBC to refrain from broadcasting the following matter:- "(a) statements expressing the opinion of the Corporation on matters of public policy; and (b) speeches or lectures containing statements on topics of political, religious or industrial controversy."', MOI memorandum, 27-8-1945, CAB 124/408.

⁴⁷ 'In January 1928 the BBC made a formal application to the Postmaster General for a relaxation in these restrictions. The Corporation [said that]... the power, if granted, would not be misused. No partisanship would be shown and any new controversial matter would be introduced gradually and experimentally. There would be no expression of views contrary to the interests of the State'. The rules were relaxed shortly after, MOI Memorandum, IH(46)8, 25-6-1946, CAB 124/408.

⁴⁸ 'The history of political broadcasting before the war was decidedly chequered', Herbert Morrison, (IH(46), 22nd June 1946), CAB 124/408. See also 14 page MOI memorandum on the history of political broadcasting 27-8-1945 (CAB 124/408) and 'Reith and the Denial of Politics', in Curran & Seaton, *Power without Responsibility* (1997).

have authoritarian leanings in this'.⁴⁹ Haley tried to overcome these leanings by capturing the BBC's proposals within an Aide-Memoire. This was discussed at length in the penultimate Cabinet before Christmas. But the Cabinet were concerned that written rules made the government too weak and instead felt 'these matters should continue to be governed by understandings as to the normal practice'.⁵⁰ Greenwood explained to Haley on 23rd January that such rules could as easily be written down as could "conduct befitting an officer and a gentleman".⁵¹ The issue therefore remained temporarily unresolved and the other political parties without ready access to the microphone.

Haley was more successful at rebutting clumsy efforts by the Government to interfere with specific BBC programming. After a World Affairs talk by the historian A.J.P. Taylor in September 1945 which Ernest Bevin found objectionable it was suggested that the BBC submit all scripts dealing with overseas matters to the Foreign Office.⁵² Haley refused. In October, after the dockworkers went on an unofficial strike, George Isaacs, Minister for Labour and National Service, wanted the union leader, Donovan, to broadcast a 'factual statement' on the BBC. Haley blocked Isaacs, telling him that if Donovan broadcast they would have to let the strikers broadcast as well. Attlee then called Haley directly to question this 'extraordinary argument'.⁵³ But the DG held firm and was backed by the Chairman and Governors.⁵⁴

Therefore Haley was trying, after July 1945, to assert the BBC's independence from Government; in its news output, in its financing, and in its political

⁴⁹ Haley diaries, 10-11-1945, HALY 13-35, CAC.

⁵⁰ Cabinet Conclusions, CM(45)64, 20-12-1945, CAB 128/2.

⁵¹ Meeting recorded in BoG minutes, 24-1-1946, Min.19, R1/14/1, BBC-WAC, and in Haley diaries, 3-2-1946. Haley commented that 'this is delightful from a Labour Government', HALY 13-35.

⁵² Haley diaries, 30-9-1945, HALY 13-35, and in separate diary entry 30-9-1945, HALY 13-5, and reference in BoG Minutes, 4-10-1945, R1/13/1, BBC-WAC.

⁵³ Haley diaries, 15-10-1945, HALY 13-35.

⁵⁴ BoG Minutes, Minute 229, 18-10-1945, R1/13/1, BBC-WAC.

broadcasting. However, the provocativeness of this assertiveness should not be exaggerated. The BBC did not challenge the Government openly, neither did it introduce a raft of new political discussion programmes. In fact, it seemed to play down domestic politics in the period after the war. Asa Briggs has argued that this was 'through fear of broadcasting being used for propaganda purposes' although it seems odd that an organisation trying to assert its independence from Government should do so by avoiding politics.⁵⁵ The newspapers, for example, took the opposite approach and celebrated their peacetime freedom with much greater discussion and criticism. Moreover, there were many aspects of the BBC where the wartime closeness persisted, and this closeness compromised the Corporation's aspirations to independence.

The BBC Remains "Enmeshed in Government"⁵⁶

Given the depth and length of the wartime relationship between the Government and the BBC the legacy was bound to extend into peacetime. There were too many official, unofficial, attitudinal, and habitual connections to shed quickly. However, whilst the BBC was conscious of many of these connections and keen to let them go, the Government was both less conscious and much less keen. This was true of both the formal and the informal connections.

"Nominally, the Government's powers of dictation over the Corporation are... absolute", Morrison told the House in 1946, "In practice, there is a clear understanding that the Government will not use their powers as long as the Corporation does not misconduct itself".⁵⁷ The Government had always held de jure powers over the BBC via its constitution but, as Morrison said, rarely used

⁵⁵ Asa Briggs, *Volume IV* (1995), p.564.

⁵⁶ Haley diaries, 30-9-1945, 'The revelation one gets of being enmeshed in Government is to see how many things that ought to be done remain undone simply for lack of decisions', HALY 13-5, CAC.

⁵⁷ Herbert Morrison, *Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting*, 16-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.1079.

them. During the war it increased its powers and influence significantly. At the end of the war, instead of giving all of these new powers back, it formalised some of them.

Given the power of radio at this time this is not surprising. The BBC's monopoly of broadcasting combined with the popularity of the wireless gave the broadcaster a direct channel into four out of every five households in the country.⁵⁸ It was a very valuable and influential channel, as the wartime Coalition had found. It could be used for announcements, for appeals, for campaigns and for Ministerial broadcasts. During the war there was rarely a day when a listener would not be treated to an abundance of Government information.

Government announcements continued after the war but slowly wound down. In November 1945 there were still many public service broadcasts for the home listener. Martin Flett's research identified '77 informative talks given in the course of one month chosen at random' including 'The Small Farm – Labour Problems', resettlement information and citizens advice.⁵⁹ The official announcements period on Mondays, Fridays and Saturdays disappeared, first to be replaced by a more flexible arrangement each weekday, and then to be reduced to a single slot on a Tuesday from December 1945.⁶⁰

Ministerial broadcasting was, however, too useful for the Government to let go. During the war the procedure was that any minister could approach the Ministry of Information and request time to broadcast on air. He or she would then be given a slot of up to 15 minutes to broadcast live to the nation, in monologue not

⁵⁸ According to Lord Listowel, House of Lords Debates, 26-6-1946 (reported in *The Times*, 27-6-1946, p.8). The number of households paying a BBC Radio Licence Fee passed 10 million in January 1946. See BBC Programme Policy Meeting minutes, 29-1-1946, R34/615/4, and *Radio Times* 24-2-1946.

⁵⁹ 'List B', 'Public Service broadcasts for Home listeners' November 1945. Research provided to Martin Flett by the BBC for the July debate, 8-7-1946, CAB 124/25.

⁶⁰ Correspondence between BBC and MOI, June to December 1945. The MOI was not happy to give up the slots as seen from MOI telephone call to Tony Rendall, 18-12-1945, R28/84/3, BBC-WAC.

dialogue. Once in office Labour did not ask the BBC if it could maintain this privilege; it notified the Corporation that the practise of wartime Ministerial access would continue. 'Dear Haley', Sir Eric Bamford wrote to the Director General in mid August 1945, 'You may wish to know that Mr. Attlee has reaffirmed the procedure with regard to Ministerial broadcasting which was laid down by the Coalition Government'.⁶¹

Morrison was not unconscious of the importance of Ministerial access. When, at the end of September, Martin Flett wrote a memorandum to Morrison about home broadcasting which suggested there was general agreement that Government control should revert to the pre-war position, Morrison wrote in the margin, 'Yes, but it may include requirements as to Ministerial or official broadcasts'.⁶² This led to a follow up note in which Flett made certain that the BBC were still bound to "send out any matter which any government department may require to be broadcast". 'I think that these terms are sufficiently wide enough to enable the Government to arrange for any Ministerial or official broadcasts it wishes', Flett wrote.⁶³

The post-war process for Ministerial broadcasting was then formalised in Cabinet Paper CP(46)199. Ministers simply had to inform the Postmaster General of the subject of their broadcast, the proposed length and the desired date. The Postmaster General would then contact the Prime Minister who would sign off the broadcast. Though the P.M. could turn down the broadcast John Pimlott, Morrison's Personal Secretary, told the Lord President that 'the number of times

⁶¹ E Bamford to Haley, 18-8-1945, R34/534/5, BBC-WAC. Procedure outlined in Cabinet Papers, CP(45)100, 8-8-1945, CAB 66/67.

⁶² Margin, Flett to Morrison, 'Ministerial Control of Broadcasting', 26-9-1945, CAB 124/400.

⁶³ Flett to JAR Pimlott, 1-10-1945, CAB 124/400.

on which he has declined to agree to a broadcast is small'.⁶⁴ The Postmaster General would then contact the BBC and schedule it in.

The Government also maintained a formal connection with a large part of the BBC after the war, the BBC Overseas Services. These had expanded enormously after 1939.⁶⁵ During the course of 1944 there were many discussions as to whether they should be maintained and if they were, whether they should become independent after the war or remain within Government. In 1945 Attlee decided they should be kept. They could not, however, be given back entirely to the BBC. The Government believed they were too important a political instrument for that. Instead, they would sit in an uncomfortable middle ground, ostensibly free to determine their own programming, but always in 'close consultation' with the Foreign Office and always in pursuit of the national interest.⁶⁶

In addition to these formal connections many of the unofficial links between the Government and the BBC still existed. Over the course of the war departmental officials had become very familiar with programme heads and programme makers at the BBC, sometimes going as far as 'writing or re-writing their scripts and rehearsing them'.⁶⁷ Some BBC personnel had also worked directly for the Government during the war. Mary Adams, post war head of BBC television talks, was Director of Home Intelligence at the Ministry of Information from 1939-41. A.P. Ryan, Editor of BBC News after the war, was seconded to the MOI to be "Adviser to the BBC on Home Affairs". His task, according to his Times obituary,

⁶⁴ Pimlott to Morrison, 19-12-1946, CAB 124/33.

⁶⁵ Between 1939 and 1948 the number of live hours broadcast by the BBC overseas services each week rose from 99 to 481. Over the same period the number of staff rose from 323 to 4,161, G69/48, R1/84/3, BBC-WAC.

⁶⁶ See Asa Briggs, *Volume IV* (1995), 'Overseas Broadcasting', pp.125-147.

⁶⁷ Sian Nicholas, regarding 'Kitchen Front' 1942, *Echo of War*, p.79.

'was to put the Government's point of view to the BBC on domestic matters'.⁶⁸ Or to keep a careful watch on the broadcaster.

The closeness of personal and departmental relationships extended to information sharing. From late 1945 through 1946 the Government and the BBC cooperated closely on the preparations and packaging of the broadcasting White Paper and subsequent BBC Charter. As noted above, for example, Bamford was happy to contact Haley shortly after he knew the outcome of the Cabinet meeting on the BBC White Paper in December 1945 – even though Parliament would not know of the Government's intentions until late January 1946 and after.⁶⁹ The BBC then worked collaboratively (and secretly) with the Government to prepare the White Paper on broadcasting throughout the first half of 1946.⁷⁰ When, prior to the Broadcasting debate in July, pressure began to build for an inquiry into the BBC, Morrison even asked Haley for information about the BBC's reorganisation that he could use to argue against an inquiry. At this stage Haley 'pointed out to Abbott [at the Post Office] the BBC would have to be circumspect in such a matter. It cannot be put in the position of seeming not to want an inquiry'.⁷¹

As important as the formal and informal connections with Government was the profound psychological legacy of the war years on the BBC. As a result of its self-censorship and its increased stature the BBC felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility which naturally encouraged conservatism. For example, Maurice Gorham, head of the Light Programme, asked in a Coordinating Committee meeting in August 1945 whether there were any limitations on the use of MPs in entertainment programmes. He was told that they 'should not be allowed to

⁶⁸ AP Ryan, obituary, *The Times*, 3-7-1972.

⁶⁹ E.J. Williams told Parliament the Licence Fee would double on 22-1-1946 (Vol.418, Col.34). Attlee told Janner there would be no inquiry into the BBC on 19-2-1946 (Vol.419, Col.952-953).

⁷⁰ Flett and Bamford visited Haley on 14-2-1946 about working more collaboratively and worked with the Corporation from then until the broadcasting debate in July. See Flett to Morrison, 20-2-1946, and subsequent memoranda in CAB 124/402.

⁷¹ Haley diaries, 25-6-1946, HALY 13-35, CAC.

broadcast in a context which might be derogatory to their dignity' and that this was 'Of the greatest importance, MPs must be protected agst [sic] themselves. They are not always good judges in such matters'.⁷²

Associated with this sense of conservatism was a sense of passivity that came from the wartime reversal of initiative. The Government had led so many campaigns and required so much help from the Corporation in communicating information that the BBC became used to receiving news rather than retrieving it. This was highlighted by a BBC memorandum reviewing liaison with Government departments in mid-1946: 'Before 1939 contact with Government departments was made on the initiative of the Corporation when it required guidance. During the war numerous regulations, eg. rationing of food, brought about a complete change in relations'.⁷³

The persistent formal and informal closeness between the Government and the BBC enhanced the inhibiting sense of responsibility and passivity within the Corporation. It made it difficult to shake the feeling that the BBC and the Government were working together, sharing information and coordinating programme making. Equally, it gave the Government a continuing sense of control and assumption of BBC acquiescence. It saw the BBC as its natural ally, and encouraged it to treat the Corporation as a subordinate. For example when RA Rendall, controller of talks, spoke to John Strachey's office about the nature of the Minister of Food's proposed broadcast in July 1946 the office 'suggested it was not for us to cross question the Minister, and although I [Rendall] pointed out that the Corporation had a great responsibility in these matters, it was clear that

⁷² Policy, Coordinating Committee Meeting Minutes, 8-8-1945, Minute 136, 'Broadcasts by MPs', R34/320/1, BBC-WAC. The second comment is scribbled by Haley beside the first (his underlining).

⁷³ 'Liaison with Government Departments' (unsigned), 1946, R51/205/4, BBC-WAC.

he did not think it was our job to do anything but say yes, or his to do anything but get us to say it as quickly as possible'.⁷⁴

This relationship inherently tended to favour the Government (it was invariably given the benefit of doubt, was normally used as first source for information and questions, and was consulted regarding scripts which might offend). This was important because, as time went on the closeness not only encouraged a sense of partiality, it compromised the BBC's independence. This is shown by a *News Chronicle* poll conducted in June 1946 that asked, 'Which do you think the BBC most resembles, an independent concern like a newspaper, or a Government controlled body like the Ministry of Information?' 37% answered that it resembled an independent concern, 52% answered that it was like a Government controlled body.⁷⁵

SECTION 3: Continuation of Government–BBC Relationship Prompts Calls for an Enquiry

Free Access to Microphone leads to Monopolisation and Partiality

The advantages to the Government of the connections with the BBC became apparent as 1945 wore on. Ministers used their right of access to the microphone liberally. From 14th August to end of December, there were 15 Ministerial broadcasts (this does not include ministerial appearances on the news or on other BBC programming – just direct broadcasts to the nation). They included informational talks by George Isaacs about demobilization, appeals from Sir Stafford Cripps for the Workers Educational Association, and Aneurin Bevan explaining Government policy on nurses.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Record of Telephone Conversation, 3/4-7-1946, RA Rendall (Controller, Talks) with Sir Drummond Shiels re Strachey desire to broadcast on bread rationing on Sunday July 21st, R34/534/5, BBC-WAC.

⁷⁵ 'What Listeners think of the BBC', *News Chronicle* poll, 25-6-1946, p.2.

⁷⁶ 'Ministerial Broadcasts', R34/553/2, BBC-WAC.

Though some of the broadcasts may have seemed innocuous, there were a number of difficulties with them. First, there was an implicit assumption that everyone in Britain was still striving towards the same goals. In some cases this was probably true. Attlee, for example, spoke in September about trying to establish stable democratic Governments abroad: "Our sole endeavour is to enable the will of the people to prevail, and to assist in the establishment everywhere of Governments resting on popular consent. It is a difficult and perhaps a thankless task, but we have to perform it".⁷⁷ But opinions, even on foreign affairs, were no longer as uniform as they were during the war, as witnessed by the controversial A.J.P. Taylor talk in September. The Government did not seem to recognise this and, in November, asked Haley for the right 'on certain occasions' to broadcast on foreign affairs without prompting any right of reply. The Director General was concerned that this would be unrepresentative. 'They [the Government] plead' he wrote in his diary, 'there will be some isolated emergencies when it will be necessary to speak as a united people, so that other countries, such as Russia, may be impressed. But what if we are not a united people?'.⁷⁸

The issue of unity was even more apparent with broadcasts on domestic issues. It was very hard, despite their efforts, for the Government not to sound partisan. It was only natural that, in making an appeal a Minister should seek to justify his or her policy and outline its goals. Therefore Nye Bevan, speaking about the need for nurses in November 1945, explained that the new Government nursing charters "are intended to establish the nursing profession on a much more satisfactory basis and to provide for conditions of work, and for salaries which will meet the highest status of the profession. The government intends that nurses

⁷⁷ PM's broadcast 'There is much to be Done', 3-9-1945, printed in *The Listener*, 6-9-1945.

⁷⁸ Haley diaries (his underlining), 10-11-1945, HALY 13-35 CAC.

shall have a square deal".⁷⁹ It was also understandable that, when a Minister was broadcasting bad news, he or she should try to explain what happened and put it in context. This context would naturally emphasise the good intentions behind Government policy and highlight the influence of factors outside of the Government's control which undermined those intentions. John Strachey, for example, broadcasting about bread rationing in June 1946, told listeners that 'It is the destruction, and even more the disorganisation that is the inevitable aftermath of the war' which forced the policy on the Government.⁸⁰

The Ullswater committee had made a note of some of the dangers of excessive Ministerial statements back in 1936. Though it recognised that it was 'inevitable that more prominence is given to the leaders of the political parties in power than to the Opposition' it warned that 'These [statements] necessarily have some political flavour and tend naturally to stress the beneficence of Government activities'.⁸¹ Attlee, a vocal member of the Ullswater Committee, went even further and told the BBC it should 'exercise great care in deciding the occasions which in the interests of the country call for a ministerial statement to be made, for there have been instances where broadcasts, professedly based on the need of giving information to the general public, were in fact merely partisan speeches'.⁸² Though Attlee was referring to broadcasts made on the BBC in 1931 he could reasonably have made them about broadcasts by Ministers in his own Government.

By February 1946 the Director General was becoming frustrated by the number of Ministers who wanted to broadcast. 'Ministers who wish to broadcast are

⁷⁹ Home Service, 11-11-1945, 9.15pm, printed in *The Listener*, 15-11-1945, p.549.

⁸⁰ Strachey, Home Service, 16-6-1946, 9.15pm, printed in *The Listener*, 20-6-1946, p.801.

⁸¹ Ullswater Committee Report, Cmd.5091, February 1936, paragraph 89, p.28.

⁸² 'Reservations by Mr. Attlee', Ullswater Committee Report, Cmd.5091, February 1936, p.50.

becoming a nuisance' he wrote in his diary on February 9th.⁸³ Since the beginning of the year Pethick-Lawrence, Ben Smith and Emmanuel Shinwell had already spoken on air.⁸⁴ There would be a further 18 Labour broadcasts before the end of June, almost the equivalent of one a week. By May the BBC Programme Policy committee noted the 'Recent unsatisfactory handling of ministerial broadcasts on the Government side'.⁸⁵ It did not help that there were virtually no broadcasts by the Opposition (since 'political broadcasting' had not been re-established). In its first year of office the Government broadcast 38 times compared to the Opposition twice (both Opposition broadcasts were by the shadow Chancellor, John Anderson, about the budget).⁸⁶ This monopoly of the airwaves could not help but have a naturally beneficent effect on listeners' perceptions of Government policies.

BBC Self-Censorship and the Impression of Consensus

This positive impression was further enhanced after 1945 by the prohibition of any debate about issues under discussion in the House. For this prohibition the BBC had itself to blame. Shortly before the White Paper on Education was to be debated in July 1943 'Rab' Butler asked the BBC if he could make a broadcast about education. Anxious that this type of broadcast might constitute competition with Parliamentary debate, the BBC drafted a resolution the following year which precluded discussion of a topic on radio that was the subject of legislation in the House.⁸⁷ This draconian ruling, if taken literally, would have meant the BBC could broadcast about almost no current ongoing political issues. Though they did not

⁸³ Haley diaries, 9-2-1946, HALY 13-35, CAC.

⁸⁴ Pethick-Lawrence on the 1st January, Ben Smith on the 5th February and Shinwell on the 9th February itself, R34/553/2, BBC-WAC.

⁸⁵ 'Extract from Minutes of Programme Policy meeting', 21-5-1946, R51/205/4, BBC-WAC. Haley proposed that he go and speak to the Post Office 'as [a] first step towards [a] proper working arrangement'.

⁸⁶ Full list of Ministerial broadcasts for 1945-46 in R34/553/2, BBC-WAC.

⁸⁷ Note by DG, 6-5-1948 to BoG, G41/48, 'Broadcast on Matters before Parliament', BoG Papers, R1/84/2, BBC-WAC.

adhere to it to the letter, the BBC did abide by the ruling's broad intention. Coupled with its reluctance to broadcast controversy this meant programming on the post-war BBC inevitably played down argument and encouraged an impression of consensus.⁸⁸

The BBC's treatment of food and bread rationing provides a good example of this. As outlined in the previous chapters, bread rationing became a highly political issue in the first half of 1946. From February to July there was rarely a week without some coverage of bread in the newspapers. And yet there was not one BBC discussion programme on the topic during this time.⁸⁹ Specific items were covered in news broadcasts but not in discussion programmes. At the same time there were six long statements on food and bread made by Government Ministers – Ben Smith, Edith Summerskill, Tom Williams (three broadcasts) and John Strachey.⁹⁰ There were also other talks (as opposed to discussions) on the world food shortage – by Arthur Salter and D.G. Bridson.⁹¹ The last, on the UNRRA, 'The Battle Against Starvation and Want in Europe' was broadcast at 9.30pm on Sunday 30th June, immediately after Herbert Morrison's production talk.

A listener would therefore come away from the BBC with the impression that there was a terrible shortage of bread worldwide, that the Government was doing all it could to alleviate the world food crisis, and that people within Britain would

⁸⁸ This became formalised in Clause 6(iv) of the Aide Memoire on political broadcasting in 1947 and, in 1948, was expanded to explain that this meant the BBC could not have discussions on any issues for a period of a fortnight before they are debated in either House, nor could MPs be involved in discussions on subjects regarding ongoing legislation. See Briggs, *Volume IV*, pp.582-3.

⁸⁹ From analysis of the *Radio Times* 1945-46 and *The Listener* 1945-46.

⁹⁰ Ben Smith (5.2.46 on world food shortage), Tom Williams (22.2.46 food production), Edith Summerskill (10.3.46 on food shortages), Tom Williams (27.3.46 – Battle for Food - Women's Land Army), Tom Williams (30.5.46, wheat off farms quick), John Strachey (16.6.46 review of food), from R34/553/2, BBC-WAC.

⁹¹ Arthur Salter, 'The Shadow of World Famine', Home Service, printed in *The Listener* 11-4-1946 (p.453), Maurice Webb also wrote an article for *The Listener* on 'Hunger in Europe', 30-5-1946 (not clear if broadcast first, p.709), DG Bridson, 'UNRRA – The battle against starvation and want in Europe', Home Service, 30-6-1946, 9.30pm, *Radio Times* June 30th-July 6th.

have to work harder and eat less as a consequence. They would not have heard any Ministers being challenged on the statements they were making about food and bread, nor would they have heard a spokesperson broadcasting from the opposite perspective, against the rationale for rationing.

The BBC was not in a strong position to object. It was avoiding debate on issues that were under discussion in the House and it was allowing Ministers to make 'non-controversial' broadcasts as it was obliged to do under Clause 4(2) of the BBC Licence. Though the BBC ostensibly had the right to turn down a broadcast, it rarely did. It did eventually draw the line, however, at a request by John Strachey to broadcast on Sunday 21st July, the evening before bread rationing began. Though the Government claimed the broadcast would deal only with administrative details, the BBC responded that '(a) it is impossible for a Minister to speak on bread rationing without being deemed controversial (b) that if purely administrative explanation is aimed at an administrator could do just as well'.⁹² On this occasion the Government agreed to the BBC's request not to broadcast.

One reason for this is that Labour's free use of the microphone had, by this time, attracted the attention of the Opposition. The specific catalyst was a broadcast by Herbert Morrison on Sunday 30th June 1946 when the Lord President spoke for 15 minutes under the title 'Britain Gets Going Again'. Winston Churchill sent a letter to the BBC arguing that this talk could not be considered non-controversial and merited a response from the Opposition. It is hard not to have sympathy for Churchill's view. Morrison's broadcast was littered with examples of the Government's successes since the end of the war; "Since June last year we have cut down the number of people working for the forces and their supplies by about six millions – that is by about half a million every month... 97 out of every hundred now ready for work are employed... the building industry is being

⁹² Recorded in Haley's diaries, 4-7-1946, HALY 13-35, CAC.

doubled in size over eighteen months... How are our exports looking? They are reviving wonderfully".⁹³ He even made an ambitious political claim that if Labour's attempt 'to combine order with liberty' was successful, 'we will have invented something as revolutionary as some of the previous social inventions which we have given the world, such as our parliamentary system".⁹⁴ Morrison, however, did not believe he had been partial and would not agree to an opposition reply.⁹⁵ As a consequence the Conservatives insisted that the two Parties enter discussions about political broadcasting.⁹⁶

Therefore the Government was using the BBC to its advantage and the BBC was favouring the Government by its own self-censorship. The Opposition and the press could not fail to notice and to react.

The Growing Pressure for an Enquiry into the BBC

From the end of 1945 until the Broadcasting debate on July 16th there was growing pressure on the Government to hold an enquiry into the BBC. Barnett Janner MP asked the first question to the Labour Government on 13th December and was told by the Prime Minister that the administration were undecided on whether there would be an enquiry before the Licence was renewed.⁹⁷ On 24th January 1946 the *Daily Mirror* said it felt it was 'quid pro quo' that if the licence fee payer was to be required to double the amount he or she paid, the BBC should be required to explain why.⁹⁸ Janner asked again about an enquiry on

⁹³ 'Britain Gets Going Again', Morrison, Home Service, 9.15pm, 30-6-1946. Transcript in *The Listener*, 4-7-1946.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cabinet Paper, CP(46)255, 2-7-1946, Morrison believed the broadcast 'could hardly have been less controversial in either matter or manner' CAB 129/11.

⁹⁶ Churchill had already started informal discussions about political broadcasting (e.g. meeting of 18-3-46 in LP's office) – but the Morrison broadcast forced the issue, CAB 124/408.

⁹⁷ Barnett Janner, Parliamentary Debates, 13-12-1945, Vol.417, Col.606-7.

⁹⁸ *Daily Mirror*, 'The BBC's Quid Pro Quo', Editorial, 24-1-1946.

January 29th and on February 19th.⁹⁹ It was not until this third occasion that Attlee told him there would not be an inquiry. This rejection sparked further debate in the Press. In April *The Times* in a leader column and a serving BBC Governor, Arthur Mann, in a letter to *The Times*, both called for an enquiry.¹⁰⁰

The pressure coalesced in a motion put forward by Winston Churchill in June. Brendan Bracken was almost certainly the driving force behind this motion. Bracken had, as noted above, been the only proponent of an enquiry whilst on the Coalition Broadcasting Committee. He was one of the main signatories of a note sent to Churchill by James Stuart on 5th June 1946 asking the leader of the Opposition to lead the charge for an investigation: 'A Motion has been drafted by Messrs Bracken, Crookshank and WS Morrison' Stuart wrote, 'which has been approved by the Committee of Chairman and which reads as follows: - 'To move that the question of the renewal, with or without amendment, of the Charter of the BBC be referred to a Joint Select Committee of both Houses'.¹⁰¹ Churchill agreed to head the list and tabled the motion on 20th June.

By this time there was virtual unanimity amongst the opposition, the press and interested outsiders, of the need for an enquiry. The extent of support can be seen in the debate about the issue in the Lords on 26th June when Lord Listowel, the Post Master General, had to defend the Government's decision not to have an enquiry almost single handed.¹⁰² And, to an even greater degree, it can be seen in the editorials of the press and periodicals. 'It is almost impossible to find a single person who, on due consideration of the question, fails to see the need for a full and public discussion of the working of British broadcasting' *The Spectator*

⁹⁹ Barnett Janner, Parliamentary Debates, 29-1-1946, Vol.418, Col.693-4. And, 19-2-1946, Vol.419, Col.952-953.

¹⁰⁰ *The Times*, leader article, 'BBC Prospects', 8-4-1946, p.5. 'BBC News Policy', letter from Arthur Mann, also p.5.

¹⁰¹ James Stuart to leader of the Opposition, 5-6-1946, in Churchill 2/5, Correspondence A-C, Churchill Papers, CAC.

¹⁰² Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 26-6-1946, Vol.141, Col.1173-1218.

wrote.¹⁰³ Whilst *The Times* said 'the public is unquestionably entitled, before the Charter is renewed, to the benefit of a thorough survey and adjudication'.¹⁰⁴

There were a variety of different motivations driving interested parties to call for an enquiry. Some, like *The Daily Mirror*, were triggered by the rise in the Licence Fee. Others, like Arthur Mann, were motivated by political and personal reasons.¹⁰⁵ Most, however, were motivated by the desire to investigate the enormous changes that the BBC had undergone over the course of the war, in size, in structure and in purpose. As well as an increase in spending of 150%, the BBC now had 11,349 employees against 4,300 in 1939.¹⁰⁶ It had two national channels, soon to be three, and was broadcasting an overseas propaganda service to over twenty countries. There had also been rumours of internal crises left unreported during the war (such as that surrounding the departure of Sir Frederick Ogilvie, Reith's successor as Director General until 1942).¹⁰⁷

Some of those calling for an enquiry were also concerned that the 'heavy hand of Whitehall' which had controlled the BBC during the war 'was never quite removed'.¹⁰⁸ A *Times* editorial on 22nd June suggested that, over the last 6 years, 'The BBC has entered into fundamentally new relations with the Government' which deserved to be examined.¹⁰⁹ On the 29th June *The News Chronicle* wondered 'What should be the relationships between broadcasting and

¹⁰³ *The Spectator*, 'Scrutiny of the BBC', 28-6-1946, p.650.

¹⁰⁴ *The Times*, leader article, 'A BBC Inquiry', 27-6-1946, p.5c.

¹⁰⁵ Arthur Mann argued that news and Parliamentary affairs were not receiving enough airtime. He had a history of taking principled stances when editor of the *Yorkshire Post* in the 1930s and later over Suez. See heated correspondence in BoG papers 1946, between G2/46 and G33/46, R1/82/1, BBC-WAC

¹⁰⁶ BoG Papers 1948. Comparison of numbers of pre-war and present staff, Note by director of administration G69/48-1939: 4,300 (total) 1948: 11,349, R1/84/3, BBC-WAC.

¹⁰⁷ Ogilvie had been effectively dismissed as DG of the BBC in January 1942 because the Governors did not think him capable enough. This was kept secret at the time and subsequently. Haley told Morrison prior to the Broadcasting debate after Ogilvie began writing to *The Times*. See Flett to Morrison, 'Sir Frederick Ogilvie', 13-7-1946, re Haley note. CAB 124/25.

¹⁰⁸ *Time and Tide*, 'No BBC Commission – Why?', 6-7-1946, p.627.

¹⁰⁹ *The Times*, 'BBC Select Committee', 22-6-1946.

Government?’ and suggested that it was up to an enquiry to find out. Some Conservatives were equally anxious to illuminate the tangled relationship of the BBC and the Government and protect it from Cabinet Ministers. Brendan Bracken told Sir Ian Fraser, an ex-Governor of the BBC, on the 24th June that he had tabled the motion, “To strengthen the BBC” and “to ensure its independence against Herbert Morrison”.¹¹⁰

When the Government presented its reasons for not having an enquiry in the Broadcasting Policy White Paper issued on 2nd July it increased rather than removed the speculation.¹¹¹ The three reasons it gave for not having an enquiry were: that the BBC had only been operating in normal (peacetime) conditions for less than a year which was not enough time to evaluate its position; that technology was moving forward too quickly right now to make a proper assessment; and that international agreements on wavelengths had yet to be revised.

The Spectator called the White Paper ‘completely unacceptable... in almost every respect a thoroughly bad document’.¹¹² The three reasons all seemed surprisingly weak. It was the changes wrought by war that the public were interested in, said *Time and Tide*, not the twelve months of peace.¹¹³ The argument that technology was moving too quickly could have been made at any time in the post war period. And in the broadcasting debate Ian Orr-Ewing suggested that an enquiry should strengthen the Government’s position when negotiating future international agreements on wavelengths.¹¹⁴ The naïveté of the

¹¹⁰ Haley diaries, 25-6-1946, HALY 13-35, CAC.

¹¹¹ Parliamentary Papers, Broadcasting Policy White Paper, Cmd.6852, Vol.XX., 2-7-1946.

¹¹² *The Spectator*, ‘Bad News About Broadcasting’, 5-7-1946, p.2.

¹¹³ *Time and Tide*, ‘No BBC Commission – Why?’, 6-7-1946, p.627.

¹¹⁴ Ian Orr-Ewing, Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting Debate, 16-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.1086. PP Eckersley, ex-chief engineer of the BBC, also asserted that there was not a limit on wavelengths,

Government's arguments made some people even more suspicious of the relationship between the state and the national broadcaster; 'the White Paper is indeed very disquieting' *Time and Tide* wrote, 'It seems to view the monopoly as taking its place in the national propaganda machine'.¹¹⁵

There is no evidence to suggest that, despite the significant amount of pressure, Morrison ever reconsidered his original decision not to have an immediate enquiry. Rather the Government papers indicate that he spent his time preparing for the broadcasting debate by collecting additional arguments not to have an enquiry. He asked his Assistant Secretary Martin Flett to look over the papers of the Coalition Broadcasting Committee to confirm that but for Bracken's contrariness they too would have voted against an enquiry.¹¹⁶ He calculated the length of time it took the Government to appoint the Ullswater Committee and react to its report.¹¹⁷ And he contacted William Haley and asked for information showing how the BBC's reorganisation would make an enquiry very difficult.¹¹⁸

There are a few probable reasons why Morrison was not affected by the pressure for an immediate enquiry. He was conscious that the BBC was in the midst of launching new services and restructuring the organisation and that an enquiry would make this more difficult. He may well still have been worried about the implications of an investigation for the BBC's new overseas services. This had been one of the original reasons against an enquiry which Flett had raised immediately before the meeting of the August 1945 Broadcasting committee.¹¹⁹ But most importantly, Morrison was very happy with the situation as it stood. This

as the Government suggested: 'there are no real technical limitations whatsoever barring the expansion of broadcasting'. Eckersley letter to *The Times*, 16-7-1946.

¹¹⁵ *Time and Tide*, *ibid.*, p.627.

¹¹⁶ Based on note from Flett to Morrison, 21-6-1946, CAB 124/25.

¹¹⁷ Flett to Morrison, 24-6-1946. From appointment to White paper – fourteen months. The committee itself took eight and a half months, CAB 124/25.

¹¹⁸ Haley diaries, 25-6-1946, HALY 13-35, CAC.

¹¹⁹ See above, memorandum from Flett to Morrison, 27-8-1945, CAB 124/399.

was particularly true because he could make a direct comparison between political communication on the BBC and political communication in the newspapers. From Morrison's perspective the BBC was responsible and impartial, the newspapers were irresponsible and partisan. If there should be any enquiry, Morrison believed, it should be into the Press, not into the BBC.¹²⁰

Morrison did, however, have to make a concession. Calls for a BBC enquiry had spread to his own party and he faced a potentially difficult battle to force the Charter through without some sort of compromise. He therefore told the Parliamentary Labour Party that he would reduce the length of the Charter to five years and promised to hold an enquiry before the end of that date.¹²¹

The Government's intransigence up to this point and its determination to preserve the status quo unquestioned caused people to raise fundamental questions about the nature of the BBC and about its relationship with Government.¹²² It increased awareness of this relationship going forward and ensured that the Conservatives would not give the Government unchallenged access to the microphone again. It also led people to question Labour's commitment to open-ness in other socialised industries.¹²³ Morrison had always argued that socialised industries would maintain public trust via frequent open enquiries. His refusal to have one into the BBC made this claim seem much less credible.

Had the Government recognised people's concerns and opened the BBC to public scrutiny in mid-1946 it might have allayed suspicion about the

¹²⁰ Morrison made the contrast between broadcasting and the Press explicit during the Broadcasting debate when he called for an enquiry into the latter, Parliamentary Debates, 16-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.1084.

¹²¹ Note from CPM (privy council office) to Morrison re speech to PLP, 12-7-1946, CAB 124/25.

¹²² During the Commons debate Henderson Stewart, Brendan Bracken, Lady Megan Lloyd George, WJ Brown, KWM Pickthorn and Herbert Butcher all questioned the nature of the relationship between the BBC and the Government. Hansard, 16-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.1118.

¹²³ Lord Brabazon, 'Is this the way the mines are going to be run – in a spirit of perpetual self-satisfaction?'... Do they really want these organisations kept up to date by inquiry and improvement...?' Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 26-6-1946, Vol.141, Col.1182.

Corporation's independence and impartiality. That it did not mean these suspicions were encouraged and one of the key arguments in favour of the continuation of the monopoly was undermined.

No Change

Morrison's concession on the BBC enquiry did not represent a shift in Labour's attitude towards broadcasting. The Government remained outwardly unconscious of the potential problems associated with its excessive closeness to and control of the BBC. It maintained and in some cases increased its formal and informal connections. The BBC's new Charter and Licence perpetuated the key elements of Government influence. Ministers continued to use the broadcaster to make frequent statements to the nation. Departments remained convinced that the BBC should be their ally on Government campaigns and receive most of its information from Government sources. The Cabinet began talks with the Opposition regarding political broadcasting but did not question its assumption that the BBC was incapable of organising political broadcasting on its own. Over the course of the next three years each of these would be questioned, by the BBC itself, by the Conservative Opposition, and by the press, such that eventually, not only would the persistence of Government control seem untenable, but so, to some, would the maintenance of the BBC status quo.

SECTION 4: Continued Government Influence Compromises the BBC 1946-48

Continued Government Influence: The New Constitution

The BBC Charter that was renewed in December 1946 was essentially unchanged by the heated discussions of the summer. It maintained the Postmaster General's power of veto. It perpetuated the right of any department to

broadcast whatever it liked whenever it liked.¹²⁴ It made regular coverage of Parliament a written BBC obligation¹²⁵, and it allowed the Postmaster General to require the BBC to 'refrain from sending any broadcast matter (either particular or general)'. This requirement could also 'specify whether or not the Corporation may at its discretion announce that the note has been given'.¹²⁶ In other words, the Government could use the microphone whenever it wanted. It could censor anything to be broadcast on the BBC. And, it could ask the BBC not to tell anyone that the content had been censored. In television the Government's powers were made even broader still.¹²⁷ Though these clauses were similar to those included in the 1936 licence, the reaction of the press and the BBC to their renewal illustrates both how far broadcasting had changed over the previous decade and highlights contemporary fears about the BBC-Government relationship.

Some of the press were appalled at the breadth of powers taken by the Government. The Charter contains 'the foundations for an almost limitless censorship' *Time and Tide* wrote.¹²⁸ 'There is too much at the present time of the Government taking powers "which will naturally never be used"', the magazine continued, 'The fact is that under the monopoly's charter the Government has taken powers so unspecified and therefore so wide as to enable it to control completely, if it wants, what the listener can hear'.¹²⁹ *The Spectator* was of the same opinion, writing that 'To give that authority, without qualification or

¹²⁴ BBC Licence, Cmd.6975, 29-11-1946, Clause 4(3).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* BBC Licence, Clause 4(2).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* BBC Licence, Clause 4(4).

¹²⁷ *Ibid.* BBC Licence, Clause 5, 'The Corporation shall observe and perform such stipulations conditions and restrictions and do such acts and things in relation to the Television Broadcasting Stations or the Television Service as from time to time may be prescribed by the Postmaster General in writing'.

¹²⁸ *Time and Tide*, 'The BBC Charter', 14-12-1946, p.1212.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1212.

reservation, to every Government department in Whitehall or its purlieus is altogether excessive'.¹³⁰

The BBC had been brought in, very late in the process, to make final alterations to the draft.¹³¹ Haley was able to remove some of the more stringent aspects of Government control but was still unhappy with the outcome, especially clauses 4(3) and 4(4). He and the Governors were particularly bothered by 4(4) which specified that the Government could stop the Corporation broadcasting something and prevent the Corporation telling anyone it had been stopped. They felt the Government should only be allowed that power of veto on issues of national security.¹³²

The Governors were anxious enough about it to take legal advice the following February. They asked Cyril Radcliffe, the highly respected barrister and later Lord of Appeal, whether they could challenge the clause. Radcliffe confirmed their fears. He advised them that they had to interpret the word "announce" in the final sentence of Clause 4(4) extending "to any communication of the facts addressed to the public or intended to reach the public" whether on the radio or by any other method of communication.¹³³ To challenge this the BBC would have to wait until the renewal of the Charter in five years time. Until then Government power over the BBC would remain very much intact.

¹³⁰ *The Spectator*, 'The Government and Broadcasting', 19-7-1946, p.53. Though written before the ratification of the Licence, this article is referring specifically to the proposal that the BBC be compelled to broadcast "any pronouncement or other matter which a Department of his Majesty's Government may require".

¹³¹ Haley told the Board of Governors that he had only a few days in which to suggest amendments to the Charter and Licence, BoG Minutes, 27-11-1946, R1/14/1, BBC-WAC.

¹³² 'Postmaster-General's Right of Veto', G15/47. Note by DG to Governors, 26-2-1947, BoG Papers, R1/83/1, BBC-WAC.

¹³³ Cyril Radcliffe to BBC, quoted in G15/47 PMG's right of veto. Note by DG 26-2-47, R1/83/1, BBC-WAC.

Continued Government Influence: Ministerial Broadcasting

Despite the fracas surrounding the Morrison broadcast of June 1946 and Strachey's attempt to broadcast in July, Ministers continued to use the BBC microphone freely. Tom Williams, James Griffiths, Stafford Cripps and ten other Ministers made radio statements before the end of the year.¹³⁴ On top of this many Labour MPs and Ministers were appearing on BBC discussion programmes. Ministers now appeared to assume it was their right to talk to the people directly without being challenged, edited or interrupted.

By late 1946 the Conservatives became convinced that Labour voices were being significantly over-represented on radio. To prove it Lord Woolton hired a media research firm called 'Watching Briefs' to monitor the amount of airtime each party received on the BBC.¹³⁵ Basing their analysis on the month of December 1946, Watching Briefs counted 32 talks on political subjects by 22 different speakers. 15 of these speakers were, according to the research, Socialists, 6 were Liberal and 11 were independents. None were given by Conservatives.¹³⁶

Though publicly the BBC disputed the figures recorded by the Conservatives, privately it had already recognised there was a problem.¹³⁷ Prompted by a comment in the House by Woodrow Wyatt in November Haley had written to Morrison's Personal Secretary, John Pimlott, to make him aware of the disparity between Government and opposition broadcasting. In the note he quoted the Ullswater report to the effect that these Ministerial statements "tend naturally to

¹³⁴ Ministerial Broadcasts, R34/553/2, BBC-WAC.

¹³⁵ Letter from Lord Woolton to James Stuart, copied to Winston Churchill, 12-11-1946, Churchill Correspondence 2/38 (Public and Political: General 1946-51) Political Broadcasting, CAC.

¹³⁶ Copy of Conservative Central Office Statement; Politics and the BBC. An Analysis of Broadcast Talks, Ga1/47, 25-1-1947, R1/83/4, BBC-WAC.

¹³⁷ The BBC claimed that the Conservative figures only related to the Home Service broadcast from London and excluded the appearance of Conservatives on programmes which were less explicitly political (like 'Brains Trust'). BBC statement in *The Times*, 30-1-1947.

stress the beneficence of Government activities".¹³⁸ Pimlott drafted a follow-on note to Morrison in December.¹³⁹ As a consequence, Morrison spoke to Attlee about reducing the number of Ministerial broadcasts, and John Pimlott set about trying to define impartiality.¹⁴⁰

This experience did not, however, lead Morrison to question the Government's dominance of broadcasting. Instead, he was anxious that the imbalance between Government and Opposition broadcasting was becoming too noticeable, and that the Ministerial broadcast had been over-used as compared to other methods of communication.¹⁴¹ His office made sure that Rowan's draft of the Prime Minister's Cabinet Paper spelled this out. Excessive numbers of Ministerial broadcasts, it said, 'debase their value and reduce their effectiveness'.¹⁴² By reducing the number of broadcasts and seeking alternatives they could make the remainder more powerful. Attlee issued a note to Ministers on the 3rd January to this effect.¹⁴³ As a result, the number of Ministerial broadcasts dropped to nine in the first half of 1947 (two of them by Attlee).

However, after the economic crisis in July Morrison sought to increase the number again. On the 31st July he told the Home Information Services committee that 'there might with advantage be somewhat more such broadcasts'.¹⁴⁴ Though this was followed by three in the next four weeks (four including Morrison's Party Political Broadcast), the number then dropped again so that in November the Lord President talked to Attlee about having a regular, monthly broadcast about

¹³⁸ Haley to Pimlott, 19-11-1946, regarding alleged verbal directive, CAB 124/33.

¹³⁹ Pimlott to Morrison, regarding the number of Ministerial broadcasts and the procedure surrounding them, 19-12-1946, CAB 124/33.

¹⁴⁰ Morrison to Attlee, 24-12-1946, regarding the number of Ministerial broadcasts and recommending the use of alternative means of publicity, CAB 124/33.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² This sentence was specifically added to Rowan's draft of CP(47)7, 3-1-47, by Morrison's office, see JAR Pimlott to Morrison, 30-12-1946 and Pimlott to Rowan, 1-1-1947, CAB 124/33.

¹⁴³ Cabinet Paper, CP(47)7, 3-1-1947, 'Ministerial Broadcasting', CAB 129/16.

¹⁴⁴ IH(47)1st, Minutes, Morrison, 31-7-1947, CAB 134/354.

the economic situation. Attlee thought that these might be given by Stafford Cripps but Morrison, concerned in case other Ministers might think this disproportionately raised Cripps' stature, suggested they be given by a range of Ministers.¹⁴⁵

Morrison was particularly concerned that these broadcasts be perceived to be absolutely impartial. This was less to protect the listener from possible Party political influence than to make sure that they would not provoke a response from the Opposition. Morrison was very explicit about this. 'The scope and tone of these broadcasts would have to be national' he told Attlee, 'and it would be essential that they should not give rise to opposition replies. If this could not be secured then I think the idea should be dropped'.¹⁴⁶ Morrison and other Ministers remained convinced that a 15 minute monologue given by a Minister could be impartial.

Haley found it hard to agree. Reviewing the status of Ministerial Broadcasting for the BBC's Board of Governors at the beginning of 1948 he said that while 'It is true that they were considerably reduced last year... the basic difficulty remains'.¹⁴⁷ How could the listener tell the difference between factual information communicated by a Government Minister from straightforward party political propaganda? Regarding Hugh Gaitskell's recent broadcast on petrol rationing, for example, Haley said it was questionable whether it 'was necessary in the interests of carrying on the King's Government or whether it put the Government in a more favourable light'.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, how could a review of the economic progress made by the Government in 1947, due to be made by Sir Stafford

¹⁴⁵ Morrison to Attlee, regarding conversation of the 16th about possible Cripps' broadcasts, 17-11-1947, CAB 124/33.

¹⁴⁶ Morrison to Attlee, 25-11-1947, CAB 124/33.

¹⁴⁷ Haley to Board of Governors, BoG Papers, G13/48, 29-1-1948, R1/84/1, BBC-WAC.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Cripps in January 1948, fail to be politically partisan?¹⁴⁹ On February 17th Haley brought up his concerns at a meeting between the BBC and the Government. 'Ministerial broadcasts on controversial subjects caused difficulties for the BBC', the Director General said.¹⁵⁰ It was hard to distinguish between controversial and non controversial subjects, 'especially when the "facts" of the situation were the subject of dispute between parties'. Despite Haley's concerns, Morrison would not agree to stop or even reduce Ministerial broadcasts but said he understood the issue and would 'keep a close watch'.¹⁵¹

The number of Ministerial broadcasts did decline slowly, but there is evidence to suggest that Labour never became conscious of the difficulties associated with them.¹⁵² In January 1949 Philip Noel-Baker wrote to the Prime Minister requesting time to broadcast on the Commonwealth because 'there has been a good deal of irresponsible comment in the Press and elsewhere implying that the Labour Government is giving the Commonwealth away, or at least letting it break up'.¹⁵³ Though he assured Attlee that the talk would be non-controversial it was clear that the Minister was using the BBC as a means to counter unfavourable comment in other media. Attlee approved the broadcast.

For Labour Ministers the BBC was a channel through which they could speak directly to the people. Unlike the newspapers the BBC was not, they thought, a filter but simply a means of access to the homes of their electorate. When they were denied access Ministers tended to become quite angry (as with John Strachey in July 1946). Equally, when Ministers gave the BBC statements, they

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* Cripps eventually had to cancel this broadcast, planned for January 22nd.

¹⁵⁰ Minutes of meeting between Government and BBC, 17-2-1948, CAB 124/410.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² There were 31 Labour ministerial broadcasts in 1948 compared with 26 in 1949 and 18 in 1950 (not including Party Political Broadcasts), R51/414/1 to R51/414/4.

¹⁵³ Philip Noel-Baker to PM, 28-1-1949, CAB 124/33. Approved by Attlee the next day although subsequently cancelled for other reasons, then rearranged for later that year (Noel-Baker to Attlee, 5.5.49, CRA reply 5.5.49).

expected them to be read out verbatim. When they were not, they attacked the BBC for irresponsibility and misrepresentation. In May 1947 George Isaacs accused the BBC of prolonging the dockers' strike by not reading out his three paragraph statement on the news, in full. AP Ryan, Editor of News, responded that the BBC had read out two of the paragraphs and had only briefly mentioned the first paragraph because it 'summarised past history'.¹⁵⁴ Unmollified, Isaacs told the BBC that in future he would make it clear when an important announcement should, for policy reasons, be read out in full.¹⁵⁵ Despite this assumption of compliance, Ministers publicly applauded the idea of BBC autonomy, and did not seem to view their actions as a threat to this autonomy.

Continued Government Influence: Economic Campaigns, 1947

The persistent assumption that the BBC would and should be the ally of the Government is seen nowhere more clearly than during the economic campaigns of 1947. The language used was even reminiscent of the Second World War. This was the country's 'economic Dunkirk' and the Government expected the BBC to act in the same way as it did in the difficult days of 1940. The BBC did its best but was increasingly uncomfortable with the Government's interference and direction.

Herbert Morrison's office had worked closely with the BBC before 1947 but in that year it established a more regular, reciprocal information channel. The Government could pass detailed economic reports through this channel and the BBC could discuss specific programmes and approaches. This reciprocal channel came about as a result of an approach by Francis Williams, acting in his role as a member of the Prosperity Campaign Committee.

¹⁵⁴ Note by Editor (News) to Board of Governors, 5-5-1947, G36A/47, R1/83/1, BBC-WAC.

¹⁵⁵ Isaacs to DG (BBC), contained within papers to Board of Governors, G43/47, 21-5-1947, R1/83/2, BBC-WAC.

On 7th March Francis Williams wrote to the Controller of Talks (RA Rendall), the head of the Home Service, (REL Lindsay-Wellington), the Editor of News (AP Ryan), the deputy Editor of News (JCS MacGregor), the head of Features (L Gilliam) and the head of television (Norman Collins) inviting them to a meeting of the Prosperity Committee at 10 Downing Street to talk about the communication of the forthcoming Economic White Paper and the campaign to raise productivity.¹⁵⁶ The Committee was keen that the BBC help explain the White Paper to the country and make the crisis and its implications comprehensible to the listener. Williams said he wanted to know 'what plans the BBC has for further explanation of the economic state of the nation to its listeners in the way of discussions, feature programmes and so on'.¹⁵⁷ Williams' intention was to create a "successful chain of persuasion" across various media to increase national productivity over the course of 1947.¹⁵⁸

The BBC had already begun to play its part in coping with the developing national crisis. It had temporarily stopped television broadcasting and the Third Programme to save fuel. Haley had offered Attlee access to the microphone to make a national appeal. And prior to the meeting at Number 10 it began preparing its response and organising a whole series of talks and discussions. In doing this the BBC found one of their difficulties was 'the lack of a central point where they could obtain information, ventilate their own ideas, or find out where information was to be got; and the lack of a news gathering organisation which would supply them with hot news stories on the production front, in specific factories'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Letter from Francis Williams to R.A. Rendall, 7-3-1947, R34/701, BBC-WAC. Williams told Rendall, 'I am also writing to REL Lindsay-Wellington, Mr. AP Ryan, Mr. JCS MacGregor, Mr. L. Gilliam [features] and Mr. N. Collins [TV]'.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ AP Ryan letter to DG (BBC) re Production drive, 18-3-1947, R34/701, BBC-WAC.

¹⁵⁹ Prosperity Campaign Meeting, minutes, 20-3-1947, CAB 124/909.

The Lord President's office thought it could be this source and as a result of the meeting Puck Boon became the principal conduit of information between the BBC and the Government on the production drive. He began collecting stories from departments to give to the BBC and became the central point of contact for senior BBC staff. The relationship was evidently fruitful, as Rendall wrote to the Ministry of Food in April that 'the arrangement with the Lord President's office... is proving very useful to some of our programme departments, particularly the Features department'.¹⁶⁰

Boon was equally pleased with the cooperative arrangement and, on 1st May 1947, reported back to the committee that the BBC were 'now giving very satisfactory treatment to the Production Drive'.¹⁶¹ In addition to the weekly production reports and coverage of Press Conferences, for example, the BBC were planning a major new series called 'Britain's Crisis'. This was to consist of eight talks at 9.15pm each Wednesday on the Home Service, dealing with a different economic theme each week. They would be given by Graham Hutton, an independent economics expert. Each talk would be followed, on the Thursday, by a 45 minute discussion between various experts hosted by George Schuster, along the same theme. They were due to start on Wednesday May 7th.

Harman Grisewood, the Assistant Controller of Talks, had spoken to Boon about the series. Grisewood even went so far as to ask 'the [Prosperity Campaign] committee to assist him by suggesting names of people to take part in the debate, and by giving guidance on the emphasis to be given in the programme'.¹⁶² The Committee were sent synopses of the talks and, at their meeting on the 8th May, discussed them with the BBC producer, G. Steedman.

¹⁶⁰ R.A. Rendall letter to Professor Robert Rae, MAF, 16-4-1947, R51/205/5, BBC-WAC.

¹⁶¹ PC(O)C(47)16th, Minutes, 'The BBC and the Production Drive', 1-5-1947, CAB 124/910.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

They questioned him in some detail. For example John Pimlott asked Steedman 'if full justice was done to the treatment of planning in a democracy. The discussion in [programme] No. 8 dealt with the administrative details of planning and not with the place that planning occupied in a democracy. Mr. Steedman explained that Mr Hutton was very much alive to that point, and that it would run all the way through the series'.¹⁶³

Despite this close involvement the BBC was keen to maintain the impression of independence. An editorial in *The Listener* introducing the new series on 8th May 1947 went out of its way to stress the lack of Government–BBC collaboration. 'The Government has published a White Paper and launched a propaganda campaign: 'We work or want' with graphs illustrating the production and export targets that have been set. Parallel but entirely independent of this – and here we may stress the non-party nature of the programmes – a new series of broadcasts began yesterday under the general title of 'Britain's Crisis'.¹⁶⁴ As already demonstrated, this was not actually true. Presumably the BBC was self-conscious about its connections and felt the series might be compromised if the Government's involvement was revealed.

In addition to 'Britain's Crisis' the BBC broadcast an impressive range of programmes to explain Britain's economic circumstances in 1947. The Corporation counted 62 broadcasts on the economic situation for the three months between 1st June and 31st August. This included the Home, Light, Third and Regional Programmes and everything from Graham Hutton's talks with the follow-up discussions, to educational broadcasts, pieces on Woman's Hour, feature programmes, and Ministerial broadcasts (this list does not include

¹⁶³ PC(O)C(47)17th, Minutes, 8-5-1947, CAB 124/910.

¹⁶⁴ *The Listener*, Editorial, 'Britain's Crisis', 8-5-1947, p.702.

mentions of the crisis on the news).¹⁶⁵ Lindsay Wellington was also planning more programming in the autumn, including documentaries on 'Britain at Work', 'Coal' and 'The Tradition of Courage'.¹⁶⁶

When the economic situation was made much worse by the July currency crisis even this was not enough. The Government put even greater pressure on the Corporation to soothe national anxieties and encourage greater economic effort. The Chairman and Governors of the BBC were 'frightfully anxious to live up to their responsibilities'.¹⁶⁷ Lady Reading, Governor and Deputy Chairman of the BBC, wanted the BBC to explain the crisis to ordinary people and tell them 'what they personally could do in the way of food preservation, salvage, and national savings'. Her fellow Governor Barbara Ward 'suggested encouragement and enlightenment were needed, particularly on the world food situation, inflation, coal and incentives'.¹⁶⁸

William Haley, though conscious of the BBC's 'responsibilities', was concerned that it might be moving too closely into line with the Government. He felt the Board of Governors 'do not face up to the fact it is predominantly a political crisis' and the BBC must not immediately assume the position of the Government.¹⁶⁹ He therefore drew up a long memorandum which he gave to the Board and to senior BBC staff outlining how he thought the BBC should behave. It split the BBC's responsibilities into the moral, the economic and the political. The BBC should try to help morally and economically by discouraging the black market and explaining the economic situation to people as best it could. 'On the political side',

¹⁶⁵ 'Broadcasts on the Crisis', September 1947, R51/55, BBC-WAC.

¹⁶⁶ Lindsay Wellington to DG, 'Autumn Plans Bearing on "The Crisis"', Features, 17-9-1947, R51/55, BBC-WAC.

¹⁶⁷ Haley Diaries, 18-9-1947, referring to Governors' Board Meeting, HALY 13-34, CAC.

¹⁶⁸ BoG Minutes, Minute 224, 'BBC and the National Crisis', 18-9-1947, R1/15/1, BBC-WAC.

¹⁶⁹ Haley Diaries, 15-9-1947, referring to special meeting of Board of Governor's on 18th September, HALY 13-34, CAC.

however, Haley said that 'it was important that the BBC should not try to make out that there was political unity when in fact the country was divided'. 'It is not the BBC's duty' he wrote, 'to win any political battles'.¹⁷⁰

The three way split of the BBC's responsibilities was difficult to maintain in practice. Economic issues dominated the political agenda throughout this period and the BBC was showing rather a lot of the 'Dunkirk spirit'. Shortly after distributing his memorandum, therefore, Haley found himself telling programme makers to be careful about how they used the economic information the Government was giving the BBC (prepared by the recently formed Economic Information Unit). The Bulletin which was distributed by the EIU, 'should be used as background information and in no sense as a guide as to what Corporation should put out' Haley wrote.¹⁷¹

The Director General also found himself having to police any further encroachment of the BBC's impartiality by the Government. In November, at a meeting of the Information Services Committee, Morrison "drew attention to recent announcements which had been made over the BBC regarding the cut in sugar and the rationing of potatoes'. Morrison was concerned because 'Both these announcements had been couched in extremely bald terms'. Though the Lord President 'recognised that Departments had in all probability provided the BBC with explanatory notes' it seemed they had not been used. Morrison therefore 'thought it would be helpful if Departments which had unpalatable announcements to make should, where possible, agree with the BBC the terms of a short explanation which would accompany the official announcement'.

¹⁷⁰ 'The BBC and the Crisis', note by the DG, 30-9-1947, R34/339, BBC-WAC.

¹⁷¹ Extract, Programme Policy Meeting Minutes, Minute 199, 'Economic Bulletin', 2-12-1947, R51/205/5, BBC-WAC.

Morrison 'also drew attention to the importance of proper timing, bearing in mind the political repercussions which such announcements might cause'.¹⁷²

Haley was not prepared to sanction such an infringement of BBC news' autonomy. All Government announcements should be treated on their news merit, he told the Programme Policy meeting on the 18th November. 'The wording of news items in the BBC news bulletins is a Corporation responsibility' not a Government one.¹⁷³

However, the fact that Haley had to become so involved in protecting the integrity of the BBC demonstrates the extent to which, even by 1947, the Government assumed the BBC would be its immediate ally and partner. The BBC did not make it any easier to define the parameters of the relationship by cooperating with the Government and using the Government as its main source of information. The editorial in *The Listener* and Haley's autumn memorandum show how concerned the BBC was about its proximity to the Government. The Government showed no such signs of concern. Morrison in particular was determined to maintain the closeness and was not worried about the risk of partiality. This can be seen even more clearly by the way in which he appointed a new BBC Chairman and Board of Governors in 1946 and 1947.

Continued Government Influence: The BBC Chairman and Governors

The manner of the appointment of the BBC Chairman and Governors in 1946 and 1947 is important as a way of judging the degree to which the Government genuinely sought independent and impartial appointees or simply those that were perceived to be so. The BBC Governors were the guardians of the BBC's freedom from political and commercial influence. To quote Morrison in the 1946

¹⁷² IH(47)2nd, Minutes, 'Terms and Timing of Government Announcements', 12-11-1947, CAB 124/404.

¹⁷³ Programme Policy Meeting Minutes, min.192, 'Wording of News', 18-11-1947, R34/615/6, BBC-WAC.

broadcasting debate, 'The Governors are the BBC'.¹⁷⁴ Their integrity was also important as a validation of Labour's other nationalisation plans. The BBC board was the model which Labour said it would use when structuring other nationalised industries.

In 1946 and 1947 there was plenty of opportunity to demonstrate the proper manner in which to appoint BBC Chairmen and Governors. In April 1946 all five wartime Governors of the BBC were set to complete their 5 year terms and needed replacing. And towards the end of 1946 Morrison decided to ask Sir Allan Powell, the BBC wartime Chairman, if he would step down to make way for a new candidate.

Morrison had been considering who should succeed the BBC Governors since February 1946. He and John Pimlott put together an initial list of 22 names which they then discussed with Patrick Gordon Walker and Maurice Webb before passing on to the Cabinet Secretary Edward Bridges. This then increased to over 45 potential candidates from whom Morrison picked five (with a couple of alternatives) to recommend to the Prime Minister.¹⁷⁵ He also forwarded the list to the Post Master General, Lord Listowel. The five first choices were Ernest Whitfield (unsuccessful Labour candidate in 1931 & 1935), IJ Hayward (prominent trade unionist and Chairman of Education Committee of LCC), Barbara Ward (active member of the Labour Party), David Low (well known cartoonist with Labour sympathies), and GM Young (historian with Conservative sympathies).

Listowel was taken aback by the predominance of left-wingers on Morrison's list. 'I think it would be a serious mistake' he wrote to Morrison, 'if four of the new

¹⁷⁴ Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, Broadcasting, 16-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.1080.

¹⁷⁵ The list included George Orwell, Note to EE Bridges, 7-3-1946. Herbert Morrison sent his five recommendations to the PM on 12-3-1946, and forwarded it to the Post Master General, CAB 124/413.

Governors were either members of the Labour Party or familiar to the public as exponents of Labour views'.¹⁷⁶ Morrison accepted the criticism and Hayward was replaced by the non-political Air Marshall Sir Richard Peck, David Low was dropped in favour of the Chair of the Women's Volunteer Service, Lady Reading and GM Young was exchanged for the more outwardly Conservative Geoffrey Lloyd. Had Lord Listowel not made such a vocal objection to Morrison's choices there is no reason to believe he would have changed them.

When it came to choosing a chairman later in 1946, Morrison was equally keen to find a left winger. In October he wrote to Attlee, 'My own mind has been working on the lines of appointing a Chairman whose sympathies are towards the Left – though not necessarily violently so'.¹⁷⁷ He found his ideal candidate in Lord Inman, 'a sane and reasonably left figure, not too tarred with "party" but making no secret of his membership of the Labour Party'.¹⁷⁸ Unfortunately, only three months after Morrison appointed Lord Inman he was asked to become Lord Privy Seal and in April 1947 Morrison had to find another candidate. Once again Morrison looked for someone with clear Labour sympathies. He decided on another Labour peer, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe.

The appointment of Labour sympathisers as Chairman and Governors of the BBC was not, in itself, surprising or necessarily detrimental to the integrity of the BBC. However, it does demonstrate the determination of Morrison to maintain the closeness of the Government to the BBC and his blindness to the potential damage it might do to the BBC's reputation. This was not lost on outsiders. Lord Reith, who had been hoping to be invited to be chairman, told Haley that the

¹⁷⁶ Lord Listowel to Morrison, 14-3-1946, CAB 124/413.

¹⁷⁷ Morrison to Attlee, 14-10-1946, CAB 124/413. Morrison thought this might be slightly balanced by a vice-Chairman who was 'moderately to the Right or non-political'.

¹⁷⁸ 'E' (presumably Ellen Wilkinson), Ministry of Education, re Lord Inman to Morrison, 24-10-1946, CAB 124/413.

reason he was not was that, 'He was not a member of the Labour party [and] He was not amenable to the Government'.¹⁷⁹

The most determined defender of the BBC's integrity in the late 1940s was not the Board but the Director General. William Haley repeatedly blocked Government attempts to encroach upon the independence of the BBC. He refused to be influenced even when directly criticised by the Prime Minister. He spoke frequently about the need for the BBC to stay aloof from Government. And he avoided the regular advances of Herbert Morrison. In May 1947 Haley noted in his diary that 'Morrison had complained I was reserved towards the Govt. He had apparently no complaints to make agst my impartiality but he thought I could be a bit more forthcoming. This is about the fourth time in the last 18 months Morrison has aired this complaint'.¹⁸⁰

When Haley remained non-compliant Morrison sought to dilute the power of the Director General in favour of the Chairman and Governors. Immediately before Lord Simon's appointment Morrison talked to him about the structure of public corporations and the relationship between the Board and the Executive. He told Lord Simon that the DG of the BBC was too powerful.¹⁸¹ Morrison would later tell Lord Beveridge about the same thing and Beveridge would eventually make this dilution of power one of the recommendations of his 1951 broadcasting report.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Haley diaries, 25-5-1947, HALY 13-34, CAC.

¹⁸⁰ Haley diaries, 13-5-1947, HALY 13-34, CAC.

¹⁸¹ Haley diaries, 13-5-1947, '[Ernest Simon] told me he had been talking to Morrison about his possible investigations into how public corporations should be organised as between Board and Executive. Morrison had said that the DG of the BBC was too powerful' HALY 13-34, CAC.

¹⁸² As well as recommending greater power for the Governors ('the Governors of the future should have as much authority as possible' Cmd.8116, p.177, paragraph 591), the report suggested the Governors take a bigger role in programme policy making – for example by attending Board of Management meetings (paragraphs 581-582).

SECTION 5: The Consequences of Government Control – Excluding Other Voices

The consequences of the Government's continued control of broadcasting are best illustrated by the way in which it was able to exclude other political and commercial voices from the air. It has already been shown how effectively it managed to keep the Opposition off the radio for its first 18 months of office. But it was also able to control the access of less mainstream political voices, and of course commercial ones, even from abroad.

Excluding Non-Mainstream Political Voices

After Morrison's broadcast of 30th June 1946 Churchill insisted that Labour begin discussions about political broadcasting. The two Parties then met on July 30th 1946, without the BBC, and then on November 5th, with a further discussion after the completion of the Aide Memoire on February 28th (the BBC was invited to the latter occasions).¹⁸³ At the first meeting, in the BBC's absence, Labour and the Conservatives decided that Party political broadcasting should be resumed. Each Party should be allocated a number of political slots on the radio each year according to the number of votes it received at the last election. The Parties could choose to use these slots as they wished (including which politicians should be allowed to broadcast). In addition, the Government should be allowed to make national broadcasts as long as they were absolutely impartial. They gave these proposals to the BBC to be discussed at the second meeting on political broadcasting on 5th November 1946.

The Chairman at that time, Sir Allan Powell, and William Haley were unhappy with the proposals. They suggested that they represented a return to the practice of the 1930s when the Party Whips would decide who did and did not broadcast.

¹⁸³ Minutes to meetings in CAB 124/408.

This had meant that dissident voices (most notably those of Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George) were blocked from appearing on the radio. The initial draft of the 1946 Aide Memoire on political broadcasting would have effectively formalised this procedure rather than changed it. The BBC Chairman believed this would compromise the Corporation's freedom to safeguard broadcasting in the national interest. The BBC must, he argued, be allowed to invite persons of public eminence to the microphone if the circumstances required it.

But neither Morrison nor Churchill was keen to change the draft.¹⁸⁴ Churchill said there were 'no such eminent men' outside the mainstream today so it did not matter'.¹⁸⁵ If there was such a person, Morrison said, the BBC could always consult the Parties and gain their agreement. This, Haley replied, rather defeated the object. After further discussions they eventually agreed that the BBC could invite people of 'outstanding national eminence' to the microphone. This definition was specifically exalted enough that it would prevent all but very rare invitations, and even on those occasions the Parties would have room to object, should they choose to.¹⁸⁶ This was included in the Aide Memoire on political broadcasting which was eventually agreed and signed off on 6th February 1947.

Throughout the November meeting and those subsequent to it Haley was conscious that the politicians did not think the BBC was competent to organise political broadcasting on its own. On 5th November 'There was a great deal of talk of the responsibility of the political leaders to guide political controversy and the

¹⁸⁴ 'The Chairman and Director-General reported that at the meeting on 5th November they had been faced with complete unanimity of view between the two parties', BoG Minutes, 18-11-1946, R1/14/1, BBC-WAC.

¹⁸⁵ Haley diaries, 5-11-1946, HALY 13-34. This was despite Churchill's comment in 1938 that "the idea that no public man not nominated by Party Whips should be allowed to speak on the radio is not defensible in public policy". Cited by Haley in BoG Papers, G61/46 Political Broadcasting, R1/82/2, BBC-WAC.

¹⁸⁶ As Morrison pointed out in a note to Attlee, 16-1-1947, CAB 124/409.

difficulty of the BBC treading in this field on its own'.¹⁸⁷ This attitude was equally apparent during an argument over political broadcasting a few months later, in August 1947. Clement Attlee had just made a national broadcast regarding the currency crisis. The Conservative Chief Whip then contacted the BBC to tell them Winston Churchill was keen to reply. Told that Churchill would have to use a coupon (one of the Conservative's 5 political slots) since Attlee's broadcast was 'national' and not political the Chief Whip complained. An argument ensued between the Lord President's office and the Opposition. 'At no stage has any reference been made to the BBC' Haley noted in his diary. 'It is strange how even in a row the politicians keep this affair a close c...[*illegible*]. They would do almost anything rather than let the BBC decide the issue – as it legally can under the Aide Memoire'.¹⁸⁸

Though outsiders were unaware of the internecine arguments behind the scenes at the BBC, they were clearly aware of the end result. Only a small number of politicians ever made Party political broadcasts. Those that made broadcasts did so on their own terms not those of the BBC. Once again the BBC was seen to be abdicating its position in favour of the leaders of the political Parties. Not only were other politicians blocked from appearing on air, but so were other non-Party political voices. Haley lamented that 'all the politicians regard their world as a closed world. So long as a reply is forthcoming from an official opposition they really feel all duty of impartiality has been met [sic]. It does not occur to them there are other forces in the community, such as the Church, which may have a right to a say in some matters'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Haley diaries, 5-11-1946, HALY 13-34, CAC.

¹⁸⁸ Haley diaries, 13-8-1947, HALY 13-34, CAC.

¹⁸⁹ Haley diaries, 10-11-1945, HALY 13-35, CAC.

A comparison can be made between this 'closed world' of the politicians on air and the blacklists of the newspaper owners that caused such a stir during the Royal Commission on the Press. Both the owners and the politicians made sure their media outlets were exclusive and that those who they did not want to gain publicity were prevented from gaining it. An important difference, however, was that since Britain had a competitive press there was normally an alternative newspaper through which someone could make sure they were heard. No such alternative existed in broadcasting.

Excluding Commercial Voices

It had been a consistent policy of the British Government since the early 1930s to try to prevent commercial broadcasting to the UK from abroad in order to uphold the monopoly at home. The Labour Government continued this policy after 1945 but with even greater urgency.

The most prominent target of Labour policy was Radio Luxembourg. Radio Luxembourg had been broadcasting to Britain since 1933 and had gained quite a following before the war. As a commercial station broadcasting music and entertainment its programming was quite different from the rather staid BBC (especially on Sundays when Lord Reith insisted the BBC desist from all forms of entertainment).

During the war Radio Luxembourg was twice taken over. First by the Germans in 1940 (who used it for propaganda), and then, in 1945, by the American Army (who did the same). At the end of the war the commercial station was very keen to start broadcasting again. The British Government, however, was determined to stop it. Initially, the Foreign Office thought it might be able to take control of the

station's transmitters itself and use them to broadcast the BBC overseas service to the continent.¹⁹⁰

When it became clear this would not be possible and that Radio Luxembourg might be able to get back on air the F.O. and the Lord President's office began desperately searching for ways to prevent it. They had already encouraged the BBC to counteract the potential revival of Radio Luxembourg by supporting the launch of the Light Programme. This was supposed to give listeners an alternative to overseas commercial radio and undermine its competitive advantage.¹⁹¹ But the Lord President wanted to go further and stop Radio Luxembourg broadcasting entirely. In May and June 1946 Morrison tried to alter the defence regulations to prevent the channel selling advertising time on air to British companies.¹⁹² When this did not work he had Flett ask the Treasury if they could do the same thing via the Finance Bill. When even this was unsuccessful he asked the Board of Trade to introduce exchange controls which would stop Luxembourg buying British records.¹⁹³

Labour justified its concerted campaign against Radio Luxembourg by saying that it was committed, like other British Governments before it, to sustaining the broadcasting monopoly. It also defended its actions by arguing that it was maintaining standards which, it suggested, would inevitably be reduced by a commercial broadcaster. But there was another reason why it found Radio Luxembourg objectionable. One which was outlined in a memorandum from Morrison's office: 'it might be said that an additional reason for disliking

¹⁹⁰ A summary of their attempts can be found in a Foreign Office memorandum, 'Memorandum on Radio Luxembourg', 6-1-1947, CAB 124/407.

¹⁹¹ Flett to Pimlott, 19-2-1946: 'The BBC themselves have taken steps to counteract this [the popularity of Radio Luxembourg] and in fact one of the main purposes of the new Light Programme is to kill any demand for the sort of thing which used to be put out by Radio Luxembourg', CAB 124/407.

¹⁹² Flett to W.E. Phillips (Treasury), 7-6-1946, CAB 124/407.

¹⁹³ Board of Trade letter to Flett, telling him that they are going to be unable to block the export of records to Radio Luxembourg, 11-7-1946, CAB 124/407.

programmes like those of Radio Luxembourg is that we have no control over their content'.¹⁹⁴

This control over content was important not only for maintaining standards but also for preventing specific people or organisations from gaining airtime. Puck Boon, from the Lord President's office, discovered in February 1946 that if Radio Luxembourg began broadcasting again, 'There is a probability that two of their clients will be THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY and the ROAD HAULAGE ASSOCIATION' [his capitals].¹⁹⁵ Three months later Boon confirmed that this was the case and that 'there was talk to the effect that the Iron and Steel Federation are being approached to work a program on similar lines'.¹⁹⁶ Morrison's office redoubled its efforts to keep the station off the air. In May and June it worked directly with the Treasury to try to stop British companies being able to pay Radio Luxembourg to advertise.¹⁹⁷

The Government was not successful and Radio Luxembourg did eventually begin broadcasting again on 1st December 1946. Morrison's efforts had, however, scared off a number of potential advertisers and Morrison himself continued to try to bring down the commercial station throughout 1947.¹⁹⁸

Labour's treatment of Radio Luxembourg is interesting for three reasons. It suggests that the Government was not aware of the contradictions inherent in its actions. Morrison told Patrick Gordon-Walker in June 1946 that he doubted 'there

¹⁹⁴ Preparatory notes for response of Morrison to Parliamentary question from Wilson Harris. Unsigned and undated. June 1946, CAB 124/411. See also Harris to Morrison, Parliamentary Debates, 10-7-1946, Vol.425, Col.385.

¹⁹⁵ PH Boon to Morrison, 13-2-1946, CAB 124/407.

¹⁹⁶ PH Boon to Morrison, 22-5-1946, CAB 124/407

¹⁹⁷ Morrison to Flett, 12-6-1946, 'I trust the Treasury can find a suitable amndmt to the DR's. It is important. If not try a new clause in the Finance Bill. It is an important evasion and shd not be tolerated' written on bottom of note from Flett to Christie (Treasury), 7-6-1946, CAB 124/407.

¹⁹⁸ Haley to Flett, 12-6-1946 and 20-6-46, informing him that companies were not buying space on Radio Luxembourg because they knew the Government was trying to shut it down. Stephens letter of 11-11-1947 shows that Morrison's office were still actively pursuing this course a year after the station re-opened, CAB 124/407.

is really a very strong demand in Britain for this sort of programme' and yet he exerted an awful lot of effort trying to block it.¹⁹⁹ It also seems to reveal a remarkable lack of self-consciousness. Labour was desperately attempting to prevent all foreign broadcasts to the UK while, at the same time, broadcasting the BBC Overseas services to over twenty countries around the globe. And, Labour's treatment of Radio Luxembourg demonstrates the Government's determination to retain absolute control of broadcasting to the UK. Their reasons for this were not only to maintain standards but also to control who gained access to the microphone and for what purpose.

Excluding Communist Voices

As well as actively suppressing commercial voices, in 1948 the Government began actively suppressing political ones. It did this when it suspected the BBC had been infiltrated by Communists.

On 17th February 1948, Churchill wrote to Morrison about the 'undue prominence being given by the BBC to Communist and near-communist speakers, the featuring of Mr. Horner etc.'²⁰⁰ The following week he brought it up at the political broadcasting meeting with the BBC.²⁰¹ The leader of the Opposition said he thought the BBC had within it a nest of 'Communist vipers' who were using their influence to give Communism a disproportionate amount of coverage on air. Lord Woolton presented analysis to back up these claims.²⁰²

Given the fear aroused by the Czech coup, the issue was raised in Cabinet on the 5th March. At this meeting 'the suggestion was made, in the course of the discussion, that Communist influences might be at work in the BBC' which the

¹⁹⁹ Quoted above. Morrison to Gordon-Walker, 25-6-1946, CAB 124/411.

²⁰⁰ Churchill to Morrison, 17-2-1948, Churchill correspondence, Churchill 2/38, Political Broadcasting, CAC.

²⁰¹ Political Broadcasting meeting, 25-2-1948, CAB 124/31.

²⁰² Research submitted by Woolton to BBC, re excessive broadcasts and publicity for Communists, in R34/313/2, BBC-WAC.

Lord President undertook to look into.²⁰³ Due to its sensitivity, the Cabinet secretary intentionally did not record this in the Cabinet minutes.²⁰⁴ A small Ministerial committee was set up to examine the infiltration of Communists westward. Morrison was given responsibility for reporting on Communism in the BBC.

Morrison began listening out for signs that Communism was being treated too favourably in BBC broadcasts. After a speech by Harry Pollitt received coverage on the BBC news on March 21st Morrison sent Stephens, from his private office, to the BBC to find out who was responsible. Haley refused to say, telling Stephens he would not submit to what he called 'witch hunting of the worst type'.²⁰⁵ He also told Stephens that he was well aware of the danger of BBC infiltration and that the BBC had been vetting people according to their political affiliations with the help of MI5 for 10 years.²⁰⁶ Undeterred, the Lord President then contacted Lord Simon and told him to sack whoever had produced the broadcasts.²⁰⁷ Though Lord Simon did not go this far he insisted to Haley that from now on the BBC keep a careful record of all references to Communism and any airing of Communists on the BBC.

The BBC Governors discussed the issue of Communism on the 4th and 18th March and 1st April.²⁰⁸ Acting on Haley's advice they confirmed that the Corporation did not employ people with overt Communist sympathies. If, however, there was a Communist already on the staff, they did not think it right to

²⁰³ Norman Brook to David Stephens, 22-3-1948, CAB 124/31.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 'This, for obvious reasons, was not recorded in the Cabinet minute; but the LP undertook to look into the point', CAB 124/31.

²⁰⁵ Haley diaries, 10-4-1948, HALY 13-34, CAC.

²⁰⁶ Stephens to Morrison, 30-3-1948, Stephens description of his conversation with Haley, CAB 134/31. Reiterated by Haley in a letter to Churchill, 5-5-1950; 'No entrant to the BBC for the past 12 years therefore, has come into the Corporation without check', R34/313/3, BBC-WAC.

²⁰⁷ Haley diaries, 10-4-1948, HALY 13-34, CAC.

²⁰⁸ BoG Minutes 1948, R1/16/1, BBC-WAC.

remove them unless their political affiliations were affecting their work. They emphasised the need for 'vigilance' as well as the need to 'preserve a proper perspective' about Communism.²⁰⁹

Morrison, however, continued to harry them. In early April he had dinner with Lord Simon and Haley and asked them about an invitation which BBC Manchester had made to a fascist speaker. Haley explained how it was 'some minor blunder' but Simon was appalled that such a thing could have happened without him knowing about it. After the meal he said to Haley that in future he should 'be told of every communication written or verbal, from any Government department that has occupied, or may occupy, the attention of a Minister'.²¹⁰

Only a few days later the Lord President was in contact with Lord Simon again. He now wanted the BBC to appoint someone to watch over BBC staff and act as a contact between the broadcaster and the Government. He had a specific candidate in mind.²¹¹ He asked Lord Simon if the BBC would take him on as an advisor. The Chairman rang the Director General and asked him to appoint Morrison's candidate. Haley objected, saying he was unable to see how this person would fit in. Though Lord Simon pushed the issue he dropped it after Lady Reading also raised serious objections.²¹² Morrison continued to badger the BBC during the summer, at one point going as far as asking for attendance records of the Board meetings, before temporarily abating.²¹³

The Government's behaviour towards the BBC in the spring of 1948 once again emphasised the difficulties inherent in a single national broadcaster maintaining

²⁰⁹ BoG Minutes, 1-4-1948, Minute 87, R1/16/1, BBC-WAC.

²¹⁰ Haley diaries, 12-4-1948, HALY 13-34, CAC.

²¹¹ Haley refers briefly in his diaries to the candidate, called 'Mr. Gater'. Gater does not appear in other files relating to this episode. Haley diaries, 14-4-1948, HALY 13-34, CAC.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ 'Mr. Morrison continues his antics. He is now demanding a report of the Governors attendances. I hope they will refuse them. The are independent and he is not their schoolmaster', Haley diaries, 17-7-1948, HALY 13-34, CAC.

its independence. As soon as the Communist scare arose after the Czech coup the Government and Opposition began attacking the BBC. The Government treated the staff of the Corporation like members of the civil service, calling for them to be vetted, policed and even fired if the Government required it. Though the experience says quite a bit about Lord Simon's 'appalling susceptibility' it also emphasises the willingness of the Government to transgress the boundaries that were designed to separate the BBC from the Government.²¹⁴ Had Haley not been so firm in his own defence of the Corporation's staff it is likely that there would have been many more concessions to the Government's demands.

The Communist issue came up again in 1950 immediately prior to and during the Korean War.²¹⁵ For a second time the Government and the Conservative Opposition pressured the BBC and its staff and sought to influence its programming.²¹⁶ Through its actions the Government showed that not only was it prepared to limit access to the microphone to itself (with occasional broadcasts by leaders of the Opposition), but that it was also willing to use its powers to prevent other voices from being heard.

Past its Sell-By Date – The Beveridge Inquiry

The eventual enquiry into the BBC was appointed too late and deliberated for too long to have a material effect on the future of the BBC. This was, however, by no means apparent when it was appointed in 1949. Its chair, William Beveridge, certainly took his position very seriously, collecting copious evidence (including 640,000 words from the BBC) and conducting exhaustive research (including

²¹⁴ 'He [Simon] who should be in a position to be 100% independent is appallingly susceptible', Haley diaries, 14-4-1948, HALY 13-34, CAC.

²¹⁵ On 4th April 1950 the Government and Opposition raised the issue of Communism again after receiving a letter from the Listeners' Association, CAB 124/31.

²¹⁶ See BBC file on, 'Policy, Communism, File 3: 1950-51', R34/313/3, BBC-WAC. During the preliminary stages of the rearmament re-education campaign in early 1951 Clem Leslie and others were keen to enrol the BBC in promoting anti-communism. See Leslie to Nicholson 25-1-1951, CAB 124/80.

sending some of the committee on a field trip to America). His Committee's 100 recommendations were contained within a 327 page report complete with 583 pages of evidence, completed just before Christmas 1950. They were perhaps best summarised by the headline in *The Spectator*, 'BBC for Ever'.²¹⁷

Beveridge advocated no major changes in British broadcasting. He believed that the monopoly was the best way in which to preserve 'a public service for a social purpose'.²¹⁸ To ensure that the monopoly did not become complacent or unresponsive he suggested strengthening the role of the Governors. They should be 'completely masters in their own house' and, in an unfortunate turn of phrase, 'agents of democratic control'.²¹⁹ Internally, the 'Charter should place them in unfettered control of the staff and all its activities'.²²⁰ Externally, they should make sure that the BBC remained responsive to public opinion. This did not, however, mean encouraging programming people liked. 'Broadcasting should not' recommendation 57 read 'be governed automatically by regard to what will please the listeners'.²²¹

The Committee's report was at its most conservative when it came to relations with the Government. It suggested keeping Clause 5 from the 1946 Charter, giving the Government sweeping powers over television.²²² It believed that the 'friendly arrangement' by which the BBC arranged Government broadcasts should be maintained.²²³ It even said the Governors should fulfil a 'Ministerial

²¹⁷ *The Spectator*, 'BBC For Ever', 19-1-1951, p.67.

²¹⁸ Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1951, Cmd.8116, para.205.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Para.554. and title to page 166.

²²⁰ Ibid. Para.552.

²²¹ Ibid. Recommendation 57.

²²² Ibid. 'We believe therefore that the Government should retain powers of direction in relation to television greater than those possessed by it in the older field of sound broadcasting', para.342.

²²³ Ibid. p.8, para.29.

function' and compared the BBC to a department.²²⁴ Overall the conclusion was 'No Revolution at the BBC'.²²⁵

But shortly after it was finished the report 'began to be thought of increasingly as only one piece of relevant background material on broadcasting policy and not as a set of positive recommendations to be accepted or rejected'.²²⁶ The changes it suggested, such as greater regionalism and the dilution of the authority of the Director General, were intangible enough to disappoint the public and complex enough to excite months of inconclusive Parliamentary debate. Moreover, the Cabinet were distracted by much larger issues.²²⁷

More significant was Selwyn Lloyd's Minority Report. Lloyd was unable to agree with the other members of the Committee and wrote a separate short report recommending an end to the BBC's broadcasting monopoly. His report was taken up by a Conservative Broadcasting Policy Committee formed in February 1951. This 10 member committee 'summoned witnesses, including Haley, and looked at alternative models of future broadcasting'.²²⁸ Though not able to come to a unanimous conclusion (Brendan Bracken was one member of the committee), they were all agreed that there had to be more competition and diversity. The findings of the group were to form the basis of the Conservative government's broadcasting policies after they won the election later that year.

Beveridge himself was understandably dissatisfied with the Government's treatment of his report and the White Paper they wrote in response to it. Beveridge did not believe Labour had engaged with the problems of broadcasting and did not comprehend the dangers inherent in the relationship between the

²²⁴ Ibid. p.166, para.553.

²²⁵ *New Statesman and Nation*, 'No Revolution at the BBC', 20-1-1951, p.54-55.

²²⁶ Asa Briggs, *Volume IV* (1995), p.362.

²²⁷ This was the highpoint of the Korean War, the Cabinet was split due to the impact of the rearmament budget on welfare spending, and a number of members of Cabinet were seriously ill.

²²⁸ Asa Briggs, *Volume IV* (1995), p.364.

Government and the BBC. "My Committee" he said to the House of Lords in July 1951, "were profoundly impressed by the dangers and disadvantages of monopoly in so vital a service as broadcasting. The Government, to judge by their White Paper, are not conscious of any dangers at all".²²⁹

Conclusion

From 1945 to 1951 the Labour Government and the BBC remained very close. Though the BBC was increasingly uncomfortable with this relationship, there is good evidence to suggest that the Government was not. This is not to say that it did not recognise and value the idea of the independence and impartiality of the BBC, only that it did not see a contradiction between this aspiration to objectivity and a collaborative relationship with the Government in power. Their perspective can partly be explained as the perpetuation of wartime cooperation, but the congruence of views between the Government and the BBC at the close of the conflict was even more important.

This prolonged association of the Government and the BBC made many contemporaries suspicious. An inquiry, they thought, would clear the air and accentuate the autonomy of the Corporation. The Government's unwillingness to agree to an inquiry further fuelled their suspicions and encouraged them to watch the Government more closely. Hence the determination of the Conservatives to gain access to the microphone to restart political broadcasting, and their analysis of Labour airtime.

But the continued willingness of Labour to use the BBC, either for broadcasts, for extensive help in Government campaigns, or to seek help via the Board of Governors, raised more fundamental questions about the future of the Corporation. In May 1947, while the BBC was supporting the Government's

²²⁹ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, 25-7-1951, Vol.172, Col.1260.

economic education and productivity campaign, Lord Woolton, the Chairman of the Conservative Party, spoke about these concerns to John Coatman on his way back from dinner in Pembroke College. The following day Coatman told the BBC Director General how Woolton had confided that 'it was touch and go whether the Conservative Party would make the destruction of the BBC's monopoly a plank in the new Tory programme'.²³⁰

This was because over the course of Labour's first two years in office the BBC's reputation as an objective communicator had been undermined. The characteristics that Labour had used to justify the BBC's privileged position were now seen by some to justify its removal. Its monopoly facilitated Government control and ensured only a small coterie of Ministers gained access to the microphone. Its independent Board was clearly less than entirely independent. Its promotion of the national interest appeared to be a promotion of the Government in power.

This was important not simply for the future of the BBC but for the future of the newspaper press. It is entirely conceivable that in the summer of 1946 the Government envisioned the BBC as a potential model to be applied to the Press. Indeed the 'Czech Press model', advocated by a number of left wingers to the Royal Commission on the Press, had many similarities to the broadcasting model. The Czechoslovakian Government granted licences to responsible groups, not individuals, to publish newspapers. The licences had to be renewed on a regular basis and could be revoked or suspended if the newspaper group did not conform to set rules.

To Selywn Lloyd, whose Minority Report eventually had such influence, it was this very model that was, by 1949, highly objectionable. It epitomised the idea of the Labour socialised industry which Lloyd viewed as paternalistic, centralist, and

²³⁰ Haley diaries, 19-5-1947, HALY 13-34, CAC.

uncompetitive. He strongly objected to the principles expressed in the BBC's evidence to the Beveridge Committee which he summarised as; 'it is the BBC's duty to decide what is good for people to hear or to see, and that the BBC must elevate the public taste and constantly be ahead of public opinion and public wishes in their programmes'.²³¹

He, like a number of other Conservatives, took issue with Morrison's defence of the BBC as an integral part of the Corporate State. As Selwyn Lloyd's biographer has put it, 'For the younger Conservatives this sharpened the thrust of the argument: it became free enterprise versus centralism; the market economy or the planned economy'.²³² Lloyd even used the idea of this model transferred to the Press as a criticism of the structure of British Broadcasting: 'It is just as though a British Press Corporation were to be set up with a monopoly of publishing newspapers, and were to decide what choice of newspapers people were to have and what it was good for them to read in them'.²³³ Therefore Labour's appreciation and praise of the BBC helped to poison the Conservatives against it.

After Churchill returned to office in October the Conservatives extended the current BBC Charter for six months. This was enough time to reconsider the position of the BBC and draft a White Paper which stated that 'in the expanding field of television provision should be made to permit some element of competition'.²³⁴ This provision was introduced two years later and was enough to inaugurate the advent of commercial television and, subsequently, commercial radio.

²³¹ Selwyn Lloyd Minority Report, Report of the Broadcasting Committee 1951, Cmd.8116, p.202.

²³² DR Thorpe, *Selwyn Lloyd* (1989), p.142.

²³³ Minority Report, Cmd.8116, p.202.

²³⁴ Cmd.8550, 15-5-1952, quoted in Asa Briggs, *Volume IV* (1995), p.391.

Chapter 5: The Government, Films And Newsreels 1945-51

Prologue

In 1945 cinema going was at the peak of its popularity. There were approximately 1,585 million admissions per year.¹ This equates to over thirty million a week, out of a population of approximately 49 million. Of those who went to the cinema 40% went more than once a week.² Each time people went to the cinema they would see a first feature and a support programme. The support programme would normally consist of a newsreel of about seven minutes and either a second feature or a short and possibly a cartoon.

The vast majority of those who went to the cinema were working class.³ As such, they were less likely to read a newspaper or own a radio.⁴ Moreover, fewer than half a million people owned a television license before the end of 1950 (and the BBC did not start making television news before 1948).⁵ The cinema was, therefore, the only source of visual news and information for the vast majority of people. It is not surprising, therefore, given the Government's stated commitment to communication, that it should have been interested in film and newsreels.

Introduction

This chapter will examine the Government's approach to film and newsreels and its development over the course of 1945-51. Chapters two and three studied this

¹ Perilli, 'Statistical Survey of the British Cinema Industry' in Curran and Porter, *British Cinema History*, (1983), p.372, Table 1.

² Street & Dickinson, *Cinema and State: The Film Industry and the Government 1927-84* (1985), p.183.

³ 'it is significant that the working class went to the cinema a great deal more than the members of the middle or upper classes', Pronay and Wenham, *The News and the Newsreels* (1976), p.7.

⁴ According to the Wartime Social survey, 1943, cited in James Chapman, *The British at War - Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-45* (1998) p.3.

⁵ 'The BBC Television Newsreel', PH Dort (1949) in McKernan (ed.), *Yesterday's News - The British Cinema Newsreel Reader* (2002). In 1950 343,882 people had television licences (Perilli, op.cit.).

administration's experience with the Press and highlighted the problems associated with trying to alter an established media within a democracy. Chapter four looked at the Government's experience with the BBC and the difficulties that result from working too closely with a publicly funded media within a democracy. In this chapter, the Government's experience of film-making is assessed in order to illustrate the problems associated with a democratic state producing its own media.

Films represent a particularly good example since this Government made so many of them. Between 1945-51 the Attlee Government produced more films for home consumption than any British peacetime Government before or since.⁶ In the three years from 1946 to 1949 alone the Central Office of Information made 433 films.⁷ Most of these were short films of about 10 minutes in length but it also included a number of features (40-50 minute films).

The Government initially believed film could be used simply as a channel through which departments could pass information on to the public. By 1947 it realised that film was not a neutral channel and could not be used as such. At this point the Government could have retreated from its use of the medium but instead chose to embrace its powers in order to persuade and condition the people. By 1949 this too had proved highly problematic and the Government adapted its ambitions.

But however many films the Government made, they would never be seen by as many people as saw the newsreels. Every programme in every cinema included a newsreel. Yet the Government virtually ignored the newsreels for its first two years in office. This may seem surprising given their popularity but can be partly

⁶ See Appendix B, Government Film Production.

⁷ Answer to Parliamentary Question, Sir T Moore to FS Treasury, Hansard, Written Answers, 25-7-1949, Vol.467, Col.93.

explained by the lack of political information contained within them. This does not explain, however, why the Government, given its commitment to inform the people, failed to take any action to make the newsreels more informative.

There were serious deficiencies in communicating information via contemporary newsreels. First, the companies making the newsreels considered their purpose to be chiefly entertainment, rather than the communication of information. Second, their content was highly controlled by the five commercial newsreel companies that produced them. And third, the newsreels had a cavalier approach to factual accuracy. This will be illustrated in this chapter.

The chapter will seek to explain why Labour did not take action to resolve these deficiencies, and in so doing show that the Government was more concerned with altering the behaviour of confrontational media, such as the press, and perpetuating that of consensual media, than with creating a more open, democratic dialogue.

When, in 1947, the Government recognised the value of the newsreel, it did not seek to reform them but use them to its advantage. It started collecting stories and passing them on and even producing its own film material for screening. At the same time it seriously considered making an official newsreel to run alongside those of the commercial companies. This helped lead to a deterioration in the relationship between the Government and the newsreels, after which the Government became more conscious of their sensibilities and sought to work in partnership with them. But even then it sought to use the newsreels only to communicate its message rather than to make them more accurate, unbiased or independent. The development of this relationship reveals both the Government's growing awareness of the power of visual media and its gradual adoption of modern news management techniques.

Most of the work previously done about Government film-making at this time is written from the perspective of the documentary movement. In the writings, for example, of Paul Rotha, Elizabeth Sussex, Paul Swann, Jack Ellis, and Albert Hogenkamp.⁸ 1945-51 is generally presented as the period of the decline of this movement, in which an unimaginative Labour Government failed to understand and utilise the value of documentary film. This perspective seems a little one-sided. It does not take the Government's position into account, nor does it locate the role of film in the Government's broader information strategy. This chapter will not try to reassess the perceptions of the documentary movement but rather focus on those of the Government.

Although there has been a considerable amount of work done on newsreels in Britain before and during the Second World War, there has been very little written about them post-war. This is partly due to the limited source material.

The main sources of reference about newsreels and film-making during this period are the copious Government files (particularly those of the films division of the COI and the information committees), the films and newsreels themselves (those which still remain in the NFTVA, the IWM and online), the minutes of the Newsreel Association (NRA), the documents collected by the British Universities Film and Video Council, and contemporary trade journals. This chapter is based, as much as possible, on all these written and visual sources.

SECTION 1: Films And Newsreels In 1945

The Government's Relations with Films by 1945

Between 1939 and 1945 the Government made 726 films to aid in the war effort.⁹ Many of these had been made by the Government's own film production arm, the

⁸ See bibliography.

⁹ IH(O)(47)58, Memorandum, 'COI Films: Production and Distribution', 30-12-1947, CAB 134/356.

Crown Film Unit. The Coalition had also invested in and facilitated the production of a host of feature films, including *49th Parallel*, *Millions Like Us* and Olivier's *Henry V*. But 1939 was not the first time the British Government had been responsible for making movies.

It first became involved in film production during the First World War.¹⁰ Much of this involvement ceased with the disbanding of the Ministry of Information after the war. Some Government departments used film sporadically in the 1920s but neither widely nor consistently.¹¹ Even Sir Stephen Tallents, Secretary of the newly formed Empire Marketing Board, who in 1926 decided to use film as a means of promoting the Empire overseas, saw it as only one of a number of methods available.¹² But Tallents employed John Grierson who, on the strength of his first film, *Drifters*, created a film unit. Grierson went on to use this unit as the basis of a 'documentary movement' which then produced a series of films for the Government and for industry during the 1930s (first with the Empire Marketing Board, then as the General Post Office film unit), including *Song of Ceylon*, *Night Mail* and *North Sea*.

Two aspects of the origins of the relationship between the Government and the documentary movement are particularly relevant to this chapter. First, the movement's promotion of the use of the documentary by the State as an instrument of social education and persuasion. As Grierson wrote in 1942, 'the documentary idea was not basically a film idea at all, and the film treatment it inspired only an incidental aspect of it... The idea itself... was a new idea for

¹⁰ From two minute 'advertisement' films known as 'film tags' through factual films and newsreels to investment in *Hearts of the World*, a large scale dramatic film. See Rachel Low, *The History of British Film 1914-18* (1950), pp.36-37.

¹¹ Some Ministries, such as Health, made sporadic use of some film publicity, for example in promoting hygiene, (Paul Swann, *The British Documentary Film Movement, 1926-1946* (1989), p.52).

¹² As John Grierson wrote later, 'In official records you would find the E.M.B. Film Unit tucked away in a long and imposing list of E.M.B. Departments and Sub-Departments, forty-five all told', in 'The E.M.B. Film Unit', in Forsyth Hardy (ed.), *Grierson on Documentary* (1946), p.97.

public education, its underlying concept that the world was in a phase of drastic change affecting every manner of thought and practice, and the public comprehension of the nature of that change vital'.¹³ Soviet propaganda films of the 1920s were a strong primary influence on the development of these documentaries. Grierson wrote in 1937, 'the documentary group has learned freely from Russian film technique'.¹⁴ Second, documentary's intimate links with public relations. The first films were produced in order to market the British Empire. Later films in the 1930s were made to promote the Post Office or corporations such as Shell, the BBC and the Gas Light & Coke Company. As the documentary maker Paul Rotha wrote in 1946, 'Documentary's main accomplishment, therefore, has been made possible only by sponsorship from outside the film industry'.¹⁵ The twin ideals of persuasion and promotion were both important in the use to which the documentary was put after 1945.

Though a good deal has been written about the documentary movement, the actual production of such films by the British Government in the 1930s was limited.¹⁶ It was not until the Second World War that the Government began to produce films in earnest, and then it did not restrict itself to documentaries. After a slow start, the Ministry of Information started making documentaries and feature films to increase morale, promote solidarity and communicate emergency information. After producing only 2 films in 1939 the Government made 72 in 1940 and 160 in 1942.¹⁷ Many of these were only ten minutes in length but there

¹³ John Grierson, 'The Documentary Idea: 1942' *Documentary News Letter* 1942, in *Grierson on Documentary* (1946), p.180.

¹⁴ John Grierson, 'The Course of Realism' (1937), reprinted in *Grierson on Documentary* (1946), p.140.

¹⁵ Paul Rotha, 'Documentary is Neither Short Nor Long' (1946) in *Rotha on the Film* (1958), p.233.

¹⁶ The Arts Enquiry report states the documentary movement made over 300 films in the 1930s but many of these were non-Government sponsored and of those that were, Swann points out that the figure is inflated by the many 'simple and cheap instructional films made by the Post Office' (op.cit. p.68).

¹⁷ Robert Fraser to Paymaster General, Evidence for Inquiry, 19-9-1947, CAB 124/1025.

were also some longer features. The Government also supported the production of British films by commercial companies.

There were four ways in which the Government could distribute these films. The first was non-theatrical distribution. This involved regional film officers from the MOI screening films from mobile projectors to audiences in factories, schools, village halls, women's societies etc.¹⁸ In 1946 there were 144 such mobile units.¹⁹ The second was through a Central Film Library and regional film libraries. In these the Government held a number of copies of its films which it would lend out, free of charge, to local organisations to screen themselves. The third was through a theatrical distribution deal with the Cinema Exhibitors Association, which represented a large proportion of the cinemas in Britain.²⁰ Through this deal, first agreed in 1940, the Government was able to screen a number of its short films in the cinema as well as Government trailers or 'flashes' – essentially Government advertisements of under one minute in length. After 1943 this was fixed at 12 Government short films a year, or one a month, and 25-30 trailers.²¹ The fourth and final means of distribution was commercial. The Government could, just like a private film distributor, try to secure commercial deals with cinemas. Only a limited number of Government films managed to find commercial distribution.²² By the end of the war the Government was making, on average, more than 10 films a month, or about 20 reels.²³

¹⁸ See Helen (Lady) Forman (née Helen de Moulpiéd), 'The non-theatrical distribution of films by the Ministry of Information' in Pronay and Spring, *Propaganda, Politics and Film, 1918-45*, pp. 221-233.

¹⁹ 'Shown by Request', Crown Film Unit (CFU), 1946, INF 6/382.

²⁰ The Government was also able to negotiate deals with the cinemas not represented by the CEA on a more ad hoc basis.

²¹ 'This enables us to have twelve films a year shown in over 3,000 cinemas each [out of a total of about 4,700], which is far wider distribution than any normal commercial film could ever get' IH(O)(47)4, Memorandum, 'Film Distribution: theatrical', 7-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

²² 6 in 1941, 7 in 1942, 12 in 1943 and 10 in 1944, according to IH(O)(47)58, 'COI Films - Production and Distribution', 30-12-1947, CAB 134/356.

²³ Each reel equated to 1,000 feet of film which in turn equated to approximately 10 minutes.

The Newsreel Set-Up by 1945

In 1945 there were five main newsreel companies in Britain; Pathé News, British Movietone News, Universal News, British Paramount News, and Gaumont British News. Each of them produced and distributed short news packages to the 4,703 cinemas, which were then shown as part of a programme. The news packages were changed twice a week, on a Monday and a Thursday.

Ostensibly the newsreel industry was entirely commercial and free from Government influence, much like the newspapers. But in 1945 the newsreels, like the press, still laboured under the constraints imposed during the war. The shortage of film stock, for example, had led the Government to ration its use through the Board of Trade Economy Film Stock Order, introduced in 1943. This stated that if cinemas wished to show newsreels they must sign a 'supplementary contract' which committed them to a specific newsreel from a specific newsreel company. This was supposed to maximise the number of cinemas able to show a newsreel.²⁴

Unlike the newspapers, the newsreels also suffered from strictly controlled access to sources of news. The rota system, introduced in 1943, stated that only one cameraman was allowed access to official events.²⁵ The newsreels would decide which of them would send someone, and then share the film. During the war this made it less dangerous and less expensive for newsreel companies to gain footage, and allowed the Government to control newsreel access. It also meant that each of the newsreels screened the same material.

²⁴ For a description of the Order and the supplementary contract see the Arts Enquiry report, *The Factual Film* (1947), p.137.

²⁵ This began as a 'royal rota' after a blackout on Royal news but then 'spread until it became routine for any event of security importance. Government departments arranged coverage through the Newsreel Association instead of dealing with individual companies' ('Newsreel Monopoly – Personal Statement by Alf Tunwell, Chief Cameraman, Telenews', *Impact*, Spring 1949, pp.24-26).

Though the newsreels often liked to compare their approach to news to that of the popular press, their chief similarity was their pursuit of popularity.²⁶ The newsreels did not pursue as political an agenda as the press because they did not perceive this as their role. They covered mainly sports, staged events, and royalty. When they did mention politics the forcedly cheerful commentary and the background martial music militated against argument or complexity. Most political events were reported with little other than optimistic clichés and vivid adjectives (for example, “There is hope in the air for war-drained taxpayers” Pathé said of Dalton’s 1945 budget²⁷). In the 1930s the newsreels had famously satirized rather than demonised the Nazis.

The newsreels were also even more blatant than the popular press in their relaxed attitude towards accuracy. If they were unable to film actual footage they would search for something useable from their film libraries, or, in some cases, stage reconstructions. This was well known by contemporaries. Len England wrote a number of reports for Mass-Observation in 1940, for example, in which he detailed the newsreels’ use of ‘prepared’ footage and reconstructions.²⁸

But there was another aspect which made the newsreel industry distinct from newspapers. Since 1937 these five newsreel companies had worked closely together to plan and co-ordinate their output. In November of that year they formed an association, the Newsreel Association (NRA), to prevent competitive bidding for events becoming too expensive.²⁹ From then on they would meet regularly to discuss bids for sports events, coverage of royalty, and the

²⁶ ‘The wish to become the Northcliffe of the newsreels was habitually expressed by newsreel editors’, Nicholas Pronay, ‘British Newsreels in the 1930s: 1’ (1971), reprinted in McKernan, *Yesterday’s News*.

²⁷ Transcription of Pathé newsreel, *Blessing from the Budget*, 29-10-1945.

²⁸ ‘The Faking of Newsreels’ (FR 16, LE 7.1.40), ‘Newsreel Report’ (FR 22, LE 28.1.40) and ‘Memo on Newsreels’ (FR 314, LE 2.8.40), by Len England in McKernan, *Yesterday’s News*.

²⁹ This is how Alf Tunwell, Telenews, explained the formation of the NRA in his article for *Impact* (Spring 1949).

newsreels' approach to political issues.³⁰ As soon as the war broke out the Government found the association very useful as a means of coordinating action with the newsreel companies and issuing directives. The association grew in strength as a consequence.

Expectation Of Change At End Of War

Given that the Government's involvement with film before the war was limited and that film production and distribution was very costly, it might have seemed reasonable to expect that the Government might revert to such limited involvement at the war's end. This was certainly the expectation if the Conservatives won the election. The documentary makers were particularly anxious, as Irmgarde Schemke wrote in 1948, that had the Tories gained power 'it had been feared that the end of the war might see the end of regular government support to the Documentary units'.³¹

If the Government did continue to make films many people assumed that it would reduce its wartime output. A memorandum sent by the MOI to departments in February 1945 on the 'Post War Film Needs of Govt Departments' told them to assume, for example, that at the end of the war the CEA deal (in which 12 Government short films and 25-30 Government trailers were screened in cinemas each year) 'will probably cease'.³² That, though a few 'general' films may continue to be made, 'only comparatively few Government films of exceptional merit which are likely to secure extensive paid showing' would be shown in cinemas. And, that the main outlet for Government films would therefore be through non-theatrical distribution.

³⁰ See Newsreel Association Minutes (NRA), Box 1, Book 1, Minutes 1-659. 1.11.37-17.4.1941, The first meeting of the association is on the 1st November 1937, British Film Institute (BFI).

³¹ 'Documentary Today', Irmgarde Schemke, *Sequence*, Spring 1948, p.12.

³² MOI, memorandum sent to departments, 'Post War Film Needs of Government Departments', 22-2-1945, INF 1/947.

Similarly, it would have seemed natural if the incoming Government had reduced its controls over newsreels. The post-war rationing of film stock was liable to continue until film stock became readily available, but there seemed little justification to continue the rota system, or the use of the NRA as a controlling body.

Indeed, given Labour's commitment to a free press as illustrated in its election manifesto and its promise to prohibit 'anti-social restrictive practices' it would have seemed reasonable to assume that Labour would be unhappy with the structure of the newsreels. There was public concern about the Newsreel Association's monopolistic tendencies. The controls exercised by the NRA clearly prevented the free expression of opinion. And, the newsreels themselves were well known for their lack of accuracy. These were the very reasons Morrison and others used to justify its appointment of a commission into the Press in October 1946 (see Chapter Three). It would therefore seem appropriate that Labour launch a parallel inquiry into the newsreels.

The Government Decides to Maintain Film Production & Distribution

Even while the future of the COI remained unclear, between the end of the war and early 1946, there was hardly a lull in Government film making. Production persisted, and then increased. In 1945-6 there were 143 reels made and in 1946-7 148.³³ Indeed by February 1947 the COI was having to turn down twice as many films as it accepted, demand from departments was so high.³⁴ In addition, the Government not only maintained its non-theatrical distribution, it maintained its distribution with the CEA (and Rank and ABC), and its option to distribute films commercially.

³³ COI Annual Report, 1947-48, Cmd.7567, p.22.

³⁴ Robert Fraser to IH(O) meeting, 28-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

There are four reasons that might explain why the Labour Government decided to continue to make these films. The war had shown that films could be a very powerful means of communication between the state and the people. Jack Beddington, head of the Films Division of the Ministry of Information during the war, argued this in a persuasive memorandum he wrote for the continuation of Government films in 1944.³⁵ Beddington was one of a number of forceful advocates of film making. Their lobbying of the Government offers a second reason why Labour decided to continue making films. Particularly influential was a survey published by PEP on 'The Factual Film' written by a group which included documentary makers like Paul Rotha and Basil Wright.³⁶ John Grierson later argued that it was the documentary makers who had convinced the Government of the need for film. 'A main point to remember' he wrote in *Sight and Sound*, 'is that the Government did not always want films. It was taught by the documentary people to want them because the documentary people saw the possibility of combining their interest in the medium with the Government's interest in public service'.³⁷ There was also inertia within the industry. Many production units had grown up purely on the back of official sponsorship.³⁸ Many if not most of these would fold if the Government stopped making films. A fourth reason was the latent demand from departments for more films. This was

³⁵ Jack Beddington, 'Government Film Production and Distribution'. Though unsigned it is referred to as 'Beddington's report' later in the file (handwritten note, GR, 30-8-1944), INF 1/947.

³⁶ Arts Enquiry, *The Factual Film* (1947). Though not published until 1947 this report was written in 1944. Hogenkamp identifies the members of the committee in Chapter 2 of his thesis, op.cit.

³⁷ 'Prospect for Documentary – What is wrong and Why', John Grierson, *Sight and Sound*, Vol.17, No.66, Summer 1948.

³⁸ Fraser identified 3 documentary units working before the war as compared to over 40 after it (Fraser, Evidence for Inquiry, 19-9-1947, CAB 124/1025).

demonstrated by the results of a questionnaire sent out to departments by Bernard Sendall, the acting head of Films Division, in the spring of 1945.³⁹

But the specific Government reasoning remains unclear. Morrison met the heads of the Ministry of Information on 15th October 1945 and was obviously aware of the MOI's film production.⁴⁰ But in his report on the Government Information Services he did not refer to films outside a very general context.⁴¹ HG Welch, an official at the MOI, commented on this lack of clarity in a note to Bernard Sendall in October saying that whilst it was still unclear what was going to happen to films, it had to be assumed their future was wrapped up in the general question of Government Information Services.⁴²

It was not that Morrison was unconscious of the nature of film as a means of information and propaganda. The use to which the fascist governments had put film prior to and during the war was well known and documented. Moreover, Morrison was aware of John Grierson's ideas about the importance of information as a progressive force. Morrison received a note from Grierson in late November on 'The Nature and Form of a Government Information Service'.⁴³ The note began, 'A Government Information Service may be, if it is so willed, a powerful instrument of national and international progress. Its form will reflect the degree of progressive or reactionary will which inspires it'. And it continued in the same vein, outlining how an information service should be structured to fulfil this end. Sir Stafford Cripps, who also received a copy, was so impressed that he

³⁹ Bernard Sendall to SJ Fletcher, 11-4-1945, 'Replies received to the questionnaire sent to interested departments by the DG show a strong body of opinion in favour of the continuance of Government film production and distribution, INF 1/947.

⁴⁰ Morrison meeting with the MOI heads, 15-10-1945, CAB 124/988.

⁴¹ CP(45)316, 'Government Publicity Services', Annex 1, Lord President, 23-11-1945, CAB 129/5.

⁴² HG Welch to Sendall, 18-10-1945, Reference F.1183, INF 1/947.

⁴³ 'The Nature and Form of a Government Information Service', Grierson, 20-11-1945, CAB 124/988.

suggested Morrison send the note to the Prime Minister.⁴⁴ Morrison forwarded it, but also advised Attlee that Grierson's proposed scheme would be difficult to set up.⁴⁵

Morrison was particularly concerned about the executive control of the information process in Grierson's scheme. The Lord President's plan for the process by which films were made was designed to be consistent with the Government's intention to use films simply as a channel through which to pass information from the state to the citizen. This process was supposed to be as politically neutral as possible. A department would decide it had information which would best be communicated through film. It would approach the COI Films Division to discuss the idea and then together they would choose a film unit from which to commission the work.⁴⁶ The film unit, presuming it accepted the commission, would draw up a treatment which would then be signed off by the COI and the department. Once the Treasury had then agreed the funding, the unit would produce the film.⁴⁷

All this suggests that, as with other aspects of information policy, the Labour government was committed to communication through film in principle. As an editorial in the *Documentary News Letter* said in spring 1947, 'That the present Government realizes this [the importance of public communication] in theory is obvious from the fact that the Central Office of Information exists (the Tories might well have dispensed with it)'.⁴⁸ But it also suggests that it wanted to restrict

⁴⁴ Cripps to Morrison, 3-12-1945, CAB 124/988.

⁴⁵ Morrison to Attlee, 5-12-1945, CAB 124/988. In particular, Morrison thought that Parliament would sit on it – see hand written note to Pimlott on Nicholson letter, 4-12-1945.

⁴⁶ In addition to the official Government film unit, the '*Crown Film Unit*', the COI and departments were free to offer their commissions to the independent film companies.

⁴⁷ For a good description of the process see Philip Mackie's article, 'Production History of a COI Film', in *Documentary News Letter*, November–December 1947, Vol.6, No.60, p.157.

⁴⁸ 'Information Please', *Documentary News Letter*, April-May 1947, Vol.6, No.56.

its use to the passive transfer of information from state to citizen. Film was simply another means by which to facilitate this transfer.

No Inquiry Into the Newsreels

Despite the known monopolistic practices, the prevention of the free expression of opinion, and the regular inaccuracies within the newsreels, Ministers did not consider launching an inquiry or trying to alter the structure of the newsreel industry. Even when the suggestion was made that newsreels might be examined as part of the inquiry into the press, Morrison quickly dismissed the idea, suggesting that 'these would take the Commission into the ramifications of the film industry'.⁴⁹

In fact, in its first two years, the Government hardly thought about the newsreels at all, even in its review of the MOI and establishment of the COI. The most consideration they were given was regarding the establishment of a newsreel desk in the COI as a possible outlet for Government information.

This was the suggestion of a films subcommittee, set up in early 1946 to write recommendations on how to organise the COI Films Division. In its report the committee wrote that, 'We believe that newsreels and film magazines, both in this country and abroad, will continue to provide a most valuable outlet for Government information, and we think that full use should be made of these media under the COI'.⁵⁰ It therefore recommended the establishment of a newsreel desk and even discussed the qualifications of a possible appointment.⁵¹ Ministers ignored the recommendations.

⁴⁹ Cabinet Papers, CP(46)298, 'Inquiry into the Press', Lord President, 25-7-1946, CAB 129/11.

⁵⁰ Report of Films Committee to advise on Films Division in COI, February/March 1946, INF 1/948.

⁵¹ Films Committee, 9th Meeting, 20-2-1946, INF 1/948.

There are three key reasons that help to explain why the Labour Government did not try to restructure the newsreels after 1945. First, because they were not considered agents of political communication. Second, because the Government continued to enjoy significant direct and indirect control over the content of the newsreels through most of its periods in office. And third, because the newsreels were consistently supportive of Government policy, and maintained a remarkable degree of accommodating self-censorship throughout this period.

When Labour took office the newsreels were not considered important avenues of political communication. Their natural tendency was to avoid sensitive issues.⁵² During the war the Government had worked with this tendency and concentrated on keeping sensitive news out of the newsreels rather than putting propaganda in.⁵³ By 1945 the Government had no expectation that the newsreels would 'break stories' or run political exclusives. Neither did newsreels have that aspiration.⁵⁴ Newsreels provided the audience with film footage of stories they had already read about in the newspapers or heard on the wireless. The lack of interest of Government Ministers in the newsreels is indicated by the almost complete absence of comment about them in Cabinet discussions or even amongst the members of the Ministerial Information Services Committee throughout the first two turbulent years of Labour's administration.⁵⁵

⁵² In the 1930s Pronay writes that 'The five newsreel Editors met regularly to decide on their policies concerning 'touchy' subjects and they abided by the agreements'. Nicholas Pronay, 'British Newsreels in the 1930s: 2' (1972), McKernan p.148.

⁵³ Pronay demonstrates this very clearly in 'The News Media at War', in Pronay and Spring, op.cit. (1982), pp.173-208.

⁵⁴ For example, see Hannah Caven on coverage of concentration camps, 'Horror in our time: images of the concentration camps in the British media, 1945', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.21, No 3, 2001 pp 205-53. The one exception after the war was the editor, Clement Cave, tried to take a more serious approach while at Pathé in 1947. The other newsreels did not follow suit and Cave was removed as editor of Pathé in June 1948. See Clement Cave, 'Newsreels Must Find a New Policy', *Penguin Film Review*, No.7, 1948. Reprinted in McKernan, *Yesterday's News*, pp.227-230.

⁵⁵ Review of agendas of Cabinet 1945-47 and of Home Information Services (Ministerial) meetings. There is one memorandum by Morrison regarding technical advice for Ministerial film interviews, distributed to the IH committee in September 1946, (IH(46)9, 25-9-1946, CAB 134/354).

A second reason why the Government did not seek to reform the newsreels was because it continued to maintain the controls over them that had been instituted immediately prior to and during the war. It kept the rota system which restricted the access of newsreel cameramen to many official events.⁵⁶ It held onto the supplementary contracts which directed how many newsreels should be made and where they should go. And, it perpetuated its regular contacts with the newsreel companies via the individual departments and the Central Office of Information.

With the rota system departments maintained a significant degree of control over newsreel coverage. For example, when Morrison was given the freedom of Lambeth, the Secretary of the NRA informed the newsreel companies that they had been told 'facilities for filming could be granted to one company only'. There was subsequently some discussion, 'and it was decided to shout [sic] the event on rota – British Movietone news were nominated as the result of a "draw"'.⁵⁷ For the newsreels themselves the system reduced costs but also compromised their competitiveness and their freedom to cover the story as they chose. For the departments, it meant the ability to dictate what would be filmed and how.

Even so, the newsreels were willing to accept its perpetuation. It was not until 1948 that the NRA began to lobby to change the system. 'After discussion' in an NRA meeting of 26th January 1948 'it was unanimously agreed that a letter should be sent to the ACT [Association of Cine-Technicians] stressing the NRA's ingrained dislike of the rota system, and our resistance to it since its inception'.⁵⁸ Yet despite this dislike they let the system continue. Alf Tunwell, a cameraman

⁵⁶ Limited space was normally cited as the reason for this restriction. Only one cameraman, for example, was allowed to film in Number 10. Correspondence with John Turner, Gaumont British newsreel cameraman, 20-9-2004.

⁵⁷ NRA minutes, 29-9-1947, min.2414, 'Freedom of Lambeth to Rt Hon Herbert Morrison, October 31st 1947'.BFI

⁵⁸ NRA minutes, 26-1-1948, min.2487. See also discussions in meeting of 15-1-1948.

for the non-NRA company Telenews, complained in the spring of 1949 that he was still blocked from events because he was not on the rota.⁵⁹

The supplementary contracts also outlasted the war. As explained above these legislated that, due to the shortage of film stock, the exhibitors had to subscribe to a certain newsreel indefinitely and agree to buy every copy at a fixed price. The newsreel would then be shared with other local cinemas (called 'crossovers').⁶⁰ Though this ensured the income of the newsreel companies it also discouraged innovation and investment. It is symptomatic of the inertia of the newsreel companies that the NRA discussed the cancellation of the contracts in November 1945 but decided not to challenge them.⁶¹ The contracts were only broken in 1950 when Sidney Bernstein, an independent exhibitor, threatened to challenge the controls order in each of his 38 cinemas.⁶²

Further evidence that the newsreels, far from seeking independence from the Government, sought to perpetuate their wartime collaboration, comes from their formal and informal contacts with departments and the COI after the war. During the conflict each of the newsreel companies was assigned to one or more Government departments. They were then the sole liaison for that department and were the only company with the right of separate approach. Though the NRA discussed changing this system after the war they decided not to.⁶³

Similarly, they continued their regular meetings with the MOI and its successor, the COI. Every week they would screen the newsreels at the COI offices at

⁵⁹ Alf Tunwell, 'Newsreel Monopoly', *Impact*, Spring 1949, pp.24-26.

⁶⁰ For a good, short description of the agreement see memorandum from AG White (BoT), 21-1-1948, INF 12/565.

⁶¹ NRA minutes, min.2039, 22-11-1945.BFI

⁶² See Caroline's Moorehead biography of Bernstein (1984), pp.191-192. For a full examination of the supplementary contract system see Enticknap PhD (1999), 'The Non-Fiction Film in Britain, 1945-51', Ch.2.

⁶³ See NRA minutes for: 11-7-45 (min.1938), 24-1-46 (min.2058), 22-7-46 (min.2192), 15-1-48 (min.2475, discussion of whether to discontinue arrangement), 26.2.48 (min.2505, decision to continue as is), 5-8-48 (min.2614).BFI

Norgeby House on Baker Street.⁶⁴ Every fortnight they would meet with a COI representative to discuss the newsreels.⁶⁵ The purpose of these meetings was indicated at an Economic Information Committee meeting in November 1947; 'The regular meeting of the COI with the newsreel companies would continue to serve as the channel for communicating to the companies such stories as depts. felt should be covered for policy'.⁶⁶ The NRA was even willing to supply footage to documentary producers for departmental shorts or industrial films on request.⁶⁷

Therefore the post-war audiences were watching newsreel footage for which access had been determined and defined by the Government, where political content had almost certainly been discussed with the department concerned, where the finished product had been pre-screened at the COI, and which was the same across the country.

This raises the third reason why Ministers did not contemplate change. Though the newsreels have often been criticised as politically biased, the evidence suggests that after 1945 this bias was not Party political but pro-establishment. It is true that the newsreels had been willing to work closely with the Conservatives in the 1930s, and that Movietone News was part owned by Associated Newspapers and produced films on behalf of the Conservative Party.⁶⁸ However, this did not stop the newsreels themselves being supportive of the Labour Government in the 1940s. The minutes of the Newsreel Association and the

⁶⁴ NRA minutes, 24-1-1946, min.2060, decision to maintain MOI meetings and screenings. Maintained until 1948. Thereafter moved to own cinemas, NRA minute 2659, 28-10-1948.BFI

⁶⁵ Though no minutes of the fortnightly meetings have been kept, they are referred to by the EIC in 1947, e.g., 10-10-1947, Mr. Kitchin talks about 'the fortnightly newsreel meeting at the COI', CAB 134/361.

⁶⁶ IH(O)(E)(47)14th, Minutes, 14-11-1947, CAB 134/361.

⁶⁷ NRA minutes, min.2159, 'Supply of Film for Government Shorts', 20-5-1946.BFI

⁶⁸ See Timothy Hollins, 'The Conservative Party and Film Propaganda Between the Wars', E.H.R., Vol.96, No.379, April 1981, pp.359-369.

commentary from the newsreels themselves suggest that they believed they were pursuing a national consensus, not a political agenda.⁶⁹

Certainly in the 1945 election the newsreels went so far out of their way to avoid accusations of bias that they copied the BBC and offered a fixed amount of footage to the respective leaders of the three principal parties.⁷⁰ Moreover, after 1945 there was very rarely any direct criticism of the Government. Even attempts at 'balance' elicited sharp retorts from MPs.⁷¹

Generally the newsreels were desperate to emphasise their patriotism and to promote the status quo. They repeatedly stressed collective responsibility and frowned upon any deviation from the norm. They were strongly against unofficial strikes, for example. Reporting from Lowestoft and Yarmouth on the unofficial dockers' strikes of October 1946 the Pathé news commentator said that this was 'a picture which ought never to be seen in food hungry Britain... of this year's crop of strikes the vast majority are unofficial, in all of them, the public suffers. Again, was it necessary?'.⁷²

They were also supportive of Government campaigns. When the Government was exhorting people to 'Work or Want', a March 1947 Pathé report on the economic situation told the audience that "We, the people of Britain, must produce more or we shall see our standard of living fall".⁷³ Similarly, on Movietone's end of year review, the commentator reported that 'Sir Stafford

⁶⁹ When they were accused of party political bias, in *Tribune* in August in 1949, they were grossly offended and decided to review their public relations as a consequence. See NRA meeting minutes September – December 1949.

⁷⁰ Gerald Sanger (Movietone), Clifford Jeapes (Universal) and Castleton Knight (Gaumont British) thought this 'would avoid any criticism of newsreel bias in political matters'. NRA minutes, 31-5-1945.

⁷¹ Sanger wrote that Movietone was attacked by Jennie Lee in *Tribune* when it showed a 'dissatisfied housewife' after an interview with Sir Ben Smith on a news item about reduced rations. 'Propaganda and the Newsreel', *Sight and Sound*, Vol.15, No.59, Autumn 1946, pp.79-80.

⁷² Transcript of Pathé newsreel, 'Talking Points. End the Strikes', 14-10-1946.

⁷³ Transcript of Pathé newsreel, 'Battle of Britain', 17-3-1947.

Cripps came in to mobilize industry and manpower for the mammoth task of closing the gap between imports and exports. Can it be done?' Movietone asked, 'Yes it can, by hard work and self-denial'.⁷⁴

The COI was so pleasantly surprised by the support of the newsreels that in 1947 it commented that 'their readiness to be helpful in such matters as the screen interviews and in the inclusion of brief contributions to current campaigns has been far greater than the Central Office ever expected'.⁷⁵

That the newsreels' approach fitted with the Government's economic campaigns was not accidental. Gerald Sanger, editor of Movietone News, writing in *Sight and Sound* in the autumn of 1946, acknowledged and defended the newsreels' support for the Government's campaigns. He argued that a newsreel would be 'neglecting its duty' if it did not try to explain why Britain was in such a difficult economic situation. Moreover, he said, since there was a need for exports and a Government production drive was in progress, 'Were the newsreels wrong to support this drive with their pictures and commentary? Are the newsreels wrong in dealing with a similar campaign to increase coal output?'.⁷⁶

There was also a remarkable degree of NRA caution and self-censorship which worked in the Government's favour. Newsreels that strayed outside this consensual agenda were admonished by their colleagues within the Association. British Movietone News was officially censured for the way in which it had acted during the fuel crisis, 'when the exigencies of the fuel shortage called for urgent and complete cooperation'. And, in future, the other members agreed that 'any

⁷⁴ Transcript of Movietone newsreel, '1947 and After', 29-12-1947.BFI

⁷⁵ IH(O)(47)5, Memorandum, 'Newsreels and official publicity (memo by the COI)', 19-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

⁷⁶ Gerald Sanger, 'Propaganda and the Newsreel', op.cit. This is doubly surprising since Sanger was the Conservative Party's principal adviser on film at this time (Hollins, op.cit.).

action decided upon shall be subject to a majority vote, to which any dissenting party and/or parties, shall strictly adhere'.⁷⁷

With this degree of support and self censorship it is understandable that Labour Ministers did not feel it needed to restructure the newsreels. It believed they were of limited value as communicators of political information, and that the infrequent messages that were communicated were consistent with Government policy. As a memorandum to the Home Information Services committee commented in the midst of the fuel crisis of February 1947, 'The Newsreel companies continue to be very cooperative in their own conventional and unimaginative way'.⁷⁸ Indeed the dearth of discussion about the newsreels and the lack of attention devoted to them (as compared to the other media) indicates that Ministers and officials took them for granted and tended to ignore them.

The Government's neglect of the newsreels indicates that its concern regarding the media as a means of political communication with the electorate only extended to confrontational media, or – as will be shown below – when the Government needed the media as a means of pursuing policy. Though understandable, it was a reflection of contradictions within Government policy given Labour's stated commitment to 'factual accuracy' and the 'free expression of opinion', and given the importance of the cinema in reaching many people who would not be reached by other means of political information.

The Production of 'Information' Films Proves Unsustainable

By 1947 it was clear that there were serious problems associated with the process of producing neutral Government information films. The first was that, without some criteria by which to rank the films, it was very difficult to prioritise

⁷⁷ NRA minutes, min.2335, vote of censure on British Movietonews, 20-2-1947.BFI

⁷⁸ IH(O)(47)5, Memorandum, 'Newsreels and Official Publicity', 19-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

one over another. Not only did this make the job of the COI very difficult (particularly in negotiating with departments), it meant decision making and film making took a long time.⁷⁹ Sometimes the process would take so long that Government policy had moved on before a film was started. The film 'International Trade', for example, commissioned by the Prime Minister's office in 1946, was supposed to 'explain and praise multilateral trading' but had to be dropped by the Board of Trade when Britain was forced back onto bilateral trading in 1947.⁸⁰

There was also no underlying plan or strategy (although this was again consistent with the production of purely informational films). This meant the COI and the film makers lacked purpose and focus.⁸¹ John Grierson, once again writing advice to the Lord President's Office, said in August 1947 that 'They [the documentary makers] say they have lost the conception of a total driving plan for the use of the documentary film in the urgent service of the nation'.⁸²

Even more important, this neutral process of film making tended to lead to the production of tedious films. For example, two of the theatrical monthly releases for 1946 and 1947, *Getting on with It* (Merlin and Films of Fact compilation for COI 1946) and *Introduction to Aircraft Recognition* (CFU for War Office 1947), both of which were intended for a general audience. The first film was made up of three short film packages, the second titled 'Photo-Elastic Technique in Industrial Research'. The subtitle, 'The Research Department makes a modification to the

⁷⁹ Paul Rotha complained in 1947 that 'there seemed to be no justification for many of the cancellations made by the COI and the net result was certainly not to make films impact on the public more timely and therefore telling'. Interview No.1, Marquand Inquiry, 25-9-1947, CAB 124/1028.

⁸⁰ International Trade (One World), script written by Realist. Failure described in Philip Mackie memorandum on 'COI "Feature" Films', 10-5-1949, INF 12/542.

⁸¹ The documentary producers Sinclair Road and Mr Alexander (*Federation of Documentary Film Units*) thought the COI 'tackled programming in a haphazard way. There was no sense of urgency, no leadership or imagination'. Interview No.15, Marquand Inquiry, CAB 124/1028.

⁸² 'UK Documentary Film Problems 1947' Grierson, attached to accompanying letter by Grierson to Nicholson, 14-8-1947, CAB 124/1025.

cylinder head of the Sabre Aero engine' quite accurately describes what the package contained.⁸³

Straight information films such as this could be said to be consistent with the theoretical principle of informing the public but were inconsistent with film-making. Not only were ambitious documentary makers losing enthusiasm for making them, distributors were not keen to try to rent them. *Cumberland Story*, a four reel second feature, which was produced for commercial distribution, was turned down by all distributors 'because too political and too dull a subject'.⁸⁴ Similarly *The World is Rich*, 'a grim and harrowing piece full of social conscience, having been rejected by all the major renters, has just now found a potential dealer who strongly recommends heavy cuts and the removal of "some of all that misery".⁸⁵ Exhibitors were equally loath to show information-led and over-worthy films for fear of alienating the audience.

Though the Government was able to make and distribute its neutral 'information films' for a brief period after the war, by 1947 the situation was becoming increasingly untenable. The documentary makers were becoming very frustrated and highly critical. The distributors and exhibitors were becoming unhappy. But it was the fuel crisis which highlighted the unsustainability of the situation and triggered a significant change in direction.

SECTION 2: 1947 Review

Following the fuel crisis of 1947 the Government reviewed its approach to communications. As outlined in previous chapters the Government came to believe that, up to this point, it had failed to communicate its position adequately to the electorate. As part of this review it began to change its approach towards

⁸³ 'Getting on with It' (Merlin and Films of Fact compilation for COI 1946), viewed at BFI.

⁸⁴ Tritton to Malherbe, 'Notes on Theatrical Distribution', 2-12-1947, INF 12/564.

⁸⁵ Tritton to Sendall, 2-12-1947, INF 12/564. *The World is Rich*, Films of Fact, 1947.

newsreels and towards films. It sought to make the films more topical and immediate. It created a central unit, the Economic Information Unit, which, amongst its other roles, was to coordinate and commission films on economic themes. It looked for ways to enhance links with the newsreel companies, and started to develop its own 'official' newsreel. And it established an informal inquiry to study the causes of the breakdown between the COI Films Division and the film makers.

In the midst of the fuel crisis itself the COI began to consider how it might better exploit the newsreels as an avenue of communication and persuasion. In February 1947 it wrote a memorandum on this topic for the official Home Information Services committee (IH(O)). The memorandum emphasised 'The enormous coverage and capacity for useful publicity of the newsreels'.⁸⁶ It outlined how, during the war, the Government was able to influence this capacity by providing facilities, controlling sources, passing on 'ready made' film footage to the newsreel companies, and making film stock concessions in return for coverage of issues in which departments were interested.⁸⁷ Since the end of the war it had let this leverage slip. The departments still had 'direct contact' with the companies and the COI maintained 'close and friendly liaisons' with the NRA. But perhaps the consistent support from the newsreels had made the Government complacent.

The COI felt it was time for a more active engagement. It revisited the idea of a 'newsreel desk' and made its functions more explicit. 'There was a general feeling' amongst the IH(O) committee 'that the newsreel medium had not been exploited to the limit'. It therefore approved the setting up of a newsreel desk.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ IH(O)(47)5, Memorandum, 'Newsreels and Official Publicity', 19-2-1947, CAB 134/356.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ IH(O)(47)3rd, Minutes, 14-3-1947, CAB 134/356.

No immediate action was taken, however. The subsequent reason given was that no suitable candidate could be found.⁸⁹ But the lack of action was also a consequence of much more substantial developments in Government communication, the creation of the Economic Information Unit (EIU) and Economic Information Committee (EIC).

This Committee, whose origins are discussed in Chapter One, was responsible not only for the coordination of economic information but also for commissioning films and other information media. Clem Leslie, head of the EIU and chair of the EIC, already had experience, in the 1930s, of commissioning films for the Gas Coke & Light company.⁹⁰ Leslie was conscious that part of his remit included adding urgency to the communication of Government information. He immediately set out to review how films could help do this.

But even before the establishment of the EIC the COI had started to address the problem of topicality. In the wake of the fuel crisis it had hastily established a reporting unit within the Crown Film Unit. This unit was supposed to develop more films which 'try to get close to the pulse of public opinion, and then do something about it'.⁹¹ 'We call it "reportage"' Ronald Tritton, head of the COI Films Division, wrote to Sendall, 'for convenience to distinguish this method of making films from "documentary". Documentary is leisured, often old fashioned in technique and made – alas – without much sense of timing. It seldom hits the public where the public lives, and is often way up in the clouds. Reportage is meant to be the opposite kind of thing'.⁹²

⁸⁹ The IH(O) Committee subsequently claimed that this was because there was not a suitable qualified candidate for the position, memorandum, IH(O)(49)16, 2-3-1949, CAB 134/358.

⁹⁰ See Marquand Inquiry, Interview No.9, Helen de Moulpiéd, CAB 124/1028.

⁹¹ Ronald Tritton to Bernard Sendall, reference FM 82/83, 'Crown Reporting Unit', 16-6-1947, INF 5/39.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Leslie took this much further. In only the second meeting he chaired, in June 1947, his committee discussed how it could make current films more topical.⁹³ The EIC wanted to give films an immediacy they currently lacked, and develop morale-boosting pictures that gave context to the various crises that people in Britain were facing. Robert Fraser, writing to Sendall after the meeting, described how they wanted films to imbue the current economic battle with the status and urgency of the epic battles of the war. The people of Britain, Fraser wrote, 'are waging a battle for coal, a battle for food, clothes and houses, and a battle for exports'. '...while the struggle lasts,' he asked 'cannot a film be made to chronicle regularly the successes and setbacks, the human details and the national purposes?'.⁹⁴

Amongst other proposals the committee members thought about was what to do with an industrial film currently being made for non-theatrical distribution, called 'Britain Can Make It'. At the time this was a conscientious, unambitious cine-magazine usually made up of three separate stories, one scientific, one industrial and one social. The EIC wanted to change this into a newsreel. This would not only make it feel more immediate and topical but 'had the additional advantage of providing the Central Office with ready-made material for possible supply to the commercial newsreel companies'.⁹⁵

As the summer wore on the committee's ambitions for this 'factory newsreel' increased. Until mid September 1947 the intention was to keep it for non-theatrical distribution. But on the 19th Fraser told the committee that there was a chance of getting the film distributed to cinemas nationwide via the CEA. This would transform the size of the potential audience. Moreover, Fraser said it could

⁹³ IH(O)(E)(47)2nd, Minutes, 19-6-1947, 'Films on economic and production themes', CAB 134/361.

⁹⁴ Robert Fraser to Sendall, 23-6-1947, INF 5/39.

⁹⁵ IH(O)(E)(47)10th, Minutes, 'Film Programme – Factory Newsreel', 29-8-1947, CAB 134/361.

still be distributed non-theatrically and the theatrical release would not 'impede the flow of material to the newsreel companies'.⁹⁶

If the newsreel was to reach this many people, then it had to have compelling stories. The same month an advisory briefing committee was therefore formed in order to start 'systematically supplying the COI with material for the factory newsreel, and planning the overall policy'.⁹⁷ Even before the new newsreel was produced, this committee began passing stories on to the existing newsreel companies. Indeed by October Leslie was already able to report to the Economic Planning Board that 'a method of liaison is now in operation which enables the newsreels to draw fairly widely on official suggestions about material and enables departments and the Economic Information Unit to put their proposals forward effectively. In one week recently the newsreels contained eight different items on industrial and economic subjects, all originating from departments'.⁹⁸

Throughout the autumn the committee discussed how to make the official newsreel effective by presenting economic material in a striking way. The EIC wanted to show people the dramatic and heroic nature of the struggle ahead, 'Above all there must always be present a sense of urgency and a feeling of activity'.⁹⁹ But at the same time the newsreel must remain credible. The committee stressed that though the main emphasis should be on good news and success stories the newsreel 'must be more than ready to produce bad news for its audiences, not only so that they may know the real position, but also because

⁹⁶ IH(O)(E)(47)11th, Minutes, 'Economic Information Programme – Films', 19-9-1947, CAB 134/361.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ 'Crisis Publicity – Note from the Economic Information Unit', E.P.B. 47, October 1947, T245/2.

⁹⁹ IH(O)(E)(47)54, Memorandum, 'Directive on Factory Newsreel', 6-11-1947, CAB 134/363.

the presentation of bad news increases the credibility of the rest of the material'.¹⁰⁰

So excited were they about the potential of the newsreel that though the committee considered substituting the current monthly Government film release with the new official newsreel they decided that it would be more effective to have both.¹⁰¹

This newsreel, and the other proposals being considered by the EIC, were already moving rapidly away from the neutral information films envisioned by the Government when it decided to set up the COI in 1945. Two people at the COI Films Division were very conscious of this movement; Ronald Tritton, head of the Division, and Helen de Moulpied, Chief Production Officer. Since the move first became explicit, in June 1947, they had both been considering the implications for Government policy. 'It has been suggested', Tritton then wrote, 'that the Films Division could 'do more to inform the public on the situation in the country and should be making films planned to lift morale by means of an appeal to the emotions comparable to that which was achieved by some wartime films'.¹⁰²

However, Tritton was uncomfortable with the shift in policy and listed six reasons why it might be difficult. The first and most important was that during the war the policy line had been 'clear and straight'. Now, 'The themes are themselves intensely complex. They are confused by politics. They are unpalatable to the audience because they have no heroic stature in themselves'.¹⁰³ Helen de

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ IH(O)(E)(47)13th, Minutes, 'Economic Information - Films Programme', 31-10-1947, CAB 134/361. See also 'Report by Films SubCommittee' – based on a meeting held on 23-10-1947, IH(O)(E)(47)50, CAB 134/363.

¹⁰² Memorandum by Ronald Tritton, 1-7-1947, to Bernard Sendall, Films Division, regarding films suggestion, INF 12/564.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Mouilpied agreed, writing that 'Warfare is rich documentary material, ("the dramatic interpretation of reality"). White papers are not'.¹⁰⁴

This brought Tritton to his second point, about the audience: 'The whole country is not behind the present methods of tackling the aftermath of war problems. Perhaps only half agree with the policies and a further large proportion are totally uninterested. The result is that every audience has a large proportion of cynics, doubters, the bored and the frankly antagonistic. This makes a pretty formidable core of audience resistance'.¹⁰⁵ To overcome such resistance the Government would have to make considerable adaptation to the current factual films, and maybe even expand into non-factual features as well.

De Mouilpied reiterated Tritton's point, indeed assumed that the Government realised that its new ambitions could only be achieved if it expanded from short documentaries into producing fictional feature films. 'In making these recommendations' she wrote, 'it is assumed that Government film making is not necessarily documentary film making, that although documentaries will still have their place, the main effort of present Government propaganda can only be made through 'feature' films of from 10 minutes to 90 minutes in length'.¹⁰⁶ De Mouilpied seemed already to be assuming that these films should be classified as 'propaganda'.

Morale films did not fit the original, politically neutral intention of COI film making. They were likely to be more general than departmental. They required argument and persuasion rather than straight information. They were unlikely to be aimed at a single, specific, direct reaction. These issues were brought home to the committee when, in early September, the Treasury refused to approve funding for

¹⁰⁴ Helen de Mouilpied, 'Draft Memorandum on Production Prospects', 16-7-1947, INF 12/564.

¹⁰⁵ Ronald Tritton, *op.cit.*, INF 12/564.

¹⁰⁶ De Mouilpied, *op.cit.*, INF 12/564.

'The Changing Face of Britain'. This film, though sponsored by Town & Country planning, was supposed to have a more general appeal, to 'lift people's eyes from the fish queues' and give them some hope for the future.¹⁰⁷ The Treasury did not think the film was consistent with the remit of Government films.

Until the autumn of 1947 the change in approach to films and newsreels had mainly been due to the pragmatic reaction of the EIC to circumstances. A more fundamental shift in Government approach required backing from senior Government Ministers. This only came after the Paymaster General delivered the results of his film enquiry in October 1947.

The Findings and the Repercussions of the Marquand Inquiry

In the summer of 1947 Herbert Morrison decided to set up an informal enquiry into the relationship between the COI and the documentary film units, to be led by the Paymaster General, Hilary Marquand. The inquiry had been triggered by the deterioration of this relationship. Marquand collected information from the COI, and interviewed COI officials, Treasury officials and documentary film makers.¹⁰⁸ He split the conclusions of his enquiry into 'process' and 'purpose'. Regarding process he concluded that though the film makers were justified in feeling frustrated by the various interruptions and cancellations, their problems were just as much caused by the natural decrease in demand for documentaries after the war coupled with the glut of documentary companies searching for work.¹⁰⁹

Regarding 'purpose', Marquand's most serious allegation, and one which was to lead to a more fundamental rethink in the Government's use of film, was that 'in dealing with the most creative and artistic of all media of information, the film, we

¹⁰⁷ IH(O)(47)42, Memorandum, 'COI Films', in the words of the Director of the Films Division, 3-9-1947, CAB 134/356.

¹⁰⁸ See Marquand, 'Documentary Film Enquiry. Terms of Reference', 9-10-1947, CAB 124/1026.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. Regarding the COI, Marquand particularly blamed, as the documentary makers did, its lack of departmental status.

are tending – I say no more – to limit ourselves too closely to mere information. Somehow – perhaps not in every film – we must get more inspiration. The creative spirit should blow more freely' [his underlining].¹¹⁰ Marquand believed that this focus on 'mere information' was leading to a slump in motivation amongst the film makers and the consequent production of uninspiring films. John Grierson (writing from his position at UNESCO in Paris) had already made a similar complaint that Government films were not 'firing the public will'.¹¹¹

The importance of Marquand's allegation, and his recommendation deriving from it, has to be emphasised. Until 1947 the intention behind Government communication had been to provide information. Marquand believed this was simply not enough.

Government Reaction to the Problems and to the Marquand Report

Government Ministers and officials could have reacted in a number of ways. They could have accepted that it was difficult to make straight information films and focused on other means of communication. They could have conceded that the Government could not continue to press information films on a general cinema audience and reverted to specialised audiences and non-theatrical distribution. Or they could have altered Government policy, accepted Marquand's recommendations and not limited themselves to information but let the 'creative spirit blow more freely'. They decided to do the latter.

Robert Fraser, DG of the COI, wrote his reaction to the report on the 1st November, 'We all agree most warmly with what we take to be the sense of the main paragraph – that we must make films that change people's moods and attitudes as well as films that just inform... The creative spirit must find an ally in

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ 'UK Documentary Film Problems 1947' Grierson memorandum, attached to accompanying letter by Grierson to Nicholson, 14-8-1947, CAB 124/1025.

the technique of showmanship, in entertainment value, and in rugged promotion'.¹¹² On the 5th November Marquand spoke to Morrison and the Lord President agreed.¹¹³ In addition Morrison felt the COI should 'take full advantage of the recommendation in paragraph 7c that it should itself initiate the making of films of wider scope... [and] The EIC are rightly already taking a wide view of their functions in the economic field, and I endorse the recommendation in paragraph 8b that they should be encouraged to continue'.¹¹⁴ Martli Malherbe, a member of Leslie's EIU, endorsed the report but added that it was not just a case of making films more inspirational, they must have a clear persuasive objective. 'COI should appreciate' Malherbe wrote to Leslie on 11th November, 'that the Sponsor department have, or should have, when they commission a film, a definite propaganda purpose in mind'.¹¹⁵ Malherbe's use of the word 'propaganda' illustrates how acceptable this previously resisted approach to Government communication was becoming.

At 5pm on Wednesday 12th November the Ministerial Home Information Services committee met at 11 Downing Street to discuss the Paymaster General's report and Morrison's response.¹¹⁶ The Ministers not only approved the recommendations of the report but supported an even greater use of film. Harold Wilson, the new President of the Board of Trade, argued that 'In addition to these considerations an increase in the number of documentary films was important from the aspect of public morale, for example it would be helpful if additional films could be produced showing various aspects of food production'. Aneurin Bevan 'welcomed the proposal in the report that the documentary film unit should be

¹¹² Note by Robert Fraser, response to Marquand report, 1-11-1947, CAB 124/1026.

¹¹³ JA Lidderdale, Lord President's Office, to EM Nicholson, 6-11-1947, CAB 124/1026.

¹¹⁴ Morrison response to Marquand, IH(47)12, 'Documentary Film Enquiry', 10-11-1947, CAB 134/354.

¹¹⁵ Malherbe to Leslie, 11-11-1947, CAB 124/1026.

¹¹⁶ IH(47)2nd, Minutes, 12-11-1947, CAB 134/354.

encouraged by the Government to embark on the production of film which would stress the achievements of the present Government in various fields. There would for example be room for an impressive film on the results of the housing drive'.¹¹⁷

Patrick Gordon Walker, newly appointed as assistant to Morrison on information matters, was keen that Marquand's report be put into action quickly and 'therefore proposed that he should seek from the Lord President a specific remit to follow up the carrying out of the recommendations'.¹¹⁸ Having been given this remit Gordon Walker set to work with the COI to shift the films policy, to resolve some of the tensions with the Treasury, and to consider how to enhance Government film distribution.

There were four important consequences of this shift in 1947. There was an effort by Government to force its official factory newsreel into cinemas, alongside the existing commercial newsreels. There was a more conscious attempt to expand the remit of films and move away from 'mere information'. There was a concerted effort to impose a coherent information strategy on the films programme in order to make it a much more effective instrument in the education and persuasion of the electorate. Critical in this effort was the employment of John Grierson as the new head of the films division in 1948. And there was an attempt to maintain and enhance theatrical distribution and to breathe new life into non-theatrical distribution. This was not a Government winding down its films operation. Quite the reverse, Labour was now consciously trying to use film as an instrument of policy.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ JA Lidderdale on behalf of Gordon Walker, 19-11-1947, CAB 124/1026.

The Government's Own Newsreel

Clem Leslie recognised that the EIC's official newsreel had a much greater chance of being distributed to cinemas across the country after the Ministerial meeting of 12th November 1947. He was keen that this enthusiasm of senior Ministers regarding the influence of film be directed towards this as well as other specific objectives. He therefore wrote to the Chancellor, 'knowing his interest in films in general', to point out that the real issue was with distribution, not with production. He drafted a note for the Chancellor to write to Morrison, suggesting that 'one ten-minute film a month does not take us very far' (Leslie ignored the trailers and commercially distributed films) and that the Government should aim to add the factory newsreel to the film programme. He went so far as to write on the Chancellor's behalf that 'Efforts are to be made to persuade the exhibitors to give it [the factory newsreel] general showing once a month in addition to the present free ten minute film'.¹¹⁹

On 11th December 1947 the Chancellor signed this note and sent it to Morrison. A few days later Bernard Sendall, head of production at the COI, met up with W.R. Fuller, the General Secretary of the CEA, to discuss the issue. At the meeting Fuller suggested that, were the Government to make some concessions on the ration on film stock for the newsreels, the exhibitors might consider taking on another film.¹²⁰ Sendall took this up with the Board of Trade, telling them that the inclusion of the official newsreel in cinema programmes had the 'strong personal blessing of the Chancellor of the Exchequer'.¹²¹ The Board of Trade then discussed the issue of film with Kodak. Kodak were reluctant to release any

¹¹⁹ SCL (Leslie) to Spicer (Treasury), 9-12-1947, CAB 124/1027.

¹²⁰ Sendall to Lidderdale, 22-12-1947, INF 12/564. Though Sendall's letter suggests the concession was Fuller's idea it does seem highly coincidental that the General Secretary of the CEA should suggest it just at this moment, unprompted.

¹²¹ Sendall to AG White (BoT), 24-12-1947, INF 12/564.

more film stocks since they were 'virtual dollar exports', but it would 'be prepared to act in accordance with whatever decision HMG may come to in this matter'.¹²²

The official newsreel appeared to be making significant progress, but up to this point the newsreel companies themselves had not been consulted. It was not until one of their regular meetings with the COI, on 2nd February 1948, that Ronald Tritton, head of the Films Division, introduced the idea. It was not well received. Howard Thomas, Chief-in-Production of Pathé Pictures, 'made the point with some vehemence that the exhibiting side of the Industry was getting tired of overmuch propaganda'.¹²³ Though Tritton tried to assuage them by claiming that the film would be 'a feature rather than a news piece' this did not help.

The newsreel companies were understandably upset. They 'felt that they had been helpful in giving coverage to subjects of interest to the Advisory Committee' in the past, and they considered the factory newsreel 'to be an invasion of the sphere of private enterprise'.¹²⁴ Neither did Thomas change his mind when Tritton took him and Gerald Sanger to one side at the end of the meeting to mention the film stock concession.¹²⁵

The Government consequently gave up on the idea of separate theatrical distribution. It did not, however, abandon the plan of producing industrial success stories to raise morale and promote emulation. 'It was suggested', in EIC discussions, 'that the Government might produce 'achievement' items and give them to the newsreels'.¹²⁶ This would have the added benefit of seeming less like Government propaganda. The idea was accepted and three months later the Ministry of Supply was able to report that many official films were being made

¹²² AG White memorandum (BoT), 21-1-1948. Watson to Sendall, 16-1-1948, INF 12/565.

¹²³ Tritton to Sendall, 2-2-1948, re the meeting with newsreel companies that morning, INF 12/565.

¹²⁴ IH(O)(E)(48)2nd, Minutes, 6-2-1948, CAB 134/364.

¹²⁵ Tritton to Sendall, 2-2-1948, INF 12/565.

¹²⁶ IH(O)(E)(48)2nd, Minutes, 6-2-1948, CAB 134/364.

and a good deal of material given to newsreels: 'A constant supply of material is also provided for Newsreels, to draw attention to the assistance given by the Ministry in industry and science and to achievements in industry'.¹²⁷ The Government had therefore taken a step towards deliberate news manipulation, providing 'news' stories aimed at influencing the perceptions of the audience, without an official tag attached.

As well as demonstrating the Government's shift towards an active use of film news, this episode illustrates how little it still thought of the commercial newsreels. It tended to ignore them unless they could provide an avenue for its own material. The difficult experience of the factory newsreel changed this only in as far as the COI was now producing film packages unofficially rather than officially.

Expanding the Film Remit from 'Mere Information'

A critical consequence of the Marquand inquiry was the decision to move towards inspiration and entertainment. It was now generally accepted within the COI that films were not the best means of communicating plain information but were good at stimulating feeling. Tritton was very clear about this when responding to a letter from Harold Wilson of 25th November which suggested that films were 'an extremely good way of explaining the factual background of many of the problems that are embarrassing us at the moment to the general public'.¹²⁸ Tritton replied that Films Division, 'hold the opposite view. We think that film can be used to arouse an emotional response, but not to present statistics or explain problems'.¹²⁹ The need to sublimate information was even plainer when it came to longer films, such as second features. Philip Mackie, Films Division, wrote that

¹²⁷ IH(O)(E)(48), Ministry of Supply, Report on Progress of Economic Information, 6-5-1948, CAB 134/366.

¹²⁸ Harold Wilson to Morrison, 25-11-1947, INF 12/564.

¹²⁹ Tritton to Sendall, 1-12-1947, INF 12/564.

'With possible second feature projects, we have necessarily first to consider the subject, the informational purpose, the "message". But it is clear that the eventual success of each film depends not at all on the informational purpose, but very largely on the interest and entertainment value of the characters and the story'.¹³⁰

Though Films Division had already been trying to move in this direction the reaction to the inquiry allowed them to move faster and gain funding for projects which might not otherwise have gone ahead. In particular this meant the endorsement of the plan to make a number of second feature films. Bernard Sendall was pleased that by late January 1948 'It is relevant to record that our intention to make story documentaries of 3½ to 6 reels is known to Mr Gordon-Walker, the President of the Board of Trade and the Lord President, and has been welcomed by them'.¹³¹

By this time the Crown Film Unit had just finished filming '*A Yank Comes Back*'. This film shows graphically how Government policy was shifting. The project was originally discussed by the EIC in June 1947.¹³² Leslie thought that a one-reel documentary film which showed 'what reasonable and sympathetic Dominion nationals and foreigners thought about Britain' would 'stimulate national group feeling'.¹³³ This morale boosting picture could be released as part of the monthly release schedule in the autumn.

The COI criticised the initial idea as insincere and suggested changes.¹³⁴ One of these was that Burgess Meredith, 'one of America's leading actors', should star in

¹³⁰ Philip Mackie to Helen de Moulpiéd, 17-12-1947, INF 12/133.

¹³¹ Bernard Sendall, following dialogue with Woodburn and Campbell, 23-1-1948, INF 12/133.

¹³² IH(O)(E)(47)2nd, Minutes, 19-6-1947, CAB 134/361.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ IH(O)(E)(47)8th, Minutes, 31-7-1947, CAB 134/361.

the film.¹³⁵ Meredith was willing to do so (for the price of his passage from the US and expenses) as long as he could also script the film.¹³⁶ The COI agreed. Having then received a brief about the proposed film Meredith also wanted to change the structure.¹³⁷ 'Important drawback' he telegraphed from the US in October, 'impossible my opinion to make point effective one reel stop seems waste and cramps technique'.¹³⁸ The 10 minute morale film was subsequently extended to two reels and the budget increased.¹³⁹ *A Yank Comes Back* was eventually completed in July 1948. By that time it had become a four-reel scripted second feature, described as a 'serio-comic film about Britain's economic situation'.¹⁴⁰ This is a suitably euphemistic description of a film which is clunky and highly contrived.

This was a short film which became a second feature as the approach to films shifted. Its successors were less ad hoc. In all the COI planned to make five features over the following two years.¹⁴¹ The topics being considered were Nursing, Local Government, The Farmer's Life, and Mental Health Services. Each would cost between £25-30,000 to produce.¹⁴²

The Government also tried to add entertainment values to shorter films. Stafford Cripps commissioned John Halas and Joy Batchelor, who ran an independent film company specialising in animation, to develop an animated character,

¹³⁵ Helen de Moulpiéd was thinking of Meredith for the part as early as 17-6-1947, after her initial conversations with Leslie. Moulpiéd to Tritton & Sendall, 17-6-1947, INF 12/544.

¹³⁶ De Moulpiéd to Meredith 2-7-47. Forman to Malherbe on 12-8-1947; Meredith 'would like to write the script', INF 12/544.

¹³⁷ Denis Forman, brief for Meredith, 4-9-1947 – the idea was that the film would overcome domestic preconceptions of Britain, namely that 'Britain's Lazy, Britain's Old Fashioned, Britain's Short of Everything, Britain's Gloomy', INF 12/544.

¹³⁸ Meredith telegram, 10-10-1947, INF 12/544.

¹³⁹ De Moulpiéd to Watson, 21-11-1947. Fraser agreed to 2-reeler on 13th October, INF 12/544.

¹⁴⁰ Philip Mackie memorandum to Robert Fraser, 'COI "Feature" Films', 10-5-1949, INF 12/542.

¹⁴¹ IH(O)(E)(48)56, Memorandum, 'Economic Information Programme – Feature Films', 18-3-1948, CAB 134/365.

¹⁴² IH(O)(48)14, COI Films programme 1948-9, Appendix D; 'Plans for the Production of Second Feature Films', 26-2-1948, CAB 134/357.

'Charley' for use in Government shorts.¹⁴³ He was designed to be an easygoing, timeless British everyman, who was only able to understand Britain's current difficult situation by experiencing how it got there. In light-hearted historical narratives Charley would learn about what life was like before social security (*Charley's March of Time*), why Britain was so reliant on imports (*Robinson Charley*) and why the price of coal was so high (*Charley's Black Magic*).

The COI also commissioned other short films simply to raise morale, such as 'What a Life' and 'Eye of the Beholder'.¹⁴⁴ By July 1948, John Grierson was able to comment that 'In regard to the form of the films themselves there had lately been a welcome change. The new cartoon series for instance was a precious instrument, and the tendency generally was towards drama and humour'.¹⁴⁵

Through 1948 and 1949 the Government sought to make films whose purpose, though partly to inform, was more importantly to persuade and direct. The EIU wrote in January 1949 that, 'The monthly release programme, that is to say, gives and is intended to give the Government the opportunity of inducing the public to accept ideas, and to take actions, which are of practical importance in the national interest'.¹⁴⁶ And for a period after 1947 the COI was keen to integrate values such as drama and entertainment. The Home Film Programme Committee was convinced that this was successful. 'Evidence is becoming available', the Committee wrote in December 1949, 'that the policy of reserving the monthly release for subjects of first-rank national importance which are capable of arresting and entertaining treatment is producing results...There is some reason

¹⁴³ 'Stafford Cripps, when he became Chancellor of the Exchequer, personally initiated the Charley Cartoon series', Halas and Manvell, *The Technique of Film Animation* (1976), p.116.

¹⁴⁴ The first was originally titled *Jeremiahs and Jonahs* and distributed as 'What a Life', monthly release, January 1949. Tritton to Grierson, 6-5-1948, INF 5/53.

¹⁴⁵ IH(O)(48)7th, Minutes, John Grierson, 2-7-1948, MH 79/588.

¹⁴⁶ IH(O), Film Programme Subcommittee, FP(49)1st, Minutes, note prepared by EIU for meeting, 25-1-1949, INF 12/57.

to suppose, therefore, that the monthly releases are appreciating in value in the eyes of the leading exhibitors'.¹⁴⁷

Imposing a Coherent Strategy on the Film Programme

A third consequence of the 1947 shift was the attempt to impose a coherent strategy on the film programme. This was now possible since the COI and the Economic Information Committee had been given greater latitude to centralise decision making on film production and distribution.¹⁴⁸ But it was given much more emphasis with the arrival of John Grierson as the new head of the COI Films Division in April 1948.

It is important to recognise the significance of the Government's employment of Grierson. Clearly one of the main reasons he was brought in was to heal the rift between the Government and the documentary units. But Ministers and officials were also aware of Grierson's beliefs about the use of Government information and film as a means of education and reform.¹⁴⁹ For Grierson state sponsored propaganda was a pre-requisite of a modern social democracy.¹⁵⁰ In his address on 'Education and Total Effort' in 1941 he said the role of the state was not simply to add to the mass of informational material already 'thrown at the head of the benighted citizen'. It was 'to give the citizen a pattern of thought and feeling

¹⁴⁷ IH(O), Home Film Programme Committee, Monthly Releases, Note by the Chief Distribution Officer, Films Division, COI, (Reference FP(49) 11th Meeting, Agenda: Item 4), 29-12-1949, MH 79/597.

¹⁴⁸ Though the EIC and COI had started to plan the films programme in the autumn of 1947 (via the film programme sub committee) they were given more latitude after 12th November and much greater impetus by the arrival of John Grierson. Morrison, see IH(47)12, CAB 134/354.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Sendall to Fraser, 28-8-1947, 'Even under Socialism there is a wide field of human life in which the Public Service has little part to play... the problem is docs beliefs because of Grierson and his 'public process'. Grierson is a socialist and a propagandist; his main interest is in the social and political aspects of human life' INF 12/564.

¹⁵⁰ Grierson saw, for example, radio and cinema as 'necessary instruments in both the practice of Government and the enjoyment of citizenship', *Grierson on Documentary*, p.78.

which will enable him to approach this flood of material in some useful fashion'.¹⁵¹ And in the letter he wrote to Morrison and Cripps in 1945, Grierson asserted that a Government information service 'is the instrument by which the Government secures the cooperation of the people to national and international ends'.¹⁵² The decision to employ Grierson, therefore, must surely be considered another significant shift away from the neutral transmission of information from state to citizen.

As soon as he arrived in his new position Grierson began putting together a plan 'to impose a pattern upon the future film programme and to weld it gradually into an articulated national service'.¹⁵³ In this plan the Government's short films would become part of a small number of series, each with its own identity and targeted at a specific audience. 'The purpose of this pattern' Grierson wrote, 'was to gear production to distribution. Each series would as it were be fitted into a particular jig, and those concerned would know from the start what shape and size and style a film should take and for what type of audience it was intended'.¹⁵⁴ Outside instructional or educational films, Grierson separated the domestic programme into three areas, Spirit of the Nation; Progress of the Nation; Principles and Practices'.¹⁵⁵ This would later be translated into a 'World in Action' series, a 'Report' series, the Charley films, a 'This is Britain' series, a 'Where do You Come From' series, and a factory magazine.¹⁵⁶ Robert Fraser told departments that they should 'should try to fit their individual projects into the pattern

¹⁵¹ John Grierson, 'Education and Total Effort', (1941), reprinted in *Grierson on Documentary* (1946), p.209.

¹⁵² Grierson to Morrison & Cripps, 'Nature and Form of a Government Information Service', 20-11-1945, CAB 124/988.

¹⁵³ IH(O)(48)7th, Minutes, Grierson, 2-7-1948, MH 79/588.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Grierson, 'To the Producer, Crown Film Unit, 31-8-1948, INF 5/32.

¹⁵⁶ IH(O)(49)24, Memorandum, 'Information Services Film Programme', Paper 'C', 'COI Film Programme 1949-50 (Series)', 30-3-1949, MH 79/592.

proposed... so that official films, instead of being entirely unrelated, should form part of a visible design'.¹⁵⁷

To oversee this shift Grierson developed a Film Programme sub-committee in September 1948. Fraser later said the committee's creation 'can already be seen as a milestone in the history of Information Service film work'.¹⁵⁸ Its intention was, he said, to 'advise on an identifiable group of films concerned with social progress and achievement'.¹⁵⁹ It also had 'the responsibility for guiding the programme of films for distribution at home excluding those of a purely specialist and instructional nature. This will entail decisions of priority and emphasis, the assumption of sponsorship by the most appropriate department and, in certain instances, by the COI in its own right'.¹⁶⁰ It was therefore explicitly responsible for films with a propaganda purpose. It appeared as though the Government was adopting the Griersonian model of state film-making.

A Greater Awareness of Distribution

A fourth and final consequence of the 1947 shift was a greater consciousness of distribution. After the Marquand inquiry Ministers became more aware that distribution was as much, if not more, of an issue than production. When Harold Wilson wrote to Morrison strongly pushing for the COI to produce more films, for example, the Films Division were grateful for the attention but surprised that the President of the Board of Trade did not realise how many films were already made and not screened.¹⁶¹ Films Division explained the rudiments of distribution

¹⁵⁷ IH(O)(48)7th, Minutes, Robert Fraser, 2-7-1948, MH 79/588.

¹⁵⁸ IH(O)(49)24, Memorandum, 'Information Services Film Programme', 30-3-1949, MH 79/592.

¹⁵⁹ IH(O)(48)9th, Minutes, Robert Fraser, 24-9-1948, MH 79/588.

¹⁶⁰ Terms of reference of Film Programme Subcommittee (FP(48)1, 23-11-1948), MH 79/596.

¹⁶¹ Wilson to Morrison, 25-11-1947, and subsequent Tritton-Sendall correspondence in December, INF 12/564.

to Leslie who quickly passed these on to Cripps and Gordon Walker.¹⁶² By the middle of December 1947 JA Lidderdale was writing back to Films Division on Gordon Walker's behalf that he and the Chancellor were very conscious that distribution was the problem and not the number of films made.¹⁶³

This was particularly pertinent since there was much more screen time available at this point than there had ever been before. This was thanks to the current lack of American films. In August 1947 the Government had imposed a 75% tax on imports of American films to stem the tide of dollars leaving the country. The American distributors' association, the MPAA, responded immediately by imposing a boycott on American films to the UK. Though British cinemas held enough US feature films to show for a few months, after that they would be reduced to replaying old films or showing new British films. This included the support programmes. Suddenly there seemed to be a gap on British cinema screens that needed filling.¹⁶⁴

Ministers considered how they could increase the production of British documentaries and shorts and ensure a greater number of Government films were screened in cinemas.¹⁶⁵ Gordon Walker thought that the Government should, in the new Cinematograph Act which was due for renewal in 1948, set renters and exhibitors a high quota for the screening of British films.¹⁶⁶ He was 'keen to get the Y percentage [for other films and shorts] fixed high enough to

¹⁶² Tritton to Malherbe, 2-12-1947, 'Notes on Theatrical Distribution' (from request by Leslie), INF 12/564. Sendall also wrote to JA Lidderdale to explain the issue, 5-12-1947, CAB 124/1027.

¹⁶³ Lidderdale to Sendall on Gordon Walker's behalf, 16-12-1947, INF 12/564.

¹⁶⁴ For a detailed assessment of the so called 'Dalton Duty' and its effect on the Government and the film industry see Street and Dickinson, *The Film Industry and the British Government 1927-84* (1985), Ch.9.

¹⁶⁵ In particular at the meeting on 'Production and Distribution of British Films for the "Supporting Programme"', 20-1-1948, with Morrison, Wilson, Gordon-Walker et al. INF 12/565.

¹⁶⁶ The Cinematograph Act, first passed in 1927 and then renewed in 1938, was the means by which the Government sought to promote British film production and distribution. It set minimum quotas for the rental and exhibition of cinema films. For more details see Street and Dickinson, *op.cit.*

provide an incentive for the greater production in this country of documentaries, story documentaries and second features'.¹⁶⁷

Morrison, talking in the specially convened meeting to discuss the production and distribution of British films for the support programme, said he thought the 75% tax might be an opportunity to reduce the three hour cinema programme to one main feature and two shorts, one of which would be a documentary.¹⁶⁸

Though there were problems with these and other suggestions, Wilson took them into account when drawing up the Cinematograph Act. Though the Act itself did not set a percentage it stated that there would be a quota for first features and for the support programme and that the exact figure would wait on discussions with industry.¹⁶⁹ When Wilson announced that it would be 45% British made for first features and 25% for the support programme the exhibitors were stunned.¹⁷⁰ This was considerably higher than they had expected and they did not think it could be fulfilled. Under significant pressure Wilson later lowered the figure for first features, but not for the support programme.

Even before the opportunities opened by the new Cinematograph Act the Government was having more success distributing its films commercially. In February 1948 Fraser was able to boast that 'About twice as many films had been placed with renters in the last twelve months as in any previous year. If the feature-length films made during the war by the Service Departments were excluded, then about four times as many Government films were receiving

¹⁶⁷ Lidderdale to RCG Somervell, 3-1-1948, INF 12/565.

¹⁶⁸ 'Production and Distribution of British Films for the "Supporting Programme", Minutes, 20-1-1948, INF 12/565.

¹⁶⁹ Cinematograph Act 1948, Bills, Public, 1947-8, Vol.1, Numbers 26, 44, 63, pp.571-651.

¹⁷⁰ See coverage in *Kinematograph Weekly*, 24-6-1948. For example the reaction to the 25% figure for the support programme; 'It is difficult in the extreme to see where on earth this footage is to be found', in 'Even Enough Films to Cover Quota Will Not Ease Product Headache', p.6.

theatrical showing as in any previous year'.¹⁷¹ Fraser was quick to ascribe this to the inclusion of more entertainment, telling the Home Information Services Committee that 'the rising figures for the theatrical distribution were an indication that the problem of giving official films a higher entertainment value was being tackled not without some success'.¹⁷² The figure increased further in 1948 and by July Fraser was able to announce that the commercial distribution of Government films in 1948 would reach a level 'sensationally higher than any achieved before and five times as great as in war time (if Service made films were excepted)'.¹⁷³

These commercial successes were, of course, in addition to the agreement the Government still held with the CEA. This not only guaranteed the distribution of 12 Government short films a year and 25-30 trailers in approximately 3000 cinemas, but, unlike advertising in newspapers or on billboards, guaranteed it free of charge. Officials within Government were very conscious of how valuable this now was. When the original agreement had been extended in 1946 Mr Plumbley of the Home Information Services (Official) committee calculated that 'the average weekly cinema audience was about 30 millions, which' Plumbley thought 'was an audience worth paying for. It had been computed that the free publicity given to the Government trailers during the war represented a gross value of £3 to £4 millions'.¹⁷⁴ Though the agreement had been intended as a national concession during wartime the Government clung to it desperately in its aftermath. In late 1946, when it seemed the deal might be under threat, Fraser

¹⁷¹ IH(O)(48)3rd, Minutes, 27-2-1948, Robert Fraser, regarding consideration of COI Film Production Programme 1948-49 memorandum, IH(O)(48)14. MH 79/588.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ IH(O)(48)7th, Minutes, Robert Fraser, 2-7-1948, CAB 134/357.

¹⁷⁴ IH(O)(46)4th, Minutes, Plumbley, 18-7-1946, CAB 124/1013.

and Morrison managed to convince the exhibitors to extend it for another year.¹⁷⁵ In 1947 and 1948 the Government further cultivated the CEA to ensure the deal persisted.¹⁷⁶

Shortly after Grierson became controller of the Films Division, in July 1948, he described the new distribution situation; 'opportunities of the moment were enormous. The theatres were waiting for new films (though the desire for a reduction in Entertainment tax caused the exhibitors to appear hostile), and the latest quota arrangements made the possibilities even greater'.¹⁷⁷

The Government also sought to enhance its non-theatrical distribution programme. In 1947-48 there were 52,244 non-theatrical shows compared to 46,789 in 1946-7.¹⁷⁸ The figure rose further in 1948-9. Particular thought was given to the factory audience who were so difficult to reach by other media.¹⁷⁹ A working party was formed and met twice in 1949 and proposed that 'a determined, planned and fully equipped effort should be made in the coming winter to restore to the factory film show as much as possible of the widespread popularity and influence which it enjoyed during the war'.¹⁸⁰

Therefore in 1948 the Government was increasing the number and exposure of its films through theatrical and non-theatrical distribution. This included everything from 30 second advertisements to short morale films to 45 minute second

¹⁷⁵ Though a meeting was arranged between Morrison and the CEA (including Rank) for 20-11-46, Sir Alexander King and Morrison were able to reach an agreement to extend the arrangement before the meeting (King to Ethel Donald, 16-11-46), CAB 124/1013.

¹⁷⁶ Morrison to Fraser, 'I have been trying to smooth things with CEA' because relations had become rather strained, 15-6-1948. Met with representatives 9-7-1948, CAB 124/1013.

¹⁷⁷ IH(O)(48)7th, Minutes, Grierson, 2-7-1948, MH 79/588.

¹⁷⁸ From preparation for COI Annual Report 1950-51 (compiled Nov 1950-Jan 1952), not published, INF 12/345.

¹⁷⁹ The working party agreed that 'factory film shows offer the only certain means of reaching the men and women in the factories', IH(O), Factory Film Shows Working Party, Minutes, 7-6-1949, MH 79/604.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* The proposals were eventually unsuccessful due to Government economies in information services.

features. It was doing this by adjusting legislation to help some of its own films gain screen time. It was leveraging its authority to ensure the continuation of a wartime distribution agreement, and it was increasing the number of screenings to non-theatrical (often captive) audiences. It appeared as though films were now playing an active role in the promotion of Government policy.

SECTION 3: Problems Encountered As A Result Of The 1947 Shift

The Government experienced significant problems as a result of its shift in policy after 1947. These problems are important because not only do they help to explain why the Government drew back from its newfound commitment to film, they also help to indicate why film is such a difficult medium for any democratic Government to use. There were three main difficulties. The sudden desire to produce topical news and features accentuated the Government's previous neglect of the newsreels and helped lead to a deterioration of relations with the NRA in 1948. Secondly, by trying to make inspirational films the Government found itself open to charges of propaganda and to complaints from audiences and exhibitors. And thirdly, by trying to make entertainment features the Government was taking on financial and critical risks that were much greater than it initially realised.

Deterioration of Relationship with Newsreels

The newsreel companies were able to handle a degree of neglect from senior ministers. They were even willing to accede to the continuation of controls although they were unhappy with some of them. But they became frustrated and angry during 1948 when the Government first tried to force an official newsreel alongside the existing commercial ones, and then sought to control and direct access to senior Ministers.

Shortly after the failure of the factory newsreel the COI wrote a memorandum for Ministers regarding their approach to newsreel interviews. Morrison had requested that they write this after receiving some criticisms of Ministerial appearances. This memorandum was remarkable both in terms of its disregard for the previous cooperation of the newsreels with the Government, and as a demonstration that Government Ministers were beginning to worry about style of communication as well as substance.¹⁸¹

The memorandum told Ministers that though 'a highly important medium' the newsreel was also a very tricky one. One could not predict who would be in the audience and therefore whether there might be a hostile reaction to a Minister on screen. The newsreel was 'a particularly trying test of anyone's capacity to act naturally'. The COI therefore recommended that Ministers consult the COI first, and take the advice of a producer or director from the Crown Film Unit. But they should not reveal that they had taken any such advice, 'It would be fatal for any such "outsider" to be present at the interview, and most unwise even for the newsreel company to be allowed to know that outside advice from other film production technicians had been sought'. This shows how, as well as becoming much more conscious of their presentation and style, Ministers were being encouraged to hide this consciousness.

Already very wary of the media this memorandum increased their desire to control their representation and manage their appearances. In the Ministerial meeting in which they discussed the advice Hugh Gaitskell described how 'He had safeguarded his position by insisting on giving his personal approval to the film before it was shown and by seeking the advice of the Central Office of

¹⁸¹ IS(48)3, Memorandum, 'Ministerial Newsreel Interviews', 5-3-1948, CAB 134/458.

Information'.¹⁸² Aneurin Bevan dismissed the medium as light entertainment. Morrison re-emphasised that Ministers should just be very careful and take expert advice.

The newsreels were estranged still further by the Government's resurgent interest in producing and distributing its own films and by the arrival, in April 1948, of John Grierson as controller of films. Grierson had no sympathy for the newsreel approach. He wanted to promote social engagement and challenge the conservative consensus, not to endorse it. He revealed his contempt for the newsreels in a conversation with the FO that November, describing 'the newsreel editorial person as a combination of childlike innocence, gross corruption and a stupidity only slightly concealed by low animal cunning'.¹⁸³

Grierson's feelings clearly influenced his work since in the minutes of their meeting in October the newsreel companies wrote that 'the NRA were not receiving cooperation from Mr. Grierson'.¹⁸⁴ Unlike Ronald Tritton, to whom the NRA gave a present when he left Films Division in August, the newsreel executives did not warm to Grierson.

The NRA were equally unhappy that departments now seemed to think the newsreels were under the thumb of the COI. Howard Thomas 'informed members' at the same NRA meeting in October 1948, 'that Government departments now approached the COI for permission to view the newsreels'. Thomas 'contended that far too many people were under the impression that newsreels were governed by the Central Office of Information'.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² IS(48)1st, Minutes, 10-3-1948, CAB 134/458.

¹⁸³ CF MacLaren, quoting Grierson from FO-COI meeting. MacLaren note, 12-11-1948, FO 1110/50.

¹⁸⁴ NRA Minutes, min.2659, 28-10-1948, BFI.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

The newsreels companies finally decided to act. They decided they would no longer hold weekly screenings at the COI and would stop meeting them regularly.¹⁸⁶ The Foreign Office later described how, 'Before flouncing out of the last COI meeting, they [the newsreels] explained that they felt neglected and spurned and that, although they were eager to be guided, no guidance was given them'.¹⁸⁷

Inspirational Films or Propaganda?

As another consequence of the 1947 shift, the Government soon found itself in difficulty over inspirational films. Documentary shorts whose purpose was to inspire invariably tended to focus on positive stories and achievements. The message behind them being that things were hard but were getting better fast. Yet it was very difficult not to elide the efforts to rebuild Britain with an affirmation of Labour policy. For example the first film the EIC commissioned, *Report on Coal*, talked about the 'formidable task' the NCB took on when it was nationalised but that '8 months later the Coal Board reported progress'. In its first eight months, the film said, there were 30,000 more men employed in the industry, and 4.5 million tonnes more coal was being mined; 'Not a perfect figure, but they show a profit since the country took over, after years of loss'.¹⁸⁸

Similarly, it was difficult for these 'achievement' films to resist comparing current growth and improvements to the privations of the past. The Government's monthly release for August 1950 was about 'building a new country', *From the Ground Up*.¹⁸⁹ As the camera panned over building sites, factories, coal mines

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. The NRA members began showing the newsreels by invitation in their own cinemas rather than at the COI.

¹⁸⁷ CF MacLaren, IRD, Foreign Office, 12-11-1948, FO 1110/50.

¹⁸⁸ Transcript taken from *Report on Coal*, CFU for Economic Information Committee, monthly release September 1947. Viewed at BFI.

¹⁸⁹ *From the Ground Up*, CFU for Economic Information Committee, monthly release August 1950. Viewed at BFI.

and locomotives, the commentator told the viewer that 'Today we're investing one-fifth of all our resources... in the making of a new Britain for our children and ourselves. We're rebuilding, modernising, expanding, the whole vast productive machine by which we live'. This was contrasted with the view of the past. A child was filmed with her face pinned against the glass of a basement flat with bars on the windows. 'What of our cities?' the voiceover asked, 'Can we let our children inherit a legacy of the past like this?'.¹⁹⁰

These films were also increasingly perceived as Government propaganda by the audience, by exhibitors, and by the other political parties. This did not necessarily mean people objected to them. Those who accepted the position of the films tended to condone the propaganda. Those who disagreed with it did not.¹⁹¹ This was most clearly demonstrated when Films Division commissioned the Social Survey to find out what a preview audience thought about 'A Yank Comes Back'.¹⁹² One respondent thought the film 'A very good idea, makes you feel proud of England. Brings back to mind memories we ought to be proud of (Dentist's assistant, 43). A second had 'Rather mixed feelings about it. Not very good propaganda' (Ironmongery sales manager, 41). And a third 'Didn't think much of it. Propaganda. A waste of time and money' (Housewife, 25).¹⁹³

Some cinemas were also now objecting to screening Government films. In June 1948, Ken Jones, the chairman of the Birmingham branch of the CEA, told the *Daily Mirror* that "We were happy to give screen time during the war, but we feel

¹⁹⁰ Transcript taken from *From the Ground Up*.

¹⁹¹ See letter from Geo.W.Crowe to SC Leslie, 14-2-1948, re Coal Report: 'It may or may not interest you to know that I strongly object to having propaganda pushed down my throat at a place of public entertainment, and for which I have to pay', INF 12/565.

¹⁹² Audience reaction to 'A Yank Comes Back'— survey made in August 1948, by HD Willcock. NS-132, RG 23/533.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* Quotes from Survey.

these films are now political propaganda. We should feel the same if the Tories were in power".¹⁹⁴

The Conservatives drew increasing attention to the issue of political propaganda in films in 1948. In March Boyd Carpenter criticised the film 'Ours is the Land' for contrasting the current administration's record on housing with the Governments of the 1930s. He quoted the commentary which said, "They promised us houses in 1935. Look at Paisley and Dunfermline. Now they have got them".¹⁹⁵ And during the lengthy May debate on information services A. Marlowe attacked the COI for its plans to spend £30,000 on six animated Charley films 'dealing, I suggest, entirely with Government propaganda'.¹⁹⁶

Though Ministers strongly denied that films sought to applaud the Government's achievements, it was slightly embarrassing when the Labour Party announced, in January 1950, that they would be using some of the COI films as part of their election campaign.¹⁹⁷

The Risks Associated with Making Entertainment Films

The Government found the integration of entertainment values through the development of second feature films even more difficult. Using fiction as a means of Government communication required much more depth and nuance than a short documentary film made for a specific purpose. Helen de Moulpiéd was very clear about this after having read a series of suggestions for second features

¹⁹⁴ Quoted within article in the *Daily Mirror*, 14-6-1948, contained within Fraser – Morrison correspondence on CEA deal, CAB 124/1013.

¹⁹⁵ Boyd Carpenter, Parliamentary Debates, Adjournment Debate, 19-3-1948, Vol.448, Col.2538.

¹⁹⁶ A. Marlowe, Parliamentary Debates, Supply Debate on Information Services, 13-5-1948, Vol.450, Col.2339.

¹⁹⁷ JAR Pimlott to Morrison, 9-1-1950, CAB 124/85

from the EIU.¹⁹⁸ She told Tritton that the ideas the EIU set out 'suggest a fundamental misunderstanding of what a second-feature film should be. It is not an elongated short propaganda film with a nice moral rammed home at greater length than in the monthly release films. It must be first and foremost a good story in its own right, a story in which characters develop in action. It must entertain. It influences people's opinions only by drawing them into the story and opening their hearts and sympathies, but if it is good in this way then people won't come away with a neat synopsis on their lips' [her underlining].¹⁹⁹

De Moulpiéd may have been right but this suggested a degree of creativity and experiment generally unsuited to Government ministers and officials. Indeed their intermittent attempts to put forward feature ideas shows how far many of them were from understanding how a fictional film might best represent Government policy. In December 1947, after the Ministerial committee had agreed to push forward with second features, Gordon Walker wrote to Tritton and Sendall asking 'whether you had thought of the possibilities of the short story as a basis for shorter features, lasting about ¾ of an hour. De Maupassant and Kipling might provide material for a new type of short feature which would at the same time make a good deal of use of the documentary tradition'.²⁰⁰ It is not clear how Gordon Walker thought de Maupassant or Kipling would illuminate the national situation.

The Government did not make any films based on these short stories but it did produce a number of others. *Life in her Hands*, starring Kathleen Byron, was a slow-burning drama about a woman who decided to become a nurse after her

¹⁹⁸ 'Note by the Economic Information Unit – Second Feature Films'. Tritton to Moulpiéd, 22-3-1948. These suggestions included a film on cotton, on the black market, on women in the home and shipbuilding, INF 12/133.

¹⁹⁹ De Moulpiéd to Tritton, concerning second features, 7-4-1948, INF 12/133.

²⁰⁰ JA Lidderdale to Bernard Sendall on Gordon Walker's behalf, INF 12/564, 16-12-1947.

husband was killed in a car crash. By showing what a rewarding experience nursing could be it was intended to encourage women to go into the profession.²⁰¹ *Out of True* was a film devised to show modern methods at mental hospitals to 'to remove public misconceptions'.²⁰² It also made *Waverley Steps*, a film about Edinburgh, and *Four Men in Prison*, a Home Office feature on the penal system.²⁰³

However, as many feature films were attempted and abandoned as were made. In May 1949 Fraser asked Philip Mackie to draw up a list charting the history of Government feature film making since the end of the Second World War. 'This is one of the most fascinating COI documents I have ever read' he wrote to Grierson when he had received it.²⁰⁴ Though the record with long documentary films was reasonably good, with the 'big-fiction propaganda film - here the record is simply ghastly – false and feeble and fumbling start after start, wasted money, strained tempers, horrible wasted effort and talent'. 'Surely' he wrote 'there is a great deal to be learnt from all this'.²⁰⁵ That the Government was not well suited, for example, to making fictional films.

In addition, 'the few [non-fiction feature] films that have been completed ("Cumberland" and "Yank") [have been] total distribution flops'. 'A Yank Comes Back', for example, was originally agreed as a £7,000 one reel film for autumn 1947 release. It was eventually completed as a four-reeler in July 1948 at a cost of over £19,000.²⁰⁶ Despite the protestations of the COI that it had great potential

²⁰¹ *Life in Her Hands* (dir. Philip Leacock, CFU, 1951), viewed at BFI.

²⁰² *Out of True*, CFU 382, Fife Clarke letter to Philip Mackie, 'Origination of project', 3-5-1947, INF 6/33.

²⁰³ *Four Men in Prison* (dir. Max Anderson, CFU), INF 6/410.

²⁰⁴ Fraser to Grierson re Philip Mackie memorandum of 10-5-1949, 'COI "Feature" Films', 2-6-1949, INF 12/542.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ According to Woodburn, letter to Treasury, 3-11-1948. Total cost of the film estimated at £19,776, INF 12/545.

to earn back the expense through commercial distribution, by May 1949 it had only received 22 bookings and receipts of £154.²⁰⁷

The problems with “Yank” helped to convince the Treasury that making second features was risky and unpredictable. This was compounded in the case of fiction films by the problems inherent in measuring their success. If they were not ‘elongated short propaganda films’ as de Moulpied suggested, than their success could not be measured by the audience’s immediate reaction. Yet neither could they be judged solely by their receipts since this would suggest they were competing with commercial entertainment films for profit rather than communicating an important message.

The growing Treasury scepticism about Government film making coincided with major Government budget cuts. Together they helped inaugurate a third phase in the Government’s approach to film, when it recognised some of the problems associated with producing its own film and relied more heavily on pre-existing media, and when it revised its approach to its own production to make it more targeted to avoid waste and criticism.

SECTION 4: Collaboration And Retrenchment

Recognition of Difficulties of Film Making

By 1949 the COI was fully aware that there were some very practical problems to the production of films. Firstly, each film took a long time to make. This meant that by the time one was completed, the political context in which it had been commissioned had often passed. ‘*What a Life*’, for example, was devised in 1947, when the national mood was very gloomy and pessimistic. But by the time it was screened, in January 1949, the mood had changed significantly, such that a film

²⁰⁷ Mackie memorandum to Fraser, ‘COI “Feature” Films’, 10-5-1949, INF 12/542.

about two old men who consider drowning themselves and then think better of it no longer suited the country's temper.

There were many opportunities for films to go wrong. They required lengthy gestation, they involved significant numbers of people, and they were often delayed by tortuous discussions over distribution. They were, therefore, difficult for the Government to control. This control was loosened still further when the COI gave independent film makers the freedom to produce films which were more creative and engaging. Given the conspicuousness of the eventual product, this lack of control made some within Whitehall, particularly within the Treasury, very nervous.

Film making was also expensive. The ten minute shorts the Government made cost between £3,500 to £6,000, on average.²⁰⁸ Second features cost upwards of £25-30,000.²⁰⁹ This expenditure became harder to justify after the budget cuts of 1949 and especially after the French committee recommended the Government focus on publicity that had directly measurable effects.

Understanding the Value of Film

But the COI also had a much greater understanding of the advantages of film as a means of democratic communication. Films had a profound and long-lasting effect. 'Once successfully made', Leslie wrote in March 1949, 'their effect will be strong and deep, for they bring to bear upon a large and organised audience emotional forces much more powerful than can be given expression in press advertising or posters'.²¹⁰ One of these was 'the force of example' which, Fraser noted, was not only very powerful but, for many, the 'main source of social

²⁰⁸ Cost of films based on reference to COI Films made for theatrical release in COI Films Programme, 28-2-1950 (FP(O)(50)2), FP(O)(50)3, MH 79/600.

²⁰⁹ Based on budgets for second features agreed in 1948, IH(O)(48)14, Memoranda, 'COI Films programme 1948-9', 26-2-1948, Appendix D, CAB 134/357.

²¹⁰ Clem Leslie, 4-3-1949, CAB 134/369.

advance. People wish to do that which is honoured and admired' Fraser said, 'and the film can do much to set standards in this matter'.²¹¹ This was especially relevant for lower income groups and for housewives who, the COI's surveys suggested, were much more likely to be influenced by a film than a newspaper advertisement.²¹²

Film could provide context for Government policies and prepare the ground for the public's acceptance of them. Grierson tried to explain this to the Treasury in April 1949 when it asked him for the rationale behind making a film on Scottish Fisheries. 'Grierson elaborated the view', O'Donovan of the Treasury wrote, 'that this kind of film was needed as part of a process of "conditioning" the minds of the public... with the intention of making them receptive to more direct publicity on productivity'.²¹³ These films were, in other words, a realisation of Grierson's concept of giving the citizen a 'pattern of thought and feeling'.

Grierson was not the only one to defend such films. Robert Fraser argued that films without a specific immediate objective could be as influential as those made to elicit a quick reaction. For example, of the films and publicity surrounding the Colonial Information campaign Fraser said; 'One cannot however define its purpose except by saying that it seeks to make it more likely that the people of Britain will act alertly and intelligently and generously in governing their colonies and guiding their political future'. Therefore films were, he wrote, inherently better for 'long term information'.²¹⁴

But in the constrained economic environment of 1949, as part of their austerity drive, Ministers decided to concentrate on 'action publicity', or publicity that

²¹¹ Robert Fraser, 'The Film Programme 1949-50 – A Draft Memorandum on Purposes', 17-5-1949, INF 12/130.

²¹² See Social Survey on exports, 'Fill the Ships', NS87, in IH(O)(E)(47)24, 7-8-1947, CAB 134/362.

²¹³ O'Donovan (Treasury) to Woodburn (COI), 8-4-1949, INF 12/134.

²¹⁴ Robert Fraser, 'The Film Programme', op.cit., 17-5-1949, INF 12/130.

elicited a clearly identifiable reaction.²¹⁵ The Treasury took this as an endorsement of its scepticism towards film and intervened more frequently in production decisions, refusing funding for new features and diluting the autonomy of the COI. Grierson was forced to make staff cuts and reorganise the process by which films were made. Unhappy about the changes Grierson resigned from the COI the following year.

Revision Not Reversal – Information by Other Means

The problems inherent in film production led the Government away from the Griersonian ideal of socially progressive film-making and away from non-factual second features. It persuaded the COI to seek to reduce the risks within film production as much as possible. This meant introducing more controls over the process, targeting films at specific groups within the population, and working out their method of distribution in advance. Furthermore, it led it to look for alternative means of distribution, such as television, and to try to use the newsreels more effectively.

Between 1949-51 the COI introduced a range of controls designed to reduce the costs and the risks of film production. It drew up specifications sheets which required departments to lay out the purpose and function of each film they commissioned.²¹⁶ It integrated audience research into film production and distribution.²¹⁷ And, it made the consideration of distribution a pre-requisite to each film's production. The process became, in other words, very similar to that of a modern advertising company. A fortnight before the election of October 1951 Niven McNicoll, head of Films Division after Grierson's departure, told Fraser that

²¹⁵ 'Action publicity' recommended by Ministerial Information Services Committee, IS(49)1, 25-3-1949, CAB 134/459.

²¹⁶ Fraser, 'The Shaping of Film Proposals – Some Notes on Departmental Procedure', 25-9-1951, INF 12/542.

²¹⁷ Niven McNicoll to Fraser, 11-10-1951, INF 12/542.

'During the past two years, we have revolutionised the process of examining proposals before taking them on as jobs'.²¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the controls scared off some of the documentary directors like Stuart Legg.

The COI also sought to target films at specific groups for a specific purpose. This was especially true of films made for non-theatrical release. Each film was now supposed to be produced for a selective audience 'as an instrument shaped with a particular purpose in view – an instrument which we must hold in our hands and use consciously and deliberately until we are satisfied that there is no more to be got from it as a means of serving that purpose'.²¹⁹ The emphasis was on using any and every means to maximise the audience and reduce cost; 'we should take advantage of all legitimate and unextravagant opportunities, of showing our films to all persons who are willing to see them'.²²⁰

Making such targeted films made it more difficult to find ones suitable for general release. But the Government was now very conscious of the benefits of established mass distribution channels, especially if they were cheap or free. Therefore it clung onto the CEA deal even though it was looking more and more anachronistic. Each year Morrison would meet with the cinema owners and try to convince them that the arrangement should be continued. Though in 1947 he had put forward a strong 'national interest' argument, by 1950 he was resorting to vague, general appeals. 'Telling the people', he said, 'keeping the people informed – is a prime essential of democracy in any circumstances, no matter what colour the party in power may wear, whether we are at war or in peace, whether times are good or bad'.²²¹ The following year, despite not even having

²¹⁸ McNicoll to Fraser, 11-10-1951, INF 12/542.

²¹⁹ COI Memorandum, CH Dand (Chief Distribution Officer) to Chief Regional Officers and Film Officers, Guidance Paper No.1, Planning for September 1950 to March 1951, 1-6-50, MH 79/607.

²²⁰ FP(50)2, Memorandum, Non-Theatrical Distribution, 3-2-50, MH 79/600.

²²¹ Note for LP meeting with CEA, 11-1-1950 (prepared by McNicoll), CAB 124/85.

made enough films appropriate for general release, the official information committee still sought to keep the distribution deal alive.²²²

But recognising that the arrangement could not be sustained indefinitely, and conscious that a new and much more powerful means of distribution was now available, the COI turned its attention to television. 'Television is now emerging as a highly important method of distribution for information films, and it may well grow one day into the most important of all', the COI wrote to Ministers in 1950.²²³ And fortunately, the Government was on good terms with the monopoly broadcaster. As the COI said; 'Relations with the Television Service are close, good, and continuous'.²²⁴ And the problem of rights, which had restricted the screening of Government films for the first years after the war, had been substantially resolved by 1951 (as Tom Wildy has described in his 1988 article, 'British Television and Official Film, 1946-51').²²⁵ Therefore by the final year of the Labour Government the COI was able to report that 'Many films had been televised during the past two years, and the medium was now also being used experimentally for the showing of trailers'.²²⁶

By 1949 the Government had also recognised that there were significant problems with producing and distributing its own material. It was much easier, and cheaper, to collaborate with existing media, especially if such media were compliant. It became more conscious of this after its relationship with the newsreel companies deteriorated in late 1948. In order to reverse this

²²² IH(O)(51)32, Memorandum, 30-10-1951, 'Though it will not be possible to continue the monthly release scheme on a regular basis in the immediate future, it would seem to be very desirable to keep open this valuable means of reaching the cinema-going public', CAB 134/360.

²²³ IS(50)7, Memorandum, 'Home Distribution of Official Films', Note by COI, 9-10-1950 CAB 124/85.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Tom Wildy, 'British Television and Official Film, 1946-51', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.8, 1988, pp.195-202.

²²⁶ Home Film Programme Committee (HFPC), 'Distribution of Official Films', extract from IH(O)(51)2nd, Minutes, (note 3-5-1951), MH 79/607.

deterioration, and to use the newsreels more effectively, the COI finally decided to establish a newsreel desk.²²⁷ As noted above, it had been planning to do this for three years and its repeated failure to establish one before 1949 is indicative of the journey the Government made in its understanding of communication. Having initially virtually ignored the newsreels it then assumed that it could communicate best by creating its own films and pushing its own material through the existing media. Eventually it found that in addition to producing its own material it was economical and effective to work in partnership with the newsreel companies, fostering good relations, suggesting stories, and providing access. This was the intention of the appointment of Fred Watts, previously Production Manager of Pathé Gazette, to head a newsreel desk at the COI, announced in March 1949.²²⁸

Evidence from 1950 suggests that his appointment was very successful. In that year the COI was defending Watts from more budget cuts. 'As a result of the work of the officer concerned' G. Meara (COI) wrote to P.E. Stephenson (Treasury), 'the newsreel companies have been persuaded not only to cover many events which they would not otherwise have considered but also to include in their newsreels a number of items made up from official material in the course of production for other purposes. The result has been, broadly, that a great many more items of direct informational value are now getting into the newsreels produced for home circulation'.²²⁹ Watts was especially valuable since some post-war controls, such as the supplementary contracts, were dismantled during the course of 1949-50. In addition the NRA decided, at the end of 1950, to stop

²²⁷ IH(O)(49)16, Memorandum, 2-3-1949, 'Newsreels and Official Publicity', CAB 134/358.

²²⁸ IH(O)(49)2nd, Minutes, 3-3-1949, CAB 134/358.

²²⁹ Meara to Stephenson, re Films Division, 12-8-1950, INF 12/355.

attaching Government trailers to the end of each newsreel. The majority of its members no longer felt that the trailers dealt 'with items of "national interest"'.²³⁰

Therefore the Government turned away from its more ambitious plans but remained convinced of the value of communicating its message via film. Its anxieties about producing its own media encouraged it to make it selective and targeted (rather than general and ubiquitous) and, wherever possible, to filter news through existing organisations.

Conclusion

1945-51 was the first and last time that a peacetime Government tried to use film on such a scale to communicate with a domestic audience. When the Conservatives came to office in October 1951 they did not disband the COI as they had sometimes threatened. They did, however, cut it back significantly. Their primary target was Government films. They stopped non-theatrical distribution in March 1952. 'Narrow limits were placed on film production – particularly on films for home use'.²³¹ In addition 'The Crown film Unit was disbanded and it was intended that there should be no more home theatrical distribution'.²³² By April 1952, 'the authorised complement of the [Films] Division was reduced from 165 posts to 64, of which 24 were for the Central Film Library' (from which it was no longer free to borrow films).²³³

The extent of film production and distribution by the Labour Government between 1945-51 has been largely forgotten. This is despite the fact that its scale was quite unprecedented in peacetime Britain. In 1949 Robert Fraser wrote that at any one time this Government was overseeing the development, production or

²³⁰ NRA minutes, min.3391, 'COI Trailers', 19-10-1950, BFI.

²³¹ Review of Films Division, November 1952, in 'Inspection of Duties of Films Division, Feb 1951–Aug 1956', INF 12/409.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

distribution of approximately 150 films.²³⁴ That the great British film-making experiment fell away after 1951 does not reduce its importance. Rather it makes it the more necessary to understand what happened and its repercussions. This chapter has sought to go some way towards this but there is certainly room for more research than is possible here.

In retrospect it seems remarkable not only that the Government made so many films, but that contemporary audiences sat through them. Of course they frequently had no choice, since the films were normally screened as part of a cinema programme, or shown during a factory lunch-hour.

For the Government itself, the experience was extremely educational. The many problems associated with film-making made Ministers and officials much more aware of the complexities of presentation. But they also convinced officials that they needed to be pragmatic about the ways and means of getting the message across. This belief in pragmatism comes across clearly in an 8-page memorandum which Fraser wrote in April 1949, intended as a policy document. 'Information is not a function independent of the purposes of society,' Fraser wrote, 'and informative or persuasive material derives its significance from the end to which it is directed. It may have its own integrities of truth and imagination, but its purpose is derivative from some national end. Information is not "for its own sake"'.²³⁵ The simple, idealistic objective of providing basic information for the public had given way to a more realistic use of information as an adjunct of policy.

Newsreels were like the poor cousin in terms of Government attention towards the media. For a long period Ministers had a low regard for them and tended to

²³⁴ Robert Fraser Memorandum, 'The Film Programme 1949-50', attached to letter to Grierson, 17-5-1949, INF 12/130.

²³⁵ Robert Fraser, 'The Film Programme', op.cit., 17-5-1949, INF 12/130.

ignore them. This neglect seems surprising given Labour's commitment to greater political communication, given the dearth of serious information which was communicated via the newsreels, and given that the newsreels reached a very large and broad audience that was difficult to access through other media.

Prior to 1947 the Government did not seem to consider the newsreels to be an important means of political communication. From 1947-49 it tried to circumvent them or, if it used them, tried to do so in a highly controlled manner. Eventually it became more conscious of them and sought to create a mutually beneficial means of exchanging stories and material. This was a particularly important development since it meant the institutionalisation of news management techniques.

Labour's failure to contemplate restructuring the newsreels undermined its professed belief in changing the nature of political communication. And this failure to initiate change almost certainly accelerated the demise of the newsreels. However, the newsreel companies themselves were highly complicit in this failure. They sought guidance and consensus rather than freedom and confrontation. They had the opportunity to pursue the latter after the war but chose not to and to enjoy the twilight of their years cosseted by guaranteed sales and monopolistic coverage.

By 1951 cinema attendances were dropping quickly as television grew increasingly popular.²³⁶ Television was able to break news rather than simply replay stories that people had already seen elsewhere. Many cinemas gave up showing newsreels as part of their programme. By 1960 three of the five main newsreel companies had closed down; Universal News in 1956, British Paramount News in 1957 and Gaumont British News in 1959. As the newsreels

²³⁶ From a peak of 1,585m in 1945 attendances dropped to 1,396m in 1950, 1,182m in 1955, and 501m in 1960. Perilli, *op.cit.* (1983).

declined in importance, so the Government redirected its attention towards television broadcasting. The lessons it had learned with film and newsreels it was now able to transfer to this much more powerful medium, television.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that 1945-51 was a critical time in the development of Government communication in Britain. It was the period in which the nature and the extent of communication between the Government, the media and the people was transformed.

This is not simply a retrospective judgment but one which was apparent to a number of contemporaries. Many of the most senior officials involved – Robert Fraser, Clem Leslie, Francis Williams, John Grierson, John Pimlott – all wrote and commented about Government communication and the Government's relationship with the mass media.

John Pimlott, for example, was so struck by the emerging importance of communications and public relations that he took a sabbatical in 1947-8 to go to America and write a book about it. In this he argued that communication was now an important and inevitable aspect of administration. 'Modern techniques of mass information and persuasion are powerful tools,' he wrote, 'and all who seek to acquire or maintain power in a democracy must make use of them'.¹

Pimlott also argued that information now had to be presented in such a way as to have mass appeal and convince people to take action. To do this Governments might have 'to select facts which are most likely to interest the audience; to state them in the language of a mass circulation magazine; to repeat them; to use other media than the printed word such as broadcasts, motion pictures, comic strips; and to follow up with personal contacts'.² Or, put another way, to manage information.

¹ JAR Pimlott, *Public Relations and American Democracy* (1951), p.71.

² *Ibid.*, p.80.

This overt acceptance of information management as a necessary aspect of democratic governance was new. Though Governments had always sought to sustain their legitimacy through communication (promoting good news and suppressing bad), this period was novel because, for the first time, there was an administration which aspired to genuine popular participation and which appeared to have the practical means by which to achieve it.

The administration only came to accept the practicalities of information management after its experiences in office. It began with an idealistic hope in the potential of a comprehensively informed electorate. This hope gradually dissipated as it came to recognise how difficult it would be to achieve. Over the same period it became reconciled to the more active use of information as a means of persuasion and direction as well as of explanation. This shift from idealism to pragmatism was similar to Labour's approach towards economic planning. From initial ideological commitment through disappointed endeavour towards a compromise solution.

It is important to understand how it came to this position since its experience informed the approach to democratic communication for each subsequent British Government. The Attlee Government's experience is so informative because it encompassed three separate, but parallel, approaches. It looked for ways in which to restructure the established commercial press in order to guarantee the passage of information to the electorate. It collaborated with the state-funded monopoly broadcaster to do the same. And, it produced its own media in the form of films, pamphlets, books and newspapers.

In examining each of these approaches this thesis has sought to demonstrate that not only do they explain the status of communication in 1951, but that they illustrate the perennial problems inherent in Government communication within a democracy. That it is extremely difficult for a Government to compel commercial

media to act as a conduit for political information without appearing undemocratic. That a democratic Government cannot work closely with a public broadcaster without undermining that broadcaster's independence and credibility. That it is problematic for a Government to produce its own media due to its expense and the difficulty of balancing factual detail with popular presentation. And that the most intractable problem for a democratic Government is how to overcome the general indifference of the people to the information. As G.K. Evans of the COI wrote to Robert Fraser in 1949, 'Government publicity cannot hope to educate or inform more than an insignificant fraction of the public directly'.³

Having experienced each of these problems the Attlee Government developed a range of formal and informal techniques in order to communicate its policies and intentions via the existing media. For example, Ministers sought to establish a 'common line' which would prevent ambiguity in presentation. The EIU sought to use Ministerial speeches and policy statements to establish 'news values' and set the news agenda within the independent media. The IRD attempted to infiltrate the news and editorial columns of newspapers. The Economic Information Committee commissioned media, such as film footage, which could be passed 'ready-to-use' onto news organisations. Departments controlled access to information and carefully timed the release of information in a form to promote their case. Films Division integrated entertainment values to make information more exciting and accessible. And the COI began to target specific groups with specially tailored messages. Many of these methods led Government to bypass Parliament. Together these equated to a series of techniques which can best be described as information management.

³ GK Evans to Fraser and Leslie, 'Some Comments Regarding Recent Publicity Surveys', 23-2-1949, CAB 124/81.

The approach to communication in 1951 was not predetermined in 1945. It was the result of the circumstances encountered by the Labour Government and their reaction to those circumstances. The approach would have been different, for example, had communication initially been considered integral to Labour policy. It would have been different had the administration not experienced the crises of 1947, after which it felt justified centralising and coordinating its economic information. And it would have been different had not the Cold War, and in particular the Czech coup of 1948, not limited the Government's freedom to contemplate alternative structures of press control.

Moreover, the approach was significantly effected by the personalities involved. Morrison's attitude towards communication clearly had a major impact on its direction. But it was certainly not the case that all members of the administration were convinced of the necessity of communication or converted to it by 1951. Four different attitudes can be identified. First, there were those who were evangelical about the importance of communication to the modern State. Patrick Gordon Walker was one of these. In 1951 he published a theoretical tract, *Restatement of Liberty*, in which he argued that communication was fundamental to the process of Government. He had no qualms about using it to persuade as well as inform. 'Persuasion', he wrote, 'is particularly necessary to help achieve the sorts of natural behaviour that the new State is almost wholly debarred from bringing about by the use of its direct powers'.⁴

The second attitude was characterised by Stafford Cripps. Cripps believed that communication was necessary but had reservations about its use and extent. Third, there were those who resisted on principle, such as Aneurin Bevan. And finally, there were those who paid little attention to communication, like Clement

⁴ Patrick Gordon Walker, *Restatement of Liberty* (1951), p.369.

Attlee. There are now no longer any politicians of the fourth type. Between 1945-51 information policy was led by those who believed in its importance, such as Morrison and Gordon Walker, but was constrained by other voices in Cabinet, such as those of Bevan and Attlee.

The eventual effect of this Government's experience was seminal. All subsequent Governments have been obliged to seek to inform the electorate. The Conservatives, who had been so critical of the information services machinery whilst in opposition, reduced its budget once in office but still retained almost all of it. They even continued the measurement of public opinion, which Harry Crookshank, the Conservative Postmaster General, had described in 1944 as 'a public menace' which employed the techniques of 'informers, GPU, [and] Gestapo'.⁵ Indeed after the budget of the Social Survey division fell to a low of £89,000 in 1953-4, it then grew consistently and by 1970-71 stood at £1.2 million. This represented a real terms growth of 580%.⁶

But the experience also demonstrated to subsequent Governments that information management (as opposed to total information or no information) was a necessary feature of modern government. This did not simply mean the occasional meeting of a Minister with the editor of a national newspaper, but the constant and institutionalised organisation of the passage of information from each area of Government to the population via the independent media.

This period raised, if not answered, many of the difficult questions which would continue to dog the process of communication within a democracy. For example, to what degree was it the responsibility of Government to convince as well as to inform? Many people might accept that a Government should discourage drink

⁵ Ibid. GPU – 'Glavnoje Politicheskoe Upravlenije', Soviet Political Police, precursor to NKVD and KGB

⁶ Louis Moss, *Government Social Survey*, p.24 (staff figures), and p.265 (table 34), 'Survey Vote, Actual and Deflated'.

driving, but far fewer would agree that it should try to convince people of the benefits to Britain of closer European union.

Moreover, when did circumstances justify greater control and direction of the media in the national interest? This very question occurred to Clem Leslie during the early stages of the Cold War. Given the nature of this new conflict, to what extent, Leslie asked Max Nicholson, could the Government direct action at the BBC? 'In wartime', he wrote, 'the BBC has within a certain field to accept guidance from Whitehall Departments. In peacetime, apart from certain high level directives, it is pretty well free to go its own way. Is that state of affairs appropriate to a lukewarm war period which affects the home front in ways increasingly reminiscent of the war, or should some partial return towards wartime arrangements be considered?'.⁷

Most importantly, this period demonstrated the importance of being aware of the line between information and distortion, and of the need for specific safeguards to patrol that line. Both the Government and the media have separate agendas which, if unchecked, will continually transgress the line. Ministers have a political agenda for which they seek popular consent. They may therefore be inclined to distort information to ensure they achieve that consent. The media has to attract an audience and so they too may manipulate information in pursuit of a greater audience.

In 1949 the Government established information officers within the Civil Service. As such they were bound by the code of the Civil Service to prevent Ministers from overstepping the line between information and distortion. The General Council of the Press was set up in 1953 in an effort to draw and to police a line for the Press. The BBC Governors and the ITA were intended to do the same in

⁷ Leslie to Nicholson, 25-1-1951, CAB 124/80.

broadcasting. Each of these bodies inevitably has a different perception of the exact position of the line, influenced by its specific obligations and objectives. Therefore the line will, to some extent, always be blurred. Yet only by accepting that such a line exists and only by being constantly aware of its transgression, is it possible to maintain trust between the Government, the media and the people.

Appendix A: Committees & Commissions

Ministerial

Ministerial Home Information Services Committee, 1946-48 (IH)

Terms of Reference:

“To keep under review problems of Government information policy and the working of the United Kingdom and to consider such other related problems as may be referred to them by the Cabinet.

For these purposes to meet jointly with the Overseas Information Services (Ministerial) Committee whenever convenient”

Composition:

Lord President, Chairman (Herbert Morrison)
Chancellor of the Exchequer (Hugh Dalton)
President of the Board of Trade – (Sir Stafford Cripps)
Secretary of State for Air (Viscount Stansgate)
Secretary of State for Scotland (J Westwood)
Minister of Fuel and Power (Emmanuel Shinwell)
Minister of Labour & National Service (G.A. Isaacs)
Minister of Education (Ellen Wilkinson)
Minister of Health (Aneurin Bevan)
Minister of Food (Sir Ben Smith)
Postmaster General (Earl of Listowel)
Secretariat: John Pimlott and Geoffrey Kirk

Meetings:

1946: 8-4-46, 28-6-46

1947: 19-5-1947 (jointly with OI), 31-7-1947, 12-11-1947

1948: 21.1.48 (amalgamation with OI)

Amalgamated with Overseas Information Services Committee in January 1948

Minutes and Memoranda: CAB 134/354, CAB 134/458, CAB 134/459

Ministerial Information Services Committee, 1948-51 (IS)

Terms of Reference:

“To keep under review Government publicity, both at home and overseas, concerning home affairs, and the working of Government Information Services at home and overseas, and to consider such other related problems as may be referred to them by the Cabinet”

Composition:

Lord President, Chairman (Herbert Morrison)
Secretary of State for the Colonies (A. Creech Jones)
Minister of Labour (G.A. Isaacs)
Minister of Health (A. Bevan)
President of the Board of Trade (J.H. Wilson)

First Lord of the Admiralty (Viscount Hall)
Secretary of State for War (F Bellenger)
Minister of Food (John Strachey)
Minister of Fuel and Power (H.T.N. Gaitskell)
Economic Secretary, Treasury (Douglas Jay)
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations (P. Gordon-Walker)
Lord Henderson
Joint Secretaries: TAG Charlton (Cabinet Office), D Stephens (Office of Lord President), AK Gore (COI)

Meetings:

1948: 10-3-1948, 14-4-1948, 11-5-1948, 15-6-1948, 30-7-1948, 5-11-1948
1949: 25-3-1949, 7-11-1949
1950: 25-7-1950, 22-11-1950
1951: 12-2-1951

Minutes and Memoranda: CAB 134/458, CAB 134/459, CAB 134/460

Official

Home Information Services (Official) Committee, 1946-51 (IH(O))

Terms of Reference:

“Under the policy direction of the Home Information Services (Ministerial) Committee, to review and co-ordinate, where necessary, inter-departmental action on problems of Government information and the working of Government information services with the United Kingdom”

Composition of the Committee:

Director General of Central Office of Information (Chair)
Public Relations Adviser to the Prime Minister
Representatives of:

Treasury
Board of Trade
Home Office
War Office
Scottish Office
Ministry of Labour and National Service
Ministry of Health
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Food
Ministry of Fuel and Power
Ministry of Transport
General Post Office
HM Stationery Office

Secretaries: PH Boon, Geoffrey Kirk

Meetings:

1946: 11-4-1946, 16-5-1946, 19-6-1946, 18-7-1946, 1-10-1946, 13-12-1946

1947: 29-1-1947, 28-2-1947, 14-3-1947, 2-4-1947, 16-4-1947, 4-7-1947, 5-9-1947, 7-11-1947

1948: 9-1-1948, 30-1-1948, 27-2-1948, 2-4-1948, 30-4-1948, 28-5-1948, 2-7-1948, 6-8-1948, 24-9-1948, 26-11-1948

1949: 4-2-1949, 3-3-1949, 5-4-1949, 5-5-1949, 14-7-1949, 25-10-1949, 3-11-1949, 14-12-1949

1950: 21-2-1950, 25-4-1950, 24-5-1950, 21-6-1950, 20-9-1950, 20-10-1950, 15-11-1950

1951: 21-2-1951, 18-4-1951, 20-6-1951, 19-9-1951, 7-11-1951

Minutes and Memoranda: CAB 134/355-360 (also in MH 79/577-)

Home Information Services: Economic Information Committee, 1947-51
(IH(O)(E))

Terms of Reference:

“As a Sub-Committee of the Home Information Services (Official) Committee, to review and co-ordinate where necessary inter-departmental action on problems of Government economic information and the working of Government economic information services within the United Kingdom”

Composition:

Head of Economic Information Section (Chairman)

Director General of Central Office of Information

Public Relations Adviser to the Prime Minister

Representatives of the:

Treasury

Board of Trade

Overseas Information Department of the Board of Trade

Scottish Office

Ministry of Labour and National Service

Ministry of Fuel and Power

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Ministry of Supply

Ministry of Transport

Ministry of Food

Ministry of Works

National Savings Committee

National Coal Board

Secretaries: PH Boon (Lord President's Office), Mrs IM Schapiro (Central Office of Information)

Meetings:

1947: 12-6-1947, 19-6-1947, 26-6-1947, 3-7-1947, 10-7-1947, 17-7-1947, 24-7-1947, 31-7-1947, 7-8-1947, 29-8-1947, 19-9-1947, 10-10-1947, 31-10-1947, 14-11-1947, 12-12-1947, 19-12-1947

1948: 23-1-1948, 6-2-1948, 24-2-1948, 5-3-1948, 19-3-1948, 9-4-1948, 23-4-1948, 7-5-1948, 21-5-1948, 4-6-1948, 18-6-1948, 9-7-1948, 23-7-1948, 5-11-1948

1949: 14-1-1949, 21-1-1949, 28-1-1949, 11-2-1949, 18-2-1949, 4-3-1949, 11-3-1949, 22-4-1949, 29-4-1949, 2-6-1949, 8-8-1949, 11-8-1949, 21-10-1949, 5-12-1949, 9-12-1949, 20-12-1949

1950: 6-1-1950, 20-1-1950, 3-2-1950, 3-3-1950, 17-3-1950, 31-3-1950, 21-4-1950, 12-5-1950, 26-5-1950, 14-7-1950, 28-7-1950, 18-8-1950, 6-10-1950, 27-10-1950, 10-11-1950, 24-11-1950

1951: 12-1-1951, 16-2-1951, 9-3-1951, 20-4-1951, 25-5-1951, 8-6-1951, 13-7-1951, 27-7-1951

Minutes and Memoranda: CAB 134/361-373

Commissions

Royal Commission on the Press 1947-49

Terms of Reference:

Appointed "with the object of furthering the free expression of opinion through the Press and the greatest practicable accuracy in the presentation of news, to inquire into the control, management and ownership of the newspaper and periodical press and the news agencies, including the financial structure and the monopolistic tendencies in control, and to make recommendations thereon"

Composition:

Sir David Ross (Chair)
Reverend M.E. Aubrey
Neil Beaton (member of the Co-Operative movement)
*John Benstead (trade unionist)
Lady Violet Bonham Carter
R.C.K. Ensor (scholar and writer)
Hubert Hull (barrister)
Miss Eirwen Owen (formerly deputy regional commissioner for Wales)
*J.B. Priestley (writer and broadcaster)
Alderman Wright Robinson (member of Manchester Education Committee, member of Ministry of Education Advisory Committees)
G. Granville Sharp (barrister)
*Lord Simon (industrialist)
Sir Geoffrey Vickers (solicitor)
Sir George Waters (formerly editor of *The Scotsman*)
*R.H. Wilson (accountant)
Barbara Wright (Wootton) (economist)
G.M. Young (historian)
Secretary: Miss J.J. Nunn

*Resignations

Replacements:

AE Middleton (accountant)
James Bowman (trade unionist)

Report and Evidence: Cmd 7700 (Report of the Royal Commission), Cmd 7690 (Index to Minutes of Oral Evidence), written evidence submitted to Royal Commission contained in B.S.77/3(1)

Minutes and Memoranda: HO 251 (Royal Commission on the Press - Evidence and Papers)

Broadcasting Committee 1949-51

Terms of Reference:

"To consider the constitution, control, finance and other general aspects of the sound and television broadcasting services of the United Kingdom

(excluding those aspects of the overseas services for which the BBC are not responsible) and to advise on the conditions under which these services and wire broadcasting should be conducted after 31st December, 1951”

Composition:

Lord Beveridge (Chair)

A.L.. Binns

*James Bowman

Lord Elgin

Lady Megan Lloyd George

J. Selwyn Lloyd

W.F. Oakeshott

J. Reeves

*Sir William Coates

Mrs. Mary Stocks

*E.A.J. Davies

Secretary: G.R. Parsons

*Resignations

Replacements:

J. Crawford

IAR Stedeford

Dr. Stephen Taylor

Report and Evidence: Cmd 8116 (Report of the Committee), Cmd 8117 (Appendix H. Memoranda submitted to the Committee)

Minutes and Memoranda: HO 254 (Broadcasting Committee (1949-1950): Evidence and Papers)

Appendix B: Production of Government Information 1945-51 - Home**Press and Poster Advertising**

	1944-45	1945-46	1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949-50	1950-51
Expenditure	1,393,921*	N/A	N/A	1,591,000	1,548,208	1,053,140	863,999

*This is departmental and HMSO, not MOI (which is included in 'Miscellaneous') – so not strictly comparable
Sources: CAB 124/1029, COI Annual Reports 1947 to 1951

Film Production & Distribution

	1944-45	1945-46	1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949-50	1950-51
Production: number of reels produced (CFU and contractors)	136	143	148	145	155	129	117
Distribution: number of films achieving commercial release*	10	11	14	21	26	26	15
Distribution: number of non- theatrical official film screenings	56,172	52,249	46,789	52,244	54,172	43,067**	37,967***
Audience: estimated non- theatrical audience (mobile projection units)	8,951,000	7,160,000	5,497,000	5,312,000	4,928,000	3,528,000	2,814,650

* Calendar year, not financial

** According to COI, fall due to suspension of almost all shows during General Election Campaign

*** Due to reduction in number of mobile units

Sources: COI Annual Reports 1947 to 1951

Lectures

	1944-45	1945-46	1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949-50	1950-51
Number of Lectures	25,331	14,852	10,087	18,253	21,668	15,894	20,331

Sources: COI Annual Reports 1947 to 1951, INF 12/217, INF 12/345 – preparation for annual report 1950-51

Exhibitions & Displays

			1946-47	1947-48	1948-49	1949-50	1950-51
Number of Exhibitions / Displays			-	50	33	34	34
Expenditure on Exhibitions / Displays			£65,000	£147,000	£207,000	£211,971	-

Sources: COI Annual Reports 1947 to 1951, CAB 124/1029

The above data on Government Information Services does not include: publications; social surveys; regional services other than films, lectures and tours; photographs; reference material; broadcasting

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408-410: Discussion between Government, members of opposition and the BBC on political broadcasting

904-910: Prosperity Campaign Committee

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1025-1028: Central Office of Information and Documentary Films Problem

1029-1030: Proposals for Economies in Expenditure on Government Information Services

1070-1074: Appointment of Royal Commission to inquire into the control, management and ownership of the Press

CAB 128 Cabinet Conclusions

CAB 129 Cabinet Memoranda

CAB 134 Cabinet: Miscellaneous Committees, Minutes and Papers, including:

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355-360: Home Information Services (Official) Committee, Minutes and Memoranda

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HO 251 Royal Commission on the Press (1947-1949): Evidence and Papers

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 577-609: Home Information Services (Official) Committee and
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