CHAPTER 5

CLIMACTERICS IN PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

* A crisis is a condition of instability leading towards a decisive change.*

Anthony Smith

The evolution of broadcasting institutions has taken place against the wider canvas of history. Though this evolution has been a continuous process, Asa Briggs believes that it is possible to single out historical events which have had a seminal impact on the broadcasting institutions, a view echoed by Anthony Smith and Ralph Negrine.²

Briggs refers to such events as “climacterics” and believes that an in depth case study of such events is essential not only to understanding the complex interplay of forces and events that shape broadcasting policy; they also enable general hypotheses to be tested.³ However, these cases should be examined from different angles rather than from one single vantage point.

There are a number of cases in the history of broadcasting in both Britain and India that can be considered as watersheds inasmuch as the way in which they have had an impact on the relationship between broadcaster and the government. These cases will be analysed to verify the following hypotheses: i) that the evolving relationship between the public service broadcaster and the state is an intrinsic part of the

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² Ibid.

evolution of the democratic process itself, and; ii) the other side of the coin being that the measure of the maturity of a democratic system of government lies in the amount of freedom it gives its public service broadcaster.

In Britain

"Controversial" Broadcasting

This came to be the euphemism in British broadcasting for items of a delicate nature, though it was the politician’s prerogative to judge on the degree of delicacy of an issue. A confidential document prepared by the BBC on the subject in the years immediately following the Second World War sees two distinctive phases with regard to the government’s attitude to broadcasting on items that had the potential to be controversial. While, in the first phase, from 1923-28, there was a complete veto on controversial broadcasts, once that veto was lifted, there was a “very gradual and experimental introduction of political and economic controversy on clearly defined occasions, with adequate safeguards for impartiality and equality of treatment.”

That the government was firmly determined to keep the organs of broadcasting under a tight leash was evident right from the beginning when the BBC, in its earlier avatar as the British Broadcasting Company was threatened by the Post-Master General with non-renewal of its Licence if it so much as tried to behave in a “partisan” manner. The Company, on its part, also took great pains not to get on the wrong side of the powers that be; according to John Reith, then General Manager of

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4 BBC, Written Archives Centre (from now on WAC), R34/3172, "The Broadcasting of Controversial Matter", in Policy: Controversial Broadcasting 1923-28, p.7. The in-depth analysis of this subject and the voluminous nature of the document can be considered as an indicator of the importance of this issue for both government and broadcaster.

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the Company “...the broadcasting company have never ... broadcast anything controversial, and of course they are taking great care not to. Whether or not they are prevented from doing it, they obviously would not do it....”. Having said that, he was fully conscious that a broadcasting service which contained no reference to politics could not claim to be a “balanced service, or an informative or educative one in the widest sense” and there were of course commercial considerations to be taken into account. In 1923 and 1924, the BBC sought permission to broadcast the King’s Speech at the opening of Parliament. In his letter to the Post Master General (PMG), Reith complained that “…even such a non-controversial occasion as the broadcasting of the King’s Speech at the opening of Parliament is apparently to be held up....”

Reith then outlined the real reason why he wanted to broadcast such a programme: “We urgently require to develop new lines and to keep opening up fresh fields and this seems about the only direction in which we can improve our programmes.... The matter is one of great urgency to us [since it would] give a fillip to the opening of winter sales.... I know of nothing we can do unless we can get authority to move in the direction for which we have so frequently sought permission....” Permission was refused on the grounds that “when the King opens Parliament there is no table of any kind ... the space in front of His Majesty must necessarily be kept clear....”

Similarly, a request to the PMG that during the forthcoming political campaign for the General Elections in 1923, leaders of the three main political parties might each

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6 Reith quoted in ibid.
7 BBC WAC, R34/317/2, n.4, p.1
8 Ibid., p.4
broadcast explanations of his Party's intentions, was rejected on the grounds that he did not "consider it advisable."

The Sykes Committee that was set up to look into broadcasting in 1923 was in favour of relaxing some of the controls on broadcasting, saying, "We do not consider that it is desirable to maintain any system of censorship. Nor do we think it necessary to exclude everything that is controversial; indeed there are few subjects on which controversy may not arise. It would obviously reduce the interest of broadcasting if it were necessary to exclude everything which might have a political bearing."\(^{10}\) The BBC got a further opportunity to put its case across when the Crawford Committee was set up in 1925 "to advise as to the proper scope of the broadcasting service...." A memorandum from the Company to the Crawford Committee in 1925 addressed the latent fears of the British establishment on its "potentiality for good or evil"\(^{11}\) thus:

While appreciating the immense potentialities in this opportunity for helping towards the aim of a more informed and enlightened democracy, the BBC have been cramped and restricted in pressing for its fulfilment. Only when they have been freed from the chains which now impeded or nullify progress in this sphere can one of the chief functions be realised. Although the Sykes Committee considered the question of controversial transmissions... no relaxation of the original restraints has been granted.... By regularly arranged debates on political and other controversial topics, and by affording opportunities to leaders of opinion to place their case before the public, enabling them to judge for themselves, a great service would be rendered, and little danger would be incurred so long as the

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\(^{9}\) Ibid., p.2

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Phrase used in a supplementary Memorandum submitted by the BBC to the Crawford Committee after all the evidence had been heard. Ibid., p.4
necessary safeguards for impartiality were provided and discrimination exercised in the choice of subjects. While the routine scrutiny of ordinary MSS, is a necessary safeguard against advertisement or harmful matter, the present rigorous censorship without regard to the eminence of the talker is hampering the due development of one of the most important sides of the work and deterring prominent men from making as much use of the Service as they might.\footnote{12}

It must be mentioned here that neither the Licence issued to the Company nor any formal communication from the government subsequently had carried any restrictions on what could not be broadcast over the BBC. The Licence issued to the Company required it to transmit efficiently “a programme of broadcast matter to the reasonable satisfaction of the Post Master General.” The expression “broadcast matter” was defined in the Licence as meaning “concerts, lectures, educational matter, speeches, weather reports, theatrical entertainments and any other matter (including news and other information) from time to time approved by the Post Master General.”\footnote{13} It was the Company, which of its own volition, avoided political and controversial subjects and “always asked permission from the Post Office for any such programmes, submitting the manuscript of any talks which appeared to be controversial.”\footnote{14}

The government’s ally in putting a leash on the BBC’s coverage of news and current affairs was the Press which saw a potential threat to its monopoly over news. The BBC was forced to enter into a “highly restrictive” agreement with the newspaper

\footnote{12} Ibid.  
\footnote{13} See Appendix  
\footnote{14} BBC, WAC, n.4, p.3  

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companies and agencies, the main clause being that it would only broadcast news
summaries and that too, only after the evening newspaper had come on the stands,
i.e., after 7 p.m.\textsuperscript{15} One of the fall-outs of the General Strike was that since the
newspapers were also on strike, Reith was able to get the government to allow him
to broadcast news bulletins at any hour.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{The General Strike of 1926}
The BBC's coverage of the General Strike of 1926 was later to be described as a
milestone in broadcasting history, but at the time the strike took place it took all of
Reith’s political and diplomatic skills to ensure that the BBC came out of the
episode in one piece and with its credibility intact.\textsuperscript{17} The general strike began with an
employers lock-out of coal-miners on 1 May 1926 after they had rejected a proposal
for a substantial reduction in wages. This led to the Trades Union Congress taking
up cudgels on their behalf and declaring a General Strike, starting May 4th and
continuing indefinitely till their demands were met. The government declared an
Emergency for the duration of the strike. In this situation, the BBC ended up being
the sole source of information since print workers who were also highly unionised
joined their comrades in protest, thus bringing newspaper production to a stop, with
the sole exception of the \textit{British Gazette}, a government newspaper to be edited and
managed by Winston Churchill, then a member of the Cabinet.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p.141
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p.143
The BBC provided a steady and regular stream of news and announcements on the strike from all over the country. Some members of the Cabinet, notably Winston Churchill regarded this as an affront to the government's authority and, within the Cabinet itself, there were calls to exercise the powers of the government and take over the BBC, and "mobilize broadcasting as a direct agent of the government." 18

On 6 May 1926, Reith and Lord Gainford, Chairman of the BBC made up a list of "suggestions for the policy of the broadcasting service during the Emergency" which they prefaced by saying that while they were ready to "of course, accept instructions from the government in accordance with the terms of the Licence" they believed that "consultation is essential if the best use is to be made of the medium." They further pressed the point that "it is to be of vital interest to the government that the tradition of the Broadcasting Service should be maintained intact and should indeed be strengthened in the present emergency." To this end, "we strongly recommend in connection with the broadcasting of the instructions we receive from the Civil Commissioner we should indicate quite clearly that we would be required to broadcast exactly the same notices whatever were the party political complexion of the government of the day." 19 The convoluted language only serves to underscore the delicate situation the BBC found itself in. The memo ended with an appeal to the government that since it was sure that it was right "both on the facts of the dispute and on the constitutional issues, any steps we may take to communicate the truth

18 Asa Briggs, The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom vol.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.97. The Government had the legal authority not only to order the BBC to broadcast whatever messages it chose to provide, but if necessary, to take over the BBC.

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dispassionately should be to the advantage of the government. It is understood, of course, that all announcements under this category should be objective and not propagandist.\(^20\)

In a memo to Deputy Chief Civil Commissioner Davidson (who was responsible for all official news that went out on the BBC during the General Strike), Reith stated the position of the BBC thus:

The BBC has secured and holds the goodwill and affection of the people. It has been trusted to do the right thing at all times. Its influence is widespread. It is a national institution and a national asset. If it be commandeered or unduly hampered or manipulated now, the immediate purpose of such action is not only unserved but actually prejudiced. This is not a time for dope even if the people could be doped. The hostile will only be made more hostile from resentment. As to suppression, from the panic of ignorance comes far greater danger than from the knowledge of facts. If the government be strong and their cause right they need not adopt such measures. Assuming the BBC is for the people and that the government is for the people, it follows the BBC must be for the government in this crisis too. It should be allowed to define its position to the country. It must assist in sustaining the essential services of the country, the preservation of law and order, and the life and liberty of the individual and the community. While it must accept orders and communications, it might be consulted in the drafting.... It is of cardinal importance to the government and the country that the BBC tradition be maintained and strengthened, and its prestige preserved. It is suspect already ... as for the future, when the trouble is over, it will be a calamity if public confidence in the BBC has been dissipated through actions, negative or positive during this emergency. Its pioneer work of three and a half years will have been

\(^{19}\) BBC, WAC, CO2/34, “Suggestions for the Policy of the Broadcasting Service During the Emergency”, in BBC: General Strike – Policy of the Company 4-12 May 1926, p.1

\(^{20}\) Ibid., p.2

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undermined – an influence of almost unlimited potency will be shaken.21

Despite these entreaties, the BBC remained on a sticky wicket, with not much room for maneuver, a fact brought to the fore when the Archbishop of Canterbury made a request to Reith to be allowed to broadcast a “peace appeal” over the BBC during the strike. Reith consulted the government on this, the justification for this as per BBC records being that “the government still had not come to any decision with regard to the official position of the BBC during the strike - i.e. there was still a possibility that it might be commandeered by the government - and we were extremely anxious not to do anything they would take objection to and which would lead them to take over the BBC....”22 In the event, the government put the ball back in the BBC’s court: “We were given to understand that the government did not forbid the broadcasting of the message, but were not in favour of it ....”23

Accordingly, Reith sent a message to the Archbishop, refusing him an opportunity to broadcast over the BBC explaining his position thus; “...we are in a position of considerable delicacy at the moment. We have not been commandeered, but there have been strong representations to the effect that this should be done.... We have maintained a certain degree of independence hitherto ... it would therefore be inadvisable for us to do anything that was particularly embarrassing to the government, by reason of the fact that it might lead to the other decision that we are

21 BBC, WAC, CO 2/34, “Note for Davidson from Reith”, in BBC: General Strike – Policy of the Company 4-12 May 1926.
23 Ibid.
hoping to obviate...”

24 As Reith noted in his diary, “they [the members of the government] will not say that we are to a considerable extent controlled and they make me take the onus of turning people down.”

The refusal to the Archbishop led to an uproar both within and outside Parliament. The Southampton Strike Bulletin, a rag sheet brought out by the strikers denounced the decision in an article on 9 May 1926, titled “Peace Call Silenced”, which said: “The Churches under a sense of moral responsibility ... have put forward their view as to the basis of a possible concordat; but their voice has been officially silenced by the BBC which is thus shown once more to be the instrument of government....”


"using it to the best possible advantage" was only one of several measures designed to forcefully put down the strike.27

If Reith thought that the BBC was better off as an autonomous corporation under the government when it came to broadcasting controversial items, events immediately following it becoming a corporation showed that assumption to be wide off the mark. A new clause was added to the Licence of the BBC which read as follows:

The Postmaster General may from time to time by Notice in writing to the Corporation require the Corporation to refrain from sending any broadcast matter (either particular or general) specified in such Notice and the definition of broadcast matter hereinbefore contained shall from time to time be read construed and take effect subject to the provisions of any such Notice or Notices which may have been given by the Postmaster General. The Postmaster General may at any time or times revoke or vary any such Notice as aforesaid.28

According to Syvertsen, it was this clause which filled up the lacunae in the previous Licence and gave the government the authority to lay down editorial guidelines, and to require the BBC to refrain from broadcasting specific programmes29 and according to the BBC document, the General Strike was the main culprit behind the inclusion of Clause 4(3) in the Licence issued in January 1927.30

On 11 January 1927, barely ten days after the new Licence came into force, the government acted on the basis of this clause. The Postmaster General informed the BBC that "...in accordance with the terms of Clause 4(3) of the Licence, he requires

27 McIntyre, n.15, p. 142
28 From Licence
29 Trine Syvertsen, Public Broadcasting In Transition: A Comparative and Historic Analysis of the BBC and the NRK (Leicester: Leicester University, 1992), (unpublished Ph.D thesis), p.85
the Corporation 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. A dismayed Director General and Board of Governors wrote to the Postmaster General pointing out that "...by adhering to the terms of the Postmaster General’s request ... the Corporation had been aware that it was not only falling behind enlightened practice in other countries, but that it was also attracting a growing volume of substantiated criticism from its listeners." Whether due to the pressure from the BBC or the fear of "substantiated criticism from listeners" finding itself to the polls, on 5 March 1928, the Prime Minister, in response to a question from Ian Fraser, M.P., in the House of Commons, indicated that the ban was being lifted partially. The same day, the BBC received a letter from the Secretary of the Post Office in which he said:

After full consideration, His Majesty’s Government are of the opinion that the time has come when an experiment ought to be made in the direction of greater latitude. It has accordingly been decided that, while maintaining the existing prohibition upon the broadcast of statements expressing the opinion of the Corporation on matters of public policy, the bar upon the broadcast of matters of controversy shall for the present be withdrawn. Accordingly, paragraph (b) of the notice sent to you by the Postmaster General upon the 11th January 1927 is cancelled as from today.

It will of course be understood that the Government hold themselves free to modify their present decision after further experience and that

31 Ibid., p.6
32 “Letter to Post Master General dated 16 January 1928”. Ibid.
33 Ibid.
the provisions as to the control of the service in case of national Emergency remain in full vigour.34

Ban on Churchill

The official ban on controversial broadcasting might have been withdrawn but the determined efforts of the government and the various political parties to keep Winston Churchill off the air during and after the Round Table Conference on India in 1930 shows the instinctive distrust with which they viewed broadcasting. Winston Churchill’s attempts to speak over the BBC on the Indian issue were stymied by the practice that had evolved with regard to political broadcasting which was that the permission of the Party Whips would be taken prior to any instances of political broadcasting.

The Round Table Conferences were held in England in 1930 at the height of the Civil Disobedience Movement in India. The Viceroy, Lord Irwin, managed to negotiate a truce with the Indian National Congress and persuaded Mahatma Gandhi to attend the second session of the Conference in September of that year. The BBC decided to hold a series of twelve talks in April 1931, in consultation with the India Office, to give an “explanatory and non-political” background to the just-concluded talks.35

When Churchill got wind of it, he initiated a correspondence with the BBC demanding his inclusion among the list of speakers. In his missives, he requested the Chairman for “an opportunity for giving a broadcast address on the question of

34 Ibid., p.7
India...”\(^{36}\) The BBC responded by informing Churchill that “we are under obligation to confer with the three Party Whips before coming to any decision respecting broadcasts which deal with current political issues, and your inclusion would alter the complexion of the series.”\(^{37}\) Churchill responded by pointing out that of the talks given till then:

...Mr. Polak representing ‘Left’ India opinion, Mr. Yusuf Ali representing ‘Right’ Indian opinion and Mr. Srinivas Shastri representing ‘Centre’ Indian opinion ... all these addresses are from standpoints wholly different from the views which I represent, which are held by very large numbers of persons of all classes in this country.... I could not believe that the Whips of the Conservative Party would be instructed by their Party Leaders to prevent me expressing my views to the public upon this question.... I now formally ask you to accord to me an opportunity of stating the British side of the case....\(^{38}\)

The BBC then suggested that Churchill could take part in a short balanced series on the same subject to which he agreed. However, when this was put before the government, it was decidedly cold to the idea. Reith’s autobiography “Into the Wind” details a meeting on this issue between the Secretary of State, himself and the Chairman of the Board of Governors:

[The Secretary of State] was most apprehensive of the fact of such a series of talks at that time; it would do immense harm in India. The

\(^{36}\) “Letter from Churchill to J.H. Whitley”, 5 February 1931. Ibid., p.3.

\(^{37}\) “Letter from Lord Gainford to Churchill”, 12 February 1931. Ibid.

board decided to accede to the request so emphatically made by the
minister responsible for dealing with a particularly delicate and
critical situation. . . .

Churchill was enraged when this decision was communicated to him by the BBC.

He shot off another letter to the Chairman of the Board of Governors saying:

In refusing to allow me to warn the nation of the enormous perils
which are rapidly approaching us in India, you take a serious
responsibility. For more than six months, I have been pressing the
BBC for an opportunity similar to those which you have freely
extended to the opponents of British rule in India. Always reasons
have been found to refuse me. It is a bad cause which cannot afford to
face free and responsible discussion. . . . I can only regard your
renewed refusal as a definite part of the attempt to lull and
chloroform the British people into a fatal decision. . . . This attempt on
the part of the Government, to which I am grieved to see you lend
yourself, to prevent the fair public discussion of an Imperial question
can succeed only in respect of the broadcast. Parliament, the platform
and the Press are still open. What has to be said can be said, and will
be said. All that you are doing is to sterilize or unevenly apply a new
and valuable facility which science has given us, and which was
entrusted to your care. . . .

As Reith wrote to Lord Willingdon a few years after this episode:

I enclose a copy of our Charter and Licence. As I mentioned, there
are several clauses in them which we shall make an effort to have
altered next year when consideration is given to the renewal of the
Charter which expires at the end of 1936.

For instance, according to the present Licence we are supposed to
broadcast anything which any government department asks; in
practice no government department has given us an order nor do I
think they would. And there have been occasions on which we have
declined to broadcast what appeared to be ex parte material. H.M.G
statements, of course, we are delighted to broadcast on behalf of
government departments, and in fact we have helped them a great

39 BBC, WAC, R34/528, "Letter from Churchill to Whitley dated 8 August 1931", in Policy:
Political Broadcasting Churchill, W.S., 1953-54, p.5
deal in this way. We also feel that the clause which gives the PMG the right to give us orders about items should be altered. It is not that we have any idea of becoming more autonomous; but that if and when we have an order from the Government, it should be more circumstantially done. The particular P.M.G clause to which I refer has never been exercised, in other words, we have never had a direct order from him.

Everything has worked satisfactorily in practice but many of the clauses give rise to misinterpretation. The government should always have the right to take us over, as for instance, in the event of war, or during a short Emergency (such as in 1926) although they did not actually do so then, and even with respect to an item to be broadcast or not broadcast.

There are other clauses which rather irritate us in the matter of wavelengths ... but this, of course, is a relic of the early days when this was little more than a toy....

An internal analysis by the BBC in 1954 of these events came to the conclusion that “the BBC wanted Mr. Churchill to broadcast on India and was overruled by the government of the day.... It has to be remembered that Churchill’s own party was no more anxious for him to broadcast during those years than were the Governments of the day.... And the fact that there was no public outcry against his exclusion means that the country as whole was not in a mood to listen to him.... The internal report saw this episode as one more step in “the slow and cautious advance of broadcasting to independence in the handling of political and controversial matters.”

40 National Archives of India (from now, NAI), Home-Pol-File 119/1/34, “Letter from Reith to Willingdon”, in Development of Broadcasting in India, 30 July 1934.
41 BBC, WAC, R34/528, n.35, p.2
42 Ibid.
Broadcasting during Wartime

In 1939, the BBC had been in existence for 12 years, sufficient time for a working relationship between the government and the BBC to have come into being. Yet, the decisions taken by the government with regard to the BBC seem to suggest that the government still looked on the BBC with deep-rooted suspicion and was not quite sure how to handle the BBC. As during the General Strike, the BBC once again came to the fore in the days leading up to the Second World War since shortage of newsprint led to newspapers and journals reducing space, and content. Though the fledgling television service had been shut down on the eve of war, it was decided that radio broadcasting should continue but with substantive restrictions, both technical and with respect to programmes. 43 All broadcasting was reduced to one wavelength, with transmitters all over Britain being synchronised to operate on this one wavelength. Broadcasting restrictions saw the BBC's output being reduced to public announcements, and pep talks by ministers. 44

The policy of the government with regard to the BBC in war time was expressed by Samuel Hoare in the House of Commons thus:

The plan would be not that the Government would take over the BBC in wartime, but, on the whole, the wise course would be to treat broadcasting as we treat the other methods of publicity, the Press and the films and to leave the BBC to carry on, but obviously in war time with a very close liaison between the Ministry of Information and the Broadcasting Corporation, with definite regulations as to how the

43 See Chapter 2.
44 Briggs, n.5, p.176

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work should be carried on. This is our general attitude towards broadcasting.45

This statement notwithstanding, the Interim Report of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1935 had gone into the matter in great detail; its recommendation was that the general public would in any case expect the government to assume control of broadcasting in time of war. "The government should, therefore, be in a position to say what shall and shall not be broadcast and must exercise control of individuals having access to the microphone, but should avoid its becoming in the eyes of the general public a government department."46

The recommendation of the sub-committee was that the BBC should continue to conduct the service, but the government should have full power over the service in the following respects: a) to close any of the broadcasting stations at short notice – either temporarily or permanently – or to alter their hours of working; b) to maintain a censorship of all broadcast matter in order to prevent the transmission of any item which is considered dangerous or contrary to the National Interest; c) to insist on the broadcasting of any appeal, announcement, statement of policy, talks, or any other matter which may be considered by the government to be in the National Interest; d) to select speakers for certain broadcasts, to prohibit employment by the BBC of any person to whom objection is taken by the Defence Security organisation, and to insist on the exclusion of studio audiences, the discontinuation of ‘outside

45 Hansard, 28 July 1938, col 1938.
broadcasts', or the adoption of any other restrictions or precautions which may be considered necessary in order to prevent misuse of the microphone.47

This memo was circulated through the various ministries and their reactions sought. The War Office, in its reaction, noted that "It is considered that broadcasting has now assumed the status of a weapon of war of which the principal ammunition is propaganda. If this is so, and if the weapon is to be turned to the greatest advantage, it is important that plans for the active use of the broadcasting service should be elaborated and not only those which are required for control and censorship.48 The Home Ministry in its turn, declined to take responsibility for broadcasting saying, "It does not seem that the Home Secretary or indeed any other existing Ministry could properly be made responsible for propaganda in time of war."49 Reith's opinion was also sought by the sub-committee and he gave it thus:

It is essential that the response and relevance of the BBC’s news service should be established beyond doubt, even though in practice, accuracy could not amount to more than the nearest approach to absolute truth permitted by the over-riding conditions including censorship. On the lowest term, also a reputation of reliability is in fact the only possible found for credibility – or for successful deceit, should such a course be necessary in the interest of the country.... Organisation of the broadcasting service should be simple and its relation to government direct, in order to facilitate quick decisions and their immediate and efficient execution. This cannot be achieved by collective responsibility.... The Board Of Governor’s powers should therefore be vested in an individual responsible to a Cabinet Minister.50

47 Ibid., p. 67
48 Ibid., p. 79
49 Ibid., p. 83
50 Ibid., p. 98
The Government, following Reith’s recommendations, made a secret contingency plan which envisaged the take-over of the BBC by the Government, dismissal of the Board of Governors and appointment of the Director-General and his Deputy as Governors (while retaining their original posts) with the authority to prescribe broadcasting hours and, after notice, to veto any broadcast matter, either particular or general, along with the Minister of Information....

No doubt, Reith made this recommendation on the premise that he would be Director General-cum-Governor when this happened. Not surprisingly, this arrangement was opposed by the Board, when they came to know of it on grounds that “the total eclipse of the independence of the Corporation would be widely regarded as a serious blow to liberty, and would create difficulties for the Government before the public opinion in the country.” In the event, it was finally decided to truncate the Board of Governors to just two members, comprising the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman.

The BBC came under the control of two different organisations; while the newly formed Ministry of Information was entrusted with the task of providing news and entertainment to wartime Britain and allied or neutral countries overseas, the control of propaganda to enemy countries was handled by a covert organisation, Electra House (EH), but without the knowledge of the BBC.

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51 BBC, WAC, R34/258, “Record of Interview between Ogilvie and Reith”, in Policy BBC/MOI Relations 1938-45, 23 February, 1940, p.1
52 However, he resigned in 1938, a few months before the onset of war.
53 Briggs, n.5, p.180
54 The Governors were reinstated in April 1941
55 Later on, EH was replaced by the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) which had its own transmitter and could broadcast propaganda directly instead of through BBC transmitters. John Cain, The BBC: Seventy Years of Broadcasting (London: BBC Books, 1992), p.47
In a memorandum put out on 20 May 1940, Duff Cooper, the Minister of Information elaborated on what degree of control could appropriately be exercised by the Ministry of Information over the BBC. "... The BBC have hitherto and will continue to accept general guidance from this Ministry and will bow to our decisions after having made their observations ... they are willing to accept any directions, whether general or particular, on all matters ... considered to be in the national interest ... they have agreed that no broadcasts of political importance will be arranged without my approval...."\[56\]

According to a BBC memo, regarding the BBC's relationship with the newly set-up Ministry of Information:

(1) The BBC's Charter continues in force, subject to reduction of the number of Governors from seven to two, viz. The present Chairman and Vice-Chairman, as approved by His Majesty in Council:

(2) The Licence and Agreement is modified to the extent that ... the Postmaster-General transferred to the Minister of Information on 5 September 1939 the following powers secured to him under the existing Licence and Agreement:

Clause 4 (1) To prescribe broadcasting hours
Clause 4 (3) To give notice vetoing any broadcast matter either particular or general
Clause 5 To prescribe conditions, etc. for Television service

(3) In addition the Minister of Information is authorised to exercise certain powers of censorship....

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\[56\] BBC, WAC, R34/472/1, "Relations between the Ministry of Information and the BBC: Memorandum by the Minister", in Policy: BBC/MOI Relations 1938-45, 20 May 1940, p.1 272
In November 1940, the BBC handed over a memo titled “Government and BBC in Wartime” wherein it made a number of suggestions “with a view to still further the hands of the Minister in exercising his authority over such matters of broadcasting as he may consider appropriate....” The specific suggestion was for a Broadcasting Council, with representatives of other appropriate departments including the “Minister of Information, a leading representative of the Foreign Office, a leading representative of each of the three Fighting Services, a leading representative of the Ministry of Home Security, the Chairman of the BBC, the Director General of the BBC and specialists to be called as the business of the particular meeting may require.”

It would be vital that the representatives of the Departments on this Council should be persons of high standing, who would speak with full authority of their departments, ... and who would act as liaison officers for their departments, and would be the focal point to which would be directed all views, suggestions or criticisms on broadcasts affecting their departments. In this way, it is believed that the responsibility, as well as the power to direct, would be recognised both by the public and by the departments concerned, while the Minister would be able to speak in Parliament on all broadcasting matters with the knowledge that he had, through the Broadcasting Council, the complete co-operation of all the departments principally concerned.

However, the government had other ideas on how to regulate broadcasting in this period. In December 1940, the War Cabinet took a number of decisions regarding broadcasting. These were detailed in a letter to the Director General from Walter Moncton of the Ministry of Information. According to him, the War Cabinet had

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57 BBC, WAC, R34/258, “Note on Government and BBC in Wartime”, in Policy: BBC/MOI Relations 1938-45, 26 November 1940, p.2
decided to appoint two Advisors, a General Advisor and a Foreign Advisor to the BBC and "the advice given by these officers would in the ordinary course be accepted, but in the event of differences between the officers and yourselves, the matter would be referred to and decided by the Ministry of Information." This decision raised a storm of protest within the BBC. The Director General remonstrated with Sir Walter Moncton that "conclusion about a General Advisor was entirely new to us (previous indications had been confined to a Foreign Advisor) and that unless it was very carefully defined, it might obviously invalidate the position of the governors ...." The governors also raised the same point in a meeting with Moncton.

It appeared to the Governors ... that the wording of Sir Walter's letter could be so interpreted as to entitle the persons appointed to range over the whole field of the Corporation's activities and administration, that they could be held to override the D.G. and the Governors, and the procedure might be such as to involve complete executive control, and, in fact if not in name, the taking over of the Corporation by the government ... if this were intended, there would seem no need for the continuance of the Governors in office, or indeed of the Charter....

The Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, invited the governors for a meeting in January 1941 wherein he explained the rationale behind the decision as being that in war time the government needed to exercise control over matters in the BBC sphere

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58 Ibid., pp. 2-3
59 BBC, WAC, R34/469, "Letter from Sir Walter Moncton, Ministry of Information to Director General, BBC", in MOI-Advisors 1939-41, 31 December 1940.
60 "BBC Director General's record of interview at Ministry of Information with Sir Walther Moncton", 1 January 1941. Ibid.
61 "Note by Chairman, Board of Governors, BBC of a meeting with Sir Walter Moncton of the Ministry of Information", 4 January 1941. Ibid.
affecting the conduct of war. The government had avoided making any changes in the status of the BBC so that as soon as the war was over normal relations could be resumed. The General Advisor and Foreign Advisor would be on his staff; "... as to the duties, it was generally agreed that their functions would be largely determined by experience.... he described the advisors as the channel of liaisons with the Ministry ... and suggested that the two advisors were on ‘indefinite embassy’ from the Ministry of Information to the BBC and that they represented the Ministry’s wartime suzerainty in the broadcasting field. 62

These soothing words notwithstanding, a draft note on the proposed functions of the Advisors made it clear that their writ was to run in the BBC; according to the note:

(1) The main function of the advisors is to ensure that the BBC, in accordance with the undertaking given to the Minister by the Governors, acts in time of war in conformity with Government policy.

(2) All facilities will be given by the BBC to the advisors to keep them fully informed, and in advance of action, of any proposed action. This involves the advisors seeing the minutes of meetings of the Board of Governors, of Control Board, and of any other meetings which they do not attend, which may lead to action by the BBC affecting government policy.

(3) The Chairman or the Director General has the right to appeal to the Minister if the advice tendered by the advisers on any given point is unacceptable to the BBC. The adviser concerned should be informed that an appeal is being made.

(4) Except through the advisers or with their knowledge or through the Broadcasting Division of the Ministry no approach should be made by any BBC official to the Ministry or any other Government Department....

62 “Note on meeting at Ministry of Information chaired by Mr. Duff Cooper, Minister of Information”, 21 January 1941. Ibid.
(5) The advisers will put to the BBC all decisions affecting broadcasting communicated to them by the Ministry and will be responsible for satisfying themselves that appropriate action is being taken by the BBC.63

That this draft was not appreciated at the BBC is evident in a note on the draft written by the Director General to the Chairman a few days later. He began by commenting, “The functions which this document seeks to define are the functions of Inspectors, rather than of Advisers,” and then went on to point out that “the Advisers are not confined to giving advice or directives on policy affecting the war effort, but are free to roam anywhere over BBC administration....”64 Despite further remonstrance with the Ministry of Information on the subject, the Ministry stuck to its guns, with Walter Moncton, writing decisively to the Chairman on 17 June 1941 saying: “On all matters of national policy connected with the war effort it is my desire that the two advisors shall represent the views of His Majesty’s Government and that if for any reason, the Director General of the BBC is unable to accept the advice that is so given to him he shall refer the matter to the Minister of Information and his decision shall be final.”65

That the BBC was beginning to be buffeted by various forces became clear when F.W. Ogilvie, the Director General, was forced to resign in 1942, ostensibly to facilitate re-organisation of the BBC. The Director-Generalship then went to two people, R.W. Foot and Cecil Graves. While newspapers cited differences with the

63 “Draft terms of reference of BBC advisors sent down by Sir Walter Moncton to Sir Allen Powell”, 9 April 1941. Ibid.
64 “Note on the functions of the Advisors as drafted by the Ministry”, 14 April 1941. Ibid.
65 “Letter From Ministry of Information to Sir Allen Powell on Functions of Advisors”, 17 June 1941. Ibid.
Ministry of Information and "interference from Whitehall" as Ogilvie's reason for leaving, one of his successors, R.W.Foot had this to say, "Before our appointment, there is no doubt that whatever Ogilvie's personal ideas and hopes may have been, the BBC was drifting nearer and nearer to control by the government and if the change had not been made the drift would undoubtedly have continued simply because the BBC's own internal organisation was not sufficiently strong and efficient to enable it to manage its own affairs, whether financial or otherwise, without any considerable interference." 66 Asa Briggs gives a number of reasons for the easing out of the Director General; in the main, Ogilvie was just not able to display the kind of leadership qualities required to face up to the government and Parliament, especially, when the former was now led by an erstwhile foe of the BBC, Sir Winston Churchill. 67 That being the case, he lost the support of his Governors and his staff, so much so that when he finally bowed to pressure and resigned, their only comment was that "the chief executive control of the BBC under war-time conditions call for different qualities and experience from those suited for peace-time control." 68

The Suez Crisis

The Suez crisis was yet another occasion when the BBC came under enormous pressure, to the extent that for a time, the "whole position of the BBC as an

66 Briggs, n.s, p.209
67 Churchill's opinion of the BBC can be gauged from his description of it as "the enemy within the gates; continually causing trouble; doing more harm than good...." John Reith, Into the Wind (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), p. 438.
68 Briggs, n.s, p 202

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independent institution seemed at stake. On 26 July 1956, President Gamel Abdel Nasser of Egypt nationalised the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company. There was swift condemnation of his move by the two erstwhile colonial powers, Britain and France, who issued an ultimatum to Nasser to reverse his decision or face their ire. There was initial approval of the government’s actions by the opposition parties to the extent that the Leader of the Opposition did not take up his right to reply to the Prime Minister’s Ministerial Broadcast to the Nation regarding this issue on 8 August 1956.

The position of the BBC regarding such broadcasts had been laid down in an aide-memoire on Political Broadcasting agreed to by the various political parties in 1948. According to this, ministerial broadcasts were meant to be confined to non-controversial measures: they were to be used to make factual pronouncements, to explain legislation approved by Parliament, or to appeal to the public to co-operate in national policies. If the Opposition considered that a Ministerial broadcast had political or controversial overtones, it could ask for the right to reply through the government or the Chief Whips; if there was no response from these channels upto a period of three days, the Opposition could ask the BBC’s Board of Governors to arbitrate on the matter.

However, by the middle of September 1956, the political consensus had broken down and sharp differences had emerged between the government and the Opposition. It was in this scenario that Hugh Gaitskill, the Leader of the Opposition,

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69 Ibid., p.316
approached the BBC and demanded that he be allowed to exercise the right to reply that he had deferred earlier. The BBC felt that the request from the Opposition Leader could not be regarded as exercising his right to reply since over a month had passed and many events had happened since the time he had been first invited to exercise his right. The compromise that was finally arrived at was for the Leader of the Opposition to take part in an interview program on the BBC on September 21.

This exercise in walking the tightrope was only a precursor to subsequent events once the situation took a new turn with the British instigating the Israelis to attack Egypt across the Sinai on October 29, while bombing Egyptian airfields themselves on October 31. The Prime Minister again went on television to give a broadcast on October 31 and the Leader of the Opposition demanded, and received his right to reply on 4th November. Following this broadcast, the BBC received an unusual request from the Prime Minister’s Office; when repeating or reporting it over the External Services of the BBC, some of the more inflammatory portions of the speech of the Leader of the Opposition should be censored before being broadcast over the Arabic service of the BBC.

Confidential records show that as early as August 1956, the Prime Minister had sought and received information on the extent of control that the government had over the BBC. According to that note, “the simple position about control over the BBC is that under Sec. 9(2) of the TV Act, and under Clause 15(4) of the BBC’s Charter, the Postmaster General can require ITV and the BBC to refrain from

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70 Briggs, n.3, p.211

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publishing any particular item or class of news.” The Prime Minister had then added in his hand “But the power has never been used, everything having been settled by persuasion so far.”

While the domestic services of the BBC had shown themselves to be able to withstand the onslaughts directed against them by the government, due to the various safeguards built up over the years, what happened in the case of the External Services is an indicator of what might have been the case in the event these safeguards had not been in place.

The External Services were not funded out of the Licence Fee but out of a grant-in-aid provided by the Foreign Office. Nonetheless, in every other aspect down to non-interference by the government, it was supposed to be similar to the domestic services. Its reputation for factual and unbiased coverage of events had been acquired during the Second World War when it did not indulge in overt propaganda despite occasional pressure from the government to do so.

Thus, as far as the BBC was concerned, keeping silent would have irrevocably damaged its credibility, particularly when it was clear that “at no time since broadcasting began had there been such a lack of agreement in Parliament and in the country on a major matter of foreign policy”, notwithstanding the Prime Minister’s opinion that, in times of national emergency, opposition and dissenting views ought not to be broadcast, and that the duty of the External Services was to present a united

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72 J.B.Clark, Director of External Broadcasting in 1952, quoted in Briggs, n. 5, p.317

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front to the outside world. But the BBC did not distinguish between its internal and
eexternal audience, considering its credibility as a major factor in retaining both.73 In
the event, the BBC’s broadcasts on the differences of opinion within the country
were broadcast directly over shortwave via the BBC’s external services in English to
the Middle East where they were avidly listened to by British troops preparing their
assault on Egypt, as well as in Arabic which could be picked up by the “enemy”.74

The consequences were almost immediate. Anthony Nutting, Parliamentary Under-
Secretary at the Foreign Office (which funded the BBC’s overseas services)
summoned Ian Jacob, Director-General of the BBC, on 25 October 1956 and
informed him that for punitive reasons, the grant-in-aid for the Overseas Services
was being cut by £1 million.75 It was also intimated to the Director General that this
action denoted a lack of confidence in the BBC.76 This event was followed by
substantial shadow-boxing between the BBC and the Foreign Office with the latter
sending over a draft letter of its proposals for specific areas in which the budget
could be cut (including the ending of Hindi broadcasts to the sub-continent). The
tenor of the letter indicated that the government was on the route to creating
alternate sources of dissemination of information overseas, a domain which had

73 As William Haley, Director General of the BBC from 1945-53, put it in his “Lewis Fry Memorial
Lecture” on The Responsibilities of Broadcasting, “...the BBC does not attempt to have one story
for its own people and another for the rest of the world....” Quoted in Briggs, n.3, p.214

74 William Clark, Prime Minister’s public relations advisor at the time, wrote in an article for The
Observer 20 years later that the Prime Minister was worried that the BBC’s overseas services were
giving “comfort to the enemy by reporting domestic divisions, thus weakening the credibility of our
threats .... These worries resulted in innumerable schemes to discipline the BBC...” Ibid., p.213

75 Briggs, n.5, p.318

76 BBC, WAC, R34/1580/3, “The Suez Crisis and the BBC: A Study of Successful Resistance to
Government Pressure, in Suez Crisis – to End October 1956, p.10
hitherto, been the sole domain of the BBC’s external services. The letter also proposed:

As a step towards rendering more effective the services which will remain after this reorganisation, it is proposed to appoint a liaison officer (from the Foreign Office) probably of the rank of Counsellor. This appointment would not, of course, be intended to derogate in any way from the existing degree of independence of the BBC and from their own responsibility for the programmes which they transmit. Its purpose would be to improve the arrangements for consultation between the Corporation and the prescribing Government departments, and it would supplement, not replace, the existing arrangements for the transmission of information from these departments to the Corporation. 77

Though this letter was never officially sent to the BBC, two of its proposals were immediately carried out. The government requisitioned, for its use, transmitters in Cyprus which were originally meant for the BBC’s External Services and set up its own station, the “Voice of Britain” specifically to broadcast propaganda to the Middle East. A Liaison Officer was appointed on 31October 1956 and according to him, his immediate task was to vet BBC news bulletins in Arabic and see whether they were suitable for re-broadcasting by the Voice of Britain. 78

That postulated a handling of news in a manner which – among other things – would not expose the sharp division of opinion in the country and in Parliament on current government policy... It was clear that this would involve giving special prominence to governmental statements ... and whittling down to the point of suppression of opposition speeches. 79

77 Ibid., p.12
78 Ibid., p.15
79 Ibid.
The Director of External Broadcasting, J.B. Clark, responded by saying that while the BBC recognised the unique nature of the current situation, the Foreign Office seemed to be calling for a distortion or suppression of news in a manner which had never been called for even during the war.\textsuperscript{80}

The next point of conflict between the government and the BBC, rose over the Press Reviews broadcast over the External Services. In the words of the BBC’s in-house review of the Suez crisis, “The suggestion was forcefully conveyed that not too much prominence should be given to the Opposition over Suez, merely because it was well expressed in editorials.”

The BBC felt it had the following alternatives:

a) to continue scheduled Press Reviews in a normal manner;

b) to abandon them for a period on Corporation initiative;

c) to consult the government as to what should be done; or

d) to wait for the government to exercise the rights, which are clearly defined in the Charter and Licence.

This was then referred by the Acting Director General\textsuperscript{81} to the Chairman, who fully concurred with a decision to act under (a) above, which meant that (d) remained operative.

The Foreign Office took exception to the BBC’s continuation of its normal policy despite its reservations. Assistant Under-Secretary Paul Grey, responsible for information matters, conveyed this view strongly to the Director General and the

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Ian Jacob, Director General, was out of the country for a large part of the duration of the crisis. The Director of Administration was the acting DG during this period. He had previously been Deputy Chief of Air Staff, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief Bomber Command and Inspector-General of the Royal Air Force prior to joining the BBC. According to Asa Briggs, he “proved to be a stalwart
Director of External Broadcasting. "He represented that in such a situation as this, it was not necessary to tell the whole truth." 82

The matter was then discussed at a meeting of the Board of Governors where "although some misgivings were expressed, the Board came to the conclusion ... that a successful and creditable result had been generally achieved during a period of great difficulty, and that the result fulfilled the BBC's obligations for impartiality, objectivity, and for telling the truth." 83

The struggle between the BBC and the government had its echoes in Parliament as well with Peter Rawlinson, a Conservative Member of Parliament giving notice for an adjournment debate on the subject of the "BBC Charter - Political Balance" on November 14. In the course of this debate, he charged the BBC with making deliberate distortions in news bulletins, press reviews and other current affairs programmes, and "with partial presentation by omission, exaggeration, or the use of voice tone and an unrepresentative choice of people for interview." 84 The Assistant Postmaster General formulated his reply to the debate in consultation with Sir Norman, Acting Director General of the BBC and Harman Grisewood, Chief Assistant to the Director General. He said:

The BBC is fully aware of the implications of these events. I can assure all Hon. Members that it has been, and always is vigilant to

82 BBC, WAC, R34/1580/3, n.76, p.18
83 Ibid.
84 Briggs, n.5, p.216

of BBC independence throughout a period of heavy pressure from Whitehall and of bitter debate in the country." Briggs, n.5, p.215

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ensure that it carries out the responsibility which is laid upon it to be impartial in these matters.

It has examined and is now examining, the methods of presentation of the various aspects of the controversy in both its sound and its television services, bearing in mind the importance of not only being impartial but of appearing to be impartial to the listening public.

It will be possible, therefore, for the BBC to judge what action is necessary, if indeed, any is needed, to safeguard what I think all Hon. Members will agree is the vital tradition of impartiality which the BBC has built up and which, as we saw during the war years and subsequently, is one of its greatest assets.

In January 1957, the Director General met with the Postmaster-General in a bid to resolve the various problems that had cropped up during this period. He complained about the relay station in Cyprus having been handed over to "amateurs" who had started a station called the "Voice of Britain." In that case, he asked caustically, "what were we?" The Director General also wanted the amorphous entity of the Liaison Officer to be cleared up; as things stood now, he spent a great deal of time at the BBC but could do little of value since he had no responsibility for the output and could only "intervene in an intermittent and undesirable manner." The Post Master General took these complaints into account and assured the Director General that he was firmly in favour of the continued independence of the BBC. In May 1957, new arrangements for liaison were agreed between the Foreign Office and the BBC and a

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83 BBC, WAC, R34/1580/3, n.76, p.24
86 Ibid., p.20
87 Ibid., p.21
former BBC member of staff was appointed as new Assistant Under Secretary with responsibility for information matters.\textsuperscript{88}

The Pilkington Committee, which was the first Committee to be constituted after this incident to review British broadcasting, noted that in March 1933, the House of Commons had resolved "that it would be contrary to the public interest to subject the Corporation to any control by the Government or by Parliament other than the control already provided for in the Charter and Licence...."\textsuperscript{89} The Committee observed:

The independence of the BBC ... in the day-to-day management of its affairs, including programme content is the expression of the often re-affirmed policy of successive governments since the inception of a public service of broadcasting.... We record our view that its unremitting observance is essential for the proper purposes of any service of broadcasting; for this is indeed a fundamental principle, and to break it in a particular case, no matter how trifling, would be to threaten the whole basis of British broadcasting.

One test of the principle is the performance of the broadcasting organisations. We are satisfied that their programmes show no sign of deference to the government views. We recall in particular the programmes of the BBC at the time of the Suez campaign of 1956.\textsuperscript{90}

\textbf{In India}

\textbf{Colonial Government and Censorship}

Given the amount of mistrust with which the government in the mother country viewed broadcasting, it is quite surprising that the colonial government actually

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., p.24
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., para 390, 391, p.116
agreed to allow broadcasting in India. In fact, when the Federal government asked
the opinion of the provinces on this issue, they raised severe misgivings about it.
The Central Government's letter of 19 May 1924 to the Local Governments on
censorship said: 91

The Government of India proposed to retain the right to impose pre-
censorship at any time by notice to the licencee and to require the
licencee to forward the outlines of programmes in advance. The latter
requirements however did not preclude the licencee from making
alterations subsequently, if such were necessitated by causes beyond
his control, and if failure to do so would lower the standard of
programmes. 92

The Government of the Central Provinces in Nagpur wrote in response: "The
difficulty is that centres of propaganda outside India may endeavour to get matter
which would otherwise be excluded, through to the public by means of
broadcasting.... The government should reserve the power to rescind receiver
licences or refuse to issue them to undesirables.... Local seditious propaganda should
be sufficiently provided against by the provision of listening by officials of the
government and for pre-censorship...." 93 The Government of Bombay also replied in
a similar vein, saying that if not pre-censorship, then at least a provision for post-
censorship should be incorporated by compelling the broadcaster to keep a verbatim
record of all matter broadcast which should be supplied to an officer of the
government.

91 See Chapter 2 for more on this letter.
93 Ibid., p.17
When the government ultimately agreed to allow broadcasting in India, the approval came with some very stringent clauses; the government reserved the right to inspect broadcasting stations, take over or operate them or impose a complete censorship or close them down in times of emergency, impose complete or partial prohibition or pre-censorship either generally or specifically at any time, issue any special or general restrictions as regards matters which may or may not be broadcasted or as to the persons who may or may not broadcast, specify sources from which news and information in the nature of news may be obtained and the times of broadcasting the same, terminate the licence at any time in the event of improper or inefficient use of broadcasting station. The government also made it clear that all talks, readings and addresses were to be of a non-political nature. News broadcasts were to be strictly confined to press messages supplied by specified news agencies approved by the government. Speeches could be broadcast provided the government had previously approved of both the speech and speakers.94

A perusal of the communications between top echelons of the colonial government and the British government seems to indicate that the colonial government was fairly confident of being able to maintain a tight leash on broadcasting in India. In a response to a query from a British M.P. on the matter, the Viceroy wrote:

I am assured that this danger has been realised and the proper safeguards exist to combat it. Though broadcasting will be run on commercial lines, there will be a Government Director; and in addition the Government of India retain very wide powers of supervision and control. The broadcasted matter has to be approved

by the Director General of Posts and Telegraphs. The service has to be carried on to the reasonable satisfaction of government; and government reserves a general power of pre-censorship and may issue special or general directions regarding matter which may or may not be broadcasted.  

A proposed licence draft envisaged the appointment of a Censor by each local government, with the Posts and Telegraphs Directorate providing a set for this purpose. In a letter of 15 June 1927, the Secretary, Home Department, elaborated on the Government of India's views about the censoring of broadcast matter and laid down guidelines as follows:

(1) Nothing should be broadcast which offended against public morals, which was of seditious tendency or which was likely to arouse racial or communal animosity.

(2) With regard to ordinary political matter, while there was no desire to exclude it, it was necessary to ensure that there was no undue bias in favour of any particular view and that the government got its due share of publicity. The objective of censorship was to keep the balance even.

As with the earlier question of allowing broadcasting, the Federal government asked the provinces for their comments on the issue thus:

In view of the practice established in the United Kingdom whereby normally all political speeches and controversial matter are excluded, the Government of India are of the opinion that the policy of permitting political matter to be broadcasted in India requires careful reconsideration. In para 5 of the Information and Broadcasting letter of May 19, 1924, the Government of India expressed the opinion that it would be undesirable to prohibit the broadcasting of political matter such as speeches by leading politicians, as such prohibition would reduce the value of political and propaganda matter which would be broadcasted on behalf of the government. On the other

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95 BBC, WAC, File E1/897/1, "Letter from Lord Irwin to Sir William Bull, M.P", 20 May 1926.
hand, there are arguments which deserve serious consideration against the free use of broadcasting stations for the dissemination of political views and ideas.... In the first place there is the example of the United Kingdom where it appears to have been recognised from the beginning that these controversial subjects should be excluded from broadcasting programmes.... It might appear that the reason for the prohibition of such matter are stronger in India where political ideas and balance are less well developed.... 97

Of the responses to this letter from various provinces, the responses from the Government of Bihar and Orissa are most noteworthy; “It would clearly be impossible for the Broadcasting Company to hold the balance even in Indian politics.... The movement of Indian politics is so kaleidoscopic and the relations between them so fluid that it would be well nigh impossible for any external agency to hold the scales even or to gauge the hearing of any particular utterance.... The prevalence of parochial jealousies and communal differences add further difficulties to the problem.” 98

The government, after considering these reactions, notified the provinces that no statements should be broadcast “on topics of political or industrial controversy” and also retained powers of broadcasting in an emergency for itself. 99 Luthra praises the British bureaucrats for their attempts at being fair by not “seeking any special dispensation for broadcasts by the Viceroy and the Governors.” 100 It must be noted that the colonial government, was allowing political broadcasts, under stringent censorship, at a time when there was a complete ban on political broadcasting by the

97 Ibid., p. 42. Letter dated 1 September 1927.
98 Ibid., p. 43, Letter dated 22 September 1927.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid., p. 42
BBC in England. As the Secretary, Information and Labour, put it in his response to the Foreign Secretary's query on this point, "It is true that a [complete ban on political broadcasting] might save censors from some delicate decisions.... On the other hand it is realised that if political speeches on the one side are barred they should be equally barred on the other, and that such a rule would shut out many valuable speeches by the Viceroy, Governors, etc."101

Though Luthra compliments the colonial authorities on their sense of fairness even in those trying times, other documents from that period show that it was more a fallout of ignorance of the government of the potential of broadcasting as a propaganda weapon and the low priority accorded to it by the bureaucracy that led to that particular decision. One such document is J. Coatman's review on Indian broadcasting done internally for the BBC. Coatman had intimate knowledge of the Indian situation, having been Principal Information Officer to the Indian government before joining the BBC. Coatman referred to the attitude of the bureaucrats, saying, "The Department of Industry and Labour102 ... took no effective interest in broadcasting, whilst the Home Department, which is the department concerned with the political interests of the State ... has been immersed in problems of the first magnitude and has not seriously considered its interests in broadcasting...."103

Broadcasting came under the direct purview of the government at a time when momentous changes were taking place in the constitutional and political spheres in

101 Ibid., p.41, letter dated 9 August 1927.
102 Under whose purview broadcasting came
India; the Government of India Act 1935, delineating the powers of the federal vs.
the local governments was in the process of being enacted and it was not yet clear
whether broadcasting would be in the federal, concurrent or state list. The feelings of
the bureaucracy on this issue were clearly conveyed in a letter from the Viceroy to
Reith wherein he said:

Noyce suggests that the first class of broadcasting should be entirely
a central subject, under direct control by a Central Broadcasting
Department. The second class is obviously a provincial concern,
except as regards technical control which must remain with the
centre. This constitutional scheme is now being considered in the
India Office, and if Hoare accepts its broad lines, we intend to
address local governments to secure their concurrence, so that the
necessary provision may be made by or under the forthcoming
Constitutional Act.104

In the Report on the Development of Broadcasting from 1927 to 1933 brought out
by the Federal Government, the argument had been that

Although broadcasting, as an activity coming under telegraphs, is
subject to the direct control of the Central Government, and exclusive
authority is vested in the Governor General by the Indian Telegraph
Act, 1885, the objects served by broadcasting, namely education,
entertainment and information are matters falling largely within the
sphere of the provincial governments and the Government of India
would not therefore be justified in incurring any material expenditure
on broadcasting which is not covered by the revenues directly or
indirectly derived from that source.... 105

102 BBC, WAC, E1/896/1, “Broadcasting in India”, in Indian Broadcasting June 1933-August 1934,
28 July 1934, p.1
104 BBC, WAC, E1/896/2, “Letter from the Viceroy to John Reith”, in Indian Broadcasting
September 1934 - November 1935, 17 September 1934.
105 BBC, WAC, n.103, p.10

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This point was again reiterated through a new proviso which added that “though broadcasting would be placed under the control of the centre insofar as the technical side went ... all programme matters would have to be dealt with provincially ... except for the treatment in programmes of subjects which were ‘reserved’ ones under the future constitution could always be controlled from the centre – i.e. foreign affairs were reserved subjects and talks on foreign affairs could be supervised from Delhi...”

This line of thinking could trace its origins back to the Note on Broadcasting written by the Director of Wireless in 1927 wherein he said: “Censorship which may be taken to cover the whole question of government control of broadcast matter, must be primarily the responsibility of the local governments.... To prohibit all political discussion will undoubtedly detract very considerably from the value and popularity of broadcasting.”

The initial impetus was therefore for broadcasting to be the purview of the states, a policy that was further reinforced when the Government came out with a comprehensive policy in 1932 regarding principles to be observed for radio broadcasting in British India and the princely states. In its resolution, dated 22 February 1932, the Foreign and Political Department said, inter alia, that Indian states were entitled to grant their own licences within their own territories and that they were free to establish broadcast stations within their respective territories, but only after prior consultation with the Government of India. The resolution also

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106 BBC, WAC, E1/896/2, “BBC record of interview at India Office with Sir Findlater Stewart on the subject of Indian appointment”, in Indian Broadcasting September 1934 - November 1935, 1 October 1934.
encouraged them “in the interests of the Empire and their own interests to introduce such general principles of censorship as may from time to time be imposed in British India” going on to note that “…at present in British India nothing can be broadcast which offend against public morale or is of seditious tendency or is likely to arouse social, religious or communal animosity, or contains statements on political or industrial controversy…”\(^{108}\)

This *de facto* decentralisation of broadcasting led to criticism from India experts in Britain. J. Coatman, in his internal review for the BBC was particularly vociferous in his opposition to the decentralisation of broadcasting, saying that if power over broadcasting were to be given to the provinces, “in practice, it would not be possible for the Governor to control the day to day activities of the Cabinet, and Broadcasting will certainly be used as a political weapon ... it is easy to imagine Cabinets in certain provinces which would use broadcasting for anti-imperial purposes....”\(^{109}\)

A memo from the India Office, London, took that argument further:

> Hitherto in dealing with the policy which should be adopted in regard to broadcasting, financial considerations have been pre-dominant.... Under the reforms this attitude can no longer be maintained and that political considerations must be the chief controlling factor.... In the White Paper proposals we have done everything we can to secure the

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\(^{107}\) National Archives of India (from now on NAI) Home-Pol-1927-File F227, No.7, *Explanatory Note by P.J. Edmunds, Director of Wireless*, 1 July 1927, p.9


\(^{109}\) BBC, WAC, E1/896/1, “Broadcasting in India”, in *Indian Broadcasting June 1933-August 1934*, 28 July 1934, p.3. In the British context, though, Briggs notes that Coatman was a strong votary of regionalisation and was in fact prevented from publishing a book on the subject by the BBC. Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), vol. 4, p.89
position of the Governor-General administratively through his reserved departments and his special responsibilities. But we have done nothing to secure his position on Indian opinion on which through the passage of years, the maintenance of the whole structure of reserved departments and special responsibilities must depend. Under the White Paper, he is left as a Super-Prime Minister without a party to support his views and policies and without machinery to propagate his views, for the existing public machinery will automatically pass under the control of the Indian minister. Such a set of conditions demands for the success of the reforms scheme an acquiescent India which we know does not exist and is unlikely to be evolved in the future. It is therefore imperative that the Governor-General's position be strengthened in relation to public opinion. ... Broadcast systems should be under the ultimate control of the Governor-General and not the federal government.... [this will] provide the Governor-General with the means of contact with public opinion in the event of emergency.... The best system would be the establishment of an Indian Broadcasting Company independent of the political machinery in its administration but dependent on the Governor-General for its Charter.\textsuperscript{110}

H. Macgregor of the India Office, in a letter to Stephen Tallents, Director of Public Information, Government of India, gave a detailed explanation of the British experience in broadcasting to illustrate how broadcasting could be used in India for political and propaganda purposes. Relevant portions of this letter are being reproduced in full here since it gives an insight not just into Indian but British broadcasting during that period. He said:

Perhaps I might be allowed to add a word on political controversy and propaganda. Political controversy is the bugbear of the BBC.... If it is an awkward position for the BBC in British political circumstances, it is to be an impossible position for the ISBS in the political and communal circumstances of India. The only possible alternative seems to be to refuse to all parties access to broadcasting;

\textsuperscript{110} British Library, IOR, Information Department, IOR L/1/445, "Memo from H. Macgregor, Information Officer, India Office, London", in \textit{Correspondence on Broadcasting in India 1932-45}, n.d.
... during the transition period there may be a temptation on the part of the Government of India to use the ISBS to put forth views which can be regarded by the opposition as controversial. This shall be resisted because the ISBS will have in fairness to admit critics or to be at once dubbed a purely government propaganda service; thus having its potential influence discounted from the start.... The government tactics are to support the influence of the ISBS as a neutral body and to secure through it the desired effects by what I call the factive method, that is, the presentation not of views but of facts so selected that the mind of the hearer can draw only one conclusion, the conclusion desired. This is the method we have pursued at home throughout the Indian constitutional controversy with results that have now made constitutional history.... I cannot quite visualise the ultimate future of the ISBS ... but I have a picture of its yet being a nominally independent corporation like the BBC under conditions which will give the Governor-General real powers of influence....

As a result of these criticisms, the Government moved an amendment to the Government of India Act to have broadcasting reserved for control by the Centre. Though the provinces were to have considerable freedom in providing programmes and so on, broadcasting was deemed a federal subject with the policy controlled from the Centre and the Viceroy holding the balance. Section 129 of the Government of India Act, 1935, read as follows:

(1) The Federal Government shall not reasonably refuse to entrust to the Government of any province or the Ruler of any Federated State such functions with respect to broadcasting as may be necessary to enable that Government or ruler to construct and use transmitters in the Province or State to regulate and impose fees in respect of, the construction and use of transmitters and the use of receiving apparatus in the Province or State:

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111 “Letter from H. Macgregor to I.M. Stephens, Director of Public Information, Government of India”. Ibid., 3 January 1936. Question marks refer to indecipherable words since this was a hand-written letter.
Provided that nothing in this subsection shall be construed as requiring the Federal Government to entrust to any such Government or Ruler any control over the use of transmitters constructed or maintained by the Federal Government or by persons authorised by the Federal Government, or over the use of receiving apparatus by persons so authorised.

(2) Any functions so entrusted to a Government or Ruler shall be exercised subject to such conditions as may be imposed by the Federal Government, including notwithstanding anything in this Act, any conditions with respect to finance, but it shall not be lawful for the Federal Government so impose any conditions regulating the matter broadcast by, or by authority of, the Government or Ruler.

(5) Nothing in this section shall be construed as restricting the powers conferred on the Governor-General by this Act for the prevention of any grave menace to the peace and tranquillity of India, or as prohibiting the imposition on Governments or Rulers of such conditions regulating matter broadcast as appear to be necessary to enable the Governor-General to discharge his functions in so far as he is by or under this Act required in the exercise thereof to act in his discretion or to exercise his individual judgement.\(^\text{112}\)

A.S. Bokhari, Deputy Controller of Broadcasting, gave the broadcasting professionals' point of view, saying that “from the point of view of one who believes that the broadcasting service should develop as a unified whole, Section 129 is full of obstacles and pitfalls.” He elaborated on his statement saying: “It is obvious that there is very little we can do to stop any provincial government from putting up a transmitting station of its own if it so desires... at any psychological moment, therefore, broadcasting in this country may split up into provincial units.... The

\(^{112}\) Lionel Fielden, The Natural Bent (London: Andre Deutsche, 1960), pp.144-5. Italics his. Fielden referred to Clause 5 as “the usual catch at the end.”
position vis-à-vis the Indian states gives us a foretaste of the future and may serve to illustrate the above remarks.\textsuperscript{113}

However, despite the initial aspirations of the government to be free and fair, when it came to the crunch, the government enforced strict censorship in broadcasting. With provincial elections under the Government of India Act, 1935, due to take place in 1936, the “Report on Development of Broadcasting in India”,\textsuperscript{114} dated 18 March 1936, informed that a centralised system of “censorship”\textsuperscript{115} was to be set up with all talks to be scrutinised by the Controller in consultation with the authorities concerned. A further update on 4 April 1936 said: “Efficient censorship of broadcast matter is to be centralised on station directors in co-operation with local governments and the Controller of Broadcasting.” The Government also undertook “not to use ISBS for political propaganda.” Special attention was to be paid to all talks and spoken word items to avoid offence against propriety, common sense and the impartial policy laid down by the Government of India. Fielden’s attempt to appeal to the Viceroy himself to loosen the constraints imposed on broadcasting did not yield any fruit. The Viceroy discussed this with Frank Noyce, and Henry Craik and instructed M.G. Hallet, the Home Secretary, to reply to Fielden on the issue. Hallet made it clear that on no account could broadcasting be used for “the purposes

\textsuperscript{113} British Library, IOR, Information Department, L/1/445, “Memo from Bokhari”, in Correspondence on Broadcasting in India 1932-45

\textsuperscript{114} British Library, IOR, Information Department, L/1/1/967, “Report on Development of Broadcasting in India”, in Government of India’s Reports on Broadcasting, 18th March 1936. The “Report on Development of Broadcasting in India” was one submitted every two months by the Department of Communications, Government of India, to “H.M.’s Under Secretary of State for India.” From April 1936 onwards, Indian authorities began sending a copy on a regular basis(every 2 months) to the BBC Director General; these provide a fair picture of the roll-out of censorship in broadcasting.

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of broadcasting matter connected with the elections” since doing so, “we might in effect be using machinery set up by ourselves for disseminating sedition....” A copy of this letter was sent to all local governments and administrations, along with a cover note, dated 11 August 1936, making it clear that “no election manifestoes, or election speeches or extracts therefrom, should be broadcasted in any form whatever.”

In a letter dated 26 September 1936, Fielden gives an indication of the amount of censorship that was imposed. He said: “The government recently refused to allow broadcasts of even excerpts from election speeches in the news, and all matter pertaining to the Elections is shut out. Since the Elections are and will be the main topic of interest in the whole of India this is a sad situation for broadcasting....” He held the bureaucracy responsible for this situation saying, in the same letter: “The Home Department is really a frightening body, and Craik, the Member, and Hallet, the Secretary, are both rooted in the tradition of government propaganda and reactionary ideas. I can quite understand it but it makes my task exceedingly difficult.”

Referring to the ongoing Independence struggle Fielden said: “The Congress is friendly to me personally, but profoundly suspicious of Government's intentions as regards broadcasting, and their attitude will not be helped by the fact

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115 Emphasis theirs
116 BBC, WAC, E1/889, “Letter from M.G. Hallet, to Lionel Fielden”, in Development of Broadcasting in India 1936-1941, 5 August 1936, p.2
117 BBC, WAC, E1/896/3, “Broadcasting in India”, Indian Broadcasting February 1936-March 1940. This file contains relevant extracts from Fielden's letters to various people during this period. In another letter dated 28 January 1936, he again said about these two personalities, “They hate broadcasting with a bitter, unreasoning, old-fashioned hatred” to the extent that “they very nearly persuaded the Viceroy not to broadcast” on the occasion of the ex-king’s death.
that, while we are giving such prominence to the exchange of Viceroy's, which just bores the mass of people, we are practically ignoring the Congress session upon which all eyes are turned." 118 In another letter Fielden wrote about his discussion with the Congress thus: "I've had a number of talks with members of Congress, including Nehru and Gandhi, which make me fairly certain that Congress, since they feel that the present service is an intolerant one and is chiefly used for government propaganda ... would seize the first opportunity to erect their own stations in the provinces and to use them unscrupulously for their own propaganda." 119 Fielden blamed the government for the mess that broadcasting found itself in, saying, "I do not believe that this situation should ever have been allowed to arise, and I feel, and have always felt that it would have been quite possible for the government, by a more tolerant attitude, to have avoided it...." 120

That Lionel Fielden tried to follow a work-to-rule policy in an effort to get the government to allow greater latitude to broadcasting is evident from the following episode relating to the broadcast of a Book Review. The facts of the matter are encapsulated in this letter from J.A. Mackeown, Secretary in the Home Department, to Fielden.

On 25.4.38, Home Department received a Manuscript for a book review.... The talk consisted of juicy extracts from certain books about Russia which it was considered, were totally unsuitable for broadcasting from a government-owned and managed broadcasting station, as their delivery would be rightly considered as a hostile act

118 Ibid., "Letter dated 13 April 1936".
119 British Library, IOR, Information Department, File L/I/445, "Letter from Fielden to Macgregor", in Correspondence on Broadcasting in India 1932-45, 7 April 1937.
120 Ibid.
by the Russian government. The talk should have been turned down out of hand, without troubling the Home Department, by any responsible Director.

…I would be grateful if you would again issue instructions to ensure that talks are sent to Home Department for their approval at least a week before they are due to be delivered…. The attention of all Station Directors and of anyone concerned with the prior censorship of talks should be drawn to their responsibilities…They should bear in mind that criticism of acts or policies of foreign governments which might be perfectly legitimate for a private person or institution may give just cause for offence when propagated by an organisation which is completely under government ownership and control.121

The letter was the culmination of much notings on files and discussions within the Home Department on the issue of the above manuscript which was scheduled to be broadcast on 26 April 1938 but was sent for vetting by the Home Department just a day before. A telegram was sent to AIR on 25 April itself with the message, “Talk is totally unsuitable and should not be given.” However, as one of the Deputy Secretaries noted in the file, “I see BBC parallels to this Delhi talk in Broadcast Book reviews submitted in two recent numbers of BBC official publications…. But of course the BBC is not a government department.”122

However, this was not the end of the matter, discussion on this particular issue and on the larger issue of censorship continued well into the following year, fuelled by letters sent by the Controller of Broadcasting to the Home Department. A new file was started with the subject “Principles to be followed in regard to the censorship of

122 File no. 2, 28 April 1938. Ibid.
Broadcast talks on the AIR stations"  

In the first noting in that file, W.H.J. Christie, Under Secretary in the department sought confirmation as to:

a) whether book reviews should have been sent for censorship – Controller of Broadcasting said an order had been issued to that effect
b) whether the order was intended to apply only to the schedule of talks for the quarter January-March 1937, or was to hold good for subsequent schedules

According to Christie, Fielden had taken the latter view. He had also taken the view “which is more open to question, that the manuscript of such talks have to be sent first to the Home Department, without any preliminary scrutiny by Station Director, and he sys they are invariably re-censored by his own staff when they come back from the Home Department.”

This was most unpalatable to the Home Department, since it put final censorship in the hands of the broadcaster. Mackeown, the Secretary to the Department of Communications, commented on Fielden’s observations, saying “my impression is that Controller of Broadcasting is being deliberately obtuse about this as a protest against any censorship by government at all and in order to give him frequent opportunities of continuing to write letter asking for the system to be changed.”

Correspondence between the Home and Communications Departments continued well into 1939 with the Home Department going to the extent of comparing the number of talks sent to it for censorship with the actual number of talks broadcast. It was found that whereas fifty-nine talks were

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122 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 "Mackeown comments", Ibid., 16 July 1938.
broadcast in the period 1-4-38 to 30-6-38, only four had been sent for scrutiny. Therefore, as W.H.J. Christie noted in the file on 16 August 1938, "Neither Controller of broadcasting nor his Station Directors have really misunderstood the existing orders…. Explanations should be unnecessary…." 127 In response, S.N. Roy, the Undersecretary, noted: “I have doubts as to the necessity of an explanation for I had spoken to C.B. about the matter but one is never quite sure of the ground with C.B.” 128 In the event, an explanation was sent, just to be on the safe side.

Fielden made a further effort in April 1938 to use the precedents set by the BBC with regard to political broadcasting to urge for similar procedure in the context of Indian broadcasting. As he put it in his letter to Stephen Tallents asking him for information on controversial broadcasting, “BBC precedents have a good deal of force here and it would be useful to have at least some landmarks in their controversial career!” 129 Fielden outlined his problems thus: “On the one hand is the Government of India, excessively bureaucratic and cautious and nervous; on the other there are the cabinet ministers - Congress - of seven provinces, who, unless, they are lulled into some sort of belief that they are not excluded from the radio, are likely to take steps to build their own stations and thus ruin the central control altogether....” Fielden again blamed the government for its obduracy, saying:

...the difficulties here are so great - government officials wont speak and if they wont speak it’s difficult to allow Congress ministers to speak and thus we are getting into a vicious circle of doing nothing at

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127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
all which is not only very bad for our development, in a country which thinks and breathes nothing but politics, but also dangerous, I think, in the sense of drifting towards a state of affairs where provinces will feel excluded and start building up their own transmitters...\textsuperscript{130}

In the event, before events moved in the direction Fielden felt they would, the world was at war, and that led to broadcasting developing on different lines.

**Broadcasting during Wartime**

*World War II*

The advent of war led to an increased importance for broadcasting in the scheme of things since broadcasts emanating from India could cover the Far-Eastern theatre as well as the Middle East. Among the first steps taken within a month of declaration of war was an increase of transmission hours at all stations from 50 to 70 hours as well as the introduction of news bulletins in five new Indian languages as well as foreign languages.\textsuperscript{131}

The result of the earlier reluctance to spend on broadcasting was that coverage was scanty and scarcely able to respond to the propaganda put out by the Axis powers. As Fielden wrote in a letter to Reith’s successor, F.W. Ogilvie: “The recent introduction of a daily news bulletin from Berlin which is received more strongly than Daventry undoubtedly falls upon very fruitful soil. GOI has spent very little on building stations and we cannot claim an all-India coverage as Berlin undoubtedly has.... English news is somewhat dull whereas the Germans keep slingling out fact

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131} Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati, Marathi and Pushto in addition to the existing languages which were English, Hindustani and Bengali
after fact and repeating them day after day....”\textsuperscript{132} In a subsequent letter he noted “We are a long way away, we are short of material and the general feeling in the country is none too good. The Germans bang away continuously and their Hindustani service has a very large audience indeed.... Their propaganda may be crude but it is swallowed by the masses like a patent medicine advertisement.”\textsuperscript{133} The government considered various ways and means of preventing the Indian public from listening to the propaganda. Jamming broadcasts was considered but the Chief Engineer of Broadcasting pointed out that “with our communications and interest strung out all over the world, we stand to lose more than we gain by creating chaos in the air.”\textsuperscript{134} Another half-baked suggestion of the Central government was to penalize private licence holders if they allowed people in their neighbourhood to listen to foreign propaganda on their personal sets though they were free to do so in the privacy of their home as much as they liked. The Madras Government’s response to this was that “a complete prohibition on listening would be a good thing if it could be enforced completely. But without a huge Gestapo organisation, that would be impossible.”\textsuperscript{135} However, the government did cancel commercial broadcast receiver

\textsuperscript{132} BBC WAC, E1/896/3, “Letter from Lionel Fielden to F.W. Ogilvie, BBC Director General”, in \textit{Indian Broadcasting February 1936-March 1940}, 17 November 1936.


\textsuperscript{134} NAI-Home-Pol-1940, 60/2/40, “Memo from Chief Engineer”.

\textsuperscript{135} Das, n.133, no page nos.

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licences which were mainly issued to clubs, institutions and messes for relaying broadcasts over loudspeakers for the duration of the War.\(^\text{136}\)

All India Radio came under the purview of the Regulation of the Control of Broadcasting. The system of censorship which had been set up in 1936 continued with some changes. The News Editor was appointed local censor for news bulletins and the Station Directors as local censors for other programmes. Advance schedules of talks were required to be sent to the censors appointed by the Provincial Governments for vetting, and their advice with regard to the omission of certain talks or speakers was accepted. Where the head of a station felt that the advice of the Provincial Censor was unreasonable, he was authorised to seek or offer clarification, but not to question the decision or decline to abide by it. As all the broadcasts at that time were broadcast live, “cut-out” switches were provided at each station, with a responsible programme official continuously on duty to switch off the programme in case any broadcaster tried to put unauthorised matter across.

According to a Press Information Bureau *communiqué* on 23 November 1939:

> Government of India proposes to constitute a Central Board of Information of which the members will be the Principal Information Officer, the Controller of Broadcasting, the Chief Press Censor and a military member, the whole to be presided over by the Director General of Information.... The object of the Board will be to co-ordinate the provision and publication of news and information in every aspect through all existing channels.... The policy of the Board will be to endeavour to assist the press and radio to obtain a greater

flow of official news and background information, objectively and promptly than is at present possible....

According to Luthra, A.S. Bokhari had to use all his persuasiveness to convince the authorities that "any decision to transfer the responsibility for programmes directed to Indian listeners to any organisation under the direct control of British authorities would arouse adverse reactions in the people and thus indirectly hinder the War effort." Though Indian programmes were spared it was decided that broadcasts to British troops stationed in India and in foreign languages to listeners abroad would be looked after by the newly created Far Eastern Bureau of the Political Warfare Executive (PWE) of the Ministry of Information, London, which was to be responsible for the dissemination of propaganda. There was also a great deal of pressure on AIR to concentrate more on war publicity and propaganda. So much so, that A.S. Bokhari, officiating as Controller in Fielden's absence, had to perforce write a letter to the Department of Communications on 1 October 1939 putting forth AIR's point of view:

As regards war propaganda through broadcasting, it must be remembered that broadcasting is an important peace time activity which has achieved a considerable amount of popularity by virtue of the entertainment it provides, and also by avoiding too violent or too provocative a tone in its spoken word programmes. In times of war it is all the more important that it should continue as before and even more than before to attract and appeal.... Propaganda through broadcasting, more than through any other medium must strictly avoid violence, crudity and tiresomeness.... Wartime propaganda

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138 Luthra, n.92, p.128

139 Fielden had gone to London and joined the Ministry there.
through broadcasting must be conducted in such a way as not to maim post-war broadcasting, which must continue its developmental activities....\textsuperscript{140}

Lionel Fielden also wrote a note on what he euphemistically referred to as “Broadcasting and Publicity”, prefacing it with the caveat that the “views expressed in this memorandum are those of the writer and are not necessarily shared by the Government of India.”\textsuperscript{141} His memo was an effort to convince the government that the essential pre-requisite for effective propaganda was subtlety while reminding it of the dangers of over-utilising AIR for propaganda purposes:

In India the difficulties of broadcasting, particularly late under war conditions, are probably greater than anywhere in the world. AIR starts by being suspect to many listeners because it is a government organization. Jealousies whether communal, linguistic or provincial are frequent and deep. The limited experiment in mass observation which AIR carried out in November showed that there was a general tendency to think that news and propaganda from a government organizations were distorted. Although for the past five years there has made every effort to hold the scales as evenly as possible between various opinions and thus to build up a reputation for reliability among its listeners, the exclusion of Indian polity leaders from a microphone is very marked, there can be little doubt that this exclusion has been the chief factor in preventing the development of Indian broadcasting. Those who doubt whether such a policy is wise on a long term view point out that, though Indian political leaders would no doubt air their views about British Imperialism, as they already do in the newspapers, they would be equally undoubted condemn Hitlerism and agree that it is at least questionable whether their freedom to express both these points of view would not in the long run beneficial a) to Indian broadcasting, b) in exploding German assertions that Indians are their friends and c) in improving world opinion on the British position in India. The opposite view may be

\textsuperscript{140} Luthra, n.92, p.129

briefly stated to be that to permit the discussion over AIR of subjects of political and economic controversy would bring more danger than advantage. It should be remembered that AIR is a peacetime as well as a wartime activity and if it is used indiscriminately for propaganda it may easily become suspect and unpopular. At the beginning of the war AIR extended the scope of its activities by the issue of no less than 29 news bulletins in eight languages everyday and by the inclusion of a number of talks dealing with the war. Although AIR has been fully alive to the danger of over doing war propaganda the pressures from all sides have been such that war publicity has steadily increased.  

The inadequate penetration of broadcasting into the Indian countryside and inadequate coverage of the country meant that wartime propaganda did not have as much of an effect in India as it did in Europe. Nonetheless, it gave the government an excuse for tightening its control over broadcasting.

*The Kashmir Crisis 1948*

Propaganda was an important weapon in the hands of Pakistan during the Kashmir Crisis of 1948. The propaganda and misinformation that was broadcast over Radio Pakistan and "Azad Kashmir" Radio caused much concern to the government in Delhi. In a letter to his Home Minister, Sardar Patel on 30 May 1948 after a brief visit to Srinagar, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru complained that "Pakistan Radio ... carries on a vicious and intensive propaganda and there is nothing to meet it from our side.... It is urgently necessary that we should install a good transmitter in Srinagar.... Further that the broadcasts both from Srinagar and Jammu should be carefully planned so as to appeal to the people and strengthen the present

\[142\] Ibid.
government."\textsuperscript{143} In a letter on the same day to N. Gopalaswami Ayengar, Nehru wrote: "People in the Valley ... are not behaving very well. I think they are influenced very greatly by Pakistani propaganda especially by radio. Our propaganda is no good at all. I have been impressing upon the Information Ministry to make fresh arrangements for transmitters to be set up in Srinagar...."\textsuperscript{144} In a further letter to Sardar Patel on 6 June 1948, Prime Minister Nehru wrote:

The Pakistan Radio repeats the most infernal lies from day-to-day and it is not possible to counter this by leaflets etc. The only way to check it is to do our own broadcasting. Therefore the urgency of this.

Propaganda in Kashmir must obviously take into consideration the psychology of the Kashmiri people, both Muslim and non-Muslim. It must be largely addressed to large masses of people who can make a difference this way or that way. I am told that the Kashmiri broadcasts from A.I.R. is rather colourless and does not appeal to the listeners in Kashmir. It seems necessary to associate a competent Kashmiri to give the background to our broadcasts.\textsuperscript{145}

This second letter, so soon after the first, might have been prompted by a letter Nehru received from his daughter, Indira Gandhi, a future Minister of Information and Broadcasting, who had stayed behind in Srinagar:

There seems to a woeful lack of political propaganda on behalf of the Kashmir Government. The Jammu Radio gives only news and a normal peacetime programme.... The 'Azad Kashmir' radio is blaring out the most brazen lies day and night and there is nothing to counteract them.... Sheikh should have a powerful transmitter here.... Everyday there is a fresh crop of rumours.... Only radio can reach into the byways of Srinagar and give authentic news and


\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p.201

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., p.226
contradict the ridiculous stories spread by the ‘Azad Kashmir’ radio. Do you know that on the day you left Srinagar, the ‘Azad Kashmir’ radio announced that on your arrival in Srinagar, you were met by one lakh of people waving black flags and shouting ‘Go Back’!!?146

Matters in Kashmir were somewhat complicated by the fact that the status of Kashmir within the Indian Union was still in the process of being clearly defined. Thus, even though Jammu station had gone on the air with a 1 kW medium wave transmitter on 1 December 1947 with the technical assistance of AIR personnel, it was operated by the Communications Department of the Jammu and Kashmir government. Following the remonstration from the Prime Minister, a second more powerful station operating on shortwave was established at Srinagar on 1 July 1948, also under the Jammu and Kashmir government.147 It was only in 1954 that the Jammu and Kashmir Communications Department came under the Government of India and P.C. Chatterji was appointed as the first Station Director. Despite this development, the station continued to be called Radio Kashmir in order to circumvent the agreement between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan that their respective state media would not be used to broadcast propaganda against each other.148

147 Luthra, n.92, p.195
The China War 1962

On 12 October 1962, the Chinese Army invaded North-East India; the culmination of a series of incidents including India granting asylum to the Dalai Lama and a long-drawn out border dispute. Though the war was shortlived since the Chinese withdrew unilaterally after almost coming up to the plains of Assam, All India Radio was caught completely unawares, not least because it had become completely dependent on the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for guidance and had become incapable of responding with initiative in a crisis such as this. It especially failed in its duty of providing timely information to the remote areas of the North-east which were under attack and were utterly dependent on this medium for such information. As Chanchal Sarkar noted in an article in the Hindustan Times a year later:

AIR, as the most important publicity wing of the government, was completely in the dark regarding policy on the border issue. AIR asked for guidance but received none and therefore continued with its usual patter while the aggression started and developed. AIR was always late with the news. It was still reporting the evacuation of Tezpur when people were returning to that city. This caused confusion and drove people to listen to Peking and other foreign stations.149

B. G. Verghese, who was reporting for the Times of India on the conflict recollects that even though Chinese announced their unilateral withdrawal from Tezpur on 21 November 1962, “All India Radio could not broadcast that because they were

149 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 10 February 1963, p.7.
waiting to get permission from the Prime Minister ... the rest of the world was broadcasting but All India Radio was heroically fighting a war that was over.”

Prime Minister Nehru’s ignorance of the power of the medium was revealed through his unexpected extempore speech over All India Radio to the people of Assam. Gopal Das, Station Director Guwahati recounts the speech in his book *Dwani Tarangan Ki Taal Par: Akashvani Ki Karyalay Ki Kuch Smritian* as being as follows: “Today Assam is in danger. Our hearts goes out for our brothers and sisters in Assam as they have to go through this trouble and probably will have to face more problems.” This broadcast resulted in widespread panic with public reaction being “Pandit Nehru has left us to our fate” and “If the Indian government does not want to protect Assam, then Akashvani Guwahati must stop anti-China programmes.... You also will run away and the Chinese will take revenge on us....” Gopal Das also reports that he was ordered to broadcast announcements over AIR directed to government officials and informing that if they wished to leave with their families, they were free to do so.

Gradually, All India Radio also began to broadcast news on the war to the rest of the country but as Chanchal Sarkar notes, “When AIR did start its political commentaries and propaganda programmes, it did so with more vigour than

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150 Author’s interview with B.G. Verghese at Delhi on 6 February 2003.
152 Ibid., pp.17-18
153 Ibid., p.20
P.C. Chatterji gives an instance of one such programme called “India and the Dragon which was “a crude attack on the Chinese people and their culture." The producer of a second such programme in Hindi was awarded the Padma Shree with the citation specifically referring to this programme.

In a study conducted by the National Institute of Community Development on awareness of the China War across the country, 83.3% of a sample of 3,168 people drawn from 198 villages from different states were aware of the Chinese aggression but only 22% selected radio as their first source of information about it. The inference drawn by the authors of the study was that “the mass media directly touch only a relatively small number of people ... although the importance of radio as a source of information should not be underestimated.”

The AIR Code

Background

The various tussles and controversies of the type that took place between the BBC and the government in Britain have been almost non-existent in India because the Indian broadcast media were never given a chance to enjoy an autonomous existence. The government kept a firm grip on the broadcast media through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting citing the excuse that ‘the time was not

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154 Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 10 February 1963, p.7
155 Chatterji, n.148, p.168
156 Ibid. Chatterji also notes in his unpublished manuscript that D.K. Sengupta, Station Director, Calcutta was awarded the Padma Shree for his Radio Cartoons on the Bangladesh war.
158 Ibid., p.143
ripe’ and the broadcast media, not mature enough to take on the enormous responsibilities that came with autonomy.159 The fact that India was a developing nation with enormous problems coupled with the convincing arguments thrown up by the theories of ‘development communication’160 ensured that the broadcast media remained a convenient handmaiden of the government. As P.C. Chatterji notes, all dissent was suppressed through a variety of means ranging from ensuring that political commentaries were broadcast from Delhi alone to confidential instructions to the Station Directors on what could and could not be broadcast.161 The outcome of this was what the Chanda Committee described in 1966 as the lack of variety in AIR’s programmes “...they deal with dull and drab matters avoiding scrupulously anything politically controversial or even of civic consequence to the citizens....”162 However, this situation was further legitimised when an official code of conduct, the AIR code, was agreed to by the political parties and laid in Parliament in 1967.163 The code was promulgated following a dispute between the Labour Minister of the newly-elected Left-front government of West Bengal and the Station Director of AIR Calcutta, P.C. Chatterji.164 This was the year in which non-Congress governments were elected to power in eight states for the first time since Independence, a new situation for the Congress government at the centre. According

159 P.C.Chatterji, Broadcasting in India (Delhi, 1991), p.166
160 See Chapter 1.
161 Chatterjee, n. 159, p.104
162 Luthra, n.92, p.286
163 Chatterji, n.148, p.187. According to Chatterji, these guidelines had earlier been issued to AIR Station Directors as secret instructions.
164 U.L. Baruah, This is All India Radio (Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, 1983), p.14
to P.C. Chatterji, “the government was extremely sensitive to news on AIR Calcutta which might appear to be critical of it” and was “convinced that there was a communist cell working in AIR Calcutta.” It was in this situation that the Labour Minister wanted to give a talk over radio. Chatterji asked for the script of the talk before the recording, found certain points he thought could raise controversy.

There seemed to be two points that I could not let pass. In one place, in reply to a hypothetical question as to why the Left Front had come to power through elections though they did not believe in the ballot box, the answer given in the script was “now we can aid the forces of revolution”. This seemed to me a call for the overthrow of the present system. At another place the Minister seemed to accuse the Congress governments of having corrupted the judiciary.

However, according to Chatterji, the Minister refused to meet him in this context, let alone consider the objections he raised. The Minister gave his version of events at a press conference in which he said he preferred to “cancel the talk since he felt that the suggested changes would lead to a ‘total mutilation’ of the proposed speech.... He would not accept dictation from AIR authorities”. The state government protested to the Central government and supporters of the state government took out protest marches and held public meetings condemning the actions of the Director General.

According to Chatterji, it was out of this situation that the AIR Code was born. This nine point code, which was envisioned as a set of self-regulatory principles for

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165 Chatterji, n.148, p.182
166 Ibid., p.183
167 The Statesman (New Delhi), 1 May 1967.
168 Chatterji, n.148, p.185
broadcasters, stated that ‘Broadcasts by individuals over All India Radio would not permit:

1. criticism of friendly countries;
2. attack on religion or communities;
3. anything obscene; or defamatory;
4. incitement to violence or anything against maintenance of law and order;
5. anything amounting to contempt of court;
6. aspersions against the integrity of the President, Governors, and Judiciary;
7. attack on a political party by name;
8. hostile criticism of any state or the Centre;
9. anything showing dis-respect to the Constitution or advocating change in the Constitution by violence; but advocating changes in a constitutional way should not be debarred.

It was the accompanying footnotes that made it clear who exactly the AIR Code was targeted against. They stated *inter alia*:

This Code was to apply to criticism in the nature of personal tirade, either of a friendly government or of a political party or of the Central government or of any state government (though it did not debar references to and/or dispassionate discussion of policies pursued by any of them).... Cases of unresolved differences of opinion between a Minister of the State government and a Station Director about the interpretation of the Code with respect to a talk to be broadcast by the former was to be referred to the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, who would finally decide whether or not any change in the text of the talk was necessary in order to avoid violation of the Constitution....

A letter by Mark Tully, BBC representative in Delhi at the time, gives an idea of how the code was received by AIR staff though they were too scared to come out in the open and air their differences for fear of loosing their jobs:

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169 Chatterji, n.159, p.107
As you can see it is basically an instruction to the station directors, which has no legal status although it has been placed on the table of the Lok Sabha.

The background to this Code I have described in my memos of 3rd July 67 and 7th Dec. 67. It springs from the need to strengthen station directors’ hands when they’re dealing with central and state ministerial broadcasts and to give ministers a clearer idea of the limits within which they must keep. Bearing this in mind the final result is, to say the least, rather strange. No one has publicly said whether the state governments have agreed to the Code. None of them have protested so I suppose that their silence implies assent.

The Code covers every type of broadcast not just broadcasts by ministers. Although the wording of the final paragraph indicates that only scripting broadcasts are covered in fact I gather that the Code covers unscripted discussions as well. Thus if a station director wants to protect himself he will have to pre-record all discussions so that he can edit out anything which offends against the Code.

The Code does not say anything about the occasions when ministerial broadcasts, either by central or state ministers, should be allowed, nor does it say whether the opposition should ever be given the right of reply. At the same time it leaves the question of party political broadcasts still untackled.

Items 3 to 6 and 9 are all covered by the law of land anyhow and so they seem unnecessary.

Items 1, 2 and 8 are all very badly defined. What is the difference between criticism in item 1 and hostile criticism in item 8? Who are friendly countries as defined in item 1? What constitutes an attack or a criticism and what constitutes a discussion? No one seems to know, and so the end result could be the repression of all discussions of internal politics, foreign policy, and religion.

Most people are horrified by the Code. They say that it will stamp out what little freedom and independence AIR broadcasts now have. Senior staffing in AIR while regretting the Code very deeply think that its practical effects will be to preserve the status quo. It certainly gives no hope, they agree of any progress. Discussions on topical matters will continue but they will in effect be limited as they always
have been, to subjects which are basically non-controversial and to speakers who are thoroughly reliable.\textsuperscript{170}

Over the years, there were a number of documented instances where the state government, invariably belonging to the party in opposition was denied the use of the broadcast media even for legitimate purposes. In 1980, the Chief Minister of Kerala was denied the permission to broadcast a speech over AIR on the occasion of his party's second year in office. Permission was granted only when it became an item in the newspapers. Similarly, in 1983, the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh was denied permission to broadcast on the issue of a strike by government servants. Permission was granted only after the Chief Minister took up the matter with the Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{171}

The Emergency 1975-77

Whatever independence and credibility the broadcast media had, disappeared completely during the Emergency declared by Mrs. Gandhi's government from June 1975 to March 1977. Indira Gandhi announced the promulgation of Emergency on 26 June 1975 over All India Radio.\textsuperscript{172} I.K. Gujral, the Information and Broadcasting Minister was replaced, within a few days of the declaration of Emergency, by V.C. Shukla. This was consequent to Gujral's refusal to accede to the demand made by the Prime Minister's son, Sanjay Gandhi, that all news bulletins should be submitted

\textsuperscript{170} BBC, WAC, E1/2054/2, "Memo from Mark Tully to C.O.F.R", in \textit{All India Radio 1967-}, February 1968.

\textsuperscript{171} Chatterji, n.159, p.110

\textsuperscript{172} Chatterji, n.148, p.251
to him before being broadcast. According to the testimony of S.C. Bhatt, Director of News Services, AIR before the Shah Commission:

For the first few days after the Emergency was declared, a Joint Secretary of the PM’s Secretariat, Mr. P.N. Bhalla, was deputed to function as Censor and was personally present in the news room or the office of Director of News. Even the news of the arrest of Opposition leaders was not allowed to be broadcast in any of the bulletins. They were described as “preventive arrests.” The voice of dissent was stilled and coverage of news including proceedings in Parliament by AIR (as in the censored press) became completely one-sided, with all the focus on the ruling party.

Stringent censorship was imposed not just on the broadcast media but on the press as well. However, P.C. Chatterji, then All India Radio Director General notes that although censorship severely hit the print media, AIR was only marginally affected since censorship had always existed for the government media.

In a meeting with AIR Station Directors on 9 September 1975, Indira Gandhi drove home the point that All India Radio was, to all intent and purposes, the mouthpiece of the government. As she put it, “it is there to project Government policies and Government views. It does not mean, we do not give the views of other people, but primarily its function is there to give the views of the Government of India....” She also delivered a veiled warning to the AIR personnel, saying: “While anybody is in government service they are bound to obey the orders of the government. If they feel that the government policy is not right, they are unable to obey, they have some

174 Chatterji, n.148, p.254
other views which they want to express, nobody is stopping them from resigning and joining any organisation where they will have that freedom.” She derided foreign criticism of her actions in muzzling radio and the press as “the heights of hypocrisy” saying, “I don’t think there is a single country where the government doesn’t exercise control and I am not leaving out countries like the U.K. in this.... If the government really does not want them [the BBC] to say something or have a particular programme, they can very subtly, clamp down, in the many ways in which they don’t have much choice.”

V.C. Shukla, who took over from I.K. Gujral as Information and Broadcasting Minister during the Emergency, made it his mission to muzzle the Press, enforcing censorship and using the broadcast media to spread propaganda. He gave an indication of the shape of things to come at a speech made to AIR Station Directors, just after he took up office in September 1975.

All India Radio is an organ of the government and in a democracy all of you are aware, parties run the government. Any party which gets the majority runs the government and therefore, the policies of the party which runs the government are bound to be reflected in the media that are controlled by the Government and nobody should quarrel with this fact and everybody’s mind should be clear on this basic question....

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176 Ibid., p.14
177 Ibid., p.13. In this context, she was critical of the “tremendous admiration” that certain personnel of the I & B ministry had for organisations such as the BBC.
178 Ibid., p.15. Appendix 6, Extract from the speech of V.C. Shukla at the Conference of AIR Station Directors on 9-9-1975.
No doubt, those Station Directors who were listening to his speech would have been bemused by this and the statements that followed, but in retrospect, would have realised that V.C. Shukla had a clear idea of broadcasting’s place in the scheme of things.

Amongst the truth we pick and choose, we only emphasise such things which we consider in our judgement best for helping and abetting the developmental process of the country in the direction we have set for it and certain other sets of facts which may not be helpful in that direction, we ignore these facts. This is about all that we do.... The question of credibility in our media must be viewed with a very clear mind. Credibility does not consist in balancing facts.... This forum is not run by the Government to have a debate on various kinds of ideologies or various kinds of differences of opinion. This media is conducted by the Government to see that the Government’s policies are properly understood by the people and they are properly interpreted to the people, they are carried to the people in a proper manner and these media help in the understanding of those policies and the begetting of the people’s co-operation in the Government’s policies in the implementation of the Government’s policies.\(^\text{179}\)

Within six months, a publicity campaign centred around Indira Gandhi was initiated over the mass media. The objective of the campaign, entitled “A Decade of Achievements” was to highlight the progress that India had made in the last ten years that Mrs. Gandhi had been in power.\(^\text{180}\) A campaign paper prepared by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting gave its objective as follows: “To project in a systematic and concentrated manner that while the nation is on the march since Independence, the last one decade has been a period of all round progress.... For this

\(^{179}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{180}\text{Gangadharan, K, }\text{The Inquisition: Revelations before the Shah Commission}\text{ (Delhi: Path Publishers, 1978), p.87. A year later, a second campaign, “The Year of Fulfilment”, was initiated highlighting the achievements of the year gone by.}\)
purpose, the projection of the core themes of this campaign will have to be repetitive and continuous."\textsuperscript{181} To this end, AIR was instructed to select about 200 quotations from the Prime Minister’s speeches. “Five to ten of these quotations should be put out daily by each radio station as message for the nation but without bringing in the name of the Prime Minister.”\textsuperscript{182} According to one estimate, All India Radio broadcast 48,609 items on “A Decade of Achievements”.\textsuperscript{183} Mrs. Gandhi was not the only person to be propagated in this manner; her son Sanjay Gandhi was also deified by the government controlled mass media. According to some statistics, 265 news items were broadcast about him in the main news bulletins in a period of one year from January 1976 to January 1977.\textsuperscript{184}

The Das Commission details how the News Services Division of All India Radio was virtually turned into the government’s mouthpiece and its output manipulated in such a way that the government and the ruling party’s achievements were highlighted whilst activities by those parties and individuals opposed to the Emergency and the ruling dispensation were distorted, censored and even blacked out.\textsuperscript{185} S. C. Bhatt, Director of News Services, AIR, during the Emergency, in his deposition before the Shah Commission said:

Distortion of news in AIR began immediately after the proclamation of the Emergency. In December 1976, 2,207 lines were devoted in the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{181}] India, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, n. 163, p.17. Appendix 8, Campaign Paper prepared by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to project “A Decade of Achievements”
\item[\textsuperscript{182}] Ibid., p.18
\item[\textsuperscript{183}] Ibid., p.66
\item[\textsuperscript{184}] Gangadharan, n.180, p.87
\item[\textsuperscript{185}] For a full study, see Committee into the Misuse of the Mass Media, (Delhi: MIB, June 1977), Chapter VIII, pp. 69-74
\end{itemize}
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news bulletins to pronouncements of spokesmen of the ruling party as against only 34 lines to the Opposition parties. [By contrast] in December 1974, the figure was 571 lines for the ruling party and 522 lines for the opposition. The situation changed dramatically and drastically on 26 June 1975 when rigid constraints were imposed on AIR with instructions, written as well as unwritten, given by the Ministry of I&B, at times the Minister himself and also direct from the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

Among the first casualties of the Emergency was the AIR Code which was seen as a threat to the complete dominance of the government over the broadcast media and was held in abeyance as not "being feasible under the changed circumstances."186 According to the report on the misuse of the mass media, the Prime Minister noted on the file: "The guidelines given to broadcasters are now obsolete. Hence the Code should lapse...."117

The Shah Commission Proceedings
The Janata government that came to power in 1977 following the elections instituted a Commission of Enquiry headed by Justice J.C. Shah, a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, to enquire into the excesses committed by the government during the Emergency. This included the manipulation of the mass media, and persons summoned to depose before the Commission included the then Minister of Information and Broadcasting, V.C. Shukla, the Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, S.M.H. Burney, the Officer on Special Duty in the Ministry, K.V. Prasad, (described by P.C. Chatterji as the "hatchet man") and sundry officials from the ministry as well as All India Radio and Doordarshan. Much of the

186Chatterji., n.159, p.106
117 India, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, n. 176, p.67

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evidence to the Commission was in the form of a 20 page deposition by S.C. Bhatt who was Director of News Services, All India Radio through the period of the Emergency. However, the fact that he was a willing collaborator with the ruling dispensation during the Emergency and decided to turn approver before the Commission before the Commission only when he saw which way the tide was turning makes it difficult to lend credence to much of his accusations. Nonetheless, given below are some instances of misuse of the mass media where the facts have been cross-checked with other credible sources.

Fresh elections to the Parliament announced on 13 January 1977 led to a realignment of political forces; most notable among them was the decision of Babu Jagjivan Ram, a Congress stalwart, to resign from the Congress Party on 4 February. According to S.C Bhatt’s testimony, “although in the first bulletin broadcast by us after Mr. Jagjivan Ram announced his resignation we used the word ‘resignation’, Mr. V.C. Shukla later directed us that we should describe it as ‘defection’”\(^{188}\) Again on March 11, “The Secretary told me ... that from that day onward I should personally clear the major bulletins with him and the Additional Secretary.” In cross-questioning, V.C. Shukla admitted to the fact that he had suggested to AIR to use the word ‘defection’ to describe the resignation of Jagjivan Ram.”\(^{189}\)

Another instance detailed by S.C. Bhatt was the attempt to highlight an alleged attempt on the life of Sanjay Gandhi. “According to information conveyed to me, the Minister of Information and Broadcasting himself rang up the Director General,

AIR, between 1 and 2 A.M. on the morning of March 15 to give news of the alleged attack. In turn, DG instructed the News Room on telephone regarding the manner in which the news was to be treated, what was to be covered and what not....”190 In cross questioning, Shukla accepted that he had spoken to the Director General on the issue.191

A third issue was the use of AIR translators to translate the Congress Party's manifesto into various Indian languages. The Das Committee records the incident as follows:

On February 17, 1977, the Janata Party complained to the Chief Election Commission that it had come to its notice that some 20 translators working in All India Radio ... were made to produce translations of the Congress Party’s manifesto, into various Indian languages, under duress. They were allowed to leave only after they had completed the assignment. This complaint was referred by the Election Commission to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on 24 February 1977.... The Director General, All India Radio ... reported to the Ministry that no member of the staff had been sent, as alleged, and the allegations were false....192

In his testimony before the Shah Commission, S.C Bhatt gave his version of the incident as follows: “Sometime in the first or second week of February this year, I received a telephonic message from the then Special Assistant to MIB, V.S. Thripathi, conveying MIB’s instructions that AIR should provide translators for rendering the Congress Party Manifesto into different Indian languages.” Bhatt said that when the news came out in the newspapers, “after ascertaining from the SA that

189 Ibid., p.335
190 Ibid., p.329
191 Ibid., p.335
the instructions were issued at the instance of the Minister, the additional Secretary (K.N. Prasad) asked ... me to obtain statements from all persons concerned denying that translations have been done by them. This was to be done in order to avoid any embarrassment to the Minister and the ruling party if the truth came out.”^193 Under cross-questioning before the Commission, V.S. Thripathi denied having conveyed any such instructions.^194 V.C. Shukla also denied having given such instructions.^195

P.C. Chatterji, who was Director General at the time, and who was also questioned by the Shah Commission on this issue, says that he did receive a query from the Ministry on the issue which had been forwarded to it by the Election Commission. He, in turn, contacted the Director of News Services (Bhatt) who said that “on direction from the Ministry, he had already made an enquiry and sent it to the Ministry.”^196 Chatterji continues:

The fact is that the translation work had been arranged by the Ministry in collusion with the DNS, Mr. S.C. Bhatt ... behind my back.... I came to know of it when I read (of it) in the papers. However, from what the DNS Mr. S.C. Bhatt told me, although the allegation was correct, he had obtained written statements from all the translators and a few sub-editors who were used as translators in which they had individually stated that he or she had not translated the Congress manifesto or any part of it. I got this report.... I passed the report on to the ministry, commenting that the report was already with them. I did not make an independent enquiry. This was the substance of two hours of grilling that I received from Mr. Jethmalani before the Shah Commission.... And who was the chief accuser but

^192 India, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, n. 175, p.59
^193 Dayal, n.188, p.318
^194 Ibid., p.319
^195 Ibid., p.336
^196 Chatterji, n.148, p.265
Mr. Bhatt who had turned approver? When I was asked why I had not made an independent enquiry, my reply was clear. What could one make of statements made in the circumstances which obtained during the Emergency? ....What reliability could be placed on statements made by someone like Mr. Bhatt, who was prepared to make a written statement and to contradict it in a private conversation the next minute?

What eventually came out concerning this case was that Mr. Bhatt had not only arranged the whole thing as far as AIR translators was concerned, but had also distributed money to the translators from Congress funds for the work they had done.197

That this was indeed the case is underscored by the testimony of V.S. Thripathi before the Shah Commission wherein also denied having given any instructions to send translators for Congress work. He suggested that Bhatt had concocted the story “to save his own skin.”198

Another instance of manipulation recorded by the two Commissions were the attempts to appoint Congress party workers and even office bearers as part-time correspondents in the News Services Division of All India Radio. The Das Commission records the methodology used as follows:

In early 1976, it was decided to appoint 142 additional part-time AIR correspondents in different parts of the country. Formerly, part-time correspondents were appointed by the Director, News Services Division, in consultation with the local Station Director.... In 1976, it was decided that DNS would send recommendations to the Ministry for its approval. The procedure laid down was that the Division concerned in the Ministry would obtain the concurrence of the Minister informally, before convening approval to DNS.199

197 Ibid., p.265
198 Gangadharan, n.180, p.116
199 India, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, n. 175, p.74
As the Report dryly notes, "it was not the practice to appoint office bearers of political parties as Part-Time Correspondents. However, the following were appointed as Part-Time Correspondents...." These included a Member of the Legislative Council from Uttar Pradesh who was appointed as a correspondent in Rae Bareili, the Prime Minister's constituency, the Chief Secretary of the City Congress Committee in Gaya, and the Secretary, of the District Youth Congress in East Champaran District.\(^{200}\) When questioned about this by the Shah Commission, V.C. Shukla said in his defence that his policy was not to attach too great an importance to membership of any political party but to go on individual merits.\(^{201}\)

The most ingenious uses were found for broadcasting. When a popular Opposition leader, Jayaprakash Narayan, was to address a rally in Delhi, the government went to extreme efforts to telecast a popular film over television at the same time, in an effort to woo people away from his rally.\(^{202}\) Similarly, access to radio and television was used as a weapon to force stars from the entertainment world to support the government and highlight its programmes. In a notable instance, when singer Kishore Kumar resisted, his songs were banned from the air.\(^{203}\) As per the notings of Joint Secretary J.P. Jain regarding a meeting on the subject, "the name of Mr. Kishore Kumar was mentioned for not co-operating.... Secretary desired that we

\(^{200}\) Ibid., p.74
\(^{201}\) Dayal, n.188, p. 304
\(^{202}\) For a full study, see India, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, n. 163, Chapter VIII, pp. 69-74. Also see "Bobby was on TV on orders from Shukla", *Times of India*, 27 October 1977, p.1 and "Shukla admits having laid 'Bobby' trap", *Times of India*, 29 October 1977, p.5
\(^{203}\) For a full study of this case, see Dayal, n.189, pp.305-308. Also see "Shukla owns up responsibility for AIR ban on Kishore songs", *Times of India*, 29 October 1977, p.1 and Ibid., "Summary of Kishore Kumar songs ban", p.5
should immediately i) ban all records of Mr. Kishore Kumar on TV and radio for a period of three months ii) We should contact various gramophone companies and request them to freeze all records of Mr. Kishore Kumar’s songs…. It should be found out how BBC was playing Mr. Kishore Kumar’s songs, under what contract and what can be done to stop this.”204 These actions were approved both by the Secretary, Broadcasting, and the Minister of Broadcasting personally.

In the most ludicrous act of them all, the government decided that it would air request songs of only those persons “who had accepted one or other approved method of family planning such as vasectomy. They were required to give some sort of evidence of their claim…”205

The Emergency also led to nepotism and corruption invading broadcasting on an unprecedented scale since all actions could be justified through the fig leaf of national security considerations. Such instances have been documented both in the report of misuse of the media during the Emergency and in The Adventure of Indian Broadcasting, a memoir by P.C. Chatterji of his years in All India Radio. As George Fernandes, an Opposition leader noted in a letter to Jayaprakash Narayan from Tihar Jail on 18 May 1976, “The radio is putting Hitler’s minions to shame; what is more galling is (that so many are willing) to sell themselves for a pittance to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.”206 Chatterji was Director General of All

204 Dayal, n.188, p.307
205 Chatterji, n.148, p.256
India Radio during the Emergency period. He says nothing can justify his silent acquiescence to the government's actions during the Emergency.

I do not suppose there was any officer with a conscience who did not suffer grave moral qualms on what happened during the Emergency....For me sticking to my job was a practical matter. If I resigned what would I do? I had a family to support. Who would give me a job at such a time when no one dared fall foul of the government? So I argued with myself as follows: a civil servant is subject to political authority. His job is to advise his political masters honestly according to his lights. He should press his views upto a point, but no further or else he should resign. I carried out orders. 207

This was the defence advanced by the top rung of the officialdom of All India Radio and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting when questioned about their complicity in the misuse of the media during the Emergency. 208 The stand of S.M.H. Burney, Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, is illustrative. When the Shah Commission asked him whether he even now did not realise the impropriety of his actions, his response was: "My stand is that if an order is given by Government at the highest level, as a civil servant it is my duty to carry it out as long as it is not in conflict with any statute or law." When queried further that such an order should be carried out irrespective of its morality or propriety, Burney replied in the affirmative. 209

Chatterji notes the effect of the Emergency on All India Radio went further than the government tightening the already tight control it had over the broadcast media; it

207 Chatterji, n.148, p.268
208 Gangadharan, n.180, p.112-113
209 Dayal, n.188, p.338
was during this period that the fine line drawn between publicising the government’s activities (which had come to be accepted as a legitimate duty of the government-owned media), and publicising the activities of the party in power was completely obliterated.

The Janata Party government, that came to power once the Emergency was lifted and elections were held, set up a Working Group headed by George Verghese, to work out the modalities of providing full autonomy to the broadcast media as promised in the Janata Party’s election manifesto. However, the government fell before this promise could be carried out, and Mrs. Gandhi returned to power in 1980.

The Congress government made it amply clear that it did not regard autonomy for the broadcast media as an important issue and things continued as before. If anything, the government’s grip was considerably more tightened to the extent that criticism and opposing points of view were completely absent.

**Conclusion**

The relationship between the government and the broadcaster has been an evolutionary one. The government held all the cards in the beginning; it decided the finances, the hours of broadcast, and the content of the broadcasts. Its description of “broadcast matter” in the very first Licence was perhaps an indicative of the areas it hoped it would concentrate on in that order; “concerts, lectures, educational matter, speeches, weather reports, theatrical entertainments and any other matter (including

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210 See Chapter 4.
211 Luthra, n.92, p.410
212 Chatterji, n.159, p.107
news and other information).” Even after it realized that news and current affairs couldn’t be swept under the carpet, the government put a number of obstacles in the path of the broadcasters. It was only after it was convinced that there was merit in giving the broadcaster a longer leash that many of the constraints were removed, that too after prolonged negotiation and compromises.

The General Strike of 1926 and the response of the broadcaster was certainly a very important chapter in the annals of broadcasting. It at once brought the BBC from the fringes of the media to the mainstream and made the Government alive to the need for having more than nominal control over the BBC while creating an illusion that its control was only nominal. The BBC also had to walk a tight-rope and try and present events as they unfolded impartially in a situation where tensions and emotions were running high. In the event, this baptism by fire ended up pleasing no-one, and the government took special care to incorporate Clause 4(3) in the new Licence which forbade the BBC from broadcasting specific programmes which had the propensity to be controversial. Though it was short-lived, it was indicative of the general distrust that the politicians would have for the broadcasters in the years to come. For the politicians the conundrum was that here was an instrument for influencing public opinion that was almost within their grasp and yet they couldn’t make use of it. This frustration grew all the more with the arrival of television, since a picture spoke more than a thousand words, and the influence of television was much more than that of radio. But ultimately, democratic principles held sway; the amount of freedom given to the medium itself became the message on the health and wellbeing of British democracy.
The “pressure and resistance” or climacterics model to examine broadcasting followed in this chapter has been criticized on many counts, notably as being too simplistic and inadequate to explore the intricate relationship between the broadcaster and the state; however, the fact that alternative conceptual frameworks do not exist has also been acknowledged. Given, too, that this is a comparative study, this seemed to be the most appropriate framework to be followed. What critics of this model sought to emphasise was that such instances of resistance were few and far between and cognisance should be made of the everyday compromises the state was able to extricate from the broadcasters.

In the Indian context, such crises were few and far between. Broadcasting was firmly under the control of the government in the period under study and given its limited reach during a large part of that period, its existence impacted more on the employees than the listeners. In the colonial period, it was the British Indian bureaucracy that carried out with admirable efficiency the task of keeping a tight grip over broadcasting while going through the motions of seeking opinions on the form and shape that broadcasting should take in India. While there were differing ranges of opinion within the government itself about the amount of freedom that could be granted to broadcasting, ultimately, the views of the Home Ministry held sway and broadcasting was kept under a very tight leash and under direct control of the government. This was all the more ironic since broadcasting covered only a small portion of the total population of the country. There were many intriguing possibilities for broadcasting once the Congress came to power in the provinces in the 1930s and began to make noises about starting their own radio stations, but the
Second World War followed by Indian Independence nipped such plans in the bud.

In the Post-independence period, whatever events that had an impact on Broadcasting only served to send it closer into the arms of the government. Be it Partition (covered in Chapter 3), or wars with Pakistan and China all of them served to further bolster the government's argument that the Indian state was under siege from within and without; broadcasting was an important tool to counter these hostile forces and to suggest that it should be given autonomy was to virtually surrender it to such forces. Once such dangers had passed, then it was expected that such autonomy would come to pass. Of course, such dangers were never-ending. As the state became stronger, it began to bring within its fold many strategic sectors such as banking; it was quite inconceivable that it would willingly deny itself of its control over broadcasting in such a scenario.

The episode leading to the AIR Code could be construed as a crisis, raising questions as it did, about Centre-State relations and the decision-making powers of the Station Director but ultimately when the AIR Code came out, it was difficult to fathom whether the AIR Code's intention was to set the broadcaster free from pressures from Ministers or to further limit their already limited powers of initiative. Ultimately, it only made the going tougher for the broadcaster since no clarifications were forthcoming and no broadcaster was willing to stick his neck out and see how far he could go.

The nadir of state control over broadcasting in India came during the Emergency when the broadcaster went beyond being just under state control to being an
instrument for state and party political propaganda. The fig-leaf of functional autonomy, as a compromise between full autonomy and direct ministerial control which was propagated all along as being the operational philosophy of the broadcasting institutions was blown away, and whatever credibility the broadcaster had retained till then was irretrievably shattered. The broadcasters themselves could be seen as willing associates in surrendering the institution to the government without a murmur during that period. But, that even this episode did not bring about any fundamental change in the government's control over broadcasting only served to highlight the fact that politicians of all hues, whether in or out of power, were all agreed on the one point that it was better to keep control over broadcasting, even in the hands of their opponents, rather than run the risk of giving it autonomy and having it run amok. It was this perceived power of broadcasting to influence public opinion that has kept broadcasting shackled by the government all these years.