

Stephen

BBC
File

PRIME MINISTER

You might like to look at:

1. correspondence between the Home Secretary and Mr. Kaufman
2. Douglas Hurd's speech on the BBC

In both cases I have highlighted what I think is interesting.

On the speech, I have highlighted, on page 3 and 4, sentences which you might like to have at hand for quoting at Questions.

SS

STEPHEN SHERBOURNE

14th November, 1986



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

11 November 1986

Dear Gerald,

Thank you for your letter of 6 November about the BBC.

I am glad that this particular controversy is dying down, but welcome the further opportunity to remove any misunderstanding.

As I have said in public, the Government has no power and no desire to control the normal content of broadcasting. It is for the Board of Governors of the BBC, not for the Home Secretary, to ensure that the obligations undertaken by the BBC as regards impartiality are fully observed.

Norman Tebbit's action was explicitly taken by him as Chairman of the Conservative Party. He had no need in these circumstances to seek the approval either of the Home Secretary or of the Cabinet. He was fully entitled to make these representations to the BBC, as indeed is any other individual or group.

Yours,

Douglas

cc Mr Karnicki
Miss Stewart
Mr Hyde
Mr Mower
Mr Scoble
Mr Sanderson

The Rt Hon Gerald Kaufman, MP

From: The Rt. Hon. Gerald Kaufman, MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

6th November, 1986

Dear Douglas,

As you know, there is a very widely held fear that the actions of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, your Cabinet colleague, have imperilled the independence and integrity of the BBC.

I am writing now to invite you to clarify the constitutional obligations of the BBC and your own role as Home Secretary in relation to them.

All of the broadcast output of the BBC is made under the Licence and Agreement of 2nd April, 1981, made with your predecessor, now Lord Whitelaw. The Annex to that Licence and Agreement sets out the commitment of the Board of Governors of the BBC "to treat controversial subjects with due impartiality". It is this obligation which bound the BBC in its coverage of the bombing of Libya. In so far as any Cabinet Minister has the locus to remind the Corporation of this obligation it would be yourself as Home Secretary, subject to the normal rules of collective responsibility.

In view of the present controversy I believe that it would be of public benefit if you could confirm:

- (a) that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's action was taken without your direction, knowledge or consent, or those of the full Cabinet:
- (b) that you as Home Secretary have had no occasion to remind the BBC of its obligations of impartiality in its news coverage or other broadcast output:
- (c) that it is the official policy of the government to protect the independence of the BBC and not to attempt to limit or influence the editorial judgment of the Governors of the BBC or its programme-makers.

Yours sincerely,

The Rt. Hon. Douglas Hurd, MP,
Secretary of State,
Home Office,
50 Queen Anne's Gate,
London, SW1.

Mr Seale for advice please
of Mr Mike Ewins
Mr Stewart
Mr Hyde
Mr Power
Mr Sanderson
Mr Bickham
Mr Satterthwaite

HOME SECRETARY'S SPEECH TO THE
ROYAL TELEVISION SOCIETY CONVENTION DINNER
8 NOVEMBER 1986

NOT FOR PUBLICATION, BROADCAST OR USE ON
CLUB TAPES BEFORE 20.00 hrs on Saturday

8 November 1986

I am delighted and honoured to be asked to speak to this distinguished gathering. We are celebrating this week the fiftieth anniversary of the start by the BBC of the first regular high definition television service in the world on 2 November 1936. Broadcasting is a profession which attracts to its ranks many argumentative people. Broadcasting is a subject about which politicians and the public love to argue. It is therefore healthy to pause for a moment in the middle of all these swirling arguments and reflect on the wealth of creative talent which has served, and continues to serve, British broadcasting. It is right to say "thank you" this evening, not just to the creative artists but to all those who have established the systems of management which have given British television its shape today.

Looking back over these fifty years we can see how, in a peculiarly British way, tradition and innovation have fought it out within the broadcasting world. An institution or a service is established and gradually builds up its strength and its reputation. Then the climate begins to change; technology moves on; new opinions, new pressures and new possibilities come to the fore. The arguments intensify, eminent people say from their armchairs in the existing system that there is no case for change, but eventually a new system or a new service is brought to birth. The whole process begins over again. So it was that the BBC decided in the 1930s not to remain content with radio but to experiment with the complex and technically difficult medium of television. So it was again in the 1950s; when commercial television was established and producers in both parts of the duopoly found themselves for the first time competing for the interest of their audiences.

/We have once....

We have now once again reached the point in this cycle when the pressures are building up for a new change. Change never comes about in the way which was at first predicted. Cable has been slow to take root in this country, though anyone who visits the successful cable companies will come away convinced that the hopes of this industry have been postponed, not cancelled. DBS is not coming about in the way originally envisaged, but here again we can be fairly sure in 1986 that the question is not whether British DBS will be established but simply when and at what speed. Likewise in radio the increased availability of frequencies compels us to look afresh at the structures within which those frequencies can be used.

The Peacock Committee was given relatively restricted terms of reference, but understandably, being a lively set of people, they overflowed their terms of reference and produced a report which touched on most of the possibilities for the future. The members of the Committee would I think agree that they set an agenda rather than worked out full conclusions.

When I gave a cautious welcome to the Peacock Report in the House of Commons, my cautious words of appreciation were handled by the media with characteristic scepticism. When I said that we intended to study the Committee's conclusions with great care this was treated as a few polite words uttered by the graveside as the coffin was lowered out of sight. Perhaps it is now clear that that was a wrong impression and that we are now doing exactly what I undertook. We are going through the Peacock analysis and the Peacock recommendations with great thoroughness precisely because they provide a starting point for the new decisions which we believe before long will be necessary. Between now and Christmas I expect that both Houses of Parliament will debate the Report and the Government will listen attentively to the views which will then be expressed. We are committed to producing a Green Paper on radio. As the debate becomes more detailed and more fruitful we shall take and announce our decisions.

The Peacock Committee, while rejecting the concept of advertising on BBC television, built up its own philosophy of consumer choice based on the principle of pay-per-view. As I said in the House of Commons, this philosophy fits well into the general approach of this Government. As you know, we have set in hand a technical study so that we can establish more clearly what the practical possibilities in this field are and how quickly they might be realised. It is too soon to be sure of the answers to these questions. I would simply like to add one philosophical point of my own. During the period of the European Renaissance, when the countries of Europe were sending out great sailors to discover what, for Europe, were new continents, the question arose how these new discoveries might be allocated. Pope Alexander VI sought to resolve the matter with a daring stroke. He declared that all territory east of a certain line should belong to Portugal and all territory to the west of that line to Spain. Am I entirely wrong in detecting some nuances of this Papal influence among those who are now considering how the new discoveries of broadcasting should be managed? For myself, I do not believe that it will be enough simply to allocate the new possibilities whether on television or on radio between the two wings of the existing duopoly and their supporting fleets.

There is talent elsewhere with its own claim to a place in the sun. The new possibilities call for imaginative organisation and it would be a great pity if the broadcasting community and the political community could not muster once again that combination of ingenuity and compromise which has marked the progress of British broadcasting so far.

I want to say a word, not about the broadcasting controversies of the immediate present, but on the context in which I think they should be viewed. It seems to me that it is entirely legitimate, indeed desirable, that individuals and groups who feel themselves aggrieved or who judge from their own viewpoint that there are defects in the standards of present broadcasting should assemble those views and make them known

direct to the broadcaster. Broadcasters, like politicians, are in the public arena and must be prepared for the slings and arrows. It is not the job of the Home Secretary to represent the views of critics to the broadcasters - nor is it my job to shield the broadcasters from criticism. The Government has no power and no desire to control the normal content of broadcasting. But broadcasters are not in exactly the same position as journalists or publishers in other media where there is greater competition than in the broadcasting duopoly. Parliament has recognised the obligation laid on members of the IBA and the Board of Governors of the BBC to fulfil certain specific responsibilities. The 1981 Act requires that all news on IBA services "is presented with due accuracy and impartiality" and that "due impartiality is preserved as respects matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy." Similarly the BBC in its Licence and Agreement has undertaken "to treat controversial subjects with due impartiality both in the Corporation's news services and in programmes dealing with matters of public policy." These are responsibilities which the Governors of the BBC and the Members of the IBA cannot delegate or ignore, and I am sure that they have no wish to do so. Their task is an extraordinarily difficult one, given the great variety of opinion which beats upon them from outside. It is much less easy for them than it was for their predecessors to find a consensus on which to found their decisions. It is essential for the health of public service broadcasting not only that these obligations should be discharged but that they should be seen to be discharged by the public which under our curious system pays the licence fee and indirectly provides the finance for the advertising which sustains the independent sector.

/I hope that....

I hope that no-one here feels depressed or defensive about the present position of British broadcasting as we move into this new period of change. Broadcasters, like politicians, learn to thrive on controversy. We all learn to fight our own corner but if we are sensible we watch out at the same time for particles of truth in the criticisms with which we are bombarded. I am sure that when your Society comes to celebrate its centenary the historian whom you commission for the occasion will look back upon the late 80s of this century as one of those periods when British broadcasting gathered its strength and its talent for a further decisive move forward.