

THE EMPIRE OF THE NINE

Since Haley's time the BBC's Director-General was also its Editor-in-Chief. While this hadn't meant much to Jacob, who wasn't a journalist and had little feeling for journalism, it was all-important to Greene. Though he respected his predecessor enormously, he deplored the mess the news service had fallen into under his tenure thanks to his lack of journalistic background and disastrous decision to make up for it by delegating - which would actually have been fine if he hadn't delegated to Tahu Hole.

Now Hole was well and truly out on his arse, and indeed persona non grata within five miles of anything to do with the BBC as far as Greene was concerned. It was time to remove the last vestiges of his influence on the Corporation and its news department in particular. The role created for this purpose specifically for Greene - Director of News and Current Affairs - was now vacant, as he had moved to the big chair.

More than that, however, Greene considered it redundant, with the Editor-in-Chief's responsibilities largely overlapping. Jacob the administrator had had little interest in or, more importantly, talent and instinct for exercising them, hence creating Greene's old job as a way of syphoning them off to someone more suitable. Now that more suitable someone was in charge of the whole thing there was no need to duplicate the powers.

So the role of Director of News and Current Affairs was abolished after a mere two years and one occupant, and replaced with the deceptively similar sounding Editor, News and Current Affairs (known internally as ENCA). The post was filled by the unassuming Donald Edwards, who Greene, in the memo introducing the role, made clear "would be responsible under my general direction for the co-ordination and policy of current affairs output in Sound and Television." In other words, Greene, as Editor-in-Chief, was still in direct charge of the news division, just as he was before under the previous, now defunct, title. Edwards was his vassal, albeit with a certain amount of freedom - the news department would continue to have its own separate budget, something Greene considered crucial.

The Pilkington commission was one thing, but it was much easier to impress the Government with your forward-thinking mandate for change than it was the public. They famously feared and mistrusted change, and since that was the crux of his philosophy for the BBC, Greene knew from the start that he'd have to deal with it. He was still surprised by the circumstances.

Yet again the news was the arena, this time in Sound. Every single day since the pre-Cambrian era, the Home Service had come to a halt at nine pm sharp for a fifteen-minute news broadcast. Weekdays and weekends, war and peace, no matter what, the Nine O'Clock news was immutable.

On the 10th of May, the BBC announced that from September, they would move it to 10pm, simultaneously extending it into a full half-hour of solid news and current affairs. This way, plays and the like could finish in time for the news, without interruption, curtailment or forcing the choice on listeners. Furthermore, it would make space at a useful point in the night where other major programmes could go.

Greene wasn't expecting anyone to really notice, let alone cause a stir. Certainly the Governors had shown little interest when it was brought up to them. They had reckoned without two things. Obviously they badly underestimated the public's aforementioned instinctive horror of change, but the real wildcard was their powerful and unexpected ally: the Archbishop of Canterbury.