**A LONG TIME IN POLITICS**

The report was submitted to Parliament in January 1951. There was then a lengthy silence as everyone waited for the Government to draw up a White Paper putting its recommendations into action - or reject them altogether and do something else entirely off their own bat, which no-one expected them to do but was better than nothing, which is what the country got on the subject for nearly two months. Apart from the incredible effort involved in reading the massive tome, and unavoidable health issues - Attlee was suffering the beginnings of a major stomach ulcer, and his designated second Ernest Bevin was actively dying of heart failure - progress was held back by constant arguments on the Committee's ideas about regionalism, about whether or not they were advocating the supremacy of television to sound broadcasting, and inevitably about the monopoly.

The White Paper, as expected, largely nodded through the Beveridge Report's recommendations. The Board of Governors was restructured more or less along the lines suggested therein, with an increase of numbers to include more regional representation the implementation of his "National Broadcasting Councils" idea, which endures, with the odd revision and mutation, to this day. It wasn't an easy birth, however, and much of the initial squabbling was over these new bodies, and the new regional Governors intended to head them. It took several months to calm the fears of Parliament that this new setup might offer a platform to Scottish or Welsh nationalists and thereby threaten the United Kingdom.

The monopoly question was the most vexed of all. The BBC's charter was renewed for fifteen more years (Beveridge had actually recommended renewing it indefinitely for the sake of a quiet life, but Parliament was never going to do something like that) with a footnote to the effect that the Corporation's monopoly continued largely by default, as every alternative brought to their attention had been "open to substantial objections". Advertising was still right out, with the White Paper making a point of *not* changing the clause in the charter that prohibited it, while one of the few recommendations made by Beveridge that were not upheld was for the Government to reserve the right to licence local radio stations operated by anyone it damn chose other than the BBC. The Paper argued that the Postmaster General already had the power to do this, more or less, and that in the absence of any better ideas the BBC's monopoly was the best option for Britain.

Naturally, not everyone agreed. In fact it seemed at times that no two people in Parliament had the same opinion on the BBC's monopoly, and the debate dragged on throughout 1951. The pace was not helped by the vast scope of the issue. The monopoly question encompassed such concerns as the BBC's independence and power, the notion of oversight, parliamentary or otherwise, and perhaps most contentious of all, the Corporation's funding - how much it was getting, how it was

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managing what it had, and whether it could be supplemented with that word again, advertising. Commercial television still had its supporters in Parliament, other than Selwyn Lloyd, but (for now) they continued to find themselves outnumbered by the traditionalists who recoiled with horror at the idea of an opera being followed by an advert for gin.
On and on the argument dragged, to the extent that by the time the White Paper was more or less ready, it was a completely different Government that had to pass it. The Conservatives, under the now-ancient Winston Churchill, had displaced Labour by a nose, and would remain in power for another thirteen years and four Prime Ministers. By the time they'd got in, all the squabbling and compromise had meant that the Beveridge Report and its recommendations were all but forgotten, except in basic generalisations.

The White Paper finally made it into law in 1952, with the strongest link to the investigation that had triggered it being the restructuring of the Board of Governors and the basic idea of the National Committees. This was fortuitous, because the issue of the relationship, not to mention the balance of power, between the Governors and the Director General was about to become crucial. On the 6th of June 1952, right in the middle of even more Parliamentary debate on precisely this subject, and days before it was due to result in the renewal of the Charter, the Governors found themselves effectively alone at the wheel. There was no Director-General.

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