

THE DRUGS DON'T WORK

This didn't go down brilliantly with everyone back home. On October 31st, near the end of Israel's mini-campaign, France and Britain took it upon themselves to bomb a few Egyptian airfields without actively declaring war. The following day's proceedings at Parliament quickly descended into screaming chaos, with the Speaker at one point forced to bring proceedings to a complete halt for half an hour so everyone could cool off. The very idea that there was ever anything approaching a consensus on this issue seemed like a distant Utopian dream.

It was clear that another Ministerial Broadcast was called for from the Prime Minister, if only to assure the nation that he was still Prime Minister. Eden, however, "did not seem to be in a hurry to make one" according to Cadogan. Sir Anthony was, by all accounts, a mess, arguably at the lowest point of his life. The considerable stress of the crisis was doing very little for his ulcer-prone, surgery-mangled stomach, and the pain was pushing him further toward chemical relief. His usual benzedrine was now alternating with a course of barbiturates, apparently under the logic that the depressant and the stimulant would cancel each other out. What this was intended to do for his stomach was unclear, but it left the Prime Minister alternately irritable and confused, which the foreign policy crisis was apt to do anyway. Not to mention increasingly paranoid about the loyalty of his cabinet colleagues.

All this was not the best circumstances for the Prime Minister to deliver an address, but it was unavoidable, and so he made his way to Lime Grove once again to be filmed by up-and-coming BBC producer David Attenbrough (a familiar face to Eden, having also produced the very first Ministerial Address, about Krushchev). He wasn't quite at the point of bellowing incoherently down the lens while swatting imaginary elves, but he was noticeably twitchier than in previous addresses, head held at an angle, visibly agitated, even snapping on occasion. He's also clearly in pain, with some of the lines delivered through apparently involuntarily gritted teeth. He looks desperately unhappy (which is hardly surprising), particularly in unofficial footage from Pathe that shows him immediately before and after the cameras roll, in the first case sitting inertly looking monumentally depressed before, like a wind-up toy doll, raising himself with a grimace-like smile - a position he wearily reassumes at the end.

The consolation would be that between the still relatively low distribution of televisions in the nation, the 405-line picture quality and the inherent and unthinking reverence the British public still had for the Prime Minister on general principles, fewer people will have noticed these subtleties at the time than he might have feared. The confrontational nature of the script itself hardly passed unremaked, however; Cadogan described it (based on the radio broadcast) as "inevitably controversial", and the Chairman of Reuters, Christopher Chancellor, was said to have hurled his whisky glass at the screen.

The controversy was just beginning as far as the BBC was concerned. That same night, Gaitskell called the Corporation to request his own broadcast reply. This was his right as both he, most of the BBC and indeed Eden himself understood it. Indeed, it was more or less expected, from Downing Street to Broadcasting House and beyond, that Gaitskell would make this request and that the Governors would concede it. It didn't work out half as easily as everyone seems to have expected, however.

Rather than Gaitskell being nodded through and the broadcast arranged almost immediately, he and the Corporation fell headfirst into a thicket of official procedure involving the Conservative party whips - future ITA head Herbert Bowden and future Prime Minister Edward Heath. These procedures seem to have involved an awful lot of pointless faffing around that required Cadogan to act as arbitrator. By this point it was the middle of the night, Cadogan had gone to bed and to Gaitskell's annoyance, Harman Grisewood - acting as DG in Ian Jacob's extended absence - refused to wake him from his slumber. Gaitskell had to wait until nine o'clock the following morning for Cadogan to wake up and almost immediately give the go-ahead to the reply, broadcast that evening.