**INDEPENDENT'S DAY**

The debate raged on in Parliament over the details, the structure, the funding and everything about this new "Rival BBC" (as they kept calling it, inaccurately but snappily) short of the chintz on the office curtains. Meanwhile, the real BBC were preparing for a fundamental, irreversible shift in the way their entire world operated. The monopoly under which they'd operated since they were a company, which they had thought was sacrosanct and fundamental to how broadcasting operated in Britain - the monopoly was dead. Not only did they have a fight on their hands, it was the unwinnable, perpetual fight of permanent competition. Worse, there were widespread fears that the commercial broadcaster might have the advantage in some ways. Controller of Television George Barnes prepared his staff with the warning "Competition will be deathly..Do not underestimate the money behind this: the motive for it and the prestige attending to its success." 1

The anti-commercial lobby already had the perfect symbolic anecdote to illustrate what Barnes was saying. The Coronation was, naturally broadcast in America, where all the television they had was commercial and ran advertisements willy-nilly - including during world-shakingly important events such as this. So, inevitably, the solemn, regal ceremony was regularly interrupted for messages about consumer products and services. This was bad enough - disrespectful and vulgar in itself - but the most painful insult was that the frontman for these interruptions was one J. Fred Muggs. Who happened to be a chimpanzee. Bonham Carter, Mayhew, Attlee and the rest urged Britain not to open its doors to a force so terrible as to intercut the crowning of the Queen with the laughing face of a chimp wearing a T-shirt with the Pan Am logo. But they failed.

Barnes's warning came in January of 1955, the year the new service (referred to darkly among the BBC corridors as simply "the Competitor") was due to finally become a reality. All the wrangling and debate - moral and practical - had finally resulted in the Television Act 1954 creating the Independent Television Authority. This was considered the perfect compromise. Rather than aping the BBC's structure by creating another national broadcaster answerable to the Government - whose patience was already stretched quite enough by the original one - the ITA represented a ruling body in its own right, independent oversight for what was now becoming known as Independent Television.

Its structure was fairly explicitly modelled after that of the BBC, at least initially, with Government-appointed Governors, who could be hired and fired at the slightest whim of the Postmaster-General. In turn, of course, they would have the exact same power over the stations themselves that lay beneath them. The third channel's frequencies would be franchised by transmitter, giving

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all the various, squabbling companies and consortia at least an equal chance of achieving their goal of running a television station, and more importantly giving the whole situation its own corner to sit in, where they could solve their problems without clogging up Parliament, while Parliament themselves could still be their assured of having good and watchful governance in the form of the ITA. The Authority was a ward against anything even remotely like the Muggs incident taking place in Britain itself. In fact, one of the very first rules they had - woven into their very fabric as part of the Television Act itself - was that no commercial interruption *whatsoever* was to be permitted during programming involving the Royal Family.

The BBC looked on, knowing full well that such a question wouldn't even come up under the monopoly, but knowing also that it was on death row, and there was to be no stay. There was no point seething about the Competitor, because it wasn't going away. Instead they went into espionage mode. Barnes had said as much in a note to the Board as early as 1952, at the start of the latest charter period.

"*Should we not give serious consideration to our strategy...Is it enough to say that we think sponsored television evil, or that it cannot happen here? Surely we must plan the moves that we will make to defeat their initiative or better still take the initiative ourselves?*" [1]

So the Corporation watched the entire process like a hawk, gradually compiling a dossier on the Competitor, which was continually updated in a confidential in-house bulletin of the same name, for exclusive eyes only. This way, any and all information on the Competitor, what it was up to and what the current plans looked like, was available to them immediately. A new service was coming, but resources remained finite. That hadn't mattered when it seemed like only the BBC would ever have access to them, but now there was another predator in the jungle.

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