

ELECTION GALLERY

Many negotiations were held within the BBC on the right way to report on an election without seeming to influence it, given the rise of deeper, more investigative current affairs programming alongside regular old straightforwardly informative news. In late 1963, Panorama and Tonight were joined by Gallery, another weekly current affairs programme, this time specifically concentrating on goings-on in Westminster itself. Gallery was hosted by BBC newcomer Ian Trethowan, one of the new breed of hard-hitting, uncompromising journalists inspired by Robin Day and trained by Grace Wyndham Goldie, the head of Current Affairs who had finally shattered the remnants of the Tahu Hole approach.

So what was to be done with all this commentary during the purdah period of an election? Kill them all? That was one option, and one suspects the one Tahu Hole would have voted for, but in the Wyndham Goldie era it was obviously not going to happen. In the end, the more general Panorama carried on as normal, while Tonight took a nap for the duration and Gallery became so laser-focused on the campaign itself it would be renamed "Election Gallery".

The election was ultimately set for the autumn of 1964 - later than anticipated, so Douglas-Home could at least get some substantive time as Prime Minister under his belt. This initially threw off a schedule or two, but in the long run gave everyone involved time to work on the media arms of their campaigns. The power of television was undeniable and immutable now, with the term "Party Political Broadcast" a familiar one, and its more urgent cousin the "Party Election Broadcast" being refined for this election.

The Tories' ones ended up being hosted by the next Conservative Prime Minister, a young and thrusting Edward Heath (then President of the Board of Trade), in conversation with the likes of Keith Joseph and Rab Butler. They hired experienced television professionals months in advance, ensuring lush production values that included filmed inserts and even, in one case, live incidental music strummed on a guitar. Sadly this was undermined by the very last one, on the eve of the election, instead being hosted by Douglas-Home himself, squinting cadaverously down the lens while compulsively shuffling papers around. The Times called it a "symphony in black and white, played by a tone-deaf pianist", and it was far from the inspirational full stop the Tories needed.

Most of this fresh and modern use of the televised medium the Tories were now sporting had, of course, been pioneered at the previous election by the Labour Party, with Tony Benn at the helm. Benn had been out of Parliament for most of the preceding term, after inheriting a hereditary peerage that he didn't want and spent three years trying to get rid of so he could stand again. Although no-one was really at the wheel of the Labour Party's television campaign this time, Benn did make it back in time to advise, and their Broadcasts moved the form on another couple of steps. Labour's claims to cool were enhanced by contributions from jazz saxophonist Johnny Dankworth - part of the Frost set - and a Broadcast set at a coffee party in Haringey, down the road from Alexandra Palace. The Establishment, meanwhile, were catered to with an appearance by Lord Sainsbury, of all people, and a Broadcast scripted by Ted Willis, creator of Dixon of Dock Green.

The last Labour broadcast, mirroring that of the Tories, was to feature the party leader giving an address. Where Douglas-Home's was filmed at Elstree Studios, then the domain of ATV, Wilson went to Lime Grove. Fortunately, it was a little more welcoming and less cold than when Anthony Eden had broadcast from there shortly before Suez. In fact, this time it was the politician irritating the BBC rather than the other way around. The flipside of the media-savviness of Wilson's Labour was that it removed the BBC from their pedestals. Suddenly they weren't voodoo priests plying an unknowably modern trade. The politicians knew almost as much as they did.

Wilson could, for example, make sure he would deliver his remarks while seated at a mahogany desk positioned directly in front of a Georgian window - looking every inch a Prime Minister in waiting. The perceived presumption infuriated Grace Wyndham Goldie. On the other hand, for an earlier Broadcast he had insisted on the removal of a desk, this one separating him from the BBC's Robert McKenzie, who was interviewing him. There was no way Wilson was going to accept the subordinate position implied by the desk - McKenzie as boss, Wilson as employee. Reflective of the intended relationship between politicians and population it might have been, but Wilson preferred a more level playing field. Meanwhile, somewhere in the back of his head, a tiny itch began to arise marked "BBC".