

## GLASS HOUSES

Meanwhile, the glassmaker and his committee were ready to reveal their findings. The Pilkington Commission had taken just shy of two years - set up on July 13th, 1960, the report was finally released on 27th of June 1962 - three weeks after the first episode of *Steptoe and Son*. Even so it was actually later than scheduled: Pilkington had hoped to have it all sorted out within eighteen months.

If Greene and the BBC had ever had anything to fear from the Commission, they found themselves almost instantly reassured. The Pilkington Report said very little about the BBC that wasn't in fulsome praise, while ITV got almost nothing but loud tutting and shakes of the head in sorrow and disapproval. The governance of both organisations had been one of the main questions, and the answer was vindication for one, damnation for the other. The BBC, the Report found, needed to change nothing whatsoever; just carry on being beautiful. Whereas ITV, or more accurately the ITA, was barely fit for purpose and needed a slap in the face and a new constitution:

*“Our appraisal of the BBC's performance, the Committee concluded, did not lead us to expect that the Corporation's constitution and organisation would be faulty in any fundamental way; and this our examination confirmed. By contrast, our examination of independent television showed that its failure to realise the purposes of broadcasting derived essentially from a fundamental fault... an organic change was required. The change we propose is, in our judgement, the least that will suffice; nothing else will do the job.”* 

Everyone involved with commercial television immediately exploded in fury. Robert Renwick of ATV called it an affront to the notion of free enterprise and “Lord Reith all over again”. Peter Cadbury, Chairman of Westward, actually burnt the report in effigy. Maurice Wiggin in the *Sunday Times* called it “the hopeless last resort of men who fundamentally fear the operation of a free society”. Even Basil Nicolls, the now-retired BBC lifer who had been acting DG between Haley and Jacob, called the praise “almost embarrassing”.

Greene's psychological warfare had come up trumps. The tactic of “schmooze early, schmooze often” had worked like a charm - starting by sending Pilkington a copy of the BBC's “Summary of Development 192-60” while not only were ITV still formulating their own approach, but Pilkington himself hadn't even finalised his committee members yet. The ITA never submitted anything similar, and indeed Greene could hardly contain his glee at the ease of his victory. Expanding later on his observation that ITV had miscalculated by treating it as a repeat of the original campaign to establish themselves, he accused them of being:

*“lazy in the public presentation of their case and fatally casual, even, I believe, contemptuous, in the preparation of their evidence, written and oral, for the Pilkington Committee...”↔*

“They got what was coming to them.” he concluded, and it’s hard not to see him delivering that with a smirk as wide as the Thames.

There were still repercussions for the BBC, of course, in the Report’s more general conclusions. The introduction of colour television, for instance, and a new tier of the licence fee to cover it, which everyone involved had more or less agreed going in was inevitable one way or another. Similarly, the recommendation of moving from 465 to 625 lines as standard was just progress in action.

Then there was the question of a third television channel. ITV had pressed for a second commercial station for a while, and were briefly hoping the Pilkington Commission might have helped bring that about. It was pretty clear pretty early, however, that this wasn’t going to end well for ITV, and following their harsh treatment in the final report it was obvious they weren’t getting an ITV2. But Pilkington and company did agree that a third station was a good idea, and therefore recommended the Corporation starting one instead.

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