ALTERNATIVE 3

Even with Churchill's endorsement, Jacob wasn't the only, or even necessarily the most obvious candidate to replace Haley. He technically wasn't at the BBC anymore, for one thing - although officially he was merely on a leave of absence while at the Ministry of Defence - and while that wasn't a dealbreaker, the general consensus was for an internal promotion this time around, after having cast the net relatively wide to end up with Haley. Two names in particular stood out on this occasion.

Filling in as caretaker-manager between Haley's departure and his successor's eventual appointment was Basil Nicolls. He was a downright grizzled BBC veteran, having joined in 1924 when it was still the Company and steadily risen through the ranks. In fact he'd had to do so twice, having been fired in 1941 from the role of Senior Director of Programmes as a result of presenter Christopher Stone (a sort of prototype disc jockey) wishing the King of Italy - still very much on the opposing side in the War - a happy birthday, and appending "I don't think any of us wish him anything but good, poor soul". Nicolls was blatantly a scapegoat in the whole affair, however, and soon made his way back to the Corporation to become Director of Home Broadcasting by the turn of the fifties - a sufficiently senior position to be given the big role at least as caretaker.

The other man in contention was George Barnes, then Director of Television. He was an experienced BBC man, having joined the Talks Department in 1935 as a producer, and quickly became a mainstay of over a decade standing. Barnes became particularly respected for attracting, and ultimately archiving, various high-profile voices, including Virginia Woolf (the only recording of her voice that exists) and William Butler Yeats (a series of four). By the end of the War, he was Director of Talks Programmes, and in 1946 was hand-picked by William Haley as the inaugural Controller of the Third Programme. In 1950 he was appointed Director of Television, a controversial appointment in many ways. It was a new position, for one thing, with the Television Service previously headed by a Controller of Programmes, specifically one Norman Collins, previously creator of Dick Barton and Woman's Hour. Barnes' arrival was followed almost immediately by Collins' departure, resenting the sudden imposition of subordinacy, and to a man whose sole experience beforehand had been in sound. (Keep his name in mind, however, ass within a few years, Collins would return to haunt Ian Jacob's BBC).

Both alternatives had plenty going for them. Nicolls exemplified the "safe pair of hands" principle - his were the safest hands imaginable: already Acting DG and a veteran of such standing he was more than a mere lifer - he'd been at the BBC longer than the BBC had been at itself, as it were. For what it was worth, Reith favoured him, largely for this reason - he was one of the few people still there who had been around under his stewardship. His vast experience worked both in his favour and against him - as possibly the last of the Reith-era veterans, it could be argued that no-

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one knew the BBC made him extremely sure of himself - to the point of arrogance, in the estimation of many observers (Ian Jacob included). In the event, he wasn't in contention for the job on a permanent for long: shortly after Haley's departure a press release made it clear that Nicolls was only in charge "until such time as a permanent appointment can be made".

Barnes was highly respected for what he'd done at Talks and as the first chief of the Third Programme, but was at a slight disadvantage in that he'd only just started his new job as Director of Television, which everyone knew by now was the BBC's future. It would be a shame to yank him out of that position now and kill off a project before it started. When Churchill dropped his subtle hint (or indirect command), all bets were essentially off; having a DG supported by - indeed a close personal friend of - the Prime Minister would definitely come in handy. He was offered the job in October 1952, to start from the first of December, and practically bit the Governor's hands off.

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