

UNITED NATIONS

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INTERNATIONAL RADIO

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It has not yet been generally realized that it is in the radio, used internationally for supra-national purposes, that there lies the most effective counter to the dire menace of the atomic bomb. This has not been recognized so far even by the few in whose hands power rests in all lands, whether or not they qualify as democracies according to Mr. Bevin's criterion. It has by now been pretty widely appreciated that there is no physical method of guaranteeing humanity against destruction through its increasing knowledge of how to release the material power and energy which are at least part of the basic secret of creation. Yet no one in authority appears to have understood that, in order to achieve that psychological state in which the peoples will be prepared really to elevate mind over matter as the sole condition of mankind's survival, we must pay as much attention to the main instrument of psychological integration - or, if abused, disintegration - namely, the radio, as we give to the chief agent of physical progress - or, again, if abused, dissolution - namely, atomic energy.

This unawareness is truly amazing in view of the fact that, during the still recent world war, it was proved that the radio, properly used, is capable of drawing together physically separate and diverse peoples all over the world in a splendid unity based on common loyalty to certain spiritual and moral values, and this in the face of an immensely more powerful radio network, in Nazi hands, devoted with supreme ability to the task of disintegration.

In considering the possibilities of a genuinely international radio service it is necessary to remember what was achieved in London from September, 1939, until the summer of this year, when unimaginative men set to work to undo the wartime attainment of the B.B.C.'s European Service. Starting virtually from scratch, this European broadcasting system from London became a veritable prototype, alas, too short-lived, of that completely supra-national service of news and views which should to-day be one of the priorities of the United Nations Organization.

It began as a rather infrequent translation into a few foreign languages of the news and talks which the British Broadcasting authorities were putting out for the benefit - or otherwise - of their own public. It had become by the end of 1940 a thoroughly co-operative effort by the representatives of a dozen or more conquered European countries - A United Nations Organization in miniature. The service operated under British control, it is true, but this control was very far from being a dictatorship. It was more in the nature of a chairmanship of a board of directors composed of the radio representatives of many peoples.

The presentation of news and its interpretation were fully and frankly discussed by what amounted to an international policy committee with a view to producing in all languages broadcasts which would reflect not a narrow nationalist selection of news items and commentary upon events, but bulletins and talks which would promote among the listeners the habit of looking at things from a broadly European, and even world-wide, point of view. With very considerable success the inevitable instinct of the different nationals making up the staff to concentrate attention on developments particularly affecting their own countries, and to interpret them in a manner calculated to appeal to the various national susceptibilities, was overcome. Instead of an assortment

of widely divergent news bulletins and commentaries, concocted according to the supposed tastes of audiences under the influence of particular parochial prejudices and interests, there was broadcast from London in the war years in a multitude of tongues a consistent account and explanation of events. This, while differing in style in order to suit superficially different tastes, represented the common denominator of the various reactions by the Allied representatives in London to the latest happenings.

This consistent European approach was cultivated from principle, but it was soon found that every argument of expediency pointed in the same direction. The ample intelligence reports, compiled from smuggled letters, interviews with refugees and neutral diplomats and travellers, secret service agents' despatches and so on, showed that listeners habitually tuned in to transmissions in languages other than their own, either to circumvent jamming, from curiosity, an intelligent desire for comparison, suspicion of propaganda, or a wish to improve their acquaintance with foreign tongues. It would, therefore, have been very damaging, if not disastrous, had those who made a habit of going round the dial found that London was saying quite different things in the various languages in which it broadcast. This was the most useful, because the simplest, argument with which to frustrate the attempts of bright, if unscrupulous, political warriors at the Foreign Office and Ministry of Information to promote broadcasts in, shall I say, Rumanian, attacking Hungarian claims to Transylvania, simultaneously with transmissions in Magyar upholding these claims, commentaries in Spanish deprecating democracy coincident with ones in French attacking the paternal dictatorship of Pétain.

But, although useful in dealing with officials still living in the old world of diplomacy based on the principle of exploiting national rivalries, and no other principle at all, this

"cross-listening" among European audiences was not the main reason for the adoption of a comprehensive and consistent European policy in broadcasting. There was a positive purpose, the building up of an international attitude not only as a unifying factor against Hitlerite Germany, but as the foundation for a permanent peace.

It is regrettable, but, alas, true, that this - in Foreign Office eyes, eccentric - policy was only barely tolerated because it gave good results in securing European solidarity against the Nazis. Once the Nazi menace was clearly about to be removed it became difficult, and eventually impossible, to maintain in our broadcasts an internationalist attitude which was completely absent from our foreign policy.

There was, it should be recorded, an Indian Summer at Radio Luxembourg under S.H.L.E.F., when a thoroughly integrated United Nations staff of British, Americans, Frenchmen, Belgians, Dutchmen, Czechs, Russians, Germans, and Italians, produced during the last nine months of the war a broadcast service which carried the new tradition of internationalism, created in London during the first years of the conflict, a stage further by presenting all its transmissions as "The Voice of the United Nations."

It was hoped that this voice would survive with the peace and that Radio Luxembourg would become a permanent centre of International broadcasting under the control of the Security Council of the United Nations Organization. The Americans, the French, and, indeed, all the countries whose representatives had worked at Luxembourg under S.H.L.E.F. were unreservedly in favour of such an enterprise, but the British, sad to say, were opposed to it.

The Caretaker Government bluntly declared its desire to revert to "an amicable nationalism" and recalled all the British personnel from Luxembourg. Since it was the British personnel

who had held the key posts there, and who, profiting from their experience earlier in the war, had given the station its international character, this was a heavy blow to the project.

The Labour Government did nothing to reverse this decision at the time when the disbanding of the international staff could still have been prevented, though it appears now that, rather belatedly, they are taking some limited steps in the right direction.

At the time when it would have been easy to establish international radio without loss of continuity, representations by those who were deeply interested went unheeded in the general press of business. Unable, it seems, to see the trees for the wood, the Government's attitude was that, until all major international problems had been solved, it was useless to tackle what was regarded as a minor aspect of the question as a whole.

It never seemed to occur to the responsible Ministers that one of the best ways, if not the only way, to build an international system is to put in their places, one by one, the less ambitious pieces of machinery. Nor did it appear to strike them that it is essential to direct public opinion all over the world towards an international point of view before an international system of security and expanding commerce can gain general acceptance and support.

In consequence, Radio Luxembourg became in June of last year a purely American concern, feeding the network of stations operated in the United States zone of occupation in Germany, while the British zone took its programmes from Hamburg, which relayed the B.B.C. German service a great deal, and the Russian and French zones originated their own broadcasts. This meant that not only had Radio Luxembourg been cast away as an international station serving the whole of Europe, and, as it could have done with its short-wave transmitter and suitable relay points, a great part of

the world, but that the whole conception of international control of broadcasting in Germany had been jettisoned. It is an arguable point whether the latter could ever have been achieved, in view of the Russian attitude. Yet it is beyond argument that no serious attempt was made to achieve it, and that the responsibility for this lies primarily with Britain.

Almost from the first the British attitude was that it was useless to attempt to secure the Soviet's adherence to a centrally directed system of broadcasting in occupied Germany, and that, since this was a foregone conclusion, the best thing was to break up the Anglo-American partnership and for each occupying Power to act independently. The Americans were reluctant to accept this as yet unproven verdict and did all they could to press on with the original plan for a tripartite radio service from Berlin, but, the ground was cut from under their feet by the alacrity with which Britain, immediately the cessation of hostilities became imminently possible, set about organizing an independent radio service for her own zone in Germany.

It is at least possible that the excellent ideas which General Eisenhower and his advisers had worked out for an international radio service in Germany failed for want of trying on Britain's part. This, it is to be feared, was typical of the approach to the post-war world on the part of those permanent officials at the Foreign Office whose influence, paramount during the Coalition and Caretaker Governments, does not seem to have appreciably lessened under the present Labour Administration. Some of the Americans who, in partnership with like-minded Britons, now no longer in positions in which they can exert any influence, laboured so diligently and, be it said, so successfully for international integration in the field of radio have now reacted with understandable, if regrettable, violence towards isolationism. Others,

incapable of this, have nevertheless found their faith in Britain's will to join them in promoting internationalism rudely shaken.

Meanwhile, in London, the European service of the B.B.C., the nearest approach yet achieved to a League of Nations armed with a powerful weapon for the chastisement of the breakers of the peace, was being literally torn to pieces under the pretext of post-war reorganization. The purpose of this reorganization must, unless one is prepared seriously to impugn the public character of those responsible for it, remain obscure. Perhaps it can be put down to the desire to economize on a service not of direct interest to the British radio licence-holder in order to give more satisfaction to the domestic audience.

At all events, the effect of the reorganization was clear enough. From being a service devoted to the fullest and frankest dissemination of news and to the ventilation of views representing a distillation of the opinions of progressive men and women of many nationalities, European broadcasting from London has become in the last few months a truly shocking example of highly selective and frequently tendentious "news" accompanied only by such commentaries as accord with the views of the group of reactionaries in control. Gone with the wind is the entire European approach to events. Each regional department now operates independently, and, apart from a general sterility arising from the ban imposed on all discussion of the most remotely controversial topics, there is no longer any consistent or common attitude towards matters of common interest. The staff responsible for the news have no knowledge of what those in charge of talks and features are doing, and vice versa. There is no central over-all direction, and all the men and women who were most successful and able in the days when there was a truly European Service have, because of their devotion to it, presumably, been reduced to impotence, if not actually

dismissed, forced to resign, or transferred to other departments of the Corporation.

The Nazis' treatment of Lidice was no more thorough than the B.B.C. authorities' dealing with the European Service as it was in its heyday. Not a trace of its international character is left. The foreigners who still remain on the staff are dispirited automata who work only for a living while the British members who thought as Europeans and as citizens of the world have either departed or, if less fortunate, had their spirits crushed.

The fact that the best long and medium wavelengths, on which millions of Europeans had been accustomed to listen, have been taken away is of less importance than that the transmissions which do go out on the frequencies which are left lack the character which they once possessed of a vital experiment in internationalism. The fact that the broadcasts to Europe are less frequent and at less convenient times for listening than they used to be is not of such moment as that, should anyone listen to them - and the audience, according to all reports, is melting away rapidly - he would hear in any language he might choose, not a point of view representing common ground between distinguished political and cultural figures of many nations, but either some purely parochial opinion of a national commentator operating in vacuo or the obviously imposed gloss of the British owners of the station.

In short, to-day, thanks to the short-sighted failure to develop Radio Luxembourg as an international station, and thanks to the radical change in the character of the B.B.C.'s European Service, there are no broadcasts on the air which reflect or can promote an international point of view. It is urgent that this should be speedily remedied, but how? It will, with some plausibility, be maintained that the best method would be for the British Government to intervene without delay to reverse the

lamentable developments in the B.B.C. European Service to which I have referred. In support of the suggestion that it is from a revived B.B.C. that we can most effectively develop an international radio service, it can be pointed out that broadcasts from London to the outside world still have a vast prestige, that there is even now in the memory of the broadcasting of the war years an enormous asset which could be turned to great advantage.

On the other hand, there are some powerful arguments to be advanced in favour of the view that in these less trusting and more propaganda-conscious days it would be impossible to develop a broadcasting service which would be accepted as truly international, impartial, and objective, if it came from a British foundation. It was possible in the war years to run what was an essentially European Service from London under British sponsorship and control, but the same circumstances no longer prevail, and it seems pretty clear that the development of an international radio service will have to be quite independent of the B.B.C. European Service, whether the latter remains the responsibility of the Corporation or becomes that of the Government.

Indeed, it can be contended with some measure of reason that the B.B.C. European Service might well be left to die by strangulation at the hands of the Corporation, since, if there is going to be an effective international service, there will be no room for an elaborate national service of foreign broadcasts from any country.

There is a case for clearing the air of national propaganda, even though this may be disguised as innocuous cultural self-projection, and giving into the hands of an international service the responsibility for seeing that the worth-while contributions of individual nations are given due scope. The case for this is strengthened the more we move towards the conception of a world

society in which the component states will progressively surrender their sovereign rights to pursue independent policies devoted to the advancement of their own particular interests.

If it is agreed, as it will shortly have to be if we are to avoid catastrophe, that the role of independent national armed forces must be strictly limited to internal police work and the task of upholding international peace be confided to a genuine international force, then it can be maintained that national broadcasting should be confined to the domestic sphere and all transmissions designed for outside audiences be entrusted to a supra-national authority incapable of using the radio as an instrument of national policy.

This would certainly simplify the technical problem involved in the allotment of wavelengths in an already overcrowded ether. This problem would rapidly become insoluble if each nation were to attempt to institute foreign services on a comprehensive scale, but it would be very easily solved if all states were to resign the sovereign right to broadcast to the outside world into the hands of an international service in which they would exercise their fair share of influence.

How could such an international service in fact be organized? Quite simply. It would be necessary to establish under the Security Council of the United Nations Organization a Committee composed of representatives of the powers comprising the Council. This would act as the Board of Governors of the International Radio Corporation and all other information media. It would appoint a Director of Radio, chosen for his (or her) merit as an internationalist, with the necessary political, cultural and technical qualifications, irrespective of nationality.

This chief executive should be allowed to select, again on personal merit and regardless of nationality, a Director of

Programmes, who would be responsible for all output, and a Director of Organization, who would have to provide the material means for putting the service on the air. This separation of functions - which can never, however, be complete but must involve close co-operation between the heads of the two branches - is essential, for experience has proved that no man can properly attend to content of broadcasts unless he is relatively free from administrative duties, and that an administrator who is free from policy preoccupation will operate far more efficiently.

This principle should extend downwards throughout the service. No one engaged on creative work should be afflicted with organizational matters. This separation was achieved in the B.B.C. European Division during the war with wholly good results. The Director of Broadcasting directed the output through his central news and talks departments and his regional editors, while, working alongside him, the Director of Organization kept the machinery oiled through managers attached to the central and regional sections.

Another highly important principle which will have to be adopted is finding a proper balance between the central direction of policy and the regional interpretation of this central directive. It is essential in any service of information and opinion aiming at creating the maximum unity among nations to avoid an excessive degree of rigid centralization which would be repugnant to both those responsible for producing the regional versions - the local editions as it were - and those receiving them in their own countries. It is as essential to guard against regionalism run mad, which must frustrate the whole purpose of an international service. The American Foreign Broadcasting during the war suffered from exaggerated centralization. The B.B.C. European Services to-day suffer from the opposite vice. I believe that,

at its best during the war, the European Services of the B.B.C. solved the problem and struck the happy mean.

To do so requires, however, constant readjustment and a hand on the rein which is both firm and light. It depends a good deal on the personalities of the people concerned at the centre and on the periphery. Ultimately, the balance cannot be established and maintained unless there is a profound unity of purpose. The selection of staff for an international radio service would, therefore, be quite the most important factor. If it was done with vision and insight, the prophets who predict that such a service would speedily break down would be confounded. The tragedy is that so much time is being allowed to elapse before making a start. There were at the end of the war many hundreds of first-class trained men and women of many nationalities who had graduated in the school of international radio, and to whom an international approach to events and their interpretation was second nature. Nearly all of them have been allowed to disperse and they may be very hard to reassemble.

If we assume, as I think we are safe in doing if the time lag does not become too extreme, that it will be possible to secure the services of sufficient staff experienced in the delicate business of reconciling national susceptibilities with supra-national purposes, the next problem to be considered is the actual physical location of the international station or stations, and it must first be decided whether the programmes should be originated and controlled at one or more points.

My own view is that the best solution would be that the control of programmes should be established at one central station, which should feed relay stations at suitable geographical points all over the world - only a sufficient number of these relay stations being set up to guarantee adequate world coverage. The staff required

for them would be small and almost entirely technical. They should, however, be equipped to beam programmes produced locally to the central station on request for retransmission all over the world. At the same time the central station should be eager, on special occasions, to take, for world-wide dissemination, certain programmes with an internationalist character from national broadcasting systems. National systems should also be urged to relay selected programmes from the international station in the languages of their own countries.

It may be argued that the Central International Station and the staff serving it should be established at the seat of the Security Council, and there is obviously much to be said for this. On the other hand, in the earlier phases, at least, of the slow, and no doubt difficult, development of a genuinely international political authority, it might well be better if the organization responsible for what it is hoped would be a completely international radio service were to be away from the scene of the nationalist stresses and strains which must perforce afflict the Security Council during its period of growing pains.

The assumption here is contrary to that which is most common, namely, that the political authority will set the pace in the development of internationalism and the radio service merely reflect its achievements. My belief is that the radio organization should, and could, lead the way and, by its attainment of a virtually complete degree of internationalism, create the conditions which would make possible a similar development in relations between the nations on the practical political level. In short, the radio service should be propaganda for, rather than the propaganda of, the supra-national world authority, and it is this very circumstance which makes it essential that it should be set up without delay and not postponed until the day - which may never come if things are

taken in that order - when so high a degree of internationalism has been reached that an international radio service will be an obvious and automatic ancillary of a World Government. If this is soundly reasoned - if the radio service is, indeed, the horse and the effective world authority the cart which it must pull - then the case seems unanswerable for establishing the central transmitting station apart from the seat of the Security Council.

An obvious site has for some time been available at Luxembourg, where there are already an extremely powerful long-wave transmitter for direct Western European coverage, and, by relay, for covering nearly all the Continent, and a short-wave transmitter capable of putting down a signal strong enough to be picked up and passed on over a considerable part of the world. With the addition of one or two medium and short-wave transmitters and a reasonable amount of fresh studio accommodation, this delightfully situated station would make an ideal home for the international service, both sufficiently remote from the centres of the tradition of power politics and adequately central and accessible.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to point out that the establishment of a central feed station, with a fully competent and comprehensive programme staff, and of relay stations, manned technically, is only half the job in forming an international radio service. Programmes cannot be constructed and transmitted until the material for them has been collected. In the case of the proposed service the news reports and despatches, the commentaries and descriptive talks, must be of the very highest quality both in accurate objectivity and interest. They must be more complete, thorough, and well informed than anything obtainable elsewhere but, since it is no good being reliable if one is so dull that the listener switches off, these programmes must also be colourful and even exciting. It is possible for news to be colourful without

being coloured and for commentaries to be exciting without incitement.

To achieve this, the central station would have to be served by a world-wide system of news-gathering and intelligence services, which would also perform the invaluable function of listener research and public opinion survey. Here, again, the existing framework of such a system is being broken up, and this process should be arrested at once.

During the war, London, which was the centre of what was for all intents and services an international news service, was magnificently served by special news-gathering agencies established by the British and other governments. The staff engaged in broadcasting and other publicity activities were supplied with a volume of news and background information far superior to that received by any journalist working in a commercial undertaking. Obviously, an international radio service must enjoy similar services. What is needed is an international information system at the disposal of the World Security Council and organized both to gather and disseminate the fullest and most objectively presented facts. This service should not be exclusively concerned with radio, but should feed all media. Quite clearly, if the vastly improved means of influencing the public, the radio, television, the film, the pictorial magazine, and so on, are to be exclusively national in their direction and derived from information sources similarly controlled by national agencies, then nationalism must inevitably be strengthened and internationalism impeded. If, on the other hand, the international peace organization is supported by an expert and unbiased information service, then impartial truth may prevail, greatly to the advantage of human solidarity.

Alongside the proposed commission for the exchange of atomic and other scientific information, the World Security Council ought to appoint a Supreme Executive Committee to organize an information

service. This Committee should in turn appoint a Director-General. The latter assisted by a Board of Directors composed of the heads of the departments for press, radio, films, publications, publicity, and intelligence, should be responsible for the following activities in addition to the setting up of the international radio service: publishing a world newspaper with regional editions; producing documentary films; issuing magazines and books; organizing lectures, exhibitions, and publicity of all kinds, including posters; controlling a worldwide news-gathering service and public opinion survey which would supply not only the information media under the aegis of the World Peace Organization, but the national radio stations, press, periodicals and film companies.

The Supreme Executive Committee ought, as has been said, to be composed of representatives of the nations in the Security Council, but the Director-General should be selected irrespective of nationality. The staff of the World Information Service below his level should be a mixed one, drawn from all nations and owing loyalty not to their own countries but to the international organization.

It would not be necessary, however, to wait until it was possible to launch all these services before starting up the radio section, which, for reasons already given, could most easily and speedily be established. In fact, it is round the nucleus of what could soon become a flourishing international broadcasting system that the complete structure of a world information service could be built. It was, indeed, to a great extent around the B.B.C.'s European Division, and its allied radio systems that the great wartime ramifications of information services grew up.

One other aspect of radio needs to be mentioned, the future role of domestic national services. Clearly, the B.B.C. Home Service and its counterparts in other countries can, in certain

circumstances, to a large degree frustrate and stultify the entire purpose of the international service. Some steps will have to be taken to ensure that these domestic services pursue a policy directed to the encouragement of the internationalist approach, and not to the opposite. At present, as far as the B.B.C. is concerned, there is no such safeguard, and this will have to be seriously considered when the Corporation's Charter comes up for review next year. This, however, though a question closely related to that of the establishment of an international radio service, is one which it is necessary to consider separately. It is not essential to settle it before proceeding with all possible expedition with the inauguration of a world system of broadcasting dedicated first to the promotion, and then to the service of a World Political Authority, a World Government as the only alternative ultimately to atomic self-destruction.

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