



# Broadcasting in the Service of Peace

IF I remember rightly, it was in the year 1914 that that very sane Englishman, John Galsworthy, wrote an open letter to the nations pleading for aeroplanes to be outlawed as weapons of war. But even if mankind could have been persuaded to forgo the terrible joy of destruction which its new toy promised, Galsworthy's plea was too late. These are days of progress! It took centuries for the playful Chinese cracker to grow into effective artillery, but in this scientific age toys develop almost overnight into world-shaking engines of war. Perhaps the plea which forms the theme of this article is made too late. For, although only 20 years ago broadcasting was little more than an interesting toy, we have seen it used in recent years as a major instrument in bringing about and carrying on a war that all but wrecked civilisation. Without broadcasting, Hitler might even now have been a useful paperhanger, or the inmate of some local asylum for thwarted paranoiacs. Who shall say what the outcome of the war might have been, had the millions in the Empire not been heartened by the spoken word of Mr. Churchill? What disruptive forces stood any chance against that proud challenge to our courage and sacrifice? The cold black and white of the printed news sheet would have proved of small sustaining value had it not been brought to life by the emotive power of that brave voice.

THE power, extensity and immediacy of broadcasting make it an instrument which can be as devastating to the mentality of nations as atomic bombs may be to their physical structures. Even those intimately associated with the control of broadcasting are often astounded at the manifestations of its power. I understand that the BBC officials upon investigation in the liberated countries were surprised to find how much more influential had been the transmission to occupied areas than they had ever hoped for. The same experience is often the result of announcements over advertising networks—a recent case comes to my mind which is typical: a big firm, highly experienced in radio advertising, broadcast two short announcements and were astonished to

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receive mail replies six times as numerous as the outside limit for which they had prepared.

In its extension broadcasting has a unique position. Foreign aeroplanes may not land in a country without permission. Persons may not enter a country without passports. Even cable messages may be effectively controlled, either voluntarily by the editors of newspapers by rejection or comment, or by censorship. But foreign broadcasts know no frontiers. They can enter a country without let or hindrance. Broadcasting has already encroached on the territory of national sovereignty. Effective restriction on listening has been proved impossible even in the most strictly regimented country in the world during war time: the BBC did some of its finest work because of this. What hope, then, can there be in peacetime, in countries that pride themselves on their freedom of speech, of preventing the entry of poisonous aggressive ideas which will insinuate themselves into the minds of the people? And it is useless thinking that the average person can weigh up the value, the truth or untruth, of these ideas. The mental reaction of most people will always be: "There must be something in it!" If home transmissions set out to counter or correct these dangerous assertions there will soon develop that war on the air which will lead almost inevitably to war in the air.

BROADCASTING has been used during the war for the purpose of making contact with and submitting proposals to governments with whom we were not on diplomatic speaking terms—and those proposals were heard by the whole people, not merely by diplomatic jugglers. In the past the lapse of time, maybe only a few hours, that has occurred through the slowness of diplomatic channels of communication, has afforded the chance for local incidents to occur which have put peoples beyond the control of governments. But the immediacy of broadcasting makes possible a hold-up of hot-headed action so

that calmer counsel may have a chance. On the other hand, it may be used as a dangerous stimulus to such precipitancy.

But the power of broadcasting does not come alone from its immediacy or from the number and extensity of the audience. From the intimacy and immediacy of the living voices within the very circle of the fireside is created a psychological urgency that often is irresistible. Emotional tension in extreme cases can even beget communal hysteria, especially when fear is evoked, as in the famous "invasion from Mars" drama in America, or the more recent case in Paris of the radio play dealing with the running amok of unleashed atoms. Although such spectacular instances may seem exceptional because of their short-lived intensity, there can be more ultimate power for good or ill in the quiet day-by-day stirrings of emotional interest or bias which may accumulate by way of choice of news, commentators' attitudes and even selection of ordinary programme material, apart from any direct propaganda; and while these words are being written during the first year of peace, while the United Nations are sitting to hammer out the machinery for the maintenance of peace, at this crucial moment in the history of the world, one great nation is broadcasting over the face of Europe propaganda expressly designed to stir up feeling against another great nation. The real threats to the peace of the world originate far back in the sub-conscious processes of the minds of nations, repressions due to lack of understanding and lack of sympathy, whose origins are often buried in history, which gradually draw to themselves emotional energy through the years from all sorts of partly understood ideas and experiences, until they assume obsessive power and subjugate any rational view of life. Then some sort of breakdown is inevitable. But it is not until they have almost reached this breaking-point that they become in any official sense disputes or situations likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace, and as such come within the purview of the Security Council. There will be grave danger that

the Security Council will be forced into the practice of prescribing for symptoms and not basic causes.

THERE is one article in the United Nations Charter—and as far as I can see, only one—which has in mind this great underlying educative work which should aim at making the Security Council an unnecessary institution: Article XIII. (b) imposes upon the General Assembly the necessity ("shall" is the word) of initiating studies and making recommendations for the purpose of "promoting international co-operation in the economic, social, cultural, educational, and health fields, and assisting in the realisation of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion." The articles does not speak of the responsibilities and sacrifices that are involved in "rights" and "freedoms," but doubtless the "studies" will make those clear to us.

To do the work of conditioning the mind of the ordinary citizen to an active faith in the United Nations there is one agency which beyond all others can be effective—broadcasting: not by means of dry news "hand-outs" about the doings of committees and estimates of international trading, but by clothing with flesh and blood the bare bones of "blue-books" and "white papers"; by presenting dramatically or semi-dramatically the joys and sorrows of the ordinary lives of ordinary people the world over. The average citizen does not understand and does not want to understand the semi-abstracts of social science, but he does understand the individual need for love and laughter, babies and bread-and-butter, and he is shocked into action if anything goes wrong with them. And the experts who are needed to preach the gospel of the United Nations are not statistical wizards—however necessary these may be behind the scenes—but real live men with big hearts and human voices, like the man who gave eyes to our ears and brought tears to those eyes and anxiety to our hearts, when he broadcast the magnificence of D-Day as he saw it from the deck of a destroyer; like the man who almost choked our utterance with the tragic beauty of Arnhem; like the man—or men—who gathered together the skill and patience of Britain and built "Mulberry" on the