

# NEW CHARTER FOR THE BBC

## Points from the House of Commons Debate

*THE licence which authorises the British Broadcasting Corporation to operate came up for discussion in the House of Commons on December 11, and there was a keen debate before a new licence was unanimously approved, new governors were appointed, and a fresh agreement drawn up between the Government and the BBC. The House was not concerned with the BBC's Charter, which outlines its organisation, objects, and powers in detail, but only with the terms on which the Postmaster-General authorises the Corporation to operate. The following cabled account of the decision and the debate came to "The Listener" through the office of the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom. It is fuller than anything that has appeared to date in our newspapers.*

**C**HANGES in licence are few because the Government intends to continue the BBC in substantially its present form. Most of the current licence period fell under the strain of wartime conditions and it is therefore considered fair to give the BBC a further term under stable conditions to carry through developments interrupted by the war, and to test the effectiveness of wartime technical improvements. The new licence runs five years instead of 10.

### No Commercial Broadcasting

The licence prohibits commercial and sponsored broadcasts. It requires the BBC to refrain from broadcasting any

matter, on written notice from the Postmaster-General, but this has never been exercised. The BBC is prohibited from expressing its own opinions on public policy, but is allowed to broadcast on matters of religious, political, and industrial controversy.

Positively, the Corporation is required to broadcast Government announcements. It has a general obligation to broadcast during prescribed hours of the day. In overseas services it accepts the views of Government Departments about times and languages, but remains independent in preparing programmes. Each Department gives information on imperial foreign affairs and it is accepted that the BBC will give due consideration to information received. The Government hopes that the fruit of expenditure on overseas broadcasts will be a better

understanding between the peoples of the world.

Brendan Bracken, wartime Minister of Information, criticised the inclusion in the new agreement of paternal provisions which were placed there when the BBC was in its infancy and he considered no longer suitable to such an institution. Government rights had not been abused, but they might be abused under another Government.

Other points raised were the allocation of the licence-fee paid by listeners between the BBC and the Treasury which takes 3/- out of the annual 20/-, and whether and how the BBC could be improved if subjected to competition.

### Qualified Controversy

Herbert Morrison, Lord President of the Council, said it was not his business to defend the BBC, which had no obligation to do what the Government wants—"so it is a perfectly free situation on both sides." Broadcasting had been interfered with very little, even in the war. Government announcements are sent to the BBC like any other announcements. If the BBC thought the Government was sending too many they

said so, and sometimes suggested alterations and an amicable arrangement was made.

Mr. Morrison welcomed controversy and more of it, subject only to two limitations. Both sides of the case must be presented, and, secondly, the BBC must take care not to shock any substantial body of listeners who might be worried about what their children heard.

Brendan Bracken thought that the independence of the BBC was prejudiced by the Treasury taking part of the fees it received from listeners, but Mr. Morrison said he thought there was no harm in ploughing back part of the profits for the general benefit of taxpayers. It was better that the BBC should agree with the Treasury about needs for expenditure and research as it goes along and Treasury would give sympathetic consideration to demands for increased expenditure. Rather than build up reserves, the BBC had better justify current expenditure. "It is very good for expensive institutions to have negotiations from time to time with the Treasury, otherwise there might be squandering of public money right and left," he said.

Mr. Morrison stressed the value of emulation between organisations under common ownership and control. A competitive spirit had developed between the Home Service, the Light Programme and the Third Programme, particularly since the latter started, and there was also competition among the Regional Programmes.

### New Management

Lord Inman, the new chairman of the Board of Governors of the BBC, was educated at Headingly College, Leeds University, and has wide public and commercial interests. Formerly Philip Inman, he is Chairman of the Charing Cross Hospital, London, and as Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Church of England, he reorganised the Church's central finances. He was adviser on the new non-governmental organisation for developing tourist-catering holiday services, and he has been a frequent broadcaster on the Brains Trust and other programmes. His business interests are publishing and hotels, and he was made a peer this year, as a Labour member of the House of Lords.

Lady Reading, the new vice-chairman, is well known for many public services, notably as Chairman of the Women's Voluntary Services. She was a member of the Broadcasting Committee of 1935 and Governor of the BBC this year. She is the widow of the first Marquis of Reading, Viceroy of India.

The other new Governor, Mr. John Adamson, is President of the Scottish Chartered Accountants in England.

The remaining Governors are Miss Barbara Ward, Assistant Editor of *The Economist*, Air Marshal Sir Richard Peck, Director of Air Ministry Public Relations during the war, the Right Hon. Geoffrey Lloyd, formerly Minister in Charge of the Petroleum Warfare Department, and Mr. Ernest Whitfield.

The Prime Minister, announcing these new appointments, explained that Sir Allan Powell, retiring Governor, and Mr. Millis, Vice-Chairman, had been appointed to a second term on the understanding that the position would be reviewed at the end of the war. He expressed the Government's appreciation of their public spirit in continuing to serve after the war and their great services during their long periods of office, particularly their contribution to the splendid war record of the BBC.

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if the Maori is being demoralised by indolence and easy money that is a sign that he is already half pakeha, and that before we convert the other half we had better make sure that we know what we are doing.

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**T**HE trouble with these people, the doctor told me before the inquest started, is that they say what they think you want them to say.

**INQUEST** The constable thought the trouble was that they were all liars. The coroner was judicial and non-committal. "What we have to find out," he emphasised, "is whether they made any attempt to get a taxi."

The trouble the spectator thought he saw was two races talking to each other over 30 centuries of time.

The issue itself was quite simple. A child developed dysentery. The nurse told the parents to send it at once to hospital, and offered to take it in her own car. The parents said they would wait till the afternoon and get a taxi. Late that night they sent urgently for the doctor, and when he arrived the child was dead. Why had they not taken it to hospital?

A simple question, but the answer goes back three thousand years. Perhaps they were afraid of the hospital. Other children had gone there and died. Theirs would die too.

Perhaps they felt that the child would die whatever they did and that it would be better if it died at home.

Perhaps the tohunga secretly forbade the hospital.

Perhaps they thought that a taxi would not come without money.

Perhaps they did not believe that death would come so soon—thought they had another day.

Perhaps they resented pakeha advice and pressure.

There are many possibilities but no certainties. The coroner did his best, the police constable his best—a good and kind job, I thought, in both cases.

But Mary, the young mother, sat on her mattress on the floor, her legs under a blanket, her eyes wandering from the constable to the sheet covering her dead baby, cautious, frightened, pathetic. The



centre of the proceedings and aware of it, and never for a moment off guard. Her story took 20 minutes to extract and amounted in the end to what everybody knew.

Reuben, the father, was on the witness stool for 15 minutes and added nothing to Mary's story. He wore a Christ-like beard, and I found myself wondering as I watched him what pakeha of 22 could wear such clothes and retain such dignity and power. He neither hedged nor hesitated, answered all questions gravely and with a kind of confidential candour, carrying the constable gently back to the point from which he started.

A grandmother was called, two or three aunts, and one man whose rela-

tionship I could not discover, but their stories, though they began at different points and appeared to take different courses, left the key question precisely where it was.

What the nurse had said was true. She had told them the child was very sick and that it must go to hospital. She had offered to take it. Perhaps they did not understand that she was willing to wait till they were ready. Yes, a taxi had been in the valley that afternoon. Two had been. But they were for other people. If other people had ordered them they were not for the baby. Someone else they had tried to get could not come. They had thought of a man they knew who had a truck, but when they tried to ring him they could not "raise Central." It was a very serious thing not to do what the nurse said. She said get the baby to hospital at once. It was very sick. They knew they had nothing to pay. They thought it would be soon enough after dinner. They had things to do. There was church that day. It was a good hospital. Maoris went to it and got cured. No, they gave the baby nothing. It was too sick.

What the finding was in the end I don't know. The doctor stayed as long as he could, and when he went I went with him; but it was plain before we left that the gulf would not be bridged. The constable, as we went out, was talking earnestly to the whole room about the necessity to use the facilities the Government had provided—free hospitals, free doctors, free nurses, free schools.

"None of these things cost you a penny, and you don't use them. I warn you that you've got to use them. We can't do anything now about this baby. But there are other babies, and that's why we're here to-day."

It was why they were there, but it was also why they were going away without the full story.