

FREE SPEECH AND FAIR SPEECH

The Responsibility Of Broadcasting



HAROLD NICOLSON, M.P. (above), a Governor of the BBC, speaking about the functions of the Corporation in a broadcast discussion on Freedom of Speech, said:

THE BBC is a Corporation created by Parliament and holding a monopoly of all broadcasting in this country. This monopoly imposes upon us, the BBC, a responsibility which is a very grave and serious responsibility. It does not give us more freedom, it gives us less freedom. We are not a private concern in the sense that a newspaper is a private concern. We are a public concern; it is our duty not merely to inform and entertain our own public, but to present a picture of

British life and character which shall be coherent, balanced, representative, and true.

We must avoid, obviously, at any cost taking political sides. I am always delighted when my friends of the Right tell me that the BBC is a seed-bed of Leftist opinions, and when my friends of the Left deplore the fact that it should be a sanctuary of reaction. When I hear that, I feel satisfied that we are fulfilling our duty of being fair to all, of keeping the middle way. I know that the middle way often seems the middle-aged way, and that it strikes many men and women as obvious, unadventurous, and dull. But it is the only way along which a Corporation possessing so vast a public responsibility can discharge its duty.

The wireless is a new and highly powerful invention. It is at the same time universal and intimate—by which I mean that whereas we are addressing some twenty million people we are also speaking to them in the intimacy of their homes. We are bound to respect such intimacy; we are bound constantly to reflect that we are not merely addressing a vast public audience, but also being admitted into the privacy of countless families.

The BBC is not like a newspaper which can express its editorial opinion

or repudiate responsibility for what it publishes; nor is it a Government Department like the Post Office, which is obliged to accept and carry any letter, however boring or silly that letter may be. The BBC is an organisation entrusted with the handling of the most potent instrument of publicity that has ever been devised. It must be inspired throughout by the utmost carefulness, which is something wholly different from timidity. And that carefulness must take constant account of the fact that when an idea or an opinion is broadcast it at once loses its true proportion and becomes magnified or amplified beyond life-size. In giving time on the air to some minority opinion (however sincere or useful that opinion may be; however ardently we may agree with it ourselves) it is our duty, as the BBC, to consider, not merely whether we are being fair to those who agree with this opinion, but whether we are also being fair to those to whom that opinion is a very abomination. It is for this reason that in controversial matters we generally try to adopt a round-table method. I do not call that cowardice; I do not call it a denial of free speech: I call it a careful and difficult maintenance of responsibility. We do make mistakes and sometimes we make blunders: but when you have to magnify opinion a thousand times beyond life-size it may happen that free speech does not turn out as fair speech; and our rule is, when in doubt, to prefer what is fair.

An Elizabethan New Zealander

(From a tribute broadcast by 2YA)

FRANK WORSLEY, the New Zealander, who died the other day in England, will always be associated with that great explorer, Ernest Shackleton, whom he accompanied on two voyages, including the ship's-boat journey of 800 miles in an Antarctic winter. But there was much more in Frank Worsley than all this. The man himself might have strayed out of the Elizabethan age. He was by nature an adventurer in the old sense of that word. Not for him the routine of a soldier's job on set routes. He thirsted for work off the beaten track. He revelled in difficulties and hardships. His spirit was gay, humorous and infectious; he was always out for a lark. Over 40 years ago, as second mate of the New Zealand Government steamer Tutanekai, Worsley brought off something that might have caused international complications. James Cowan, who was a close friend of Worsley's and sailed with him more than once, tell the story in his book, "Suwarrow Gold." One hot afternoon in Apia, Samoa, he and the ship's carpenter walked past the German Consulate, where the flag of Germany flew on a tall mast. A German sentry with rifle and bayonet, paced up and down in front of the staff. There was a German cruiser in the bay. The Tutanekai's carpenter growled that he would like to see the flag hauled down. Germany was not popular. "Right you are," said the irrepressible second mate. "I'll get it down for you!" The two men waited. Presently, it being a hot afternoon, the German sentry went inside for his accustomed glass of lager. Worsley dodged round to the foot of the mast,

hauled down the flag, took it off the halliards and brought the line down. When they got back to the waterfront, they didn't wait for their own boat, but went off at once in a native canoe. Curiously enough, the loss of the German ensign was not noticed till next morning, and then, of course, there was the dickens of a row, but by that time the Tutanekai was on her way to Auckland. Weeks afterwards, Worsley confessed to his skipper. The Old Man talked very sternly to his second mate, but as he



COMMANDER FRANK WORSLEY

turned away, he said to himself: "The young son of a gun! I'd have done it myself if I'd been a youngster in his place!"

Worsley had another point of resemblance to the Elizabethans. He could write. He left a good deal of the story of his career in a number of books, which show a real literary gift. An English critic said of one book that it was far above the average of its kind, and that this man of action must have spent as much pains in becoming a writer as our modern writers sometimes spend in emulating men of action.

In North Africa

1. *The camel scorns the rival form of transport: This photograph was taken during a journey made by Dr. Minshall across the Sahara in a three-wheeled car.*
2. *Bird Man of Nigeria: A knowledge of camouflage is the chief requisite of this hunter. Using his headpiece to mimic bird movements, he stalks his prey and when close enough shoots it with a bow and poisoned arrow.*
3. *A warrior of the Tuaregs, who are known as "the People of the Veil." Only the men go veiled in this feudal tribe, who were subdued by the French this century. The hypothetical suggestion is that they are of Crusader origin, a theory supported by their use of a cruciform-handled sword, the visor-like appearance of the veil, and the sign of the cross on their shields, saddles, and sandals.*
4. *A glance at Algiers: This is the title of a talk by Dr. Minshall from 2YA next Tuesday morning.*
5. *Something that can happen to anybody who travels by car in the desert. One of Dr. Minshall's talks will deal with a day's journey in the desert, with reference to the preparations which would have to be made, and the difficulties to be prepared against by, say, a tank commander in this theatre of operations.*