

ALL INDIA RADIO

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I am not a regular listener, but I have often heard the news and sometimes ~~some~~ commentaries, talks and discussions. I have not broadcast much in recent years but, when I was still a Congressman, I was frequently invited to broadcast. There are advantages in belonging to the ruling party! Though direct contact has not been very extensive recently, and my view is predominantly from without, I am keenly interested in the possibilities of radio and television and have attempted to keep in touch with developments here and in other countries.

I should like to pose a problem at the very start. When I broadcast some talks for schools from the Bombay Station in the early 1940s the ^Programme Assistant - the Foremost Programme Officer in those days - who looked after school broadcasting was my friend Sophia Nararajan, a graduate of Cambridge University and certainly a well educated and well read person who could discuss my scripts with me on equal terms and could suggest many improvements in them. My recent visits to AIR studios have not brought me into contact with persons of this kind even at much higher levels than the Programme Assistant. Why? Could it be that there is something wrong with the personnel policies of AIR? In those days, in the 1940s, the Bombay Station had Mr. Z. A. Bokhari as Station Director, and Mr. B. S. Mardbaker, well-known Marathi poet and writer, as Assistant Director. Mehra Masani was Programme Executive, Mr. Chandravadan Mehta, the noted Gujarati writer, was a Programme Assistant, Mr. Walter Kaufmann, a well-known composer and musicologist, looked after Western music. Aubrey Menen, who became famous later as an expatriate Indian novelist, was producing a daily feature, "Sound News", besides producing features for school broadcasting. It must have been stimulating to work in such a lively group. Why does not an AIR Station attract such a group any more?

As a consultant in Personnel Management, this aspect of AIR interests me greatly. I have ~~no~~ doubt that the dullness of programmes, the absence of creative effort and activity, the lack of imagination displayed in a hundred small ways are all because of the failure to recruit the right kind of people to AIR. ~~As a senior officer of AIR - but it, since 1952, concerts have been encouraged at the expense of the intellectual. Unless the Minister for Information and Broadcasting takes very drastic steps to reverse this trend and to screen and reject unsuitable elements that have come into the organisation, the right kind of people will not be able to find a place in AIR. I would also like to ask whether AIR has adequate training for its staff. It was one thing in the early days for new recruits to learn their work through personal contact with their senior officers who worked as pioneers of a new adventure. Surely this cannot work in a large organisation AIR has since become. Who are the people who train? What are their qualifications for training? Is the period and nature of training adequate? These are questions for which the Minister should find proper solutions. Modern techniques, both radio and TV, require modern methods and upto date training. I can not help thinking, when I visit AIR, that it is out of date.~~

Besides its personnel policies, AIR also needs to change radically its programme policies. The failure of the shortsighted policy of making AIR into a mouthpiece of the Government has finally been realised though one would have imagined that the public and the government should have expected this and forestalled it. People have no confidence in the news broadcast by AIR because of the suppression of awkward facts, the exaggeration of Government's achievements, and the predominance of pronouncements of Ministers. People do not care to listen to AIR for their entertainment except when it broadcasts music from the films. People do not bother about what AIR puts out in the way of talks and discussions because no

dissenting opinions can be expressed. People abroad do not and cannot listen to AIR because for the greater part it cannot be clearly heard. These wrong policies are mainly the result of interference on the part of Cabinet Ministers over a number of years, but ~~are~~ also the result of subservience on the part of senior officers - one of the results of encouraging courtiers at the expense of normal intellectuals. I do not believe that these policies can be changed without a radical organisational change.

As a Management Consultant, I can not help being aware of the very close relationship between the form of an organisation and its success or failure in serving the purpose for which it is intended. If the Indian people want a radio and TV service which is modern, lively and free from Governmental interference, they should insist on the form of organisation which alone would make this possible.

A department of Government, as AIR is today, cannot but function like a department of government. Administratively it is bound by rules and procedures which were appropriate in the 19th century, when they were framed, for providing a postal service and other services of that kind. In terms of personnel, it is bound by the recruitment, training and promotion policies of a bureaucracy. Financially, it is dependent on grants from the Treasury which can be spent only according to rigid provisions quite unsuitable for an activity like broadcasting which demands flexibility.

~~Perhaps when broadcasting was started in India it was natural it should do so as a Government department. But to the credit of the British Viceroys and rulers of those days it must be said that they did not encourage courtiers at the expense of intellectuals; they did not interfere in the recruitment of staff, and certainly did not lay down reactionary policies regarding music or any other artistic or cultural activity. Now, however, to continue with this form of organisation is to ignore the experiences of other progressive societies which have experimented with different forms and arrived at what appear to be far more suitable ones for successful broadcasting.~~

I refer to the statutory Public Corporation. It takes several forms in different societies and it should be possible to adapt it to our requirements. If I were Minister for Information and Broadcasting, the first thing I would do is to appoint a panel of two or three broadcasting experts to examine the constitution of various such Corporations in Japan, Australia, Britain and France and to recommend how the Indian Broadcasting Corporation should be constituted. Of course, an independent Broadcasting Corporation in India may not be any more independent than, say, Hindustan Steel and the State Trading Corporation are today! But even if we get a Broadcasting Corporation which is still not altogether independent of government, I have no doubt that the release from bureaucratic methods of work will itself result in considerably improved personnel and programmes.

There is an altogether mistaken impression in government that making AIR into a corporation would reduce its utility as a medium of publicity for development and education. This is not the experience of other countries. Far more effective campaigns against illiteracy and ignorance are waged by the independent broadcasting corporations of other countries. The very fact that they are not agents of the government of the day gives them a prestige and influence beyond anything a government agency can hope to command.

The formation of an independent Corporation would be a step towards rationalisation but I believe that even a Corporation should not have a monopoly of broadcasting. It is dangerous and reactionary to allow one set of men and women, however competent and well meaning, to control such an important source of information. The democratic philosophy is based on the assumption that diverse people

can hold diverse views and should be free to express them within certain accepted restraints. I would, therefore, favour the establishment of radio stations by non-government agencies, such as universities, municipalities and cultural associations ~~etc.~~, should any of them wish to do so. ~~The cost of establishing and running a radio station is considerable and it is not likely that any such station could be started, but the restraint on its being done should be removed.~~

Many persons who have travelled abroad and seen and heard the TV and radio programmes of other countries have commented on the dullness and the lack of choice in ours. While wrong staff policies have much to do with this problem, I believe that inadequate financial resources also are a major factor. It is only during the last year or two that AIR's annual expenditure is more or less matched by the revenue obtained from radio licences. Even if the licences continue to yield increasing revenue, it can only continue the present standard of radio services provided by AIR. How are we to afford a major transformation so that people can receive not one but several satisfactory services providing a variety of programmes from which the listener can choose what he wants to hear? Such a development of the radio services would require massive financial investment which this country and its tax payers cannot afford. This is not a problem unique to India. It has been solved elsewhere by adopting various forms of commercial broadcasting and I do not see any reason why this should not be tried in our country.

If radio services cannot be adequately improved without considerable additional expense, the starting of TV is absolutely impossible without supplementing government's contribution with revenue from advertising in some form.

I think it is necessary to distinguish between radio and TV programmes of information and education and those of entertainment in considering methods of financing them. I would be strongly opposed to government expenditure from the hard pressed Indian tax payer's contribution on the provision of entertainment for a small minority of well-to-do persons in the cities of Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Delhi. They alone can afford to buy the viewers for TV programmes, which are expensive and cost more than Rs.1000/-. If they want TV entertainment, it must be paid for by revenue obtained from commercial advertising. From the experience of other countries it seems quite clear that considerable revenue can be derived by a Corporation from the sale of time for advertising in one form or another. It is only proper that this should be used to provide good entertainment for our city folk without the burden falling on the rural public. A State which does not ensure a supply of clean drinking water to more than a fraction of its people or primary education to more than a minority of its children has no right to spend public money on providing TV or radio entertainment to a small minority of its people who are least in need of the State's consideration and assistance. The Swatantra Party will fight any attempt to divert our scarce public resources to such frivolous use for the sake of obtaining for the government popularity with the influential upper-middle class voter.

For the services of information and education of the less favoured elements of society, the farmers, the workers in the cities, and schools the State should be responsible, but by skilful management should endeavour to finance even these services as far as possible from the surplus revenue obtained from the commercial entertainment service, supplementing it with such government grants as the Treasury can afford.

It is not possible within the ambit of a short article to discuss the merits of the different methods of commercial broadcasting

used in different countries. Apart from the American continent, where the U.S. pattern of TV and radio organisation prevails, there are interesting variations adopted by Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Italy and Ireland, which we can usefully study to find out what would be best suited to our needs.

Public opinion should insist that Government adopt some form of commercial TV and Radio to finance adequately these money consuming services. If the public fails to do so, it will have only itself to thank if higher and higher taxes are levied to pay for services which, in other countries, people receive without such impositions. Several of the countries I have mentioned ~~are~~ are Welfare States concerned with doing the best by their people. Who are we to hold up our hands in horror at the idea of commercial advertisement on radio and TV? These antiquated, priggish and irrational attitudes should now be abandoned for more modern and liberal ways.

What does all this add up to? I should say that it asks for bold policies and experiments on the part of the Minister for Information and Broadcasting and her ~~senior~~ staff.

There are always risks in experimentation and possibly some mistakes will be made in the difficult process of transforming our radio service from its present moribund state into a lively and significant part of our lives, but I feel sure that the Indian listener and the Indian tax payer will give their full support to all ~~the~~ measures that the Government takes towards rationalising and liberalising activities which by their very nature can only flourish under bold and enterprising leadership.
