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Mr. M.R. Masani's speech in the course of the discussion on the Demands for Grants of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the Lok Sabha on March 17, 1964.

Shri M.R. Masani (Rajkot): Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, I would like to support the two cut motions which I have moved, one to discuss the "failure to establish by Act of Parliament an autonomous Corporation for the running and control of Broadcasting Services" and the other to discuss the "need to utilize the medium of television for the information, education and entertainment of the people without any expenditure of public funds."

To start with the radio, this is nothing new that I am urging. My hon. friend's predecessor, Dr. Keskar, I believe as far back as 1952, assured the House that they would come forward with a Bill under which this change would be made. Twelve years have passed and this House is entitled to ask how much longer we are to wait before such a Bill is brought before this House. Even today, officials of the service are asked to sign a declaration saying that as and when AIR is transformed into an autonomous statutory corporation, they will agree to the change in their conditions of service and so on. So, I hope that it is not very long before we have this change.

But, since there has been no sign of this change coming, I think it is important that the points that necessitate or warrant this change should be stressed before this House.

The only argument that I have heard against the establishment of a Corporation is a financial one. The argument is that, since All India Radio, owing to the small number of licences in regard to radio sets in the country, is making a loss and Government have to subsidise broadcasting service, therefore it would be premature to establish a Corporation. So long as Government gives something to AIR, it should remain a departmentally run service.

Now, there are two fallacies in this argument. The first fallacy is that so long as something is subsidised you must control it departmentally. In England, His Majesty's or Her Majesty's Government subsidise every year the external or foreign services of the BBC. But that is not considered a reason for interfering in the running of this service. And our own Government here help many autonomous organisations, institutions and statutory corporations which are dependent on Government support and nobody argues that, therefore, they should not be run on autonomous lines.

The second fallacy is in regard to faulty arithmetic. Broadcasting does not make a loss in this country; it makes a profit. Take the last available year's figures, 1962-63. The expenditure of AIR was Rs. 5.70 crores and income from licence fees was Rs. 4.89 crores; with miscellaneous receipts, the income of AIR comes to Rs. 4.93 crores. Therefore, it is argued that there is a loss of Rs. 76 lakhs. But there is an important item which is amazingly overlooked, and that is the customs duty recovered on radio sets imported into India on which licence fee is being charged for listening to AIR. This income from customs duty on imported radio sets comes to Rs. 1.47 crores. Therefore, the total revenue to Government from broadcasting comes to Rs. 6.40 crores, as against an expenditure of Rs. 5.70 crores, which means a profit of Rs. 67,16,000 and odd. Therefore, this financial argument is lacking in substance.

There are two major reasons, on the other hand, why this change is imperative and should be made. One is the quality of the service. I do not want to be misunderstood, I think there are many good things about our radio service.

but there is no doubt that in regard to response to public tastes, the flexibility and the spirit of service that should be there can never be there in a Government service. If I may just quote a recent survey made in one of the local newspapers, and this is representative of many things that have been said over the last few years, here is something from a newspaper of March 15, which I happen to have with me. The newspaper says:

"We are serviced with interminable talks on what Government proposes to do or what it wants us to do. When progress is reported it is in terms of figures and totals which can make sense, if it does, only to the tabulators of the Planning Commission."

It further says:

"Treatment apart, the choice of subjects often shows an appalling remoteness from the current context of the listeners' lives."

Shri Satya Narayan Sinha: Which is that newspaper?

Shri M.R. Masani: I am quoting from a newspaper of March 15.

Shri Satya Narayan Sinha: Which paper?

Shri M.R. Masani: The Statesman.

"How many listeners in India feel that the situation in Angola (Wednesday's Focus) or China's treaty obligations under international law (talk in the National Programme by G.S. Pathak) is a problem in which they are vitally involved or even genuinely interested?"

Shri Hem Barua: Quote the remarks about Pathak also.

Shri M.R. Masani: No, I will not read those remarks, which are personal.

"....the occasions when Parliament can yield good listening material are sadly missed. I do not remember having heard any independent discussion of the Budget, although no programme would have evoked greater interest, on the Budget evening or over the next few days than discussions by both experts and laymen on what they thought of the Finance Minister's proposals."

"....Which brings me to my last point; the utter unreality of the rural programme."

One can go on quoting, but I think this is a fair sample of what the people feel. And I say it is no reflection on AIR; it is a reflection on being a government department which has all the rigidities and lack of response that are inherent in Government departments.

The second objection is a more important one, and that is the objection of interference of a political nature or political influence. Here I would like to pay my tribute to the fact that, by and large, the officials who have over the last fifteen years and are today running the AIR have done so in a fair, honest and unbiassed manner. I think they have tried, by and large, individuals apart, to hold the scales even, not to get involved. But the same cannot be said, I am afraid, of all politicians who have been in office.

A particularly shocking example came to light only a few months ago in Orissa. Shri B. Patnayak, when he was the Chief Minister, himself volunteered to broadcast a talk on the food situation in Orissa some time in May last year. When the script was submitted, the Programme Executive, I understand, objected to the talk on two grounds -- one was that it lacked objectivity and the other that it involved needless political controversy. This objection was in regard to an attack made on Opposition parties in Orissa and these are the words of Shri Patnayak, which were quoted later in the press:

"I have of late noticed that some of our political colleagues belonging to the Opposition camps have started a tirade against the Government on the food front. I would like to ask them one question. Does vilifying the Government with half-truths or untruths serve the cause of the people?... I have to caution all that Government would come down with heavy hands on all those who choose to serve their own interests at the cost of the Nation."

Now, apart from the fact that this reference "to serve own interests at the cost of the Nation, comes from the quarter it did, which is amusing, the fact remains that Shri Patnayak, the Chief Minister, was clearly misusing his position. The Programme Executive after some hours of arguing was overborne, he was intimidated by what may be called the revolutionary dynamism of Shri Patnayak, the new type of Commissar, and, in the end, the talk was allowed to be broadcast. Well, newspapers in Orissa, the Eastern Times of 17th May and 1st June and the Praja Patrika, which I understand are owned by Congressmen and not by the members of Opposition parties, drew attention to this lapse.

My hon. friend, Shri Surendranath Dwivedy, who is not here now, I understand, wrote to AIR and Government for permission to reply to Shri Patnayak. I think this House will agree that it would have been only fair if he had been given a chance to reply. At this stage, however, the non-controversial clause came into operation and Shri Dwivedy was not given permission to reply. Now, what happened? Was Shri Patnayak punished? Was he removed from service for intimidating a poor Junior Executive or for misusing authority? No, Sir. He was not punished.

Shri Inder J. Malhotra: He has been Kaskarajed.

Shri M.R. Masani: But somebody else was punished, and that was the poor little Programme Executive. He was punished for yielding to the Chief Minister's pressure and not standing up to him. How, this is not fair to the officials of a service like this, to be in a vulnerable position and find themselves unable to resist.

If this had been an autonomous corporation like the BEC, such an incident could never have happened, and that is why it is important that this kind of abuse, even though it is occasional -- I agree it is occasional; I do not think the Members of the ruling party are using the radio in a totally biased sense -- is put an end to at the earliest possible moment.

I was amused to hear from the Communist Benches a reference to AIR being the most rigid broadcasting system in the world. I wonder if my hon. friend has ever tried to write a letter to Radio Moscow, asking them not to be complete stooges of the dictatorship of the Communist Party? There is no question of comparing All India Radio with Radio Moscow. All India Radio tries to do its job in a difficult

situation where the conditions are not fairly laid down, while Moscow Radio is just a mouthpiece of a dictatorship. While I do not want to overstate the case, I do think that there are dangers which should be stopped.

Then there is the boredom of having to listen often to the statements and views of those in authority. They also are entitled to their point of view, but, if I may say so, it is often overdone. The other day I happened to look at one of these television programmes put out from Delhi. It was called a 'Current Affairs' talk. This was about four to five days ago. In about four to five minutes, I had to go through the process of seeing the faces of at least five Cabinet Ministers -- the Prime Minister, Shri Chavan, Shri Nanda, Shri Chagla and Shri Sadiq. I feel that a film which within five minutes has to drag in five Cabinet Ministers in a talk on current affairs certainly shows an amount of loading and I do not blame people if they get bored with the same faces and the same voices.

It is only in the Communist countries -- I think, there are very few exceptions outside the Communist world -- where the radio service is a monopoly of the Government. Mostly, in free and democratic countries there are two varieties of services. One is like America where broadcasting is commercialised, where different firms compete and there is no governmental organisation at all. On the other hand, there is a middle path which is followed by many other countries. Britain is one of them with the BBC. Japan has the NHK, an autonomous corporation like the BBC, France has the RLF, and in Australia there are a statutory corporation and private companies competing on radio. There are many models. I am not being rigid about this model or that, but I do hope that the hon. Minister will, during his tenure of office, bring before us and before long a Bill which will set up an autonomous corporation under the general supervision of Government and Parliament.

Sometime it is said that Parliamentary control will be eliminated. That is not so. The BBC is discussed in Parliament every few weeks. Something or the other comes up on a matter of policy. Then, every few years there is a proper debate when the licence of the BBC expires and the charter has to be reviewed. So, the House of Commons has not washed its hands of the BBC. It tries to influence the policy of the BBC; but it does not interfere with the administration of the BBC. This is important. I do hope that the hon. Minister will now move on to this next step forward in the development of broadcasting in our country. If he does so, he will have the rare distinction of being the first Cabinet Minister who will have voluntarily parted with authority which is at present in his hands. It will be a great feather in his cap.

Now I come to television. This country is 85^{per cent}/illiterate or thereabouts. In a country which is so little literate, audio-visual methods of communication and education are of the greatest value and importance. An illiterate man cannot read or write but he can see and hear. If you are going to carry information, education and amusement to our people, it is through the eye and the ear that we will be able to bring it quickest. Even for creating literacy, television is of the greatest importance. It is being used in the South of Italy and other countries to spread the knowledge of ABC and the three Rs.

Television today is a clean slate on which we can write as we will. It is being introduced even in the most backward and the smallest of countries of Asia and Africa. On a recent visit to the Far East, I saw it at work not only in Japan, where it is a major industry, but also in little Taiwan, the Republic of China, Hong Kong and even a backward country by our standards and a small country like Thailand. Today Iran, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya either have television systems or are about to have them in the next few weeks or months. Why should a country like India lag behind?

In America, which of course is advanced, it is anticipated that by 1970 14 per cent of the total expenditure on education in the United States will be used for audio-visual aids like television. In England there are two-way links being established between science and engineering laboratories of Cambridge, London and other universities.

In Morocco, an illiterate country like ours, important educational experiments on television are taking place. In each village radio and television programmes are being followed by inhabitants.

In Rhodesia, educational television started in September 1961.

In Taiwan it is two years old. They started with 50 sets two years ago. Today there are 20,000 receivers in the northern part of the island alone. The cost of a television set in Taiwan is \$ 125 or between Rs. 500 and Rs. 600/- I am told that in Egypt and other countries also the cost has been brought down to about Rs. 500/-. It is expensive for the poorest man but it is within the reach of our middle classes. In the villages and among the poorer people there can be community sets, institutional sets, reading room sets, school sets and so on. So, it is not a rich man's luxury; it is becoming a common man's need.

In the Report of the Ministry on page 24, there is half a page about what is sought to be done. I do not want to deprecate what is sought to be done. Something is being done in Delhi and they say that something should be done in Bombay at the cost of Rs. 40 lakhs. But why Bombay alone? It is my city and I will be glad if it comes there. But I do not think that it is a problem of Delhi and Bombay alone; it is a problem of our villages and of the whole country. I think this start of trying to pump public money into this is a false start. I think this is not the way we are going to get anywhere.

Then I will be told: "How will you make it nationwide when we are such a poor country? We cannot afford it." It is true, we cannot afford it. If we are going to use public revenues, my own Party will be opposed to using the public money, the taxpayer's money, on television when undoubtedly there are higher priorities. But there is a way by which India can have television throughout the country without a single rupee of the taxpayer being spent. That way has been tried elsewhere and has not been found wanting. That method is for time on television to be sold to those who have a message to convey or goods to sell. Such people will then pay by sponsoring programmes and by that payment they will maintain all the apparatus, the staff and the stations by which television is put across.

There are two objections that are raised to such television. One is that the programmes are cheap and vulgar and the other is that they are constantly interrupted by advertisements. This is not true as I shall proceed to show.

Let me mention how it works in Britain where I happen to have the privilege of being a personal friend from college days of the Director-General of the Independent Television Authority, Sir Robert Fraser, who was with me in college when I was in London as a student. Through him I have come to keep in touch every two or three years with the progress that this institution is making. In Britain there are two television services, the BBC and the ITV or ITA. The BBC runs its own television and the Independent Television Authority has its own system. They compete and by competing they are creating a healthy climate where both sides improve.

The Independent Television Authority was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1954. The Authority is responsible for operating television services as a public service on a self-financing basis. It establishes stations, it selects and appoints programme companies who compete to sell programmes to ITV, and ITV is able to choose between the programme companies, judging them by the high standards of the programmes. These companies go to the manufacturer of goods or services and get these manufacturers to sponsor programmes prepared by the programme company. The company that makes soap or radio sets is not allowed to put across its commercial advertisement. It is only allowed to sponsor a play, a story, a talk, a debate, a discussion, some feature of cultural or other value or a concert, and the company that advertises gets the value or prestige of having its name on that programme to show that such and such a company is enlightened enough to give this great pleasure or treat to the seeing public.

It is true that in some countries the programme is interrupted occasionally to mention the name of the sponsor or the goods that he sells; but that also is regulated. In England, for instance, not more than six or seven minutes are allowed for commercial sponsorship in an hour's worth of a cultural programme. So, these evils are clipped.

The Act under which the ITA was created lays down that the standard of programmes shall be high, that there will be supervision and parliamentary interest in the programmes, and there are clauses in the Act which guarantee that the ITA will maintain high standards of programmes.

Similarly, it is obligatory that competition should be maintained. No one company can be given a monopoly and today there are half a dozen companies in England who are given the right to compete for time on the ITV. By all these methods, a very high standard has been maintained. Here is a book which, if hon. Members will see, they will realise what an amount of high level cultural and artistic stuff is put across by ITV. This is the same model that is being followed in Malaya, Japan, Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. None of these countries have felt that they are being corrupted by allowing programmes to be sponsored by those who are interested in doing so. This experience in England, which has maintained a high standard, is something which we may well emulate. The only thing is that we should not be irrational enough to fear or suspect everything that makes a profit!

The ITA has made a very good profit. Let me show what it does for the revenues of Britain. The ITA has made, since its

creation, £ 26 million as income. It has spent on its services £ 10.5 million; it has paid £ 7½ million as tax to Government and on top of it it has given £1 million to the public exchequer as a contribution, just as the Railways make a contribution to the general revenues. So, here is Britain, which has given its people the benefit of television without any cost to the public, paying taxes and giving a million pounds' contribution and on top of it paying for its services. What possible objection can there be to such a system? I believe that, if we look at this dispassionately, there can be no possible objection.

I was very glad to see a few days ago in the Hindustan Times a report that the hon. Minister himself has said that -

"If India must have television in the near future, it will have to be sponsored on a commercial basis. The present shortage of foreign exchange precludes television programmes being put on any other basis."

I think the hon. Minister has undoubtedly got the right end of the stick there. I wish him success in pursuing his enquiries and research in this matter and I do hope that he will leave a permanent legacy in this country.

Sir, if I may say so, he is the first Minister in this Ministry, since the late Sardar Patel ran this Ministry, who has got political influence and prestige behind him. I hope he will use that political influence and prestige and leave behind the monument of a television service on an independent, autonomous and dignified basis.