

with cold disgust – perhaps because it suggests that Scotsmen may be well content to hold minor positions in English business. Younger men seem to squirm even at a harmless speech made by Sir Harry Lauder after the first World War. He said we ought to express our gratitude to our Allies – the French, the Americans, the Italians, and of course the English – for helping Scotland to beat Germany. This was funny at the time because it was not too wildly remote from the way some Scotsmen actually felt; and it belonged to the old Scottish game of poking fun at themselves. To-day it appears to be seen as a sycophantic effort to obscure the utter insignificance of Scotland in world affairs, and the humour has gone sour.

Neither Scotland nor Britain will be enriched if an inferiority complex is to take the place of the old sense of humour and the unruffled assurance which used to go with a proper pride.

CHAPTER XII BROADCASTING

What is he buzzing in my ears?

Robert Browning

1. *The invasion of the mind*

If a nation is to be reduced to a province, it is not enough to limit and control its exercise of political and economic power: it is necessary also to provincialise the mind.

Even without government action it is not difficult to provincialise the mind when a smaller partner is linked with a larger and richer one. The relative size of the book-markets is bound of itself to work in this direction. English books will be read in Scotland, no matter how false an image they give of that country; but Scottish books, at least those about Scottish history, will be little read in England because of the indifference of the English people. Scottish authors in general must write for an English public in order to earn their bread. If they depict the Scottish scene at all, they must simplify it for readers who cannot appreciate its subtleties. Too often they indulge in caricatures which play up to English preconceptions. The Scottish image of Scotland is at a disadvantage from the start.

A similar result is produced even more obviously by the developments of modern journalism. The London press invades Scotland with so-called Scottish editions. These give some Scottish news, especially about sport; but in the main they spread purely English stereotypes and images. In days when a newspaper with a circulation of a million copies pays its way with difficulty, Scottish newspapers are bound to have a hard struggle. It is surprising that they succeed so well. Without them Scottish opinion would find almost no expression at all.

The means of mass communication invented during the present century supply the richer and more powerful partner with a psychological weapon far more formidable than that of mere print. Nothing need be said here of the cinema: it is obvious enough that Hollywood, for example, has influenced, not merely modern English speech, but even the morals and manners of this country as a whole. With the invention of radio and television there comes an almost irresistible invasion, however benign, into the homes of the people.

Broadcasting – if this term may be used to cover both radio and television – has an influence almost impossible to exaggerate. If many people believe everything they see in print, how much more will they believe speakers whom they see and hear daily in their own homes? No government and no Church has ever before had such a power to sway the minds of men.

In the future what may be called the ethos of every nation – its traditions and legends, its images and stereotypes, its attitudes and ideals, its morals and its religion – will be dominated, and even formed, by broadcasting. If Scotland is to be treated as a nation, as was recommended even by the Royal Commission, she ought to have a broadcasting system which is not controlled by London. Otherwise her distinctive ethos is bound in the long run to disappear.

2. *The British Broadcasting Corporation*

Under the Charter of June 1952 the British Broadcasting Corporation is composed of nine governors appointed by the Crown and subject to removal by the Crown. They exercise supreme control over every side of broadcasting, and in particular over finance. No breath of democracy can disturb their calm. They are supported by a General Advisory Council, but this is appointed by themselves, as is also the vast array of officials in London, who, both as bureaucrats and as Englishmen, are bound to resent and resist any diminution of their powers.

Scotland, like Wales, is allowed to have, not a Corporation, but a National Broadcasting Council of its own. This sounds

well, but the nine members of the Scottish Broadcasting Council have to be selected in London: they are appointed, and can be removed, by the Corporation. Even so, they are apparently considered unworthy of trust: their every activity is hedged around in a document bristling with suspicion. They are subject to such reservations and directions as may appear to the Corporation to be necessary for certain specific purposes; and these purposes include, not only party political broadcasts, but even broadcasts intended for reception in schools – is it supposed that Scotsmen if unsupervised might corrupt their own children? As if this were not enough, the Corporation is given *carte blanche* to impose further directions for reasons of finance or in the interest of due co-ordination and coherent administration. On the top of all this the Postmaster General is given the power to suspend any or all of the functions of the Council, if he opines that an emergency has arisen in which it is in the public interest to do so. All these directions the Scottish Broadcasting Council is bound to obey. Even the employees appointed by the Council may be rejected or dismissed if the Corporation and the Chairman of the General Advisory Council think their employment detrimental to the administration of the Corporation.

The document here summarised should be studied as a clear expression in black and white of the English attitude to Scotland. In this sphere at least the determination to dominate is unconcealed, and the proffered autonomy is bogus.

Control at the centre is not merely for ornament but for use. The National Broadcasting Councils of Scotland and Wales have always held that at a general election their national Home Rule parties should be given an opportunity to plead their cause on the air. So eminently reasonable a demand must be rejected. At the General Election of 1955 the Welsh Broadcasting Council proposed to grant it, and it was discovered that the British Broadcasting Corporation even with its wide powers had no authority to impose a veto. What happened? Without consulting Parliament the Government and the official Opposition, by no means disinterested parties, went into cahoots with one another. As a result of their deliberations the Postmaster General opined that an emergency had arisen and issued a

direction confining political broadcasts to parties which put forward more than a hundred candidates at a general election. As there are not a hundred constituencies in Scotland, let alone Wales, the Scottish and Welsh parties were effectively gagged, so far as broadcasting was concerned. Are they so dangerous that the chance of their being allowed to broadcast an election manifesto can be regarded in London as a national emergency?

It should be added that, as a result of protests, the restrictions have recently become less severe.

In matters of finance also the control granted to the British Broadcasting Corporation is absolute, and this alone would be enough to give them powers that are irresistible. It is hard to see why the Scottish Broadcasting Council should not be allowed to disburse in its own way whatever modest sums are set aside for broadcasting in Scotland. Here too, as so often, the figures published about the relation between the revenues contributed by Scotland and the expenditure in Scotland are unsatisfactory; and it is alleged that details readily given in Oslo and Stockholm are resolutely refused in London. Does Scotland receive fair treatment in this respect or not? Is it, for example, true that the fees paid in London, as I have been told by a Scottish singer, are double those paid in Glasgow to the same broadcaster for the same work?

There are large areas in Scotland where reception is inadequate and some where it is non-existent. There are geographical difficulties, but difficulties are made to be overcome; and the desire to overcome them would be stronger in Edinburgh or Glasgow than it appears to be in London. It would seem to require some explanation why the only programme received in parts of the Highlands is one that comes from as far away as Moscow. The really powerful transmitters in this country appear to be confined to the South of England, and Scotland has to put up with the second best. Although the most recent advances, like B.B.C. 2 and coloured television, may come to her years later than to England, she has to pay the same licensing fees as her more favoured neighbours in the South. Even in extreme cases complaints are met with little sympathy. The inhabitants of North and South Uist, for example, who can receive little or

no British radio, let alone television, asked for a license to operate their own local transmitter. The license was refused.

If we set aside these details, the fact remains that the British Broadcasting Corporation is a monopoly under the absolute control of London. This is a thoroughly bad arrangement even apart from the special interests of Scotland. If you fall foul of any part of this vast institution, you are off the air for ever, so far as the B.B.C. is concerned. Winston Churchill himself was prevented from broadcasting at the very time when the country was most in need of his counsel. The disadvantages of such a monopoly are sometimes recognised, but it continues undiluted so far as radio is concerned. In television we are allowed to have as an alternative a system which depends on advertisements proclaimed by voices whose manifest insincerity is calculated to corrupt the young. Even this commercial system has some real advantages; but the proper alternative, or rather substitute, is to have a genuinely federal system of broadcasting in which Scotland and Wales, and also the English regions, might play their own independent part.

3. *Brainwashing*

Although the Scottish Broadcasting Council is hedged around on every side and has no real control over its own finances, it is supposed – except at general elections – to determine ‘the policy and content’ of the radio service provided by the Corporation ‘primarily’ for reception in Scotland. Very late in the day it was given somewhat similar rights in television. What does all this amount to in practice?

The restricted powers granted to the Scottish Broadcasting Council are confined to the hours allotted to Scotland in the so-called Home Service (Scottish) (Radio 4). These amount perhaps to a quarter of its total time on the air. The rest of the Home Service in Scotland is controlled by London, as is the whole of the Light Programme (Radio 2) and the whole of the Third Programme (Radio 3). Apart from a fraction of a fraction Scotland has no say on the character of the material pumped daily into Scottish homes.

It is often said that Scottish programmes may be unsuitable for export South of the Border; but it never seems to occur to

any one that London programmes may be unsuitable for export to the North. If the alleged unsuitability arises from differences in language, it holds equally in both directions; but this question will be dealt with later. The main ground of complaint is that in the vast bulk of broadcasting in Scotland a purely English, and mainly London, point of view is taken for granted. 'The Church', for example, is the Church of England. 'The Law' – this must cause great confusion – is the Law of England. 'Education' is English education. Even 'the British character' is merely English; and if the Scots regard themselves as British, which in fact they do, they find ascribed to themselves characteristics utterly alien to their own traditions. The images and stereotypes and legends dinned daily into Scottish ears are purely English. If Scotland is recognised at all, the image projected is that of an insignificant and perhaps eccentric English province, a topic for occasional jocularly, but unworthy of serious consideration or respect.

All this is usually done in innocence and without any awareness of its unfortunate effects. The British Broadcasting Corporation, like so many so-called British institutions, seem to have little or no notion of a Britain enriched by its multinational character. Some provincial Englishmen maintain, not without justice, that it is barely conscious of the fact that England is not merely London.

Although this London attitude is unfair to Scotland, there would be less complaint if it were confined to an English broadcasting system, and Scotland were able to control her own. As things stand, Scotsmen have an alien image and stereotype unremittingly insinuated into their minds day after day – an image and stereotype which ignores and misunderstands or even condemns their whole history and tradition. I do not wish to use harsh terms with false associations, but if brainwashing is understood to be a method of influencing minds by continual suggestions and assumptions without any pretence at argument, it would be hard to deny that Scotland is subject to a brainwashing which may in the end be fatal.

Sometimes, it must be noted with regret, even the frail defences by which Scotsmen are supposed to have some

control over broadcasting in their own country can be forgotten. In April, 1966, without consulting the B.B.C. Controller in Scotland, there was displayed on Scottish screens what purported to be an interview with a group of Glasgow gangsters. These gave a lurid description of the utter lawlessness prevalent in the city and in effect charged the Glasgow police with inefficiency and even cowardice. Later on it emerged that the so-called gangsters were not gangsters at all, but some rather attractive young people who were performing this masquerade for what they called a 'giggle'.

Such methods blacken the image of Scotland, but although they reveal the danger of London control, they are not to be regarded as typical. The normal procedure may be illustrated by a more innocent example.

Scotland has always been proud of her education, and interest in her ancient universities extended into the humblest homes. Time was when a bus-conductor in Aberdeen could astonish the English visitor by replying, when asked whether anything of importance had happened recently in the town, 'Well, the University has just appointed a new Professor of Systematic Theology'. More recently a Glasgow working man, forced to earn his livelihood in England, was asked what he missed most in his environment: he replied without hesitation: 'The University'. Yet to-day, so far as broadcasting is concerned, there might almost be no Scottish universities: if mentioned at all, they are commonly lumped together with the new 'red-brick' universities of England. The fact that their weathered stones and granite should be so misdescribed may seem of little importance. What is devastating is that, both by what is said and even by what is left unsaid, the image of the Scottish Universities projected into Scotland is that they are of no importance and never have been. Why should so false a picture be imposed by London on a nation which has cherished its universities for over five hundred years?

This manifestly just complaint should not be misinterpreted as a desire on the part of Scotsmen to cut themselves off from England and even from the rest of the world. The Scots, like the English, would want to take material from every part of the

world (and not least from England); but there is a vast difference between taking what you want and having to put up with whatever you are given. London borrows a great deal – some might say too much – from America; but it is hard to imagine that any Englishman would wish to have his broadcasts controlled from New York or even – if this were not unthinkable – from Edinburgh.

4. *Scottish programmes*

Even if London projects a sadly distorted picture of Scotland, this, it may be said, can be corrected in the hours assigned to Scottish programmes in the Home Service (Radio 4). But why should such correction be necessary?

The Scottish National Council, in spite of the restrictions under which it works, does its best, and we should be grateful to it; but the sheer bulk of English importations makes its task difficult, if not impossible. Since the Council is concerned only with the programmes which the Corporation provides 'primarily' for Scotland, it seems from the start to be confined to narrowly Scottish interests. The limitation of the hours almost forces it to confirm the English picture, both by what it has to provide and by what it must fail to provide.

Some hours, for example, must be set aside for programmes in Gaelic – a language which pitifully few Scotsmen can now understand. In a sensible system the Gaels should have their own transmitters even at some expense to the rest of the country. The Scottish people must be allowed to hear their own traditional songs and stories, to see their own dances, to listen to their own bagpipes. Time must also be given up to sport in Scotland since sport is the main preoccupation of modern man. Because the general news must come from London, the Scottish news is merely an appendix which can have no concern with world affairs nor even with Britain as a whole: it must be confined to parochial events – an occasional fire, the launching of a ship, the opening of a small factory, the closing of a local mine, and so on. When needs of this kind have been satisfied, what time remains for the wider interests which Scotland, from her own point of view, shares with the rest of the world? The

'distinctive culture, interests and tastes' for which the Scottish Broadcasting Council is supposed to cater, must inevitably seem to be confined within the narrow limits of their own country. The higher culture has to be imported from the South. All of this serves to confirm the resident Englishman in his stereotype of Scotsmen as clinging pathetically to the remaining rags of a primitive peasant culture; and this stereotype may gradually come to be accepted by Scotsmen themselves. It may even come to be true.

No wonder there is a wide-spread feeling, as was recognised in the Pilkington report, that the programmes do not meet the essential needs of Scotland. It is commonly said that they portray the Scot as a being with none but the most parochial and shallow of interests. It has even been said that they depict him as 'clottish' (whatever this may mean); and that what is offered is 'a music-hall picture of Scotland'.

Some of these complaints may be exaggerated, but they spring from a genuine feeling of injustice. The Scots have explored and battled and traded and ruled and taught in every quarter of the globe. They have a traditional interest in Europe and in other continents greater than that of the average Englishman. They have explored too the world of the mind and been pioneers not only in material inventions and scientific discoveries, but in philosophy and economics and history and literature and the wider achievements of the human spirit. Yet so far as broadcasting is concerned, it would seem as if they hardly ever looked beyond their own kail-yard.

5. *Imitation and creation*

It would be absurd to blame the Scottish Broadcasting Council for the unhappy results of broadcasting in Scotland. Here, as usual, it is the system which is at fault rather than the men who run it. The defects of the system are more far-reaching than has been suggested. Creative enterprises are not to be expected from administrators without full responsibility and real control. It is the Yes-men who are encouraged by the present arrangements, and this must mean the reign of mediocrity. On the whole we should be thankful that things are no worse.

If we try to look briefly at some of the main tendencies, it must be remembered that a random sampling may easily give a false impression. It must also be remembered that if our concern is mainly with faults and flaws, this does not mean that there are not also merits, which may display themselves even under difficult conditions.

Under the present circumstances it is almost inevitable that there should be much imitation of English methods and models, and it is hardly surprising if the imitations are not so good as the originals. All of this confirms the stereotype that the Scots are imitation Englishmen and rather second-rate ones at that.

The tendency to imitation is to be found especially among what may be called official broadcasters – the men who introduce programmes, edit magazines, conduct interviews, and direct discussions – though it is also present in many of those chosen to play a more modest part. It becomes painful in attempts to be funny light-heartedly about nothing in particular after the English fashion. The English have a genius for what may be called intellectual or verbal play, as in debates at the Oxford Union, though even there the weaker brethren sometimes work at it rather too hard. When Scots attempt to play about in a similar fashion, they are apt to become elephantine: of all peoples they are the least suited to be Smart Alecs. Scottish humour, if I may be dogmatic, is at its best when it is brought to bear on something definite and does not strain to be funny without relief. The native article is not excluded from Scottish programmes – this would be impossible; but we get far too much of the imitative kind.

If we turn to more serious matters, it would be false to suggest that traditional Scottish attitudes are given no chance to find expression. After a struggle the Scots were allowed to have a short programme of their own on more general topics. Discussions are occasionally permitted even on such questions as Home Rule and on proposals to introduce bishops into the Church of Scotland. Yet it looks at times as if the speakers were chosen to give the preponderance to one side. The supposedly neutral chairman may make little attempt to conceal his prejudices; and if he is an Englishman, as for some reason he often is, he is

probably unaware that he has any. If this came out in the give and take of argument, there would be less cause for complaint. It is more unsatisfactory when he exudes the customary clichés and assumes without argument that what he regards as a narrowly Scottish view is too irrational for serious consideration.

The same lack of respect and understanding is shown on comparatively neutral subjects. In questioning the headmaster of a famous Scottish school the interviewer may hardly bother to conceal his amazement at the idea that it is able to compete with the English Public Schools; he may even suggest, with what looks rather like a sneer, that by the lowness of its fees it is offering a first-class education at a cut rate. Another may persist in trying to make Highland villagers say that their refusal to attend dances or cinemas is imposed upon them by their minister; and only their strongest protests can induce him to admit that he and they seem to be at cross purposes.

Even when there is no active hostility, there is too often complete ignorance of Scottish practices and traditions. There is already enough misunderstanding of Scotland in the programmes imported from London, and it seems unnecessary to add more in what purports to be a Scottish programme. It is hard to believe that anything like this could happen in any other country.

Let no one imagine that this is a plea for Scottish broadcasting to be more consciously Scottish. English broadcasting is not consciously English: it just is English. American broadcasting is not consciously American: it just is American. Scottish broadcasting ought to be in the same position. The traditional Scottish practice has been to express the truth as one sees it without fear or favour – without considering whether one is being Scottish, and without looking over one's shoulder to see its effect on alien critics. When this practice is abandoned, Scotland will be down and out. What has been suggested here is that in broadcasting Scotsmen should not try to imitate anybody – not even themselves.

To sum up. The voice of Scotland finds no adequate expression in the present broadcasting system: once so clear and decisive it is narrowly restricted and is swamped by a multitude of

alien voices. Even when it is heard, it is too often checked and corrected and misinterpreted by unsympathetic voices from the South so that it appears hesitant and confused or else strident and aggressive. It is almost forced to become self-centred and self-conscious, precisely what a truly national voice ought not to be. In a satisfactory broadcasting system it would be able to take its traditions and ideals for granted – not to mention the elementary facts of the Scottish scene – and to look calmly at the wide world from its own point of view instead of having to shout in the tones of a recalcitrant province in order to make itself heard at all.

CHAPTER XIII

BROADCASTING AND LANGUAGE

*I am always sorry when any language is lost,
because languages are the pedigree of nations*

Dr. Johnson

1. *The voice of Scotland*

What has been said of the voice of Scotland, taken metaphorically, applies also in a more literal sense. The traditional speech of Scotland is subject to the same distorting influences, and the average Scotsman is deprived of his traditional standards without acquiring any others. To those who care nothing about language, this will seem a small matter, and complaints about it will be merely silly. To those who recognise that speech, as the expression of thought and emotion, at once reveals and to some extent determines the character of men and of nations, it will seem that the treatment of Scotland in this respect also leaves much to be desired. If we may adopt the view of Dr. Johnson, Scotland is being deprived of her pedigree, as of so much else.

This is a topic of special difficulty to our English brothers, as I know from sad experience. Since to them English is just Standard Southern English, they find it difficult or impossible to understand even the terms on which any discussion must proceed. A summary attempt to clarify these terms is unlikely to be successful, but it cannot be omitted here. Readers allergic to philology may be advised to go straight on to the next Chapter.

The distinctive speech of Scotland has a centuries-old tradition and history of its own which has nothing to do with Southern English. It is derived from the speech of the invading Angles who occupied the Lothians as well as what is now Northumberland. As is sometimes said rather smugly in Scotland, the acute