

Carrington 2

PRIME MINISTER

BBC EXTERNAL SERVICES

Ian Gow reports that the Adjournment Debate was uneventful. Messrs. Critchley, Strang, Blaker, David Ginsberg (Labour, Dewsbury) and Scott spoke. All were especially critical on the French service. They also spoke of the Maltese, Greek and Spanish services. Mr. Blaker spoke as in the attached text. He was interrupted by Peter Shore who claimed that there was a majority in the House against the cuts. Messrs. Grieve and Sandelson also interrupted.

I understand that Mr. Blaker spoke firmly but that the House was not interested in listening to his arguments. Afterwards, Julian Critchley asked Ian that he and other signatories of the Motion (Messrs. Scott, Blaker, Waldegrave, Watson and Higgins) should call on you early next week. They would be accompanied by Geoffrey Rippon as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Ian suggested that they might first address themselves to Lord Carrington, but Mr. Critchley was adamant that they wished to see you.

Ian has already drawn attention to the strength of backbench feeling on this subject, in his letter to Lord Carrington (attached), which you have seen. He says that nothing has happened since he wrote that letter to change his assessment.

You told Mr. Blaker that your experience of museum charges made you wary of pressing these cuts against strong backbench opinion. At the same time, this would be an unfortunate item on which to back down now, especially when Sir Michael Swann is known to have called on you on the morning after the announcement. The long arranged time of that meeting has proved very unfortunate. I have asked the Home Office to advise us urgently on the possibility of giving Sir Michael Swann more flexibility over the use of funds. If we could find some movement within that approach, I think it might offer the least damaging way out of an awkward corner.

- I agree.
ms

MAP

Congratulations to Crichtley.

de Preu

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE FRIDAY 2 NOVEMBER

Details of the effects of the Government's public expenditure review as it ^{Concerns} ~~affects~~ the BBC External Services were announced yesterday as follows:-

"The grant-in-aid paid by the FCO to the BBC for the operation of the External Services will be reduced by £2.7 million in 1980/81 and subsequent years.

The World Service will continue unchanged; and, subject to some economies, a plan to improve audibility will go ahead without delay. Vernacular services to the developing world and to those countries which do not enjoy free and open access to information will also be largely unaffected.

The following vernacular services, however, will be discontinued: French, Italian, Greek, Turkish, Spanish (but not including Spanish to Latin America), Burmese and Maltese. There will be some reductions in transcription services and some adjustments to the capital expenditure programme to improve audibility."

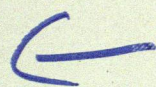
47.9
2.7

45.2

decrease
1.9

?

The cut of £2.7 million is a cut for
1980/81 and subsequent years on a figure of
£47.9 million which had been the planned
expenditure for 1980/81, at 1979 survey prices.
The grant-in-aid for the current financial year
is £43.5 million (1979 survey prices). Provision
had been made for an increase in real terms
in the grant-in-aid in 1980/81 to meet
additional capital expenditure. The House
will wish to note that even after the cut the
BBC's grant-in-aid will be larger in real terms
in 1980/81 than in the current financial year.
The reason for this is that substantial extra
sums are provided for 1980/81 for capital
spending to improve audibility. The Government
have thought it right to maintain most of this
capital spending programme, and that most of
the £2.7 million cut should fall on some of the
vernacular services.



The House will, I am sure, understand that the Government did not take this decision lightly. We have been impressed by the intensity and depth of feeling expressed in Parliament, in the media, and by correspondence from many parts of the world in support of the BBC's External Services. But the context in which this decision has been made is the overriding need to reduce Government expenditure. After taking everything into account, the Government decided that the BBC ~~must make a~~ ^{should not be exempted} contribution, ~~like almost everyone else.~~

from making it

But unlike almost everyone else, for the BBC External Services economies will end with this contribution. As the House knows, government departments, including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are being reviewed by my right honourable and noble Friend the Lord President, with the prospect that they will be obliged to suffer further staff cuts. The BBC External Services are exempt from that.

The contribution the External Services are asked to make is a much less serious one than many people seem to have feared. For months we have seen forecasts that either the whole Arabic service would be cut, or that ^{initially} all services to Africa might be cut or ~~all~~ to Latin America. These

Or cut to Africa, or a combination of these.

/were combined

were combined with predictions that in any event at least one relay station would have to go. None of these things is to happen. As a result of careful discussion and examination between the FCO and the BBC over recent months the Government have been able to produce proposals which involve very much more modest reductions than the BBC themselves had feared a few months ago. I pay tribute to those who have worked so hard on the problem.

One national newspaper reported this week that the reduction would "wipe out Britain as an external broadcaster to be taken seriously". That is certainly not true. The World Service in English, which for the vast majority of people who have made representations to us, is the BBC External Services, remains untouched. No existing transmitters will be lost, and indeed audibility will be steadily improved. The vernacular services to countries which have closed societies, and to the developing world, with ^{very few exceptions} ~~the exceptions of~~ French to Africa, Burmese and Maltese, are preserved, and will also benefit from improvements in audibility.

f1.7 million

~~The vernacular services~~

£1.7 million of the reductions will come from the vernacular services. This is exactly the same sum as the previous administration were planning to save on these services. Of the vernacular services which will be discontinued, French represents more than half of the programme hours being cut, and costs more than £650,000. Any cut is of course regrettable, but I wonder how much damage this cut will do. The French do not broadcast to us in English. Nor do the Italians. I wonder how many people there are in France who regularly listen to the BBC in French. If they have a particular interest in Britain or in the BBC external services are they not likely, most of them, to be able to understand English. If so they can listen to the World Service which broadcasts round the clock and will continue to do so. The person in France who would be adversely affected by the loss of the BBC French service must therefore be someone who is a keen listener to the BBC but who is unable to speak English. I really doubt whether such people are numerous. Most such people, I suggest, if they want to listen to the news in French would listen to the French Government programmes. A friend of mine tells me that he lived for four years in Paris and never

/met

met any French person who ^{mentioned} listened ^{to} to the BBC in French or even mentioned the BBC French services.

Much the same applies to the other European languages in the list, only one of which, Greek, broadcasts for more than one hour per day (at a cost incidentally of approximately £200,000 per year). None of the countries concerned broadcasts to us in English. Anyone in any of those countries who understands English can listen to the BBC World Service, ~~which broadcasts for 24 hours a day. From these cuts in the vernacular service savings of about £1.7 million will be achieved.~~

It has been suggested, since the proposed economies were first announced, that the BBC will lose wavelengths which it could subsequently never hope to regain. I can assure the House that it does not automatically follow that cutting a vernacular service means the loss of its frequency. The BBC World Service in English and vernacular services already share some wavelengths. I would like to assure the House that every effort will be made to ensure that existing frequencies are retained.

As regards the reduction in transcription services and adjustments to the Capital Expenditure Programme which together will provide savings of approximately £1 million, we anticipate that up to half of this sum will come from Transcription Services, which are concerned with the recording and distribution

/to foreign

2 20/10/66

to foreign radio stations of BBC programmes mainly of a cultural kind. The remainder will come from adjustments to the Capital Expenditure Programme to improve audibility. Provision has already been made over the next 5 years to the value of £25 million for this programme. The latest technical information however suggests that it may not be possible to carry out some part of this programme in any case for reasons entirely unconnected with the British Government. ~~Here again, it is a question of priorities. We have thought it better to make small adjustments here than to cut further vernacular services which would be difficult to reinstate later.~~ *But what is certain is that* But by far the major part of this programme will now go ahead with all speed, resulting in substantial improvements in audibility. ~~Details will be worked out between BBC and FCO engineers.~~

I believe all of us agree that the BBC's External Services fulfil an important role and fulfil it well. All of us must regret the need for these economies. If our national output had grown as much as that of other countries over the last five years; if the previous Government had not so disastrously ^{mis} managed our economy over the last five years; if it had not behaved in such a profligate manner in the last five years, things would have been different. The Government have had to find savings of £3½ billion in order to give our economy once again the chance

/to return

to return to health.

The result is that there are many reductions in spending plans, which, individually, honourable members will regret. Every honourable member has his own priorities. But I believe that my honourable Friends will all agree that the broad thrust of the Government's decisions announced yesterday is necessary and right. In that situation I hope my honourable Friends who have spoken in this debate will understand why the Government decided that the BBC External Services ~~had to~~ ^{should} play their part and will agree with me that the reductions they ~~will be making~~ ^{have been called on to make} will leave them as a service of which Britain can still be proud, and ^{which will} still ~~exert~~ a powerful influence for good.

Carrington

STRICTLY PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

24th October 1979

HBC External Services

I think you know this already, but I wanted to let you know that there is very strong feeling indeed in the Parliamentary Party about the value of the External Services of the HBC.

At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee yesterday, which was very well attended, there was a unanimity of view on this subject.

I enclose page 1308 of today's Order Paper which shows that there are already 27 signatures to an Early Day Motion in support of the Motion which has been tabled by Julian Critchley and others.

The Conservative signatories are ^{from} ~~among~~ every spectrum of the Party, and this was also apparent at the Committee yesterday.

The Motion is likely to attract ^f further widespread support.

It is difficult to over-emphasise the strength of feeling about this in the Parliamentary Party.

Ian Gow MP
Parliamentary Private Secretary

The Rt Hon Lord Carrington PC KCMG MC

135 *BBC EXTERNAL SERVICES*

Mr Julian Critchley
 Mr John Watson
 Mr Nicholas Scott
 Mr Kenneth Baker
 Mr Terence L. Higgins
 Mr William Waldegrave

Mr Nicholas Winterton	Mr Mark Lennox-Boyd	Mr Christopher Murphy
Mr Tristan Garel-Jones	Mr Richard Shepherd	Viscount Cranborne
Mr Robert Atkins	Sir Nigel Fisher	Mr Donald Thompson
Mr Richard Needham	Mr Peter Tapsell	Mr C. Brocklebank-Fowler
Mr Tony Marlow	Mr John Hunt	Mr Russell Johnston
Mr Geoffrey Rippon	Mr David Knox	Mr Andrew Faulds
Mr Timothy Eggar	Mr John Ward	Mr Iain Mills

★ 27

That this House believes that there should be no cut in the spending of the External Services of the BBC.

As an Amendment to Mr Julian Critchley's proposed Motion (BBC External Services):
 Mr George Gardiner

★ 1

Line 2, at end add 'since this is an essential part of our contribution to the defence of the free world'.

136 *SPEECHES BY BACKBENCHERS*

Mr David Trippier
 Mr Malcolm Thornton
 Mr Anthony Nelson
 Sir Nicholas Bonsor
 Mr Jack Aspinwall
 Mr John Lee

Mr Tony Marlow Mr John Ward

★ 9

That, in the opinion of this House, no speech from the back benches should exceed 20 minutes in length, except by leave of the House.

As an Amendment to Mr David Trippier's proposed Motion (Speeches by Back-benchers):

Mr Russell Johnston

★ 1

Line 1, leave out from 'speech' to 'should'.

★ The figure following this symbol gives the total number of names of Members appended, including those names added in this edition of the Notices of Questions and Motions.