POLICY FORMATION IN THE ABC NEWS SERVICE, 1942-61

by

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VOLUME I

Introduction

Chapter 1: The News Service to March 1942

Chapter 2: The Newspaper Agreements of 1943 and 1946

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INTRODUCTION

Caution and Conservatism

"News is news", says the Australian Broadcasting Commission\(^1\) cadet manual. "In its human elements, it is much the same as it was a hundred, even a thousand years ago ... What is news? Experienced journalists know pretty well by instinct what news is. You will learn this during your cadetship ..."\(^2\)

After sixty-six pages of instruction in that booklet, the new ABC journalist then turns to the fifty-five page ABC News Directive, which must be read, studied and used as the definitive book of reference, and in it he reads, "ABC News is changing and evolving, as all news changes and all concepts evolve under pressure of experience and new thinking".\(^3\)

It can be seen that the ABC News Service, like all news organisations, finds it difficult to define what news is. Is it unchanging, or is it changing? Can it be found instinctively or must one learn what news is?

Despite this basic difficulty of definition, it is clear from a perusal of the Manual and the Directive, that the ABC has gone to great lengths to define its own approach to news, and to guide and direct its journalists and sub-editors. Few news organisations could have gone to such trouble in spelling out specific ways of handling situations and of setting up reporting routines. As far as possible nothing is left to chance.

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1. Hereinafter referred to as ABC.

2. ABC News Department Cadet Manual (ABC News Division, Sydney, 1969), p. 1. The manual was compiled by the veteran ABC journalist, Warren Denning. It is still in use, though it is being gradually replaced by a progressive issue of guidance notes and instructions under the heading "News Syllabus".

Here, it would seem, is a distinct difference between the broadcasting organisation, such as the ABC, and the newspaper. According to Sigelman "the newspapers make no formal provisions for inculcating job or policy norms. Rather the socialization process is highly diffuse and extremely formal". In his experience, "Gradually, reporters 'just begin to know' what policy is". The absence of written, set policy guidelines in the newspaper, and the bulky policy directives of the ABC, imply a much greater degree of caution on the ABC's part and the placing of less trust and confidence in its news staff.

Smith has recently outlined how the origins of broadcasting in the nineteen-twenties and 'thirties determined their relationship both to governments and to the public. Fear about the volatile nature of mass society governed decisions which allowed a few select people to broadcast to the many listeners programmes designed to entertain or educate. Control of this one-way communication process was exercised by governments, through licences or charters. Within broadcasting institutions ideologies were devised for keeping out of trouble, particularly with governments and politicians. They could not afford to offend established political parties. They could not aim at developing or changing society - only maintaining it. They could not originate or initiate, but only arbitrate between established political and social forces, or reflect developments within that context. If they offended, governments had the ultimate power to withdraw permission to use the nationally controlled resource of the wavelength. Dissent or

5. Ibid.
controversy came therefore to be handled under stringently controlled conditions. Institutional rules about 'objectivity' and 'impartiality' were devised in order to avoid giving offence. In Smith's words, "it is instructive to observe the ever-changing meanings which these words are given as each broadcasting organisation struggles for survival in the sceptical political environment". These limitations on the freedom of expression to be enjoyed by broadcasting organisations were the result of the realisation of the power of the medium they managed.

Caution is therefore required by broadcasters if they are to survive. But, as will be evidenced in this thesis, the ABC's degree of caution about the operation of its news service, became, in the late nineteen-forties and 'fifties, quite extreme. After many years of great difficulty in obtaining news and then sufficiently controlling its dissemination, the Commission found at last a formula which seemed to guarantee survival. The tenacious clinging to this formula of utmost 'objectivity', 'impartiality' and 'factuality' meant the rejection of advanced techniques in presentation which aimed at providing more information. This thesis will detail some of the political pressures responsible for this mood of ultra-caution.

The type of news service that evolved from the passing of the Broadcasting Act of 1946, which gave the ABC a service that was independent of other news sources within Australia, was largely determined by the experiences the Commission had had up to this time with politicians and with the press, from whom it had sought a workable arrangement for the supply of news. It is unfortunate therefore that much of what is said and written about the ABC's news service tends to ignore these crucial formative years pre-1946, which helped shape standards and format for

7. Smith, Shadow, p.17.
news which are still in current use. The independent news service which began on 1 June 1947 did not begin in a vacuum. It marked the beginning of a massive new effort to shape a crucial product, which because of weaknesses in conception and control, had provided governments with excuses for intervention. Such is the mythology of the ABC, however, that the years of the news service before 1946 are usually dismissed as worthy of little comment because "it was all or mainly press news". The present Controller of News Services, R.G. Handley, is the latest to so treat this early period, in his broadcast interview on the thirtieth anniversary of the independent service. 8

In effect, both before and immediately after the start of the independent service, the Commission and its news staff were being forced to answer questions about their activities in order to justify their existence. It is doubtful whether any comparable news broadcasting service has ever been subject to such continuous governmental and public examination, in which the high stakes were the degree of independence to be allowed the Commission and, in fact, whether it should survive at all.

This chain of events began in 1941-42 when the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting 9 conducted its hearings and presented its report. It was very much concerned with the Commission's deteriorating relationship with its news sources, the newspapers, and the desirability of having a full independent service. Following its recommendations, that "in order to reconcile the ABC's independence with the political

8. In an interview with Philip Satchel, broadcast on "City Extra", ABC, Adelaide, on 31 May 1977. No transcription has yet been made available. The writer has a copy of the tape. All Handley said of the early period was, "The ABC was broadcasting news many years before 1947, but most of the information was drawn from the daily newspapers, originally all of it, and right to 1947, quite a lot of it".

9. The Committee Chairman was Senator W.G. Gibson, and it is commonly called the Gibson Committee. It will hereinafter be referred to by this name.
conception that all actions of Government or quasi-Government authorities should be subject, in the final analysis, to Parliamentary control, a Joint Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting be established, the ABC found its news service under an almost continuous spotlight.

The Labor Government of Prime Minister John Curtin set up the Committee with great enthusiasm, and it devoted two of its reports entirely to ABC News. Both dealt with the Government's rejection of agreements by the A.B.C. with the newspapers for the supply of news, and strongly influenced the direction ABC news was to take. Other reports of the Committee, until its last hearing in 1948, dealt in part with other aspects of news, such as industrial matters and expenditure.

As the Committee ceased to function, further scrutiny was provided by the Parliamentary Committee on Certain Aspects of the Administration of the ABC, which, in its report of 1948, looked closely at the efficiency and cost of news and made recommendations accordingly. It provided the opportunity for further Government measures to control the independence of the ABC.

In between these Parliamentary essays into broadcasting matters, there were internal enquiries into news, as the Commission looked for ways to devise a news service that would prove acceptable to politicians and the public. The first of these was by two senior officers of the Commission, Robert McCall and Sid Deamer, in 1942. The

11. Hereinafter, this Committee will be referred to by its initials, PSCB.
12. The third and fourteenth reports, dated 22 February 1944 and 4 July 1946, respectively.
13. Known as the Fitzgerald Committee Report, after its Chairman, A.A. Fitzgerald. Hereinafter it will be referred to by this title.
second was conducted by a 'neutral' observer from outside the ABC - the former senior civil servant, W.T. Harris - who completed his work in 1949.

Even as late as 1950, the Commission had to compile a voluminous report to satisfy the newly elected Liberal-Country Party government that its news service provided value for money. The penalty for a news service which lacked credibility was clear. Supervision on a massive scale, which sapped energy and morale.

For the researcher, the value of such enquiries is obvious. There were many thousands of words either given in evidence, or prepared in written form, as Commission, management and news personnel sought to define their role. The Commission itself held meeting after meeting in this period in which news problems were discussed. The preparation of reports, evidence and instructions has meant much more news material has survived in various cross-referenced files than in more normal times. In fact, since the era of greater stability began in 1950, the News Department, later News Division, has failed to keep files for more than a few years. The locating of important material is made much harder, in these circumstances.

From the mountain of self-analytical material up to 1950 emerged an ABC news policy, a code of values which took on permanency as its rigid application was seen to lower the level of controversy surrounding news. Much of that policy, as it was and as it has evolved in certain areas, is contained in the current ABC News Directive. But it is not a complete guide. There are also unwritten guidelines governing news selection which are of significance. It also fails to indicate which elements are emphasised. News policy in the ABC is in fact the result of a complicated interplay of forces. The Chairman of the Commission,
the Commission itself, the General Manager, the Head of News\textsuperscript{14} have each at various times taken policy initiatives. Other policies emerged out of what may be called the accumulated professional wisdom of the department. It would be difficult for most ABC journalists today to decide from which area of the Commission certain long-established policies have originated.

Of particular relevance has been the relationship of the News Department to other departments, and to the Commission. Institutional pressures on News resulted in journalists adopting a particular stance on key issues. Uncertainty, isolation, even alienation reinforced some news values and caused them to reject others. Sigal has pointed out the importance of office politics in determining news content.\textsuperscript{15} He was referring to competition for resources within a newspaper organisation. That competition is more extreme in a complex organisation such as the A.B.C. and the news service's attitudes and policies have been affected by it. Sigal also maintains that sets of values reduce newsmen's uncertainties. They serve to legitimise choice and deflect criticism. For much of its existence a pall of uncertainty has hung over ABC News. This also goes some way towards explaining the need for the hefty Directive.

\textsuperscript{14} In this Introduction I have used the general term "Head of News" to describe the senior officer in charge. In fact, the terminology used for this position has been changed frequently. See Appendix A for a complete list of titles used for the Head of the Service, the various occupants, and the years in which they held the position.

By 1961, the ABC News Service had taken on certain characteristics which distinguished it from its competitors within Australia, and from similar broadcasting institutions abroad. These may be summarised as follows:

(1) A very heavy emphasis on factual accuracy, on 'objectivity', and on sourcing stories. Attempts at backgroundering or interpretation were discouraged.

(2) Following from this, a rejection of the concept of the reporter presenting his own story, particularly in voice (the "voice report"), despite the fact that this was by then being widely practised overseas.

(3) A determination to be first with the news.

(4) A strong sense of competition with the newspapers. This partly accounts for (1) and (3).

Today the hard, factual approach is being widely questioned worldwide. At the most abstract epistemological level the very concept of 'facts' and 'factual' has come under challenge. And, from a more sociological perspective, that of ethnomethodology, what is to count as a statistic or a fact is itself the outcome of a complex series of decisions, negotiations and 'typifications' by those involved in the 'normal' handling of, and processing of, the given set of events.

This type of doubt is sometimes brought into play when the objectivity issue is raised, but it is not widespread even amongst sociologists, and ethnomethodology itself is beginning to split into a number of schools. Hence this thesis will proceed at a lower, and to the author more comfortable plane.

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At the less abstract level, there are two main reasons for the questioning. First, it is argued that 'mirror image' reporting is ritualistic, reflects the community instead of actively trying to change society, and supports the status quo. Facts, it is said, do not necessarily mean audience comprehension and this is what a news service should be aiming at. More background material is needed to aid understanding. Reporters should seek stories which affect the lives of many people, not simply report factually the doing of persons and institutions which dominate society.¹⁷

Closely related to this view is the concept that news broadcasting, by simply relaying the language and actions of those in power, usually in terms of crisis and drama, produces an unquestioning docility among the governed. Edelman claims that political forms symbolise what people need to believe about the state to reassure themselves.¹⁸ News which is oversimplified, which does not aid public understanding, assists this symbolisation. By reporting simply what is said or done, by political leaders, in the symbolic terms of threat or reassurance, the public reacts emotionally but is not persuaded to play any part in the governmental process. The language used reinforced the feeling of remoteness from those in power, the activities publicised give an impression of accomplishment. Factual reporting of handouts, statements, and speeches is perpetuating this symbolic sign structure.


The second objection to pure factual reporting is that it presupposes the objectivity of the reporter. It seems doubtful whether any reporter can be truly 'objective' in that he can cover an event in such a way as to persuade every segment of the audience that he has been 'fair' (Smith). Some will always claim today that the selection of facts has been influenced by the reporter's own criteria, resting on inferred knowledge about the audience, on inferred assumptions about society, on his professional code or ideology. Under this definition, news is not news, but a human product or construction. Institutional values shape reporters' attitudes and affect their selection of news. Factual reporting then can be subject to unconscious bias flowing from the institution's own view of its role in society. The consensual view taken by institutions is frequently that of the established values and sanctions of society. Recently, the label 'centrist bias' has come into increasing use for this process. Smith points out that it is also the result of reaching a modus vivendi with governments, whose approval must be maintained if broadcasting organisations are to survive, dependent as they are on official licensing and frequently finance. The 'objective' factual reporter is helping to maintain the status quo in several ways. Broadcasting's potential for increasing understanding and widening intellectual perspectives cannot be fully realised in this situation.

Policy making Problems

I was encouraged in embarking on this project by the obvious dearth of studies of institutional policy making. Halloran, for example,

says the higher levels of news policy making remain practically uncharted. McQuail notes that mass communications organisations are typically specialist, complex and large and concludes that they cannot be properly understood without some knowledge of their internal structure and dynamics. The absence of work in this area is said to be due to resistance by broadcasting organisations to sustained outside enquiry and difficulty of access to media controllers at higher levels.

The A.B.C. however put no such barriers in my way. The Commission granted me a Post-Graduate Scholarship for a year to enable me to begin work on this thesis as part of my M.A. Degree. The General Manager Mr T.S. Duckmanton, and the Deputy General Manager, Dr C. Semmler have been enthusiastic about the idea from the beginning and have encouraged me. They have given me permission to consult Departmental files and other ABC records. I have also had complete co-operation from the recently retired Controller of News Services, Mr Keith Fraser who has been a most valuable source of information.

In choosing a period which ends in 1961, I have however been conscious that it was easier for the ABC to agree to my researching an era which is far enough away to allow objective analysis without embarrassment, than it would have been if I had nominated a more recent time span. Moreover 1961 was a watershed year for the ABC, and is a convenient place to stop. It was the year of the death of its long-serving and influential Chairman, Sir Richard Boyer, the year that saw the advent of 'Four Corners', its first current affairs programme (which


brought strong reactions from News), and a year in which the News Service probably reached the zenith of its power and prestige within the organisation. The starting point, 1942, was chosen because it was then that wide divergences of opinion began to appear in the ABC over the future of its News Service.

In fact, what might prove to be one of the most significant observations to emerge from this thesis is that, if the ABC case is typical, institutional decision making in News has not been the clear cut process some authors seem to have assumed. I have earlier called the process complicated. More than this, it has frequently been the result of bargains struck or victories secured after widely differing internal viewpoints have been expressed. Obviously institutions sometimes have acute difficulty at arriving at news policy viewpoints. In the A.B.C. these top-level debates on key issues have been at times fiery. They have also been more frequent than outsiders might imagine. This raises the question whether news policy making within some broadcasting organisations is in some degree a democratic process.

In examining these policy problems I shall look at the major Commission's policy decisions from the point of view of effective implementation. Pressman and Wildavsky have drawn attention to the way in which policy designers frequently fail to recognise the importance of ensuring that those policies are carried through. I shall make use of some of their findings in examining the Commission's policy record.

Acknowledgements

I hope that my thesis has some relevance to the News Service as it is today. While some policies have quietly ceased to have any force, others are still maintained today as they were fifteen years ago. To most journalists, their origins are obscure, and in some cases, so is the reasoning behind them. ABC News has not changed markedly over this long period of time. In some areas it has remained static in its approach. This thesis will help explain why this is so. This is a time when the broadcasting of news is being re-examined worldwide. News values are being questioned, and the impact of news more critically analysed. The ABC's News Service has not avoided being caught up in this trend and journalists have recently had long discussions about their future. In this respect, my survey could be both timely and useful.

My chief source of information has been ABC files. Some of these have come from Commonwealth Archives and some from the ABC's own Archives. I owe a debt of gratitude to the ABC's Archivist,

23. For some details of the content of a report drawn up at a representative seminar of ABC journalists held in July 1976, see Bruce Stannard, "Internal Trouble Spells Gloom for the ABC Audience", National Times, 6-11 September 1976.

24. The source of files can be identified from the prefix. Files from Australian Archives begin with the letters SP. Those from ABC Archives begin with the letter R. Some files have three sets of numerals only, without a letter prefix, i.e. 16/16/1. These come from current ABC files. When a file is first cited in footnotes, the title, if it has one, will also be given, i.e., "News - Inauguration of Independent Service". The title will not be repeated subsequently. Titles, at best, are only a hazy guide to contents in ABC files. Correspondence on many subjects is simply filed under 'General Manager' or 'Controller of Programmes'. It is therefore very time-consuming to locate correspondence of a particular type or on a particular subject. As an illustration, among the letters in a file such as 'News Comments and Enquiries' are complaints from a Prime Minister and a State Governor, buried among hundreds of simple requests for scripts and information.
Miss Pat Kelly who has cheerfully coped with my multitude of requests. My thanks are due too to the ABC's Federal Reference Librarian, Miss Judy Clark, and her staff, particularly Miss Marjorie Wearne, and to Miss Norma Saunders of the News Division.

Another vital source has been the Parliamentary committee reports and evidence. The evidence in particular has a refreshingly extemporaneous quality which is in distinct contrast to memoranda.

Little has been published specifically about the ABC but I am fortunate that Frank Dixon's story of the beginnings of the ABC's News Service, *Inside the ABC*, was released by Hawthorn Press just before I began work on this thesis. Dixon was the first Head of the News Service and the years he spent in the ABC 1936-1950, spanned a very important period. I have made extensive use of this book and another which sheds considerable light on the thinking of Sir Richard Boyer, who was Chairman from 1945 until 1961. G.C. Bolton's biography called *Dick Boyer - An Australian Humanist* is now ten years old, and is rather superficial in its findings, but is still an important source of information about the Commission's relations with the Government, on news matters.

Dixon, Boyer and W.S. Hamilton, Editor-in-Chief from 1949 to 1959, and the first Controller of News Services 1959-65, have published articles and speeches dealing with various aspects of their work and which provide some useful clues to underlying attitudes. Dixon's book now encompasses most of the material he had written over the years for journals such as *Quadrant* and *Meanjin*. Boyer's now classic debate with Joan Rydon in *Public Administration* remains however one of the most significant.

25. Published 1975.

public statements he made while Chairman. Equally relevant for my purpose is the paper called "The Freedom of the Press" which he delivered at the 21st Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science in 1955. Towards the end of his career in broadcasting Hamilton delivered three lectures which summed up the views towards news which he had so rigidly maintained for so long. The 30th Arthur Norman Smith Memorial Lecture called "The Information Jungle" was delivered in 1968. An address given at Macquarie University, "Responsibility in the Public Sector of Broadcasting" is dated 1970. In 1972, he presented a paper called "The People and the Media" at a University of Adelaide seminar. Amusing, but carrying strong undercurrents of hostility towards the press is the rare article he wrote for the Australian Quarterly in 1962, called "The Kangaroo Affair."


30. This was the inaugural visitor's lecture in a course on Communication and the Mass Media. The lecture is dated September 1970.


I would also like to include in this brief survey of source material dealing specifically with ABC News, two theses which I have found helpful. The first, by G.R. Curnow, is a history of the development of wireless telegraphy and broadcasting in Australia to 1942, but is particularly related to the ABC. Curnow worked in the ABC while researching, in areas which brought him into close contact with senior executives. All of the chapters dealing with the ABC are worth reading, but he has a particularly useful chapter which covers the early agreements for the supply of news from the newspapers. Noteworthy too are his remarks on policy making effectiveness of the Commission and on the ABC's relationship with 'the Establishment'.

Pamela Mitchell's thesis "Development of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's News Service, 1932-1942" is an historical survey of the Commission's negotiations and disagreements with the newspapers over the supply of news. Miss Mitchell had access to ABC files for the period and her lengthy quotations from correspondence help to supplement what Curnow and Dixon himself have written.

Beyond the files and the public speeches and articles there is an area of personal recollection and viewpoint which adds another dimension to research of this kind. I have taped interviews at some length with Frank Dixon, Sir Charles Moses (General Manager 1936-64), Keith Fraser (Controller, News Services, 1968-77), Arthur Lowndes (Commissioner, 1956-74), and Ivan Chapman, a journalist whose long career has spanned

34. B.A. (Hons.) Thesis, History Department, Sydney University, 1974.
both ABC and BBC, radio and television. Gil Oakley (Controller of News Services, 1965-68), now in retirement in Tasmania, replied by letter to a long list of questions I put to him. I had a personal interview with Rupert Henderson about the relationship between the press and the ABC in the nineteen-forties.

The interviews were most productive and the transcripts have proved invaluable. I am most grateful to all these gentlemen for their patience and their frankness.

Special Acknowledgment

My supervisor has been the Professor of Political Theory at the University of Sydney, Henry Mayer. His encouragement has enabled me to maintain my enthusiasm for the project, while at the same time, he has enabled me to view journalism from new and challenging perspectives. I am most grateful for the interest he has shown.

35. Chapman is in a unique position to make comparisons between the ABC and BBC. He joined the ABC as a cadet reporter in 1947. In 1948, he went to Britain where the BBC engaged him. He was one of the journalists assigned to begin BBC TV News in 1954, and rejoined the ABC to help begin its TV news service in 1956. He resigned from the ABC in September 1976 to devote himself to writing. He is the author of Details Enclosed (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1958) and Iven G. Mackay, Citizen and Soldier (Melway, Melbourne, 1975).

36. W.S. Hamilton also agreed to do a taped interview with me. He fell ill on the day the interview was scheduled and died the following morning (20 December 1975).

37. Rupert Henderson was a key figure in the Australian newspaper world during the period when the Government and the ABC were engaged in argument over the agreements with the newspapers for the supply of news. He was General Manager of the Sydney Morning Herald from 1938-49, Chairman of the Australian Associated Press 1940-49, and Chairman of the Australian Newspaper Proprietors' Association for a period. He is still a Director of John Fairfax Ltd.
CHAPTER 1

THE NEWS SERVICE TO MARCH 1942

Overseas Developments

At the outbreak of war in 1939, the two major American networks, the Columbia Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting Company, had already devised a reporting style and formula which was to form the basis of their news coverage during the hectic years that followed. H.V. Kaltenborn of CBS had demonstrated the value of independent reports, and the immediacy of radio in his pioneering descriptions of the Spanish Civil War 1936-37. The following year, 1938, Ed Murrow described the German entry into Vienna and the same CBS broadcasts used the voices of its reporters in Paris, Berlin, Rome and New York. "The 'news round-up', a CBS creation was born in crisis".2

By 1939 the networks had decided to abandon the editorialising style that Kaltenborn had made famous and aim for neutrality and non-involvement. The National Association of Broadcasters accordingly compiled a voluntary code which called for analysis and not comment. The objective, purely descriptive but frequently dramatic reporting of the war that followed by American reporters became quite distinctive. "There must be no foisting of opinions on others. Tone was as important as content".3 Murrow set the standards with his dignified, measured delivery. It was all very different from the newspaper style and approach.

1. Hereinafter referred to as CBS and NBC.


The effect of these reports on the U.S. Government and the public was immediate. Radio news had given the networks prestige and authority. Twenty incoming transmissions a day from abroad were being received by American networks by mid-1940.

The networks had laid the foundations for their own news reporting services in 1933. In that year there had been a reaction against the free distribution of news to radio stations by the newspapers and the free publishing of radio programmes. As well as the newspapers, the news agencies were also worried by the growing importance of radio. They decided to end the supply of news to the networks, but continue to send it to other stations which were linked with their newspaper subscribers, for a fee. NBC and CBS immediately began to gather news independently.

By the end of the same year agencies and newspapers had combined to stop this development. Newspapers put pressure on advertisers. Eventually the networks, and the National Association of Broadcasters agreed to end or curtail their news services, and to limit the times of news broadcasts, in return for a jointly produced bulletin of radio news supplied by Associated Press, United Press and International News Service.\(^4\)

But such was the growing appetite for radio news at this time that the agreement soon proved powerless in limiting the supply. Independent stations ignored it, and other agencies sprang up to supply them. WOR New York, with its frequent news broadcasts, showed that there was a big audience for news. Sponsors saw the trend and offered to sponsor news from the major agencies. Big money was involved, and the agencies agreed.\(^5\)

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5. AP held out against allowing its news to be commercially sponsored until April 1939.
With the agencies once again supplying the networks, CBS and NBC found they were free to resume news gathering of their own. They found the best way to do this was by using radio's own techniques - the reporter on the spot with his microphone supplied authenticity. Shortwave or landline brought those reports to the listener in the shortest possible time.

In Britain, the British Broadcasting Corporation's 6 News Department were not as prepared as the Americans for their role in wartime. Two reporters and one mobile recording van were all that was available in 1939 to supplement what the agencies were supplying. But the techniques had already been absorbed. The BBC had begun a Newsreel programme in 1933 which, although shortlived, had opened up new vistas to the radio news reporter. There were voice reports from several locations with comment included. Ralph Murray sent back reports from the League of Nations from 1935 for news bulletins. Popular Wireless wrote in August 1935, "One likes to hear experts and men on the spot ... in the News Bulletins. They give the bulletin the right authoritative touch". 7

The BBC news might have been cautious and restricted in scope under Reith, 8 but like the American networks it had explored specific radio ways of supplementing agency material. The agencies were relied upon for the major stories which went through the careful hands of the

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6. Hereinafter called BBC.


8. Lord Reith, Director-General of the BBC from its inception in 1927 until 1938. Formerly he had been General Manager of its predecessor the British Broadcasting Company, 1922-26.
team of sub-editors, but the small News Talks team tackled the stories they were given with enthusiasm. Dimsdale had pushed back the frontiers of radio reporting. When he joined the BBC in 1936, he brought with him ideas for making the news less 'colourless' and more 'human'. "BBC reporters would describe events ... in their own words, not those regurgitated from the agency tapes", he wrote. 'The BBC news would not merely report - it would explain 'why and how it happened!'" 10

In early 1939, when the BBC belatedly sent him to the Spanish Civil War, Dimsdale had his first real chance to put his ideas into action. The fighting affected him such a way that "it produced reporting from him of a kind that had never been heard before on radio... The BBC... was delighted by the achievement." 11

By mid-1940, Dimsdale was one of a team of four BBC correspondents covering the war. "Radio Newsreal," began at this time, using the voices of BBC correspondents overseas, backgrounding the news of the day and bringing a new immediacy to radio news. 12 In the following year, nightly voice reports a punch were coming into the BBC News Talks section from overseas.

As the BBC's own reporters showed more and more keen interest in high topicality at the war continued, there were protests from the newspaper world. But the impact of the BBC's own reporters by this time was such that the Corporation could brush aside these objections. Problems however continued throughout the war and each side alleged that official preference was being extended to the other.

11. Dimbleby, Dimbleby, pp.84 and 86.
12. Radio Newsreal was not broadcast on Home Service until after the war. At this time it was only carried on the shortwave programmes.
Up to this time, however, the BBC's attitude was strictly one of non-competition with the press. Throughout the 'thirties it had taken the four major agency services, but agreed with them and the Newspaper Proprietors' Association not to broadcast news until the evening, and to limit the number of 'running commentaries'. Up until the Munich crisis bulletins were between 6 p.m. and 2 a.m. Because the BBC had made no large scale attempt to move into reporting, and because the reporting it did was confined to voice descriptions of less significant events, there seems to have been no complaints by newspaper proprietors about this supplementation of agency material, before 1940.13

Radio news in both the U.S.A. and Britain had therefore freed itself from newspaper/agency restrictions on bulletin times and on independent supplementary news coverage by 1939. The BBC and the major American networks were content to draw upon the established news agencies for their basic material and use their own reporters more and more for descriptive, analytical, on-the-spot reports, using their own voices. The question of the broadcasting organisations setting up their own completely independent news gathering networks in competition with the papers or agencies did not arise any more. While some lingering discontent remained, the newspaper world had come to accept that radio did not have the effect on sales that was imagined at one time. The public demand for news by the late 'thirties was sufficient to stimulate newspaper sales as well as cause expansion in radio news times. No more did the agencies threaten to cut off the supply of news.

13. The 1928 Agreement between the BBC and the press allowed 400 'eyewitness' descriptions a year. This restriction was also abandoned after Munich.
In Britain, the agencies and newspapers came to terms with the BBC because they saw no real threat to themselves as long as the Corporation maintained its non-competitive stance. In neither Britain nor the U.S.A. did the broadcasting organisations find any need to set up permanent large scale news gathering networks which would mirror what the papers and agencies were doing. There had been no breakdown in relations which would have compelled this. Radio news had recognised it had a special, complementary, role to play. It could highlight major news events by using its own techniques.

The Australian Situation when War Came

Since its establishment in 1932, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) had taken its news from newspapers. It had done this under the terms of separate agreements with the press for supply of Australian and overseas news. However, no formal agreements had ever been signed. Legal complications and delays were partly responsible and also the frequency of disputes over terms. Nevertheless agreements were concluded in principle, and were considered by the parties to be in force for the stipulated term, even though they were unsigned. Negotiations and disputes over these agreements between the ABC and the press had centred around the question of payment, the number of words to be used, the length of time of the broadcasts and their frequency.

On 18 September 1939, the Minister for Information, Sir Henry Gullett, had convened a conference between representatives of the press, the ABC, the commercial radio stations, the PMG's Department and Army Headquarters, aimed at providing the Australian public with a better coverage of world events, in view of the outbreak of war. Bulletin times were agreed upon which were more in keeping with the Commission's views
on its responsibilities to its audience. 14 For the first time, the major evening news was to be broadcast at 7 p.m., and not 7.20 p.m. as before. The Commission and the commercial stations were given the right to rebroadcast BBC news bulletins and to use the material from them in their own news broadcasts. Some of the limitations on the use of other overseas material were lifted.

But while the Commission won some concessions at this conference, its news service was still broadcasting under severe restrictions and limitations because of press imposed conditions.

The "gentlemen's agreement" for the supply of Australian news was with an organisation representing the major metropolitan newspapers, called the Australian Newspapers Conference. 15 Much of its overseas news came from the Australian Associated Press, 16 a cooperative newspaper-owned newsagency, the membership of which was substantially the same as that of the ANC. 17 AAP had Australian rights to the major overseas agencies, such as Reuters and AP. The ABC also took the British Official Wireless news, a service transmitted in morse by the British Government.

Although the newspapers and AAP went along with the Government's request to remove some of the obstacles in the way of radio news in Australia, the Gullett conference merely showed that, in 1939, the press still maintained firm residual rights over broadcasting. The conference itself had been called following strong protests from the newspapers at

14. The time of the major evening bulletin was always one of the most contentious issues between the ABC and the press. See Appendix B for a summary of the unsigned agreements between the ABC and the press for the supply of Australian news and of the major areas of dispute. Appendix C is a similar setting out of the agreements for the supply of overseas cable news.

15. Hereinafter called ANC. The three Sydney newspapers broke away from ANC in May 1940. They rejoined in February 1941, and from that date the organisation became known as the Australian Newspaper Proprietors; Association (hereinafter called ANPA).

16. Hereinafter called AAP.

17. AAP was formed in 1935. It took over contracts which the ABC had formerly had with its predecessor, the Australian Press Association.
their exclusion from a meeting in Canberra on 4 September, the day after Chamberlain declared war on Germany, at which the Government, the armed forces and the Post Office reached agreement with the ABC and the commercial stations on a new extended schedule of news broadcasts. The Government apologised for this omission and the Gullett conference was an acknowledgement that there could be no revised news schedules without the approval of the suppliers, ANC and AAP.

It was recognised therefore that news bulletin times and their durations were still subject to agreement with ANC as regards Australian news, and with AAP for its cabled news. News from AAP was still subject to the restriction that it could not be broadcast until after publication, although the Gullett conference removed barriers on repeats. The conference also did not challenge AAP's contention that it had the Australian rights to Reuters' news which was included in BBC news broadcasts on the Empire Service. This had the effect of making AAP permission necessary for the rebroadcasting of BBC news.

Further, the ANC insisted that it must be the sole source of Australian news for the ABC. It would not permit the establishment of a supplementary service by the ABC, by which the Commission could gather news additional to that taken from the newspapers. If the ABC were to set up such a service, it could no longer take news from ANC members. This became a major issue in the relations between the ABC and the press after May 1939, when the Commission, at the suggestion of the Lyons Government, put a permanent news correspondent in Canberra to supply a coverage of Governmental and Parliamentary affairs. 18 The newspapers

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18. The man appointed was the well-known Parliamentary correspondent, Warren Denning, who had been reporting events from the capital since 1929. As one of Dixon's key personnel, Denning played a leading role in events before and after the creation of the ABC's independent news service. He served in Sydney, Brisbane, and Hobart before retiring as ABC's Cadet Counsellor in 1971. He died in 1975.
reluctantly went along with this arrangement, but were determined that the principle would not be extended to allow for other correspondents. The Commission thus obtained an independent factual cover of events in Canberra on which it increasingly relied.

The Commission had even earlier than this acquired a taste for obtaining its own independent coverages. In 1936 it had obtained its own cabled cover of the abdication crisis through its London office. Of this Dixon says:

> these messages enabled us to give much later information than appeared in the afternoon papers; and public reaction was so strongly in favour of this that I felt that we must eventually break the hold of the newspapers on overseas news and establish our own service.  

A weekend cable service was arranged from London from December 1937. Earlier the same year a weekend cover of the Sino-Japanese war was organised. A regular service of cabled news was arranged from London on 19 September 1939, the day after the Soviet Union invaded Poland. "Thus was laid the foundation of the Commission's new overseas news service."  

So successful were these overseas arrangements that by December 1939, the ABC found the BBC, the British Official Wireless news, and its own cable service were quite adequately covering overseas developments. It therefore decided to dispense with the AAP service. All that had to be sorted out was the question of payment to AAP for the right to rebroadcast bulletins from the BBC. This was a complex and controversial

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19. The ABC's agreement with the AAP did not preclude it obtaining additional news of its own from overseas.


22. From April 1940.
matter which will be examined in greater detail in a following section.

By mid-1940, the ABC had established an embryonic news service of its own. It was proud of its independence of AAP in securing overseas news and was very conscious that its listeners appreciated the faster service. "It was then no longer handicapped in having to keep back overseas news until it had appeared in the newspapers." It was independent of the newspapers in its news of the war effort from Canberra, and basking in the plaudits of the politicians for its coverage. Although it was dependent on the newspapers for all other Australian news, from 1937 onwards it had made a small but important step in collecting news of its own for Sunday evening bulletins because of the absence of Sunday newspapers. Adding to its feeling of increasing self-assuredness was the developing professionalism of its sub-editors. In its annual report for the year ended 30 June 1940 the Commission said:

"the increasing importance of news session has brought a revolution in the scope and methods of presentation of news ... Since [1936] the necessity for special writing for broadcasting has been increasingly recognised, and the news staffs have been progressively strengthened and enlarged". In other words, the sub-editors were learning to write for the voice and not the eye. The days of reading direct from newspaper clippings were disappearing.

It was therefore becoming more and more irksome that its expansion and growing independence were severely curtailed by the restrictions of its agreement with ANC. In 1940, it was not so much a question of seeking more bulletins and more suitable times for programming them. This had


temporarily been resolved by the Gullett conference. It was more a question of whether the newspapers should have any rights at all in determining the output of the news service and in imposing limitations on the expansion of that service. It was a question of the proper relationship between the news service of the national broadcasting instrumentality and a group of newspapers which between them provided the only source of news in Australia. By this time, that relationship had become bitter and the protagonists had taken irreconcilable positions. In neither Britain or the United States had such an impasse been reached between radio news and the press. The reasons lie in the different paths of development taken by radio and the press in Australia.

The Press and the ABC

(i) Incompatibility

One major difference in the Australian situation compared with that in Britain and the United States will be immediately apparent. There was no internal domestic newsagency in Australia which could adequately supply the ABC and commercial stations with a national news cover of basic events. Only the newspapers could supply Australian news. AAP was an agency but supplied only overseas news. Australia, in fact, seems to be in a unique position in this respect. Some newspaper executives believe Australia is the only country in the world where standard news rounds, such as shipping, law courts, police, are covered.

25. There were several small newsagencies at this time which were independent, such as Australian United Press (hereinafter referred to as AUP), Utting's News Service and the Country Press. They specialised in servicing country newspapers. AUP briefly provided a back-up service for the ABC, from Canberra August 1944-January 1945. This is dealt with in Chapter 2.

26. AAP began a service from Canberra on 15 November 1944.
by individual newspapers and not by national news-agencies. The reason is that the Australian Journalists' Association has always been strongly opposed to their establishment, because, in its view, such a development would mean fewer jobs for members. 27

The news-agencies came into being to supply a non-stop coverage to newspapers, thus giving them the opportunity to provide 'special' covers of the most significant events, and conserve their manpower. Because the newspapers they served embraced many different editorial viewpoints, the agencies provided a neutral service of "objective news". Thus was born a new journalistic ideology. "The wire services conjured into being a race of neutral journalists in order that news could be sold to papers of differing political persuasions." 28 Although agencies are cooperatively owned by newspapers, the 'neutrality' of their coverage was widely accepted as such, at least until the recent UNESCO and Third World critique of them, not relevant to this thesis.

The ABC therefore, like the commercials, was forced to take its domestic news from newspapers. Smith points out that all broadcasting organisations have heavy pressure on them to be 'objective' in their news reporting, because of their vulnerability in relation to governments, being dependent on official sanction for licences, and in some cases, finance. It is in their news reporting that broadcasters can most easily incur official disapproval. Although newsmen everywhere share the same ideals, these ideals are in turn shaped by the organisations in which they work. Caution has been the keynote of broadcast news because of the constant struggle for survival which the broadcasters have had with governments. In addition, the highly selective and processed nature of

27. This information is based on my interview with R.A. Henderson on 10 February 1976.

broadcast news gives it a very important role to play as far as its audience is concerned. Its selection of the most important news of the day in the short time at its disposal has to be highly tuned to society's needs and also the needs of the organisation. The wrath of each can be easily incurred. In fact, Smith argues that broadcasting became a severely limiting factor on the press's freedom of action. By the end of the second world war, it was radio's ideas on the 'social responsibility' of news reporting that were becoming dominant, and the old ideas of press freedom were being modified as a result.

It is clear therefore that the 'neutrality' of broadcast news is most certainly better served by the 'neutral' wire services, than it is by the newspapers themselves. The fact that one satisfies the other's needs was well illustrated by the ultimate dependence of agencies on broadcasting stations as their main source of revenue. Chester said, in 1949: "it was observed that radio is now outstripping newspapers as the source of new customers for the wire services and that without the revenue provided by radio subscribers, the AP, UP and INS would have to curtail their activities or increase assessments on newspapers". 29

There is a heavy onus on the news broadcasts of public broadcasting organisations to be even more 'objective' than their commercial counterparts. Because they are directly responsible either to government or to parliament, their relationship to the political community is more delicately balanced and more crucial to their survival. They are much more frequently the subject of parliamentary examination. For the public broadcasting organisation particularly, news is the most vulnerable of its products. Its journalists have superimposed on the profession's code of impartiality and objectivity an additional and stricter code of values.

which is closely linked to the defined purpose of the organisation and for which it is accountable. Thus the Ullswater Committee report on the BBC stressed that the BBC should not have any editorial opinion of its own and that: "it is ... of the utmost importance that the news distributed by the BBC should be a fair selection of items impartially presented". 30 Similarly the Chairman of the ABC, Richard Boyer, assured the PSCB that the Commission's news service was actuated by the principle of being objective and dispassionate, highly reliable and independent of any community group. 31

The newspapers, on which the ABC had to rely for much of its news in the 'thirties, did not supply a special service for broadcasting, as the agencies did for periods in the United States and Britain. The Commission took the material from the pages of the newspapers. The material from the newspaper's printed page was regarded as being most susceptible to 'coloration' in line with the newspaper's own editorial viewpoint. Also the Commission was dependent for its supply of news on newspaper edition times. There was no arrangement for the Commission to be supplied with important news between editions, particularly overnight. In Dixon's words, the result was that:

listeners were not slow to note this apparent lack of enterprise on our part and frequently telephoned the news department to demand better service. It was useless to explain that we had no reporting staff and were bound not to compete with the newspapers - such excuses merely added to their wrath. 32

An agency, of course, could have kept up a continuous supply of material by teleprinter machine.

32. Dixon, ABC, p.22.
Clearly, here was a situation in which both the kind of material available, and the method by which it was supplied, did not suit the needs of the Commission. The situation of incompatibility was worsened further by widespread and deeply held views in the community about the nature of the Australian press which highlighted the incongruity of the relationship between the two. That view was that a few newspaper proprietors had secured a stranglehold on the dissemination of news to the public and were using this to promote their own views on national issues. Because of a similarity of interests, they were beginning to represent a monopoly. The increasing number of radio stations coming under the control of the newspapers added to this impression. Members on both sides of the House in Canberra, shared this view in the 'thirties which gave it added credibility. The most famous espousal of this viewpoint occurred in 1935 when the conservative Minister for Defence, Archdale Parkhill, attacked what he called a growing monopoly of newspapers and broadcasting "which, in combination, constitute a danger that this Parliament cannot view with equanimity, and steps should be taken to deal with it". 33 He criticised the fact that AAP had become the sole source of overseas news in Australia and also the restrictions imposed by the press on the broadcasting of news by the ABC. He saw the danger, as others did, that the ABC might become, through its dependence on the press, another vehicle for promoting newspaper views. He wanted an enquiry into "this monopoly which is being established by these newspapers and the exactions they are endeavouring to impose upon the Australian Broadcasting Commission in regard to the people's stations". 34 Frank Dixon had similar views at this

34. Ibid. p.2369.
time. "What the papers wanted then . . . is the power and influence which comes from being able to dictate what the people as a whole hear and read." Dixon had had first hand experience of the monopolistic tendencies of the newspapers. As Editor of the Maitland Mercury, he had tried to increase the circulation of his newspaper in nearby towns which had been traditionally supplied by the Newcastle Sun, part of the Associated Newspapers group. In Scone, a newsagent who took the Maitland paper was immediately told that all Associated Newspapers' productions would be taken from him if he persisted. The newsagent persisted and the ban was imposed. Dixon immediately took out a full page advertisement in the Scone Advocate urging the public to support their local newsagent in the dispute. Associated Newspapers tried to sell their publications through local refreshment rooms and fruitshops but were eventually forced to give their business once more to the newsagent. On another occasion, when Dixon tried to beat the Sun onto the streets of other coalfields owns by arranging for delivery by car instead of by train, the Editor of the Sun phoned one of the Mercury's directors and urged him to stop Dixon from wasting the Company's money. Another time, Dixon despatched boys to Newcastle to sell his papers outside the Sun's office, only to have them beaten up. It was these incidents which were recounted to the Commission by Dixon on 1936, when he was being interviewed for the post of first News Editor. They accorded very strongly with the views the Commission already had about the newspapers, after three years of argument in an endeavour to win greater freedom in terms of bulletin times and durations. Dixon's strong views coincided with the institutional viewpoint

35. Dixon, ABC, p.4.
36. Interview with Frank Dixon, 13 January 1976.
that the ABC had already arrived at and assured his appointment. That viewpoint was that the ABC had a responsibility to maintain a flow of news to the public in accordance with Clause 23 of the Broadcasting Act, and that it was improper for the newspaper owners to impose arbitrary restrictions which would prevent the Commission from doing this.

It was the failure of the Commission to fulfil the institutional role it saw for itself in news that lay at the root of the failure to reach agreement with the newspapers. It wanted 'objective' news but was forced to use a source that was widely regarded as biased and partial. It wanted accurate news, but found that it was criticised for repeating errors from the newspaper columns. It wanted to fulfil the increasing community demand for news, particularly to country listeners some of whom waited for considerable periods before receiving newspapers, but found that it could only broadcast at times which could not interfere with newspaper circulations. Even in overseas news, the one 'untainted' agency it took, AAP, was not able to satisfy the Commission's requirements because of the necessity for the material to appear in print before broadcast.

37. The Commission's views on the press were best expressed in the warning given by the Chairman W.J. Cleary to Prime Minister Lyons at their meeting on 14 December 1935. He told Lyons that the friendship professed for him by the Managing Director of the Herald and Weekly Times, Sir Keith Murdoch was not entirely disinterested. If Lyons got in the way of Murdoch's ambitions, he would experience Murdoch's anger. Cleary's record of their conversation continued "I said that I thought ... the Press were quite out of touch with public feeling, and overlooked the fact that the general public of all shades of political feeling were resentful of what everyone recognised to be a Press Combine, and the Government should not be misled by unfair newspaper criticism into thinking that this represented public opinion. He promptly admitted that this was true". "Chairman's Interview with the Prime Minister", Australian News, File No.1, Australian Archives. Murdoch had supported Lyons when he resigned from the Labor Party in 1931, and led the anti-Labor parties to victory in the same year.

38. Clause 23 read, "The Commission may collect in such manner as it thinks fit, news and information relating to current events in any part of the world and may subscribe to newsagencies".
The unsatisfactory nature of its news service at this period can be directly related to the rather precarious existence which the Commission enjoyed in the 'thirties. The Commission was using news provided by newspapers which both sides of the House viewed with suspicion. There was no certitude that the Commission would continue in the form in which it had been set up. Within a few years, the Lyons Government was considering obtaining an expert report on broadcasting control and policy. There was little sympathy for the concept of a Commission which had any marked degree of independence. Parkhill himself argued in the House for the Government to take over broadcasting. The Labor Party was vehemently in favour of the nationalisation of broadcasting. In the same debate, Curtin had supported Parkhill demanding that broadcasting became a publicly controlled utility, because:

it would be too dangerous to allow control to be exercised by this alliance of great newspapers and broadcasting stations which, by reason of the influence they can exert on the public mind, can not only, if they so desire, misrepresent public policy, but also so inflame public opinion as to make ordered government almost impossible.\textsuperscript{39}

Recognising that its news was satisfying neither the public nor the politicians, the two factors which are vital to the existence of a broadcasting institution, the Commission under its Chairman W.J. Cleary, adopted a policy designed to overcome this problem. It appealed for the support of both government and the public by adopting a stance of almost permanent confrontation with the newspaper proprietors, thus ventilating the differences that existed and making it clear that the reasons for the shortcomings lay elsewhere.

\textsuperscript{39. CPD, 3 December 1935, p.2369.}
There were two devices the Commission used in the furtherance of this policy. One was to infringe some of the more onerous clauses of the agreements. The other was the threat to set up its own news service.

(ii) The Breaking of the Agreements

The ABC deliberately breached the terms of the 'gentleman's agreement' with ANC by broadcasting more bulletins than it was allowed. Cleary told the Gibson Committee "when one is dealing with organizations which take a long time to come to terms, often the only way of obtaining results is to take the law into one's own hands. So the Commission began to edge up on the times of broadcasts". It took on the appearance of a studied campaign. Towards the end of 1935, for example, the ABC moved its news from 7.50 p.m. to 7.30 p.m., and after protests from ANC members promptly moved it back again. This followed a fierce dispute between the ABC and the newspapers over an agreement reached between the two parties at a conference in Melbourne on 3 October 1935. The meeting discussed terms for the extension of the unsigned agreement which had expired on 30 September after its term of three years. The Commission alleged that the ANC members present had agreed to a 7.30 p.m. bulletin, but after Sir Keith Murdoch, who was not present, had refused to accept it, they had all changed their minds and gone back on the agreement. ANC members who were at the meeting later denied they had ever accepted the Commission's proposal. The allegation of bad faith by the Commission worsened an already bad situation and the Commission's action in moving its news widened the rift. Cleary said of this incident "the Commission decided to keep within the law, having brought the matter to a head, so it promptly reverted to the 7.50 p.m. broadcast".

40. Evidence to the Gibson Committee (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1942), 10 July 1941, p.21.

41. Ibid., p.23.
The Commission also breached the terms of its unsigned agreement with the Australian Press Association, which continued after that Association became AAP in 1935. One of the first jobs Dixon had to do when he came to the Commission was to peruse the terms of the agreements with AAP and ANC. Dixon later said "I was shocked at the terms of the overseas news contract - it provided for the use of only two hundred words a day, one hour after publication, half to be taken from the morning papers and the balance from the evening press". Dixon persuaded Cleary that this point was somewhat ambiguous, failing to make clear whether these words were 'cablese' or as printed in the newspapers. The ABC accepted the wider interpretation. "The Commission did not feel itself to be bound to broadcast 200 words selected from a newspaper, so that part of the arrangement [with AAP] was running very loosely, although other provisions were adhered to strictly." This brought complaints from Sir Hugh Denison of Associated Newspapers, on behalf of AAP. In his evidence before the Gibson Committee A.W. Wynne, secretary and Australian Manager of AAP, was able to show fairly conclusively that the ABC had contrived its argument and Cleary must have been aware that the agreement specified 200 word summaries, not 200 cabled words. By January 1938, the Commission was using an average of over 1,500 words per day instead of the stipulated 200.

The distrust that this engendered gave rise to further allegations. The ABC General Manager, Charles Moses was believed by the press to have manipulated the conference of 4 September 1939. Moses, it was alleged, prepared the new schedule of news bulletins for approval by the military... 

42. Dixon, ABC, p.21.
43. W.J. Cleary, evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.30.
authorities, knowing that they breached the agreements, in terms of
the times of broadcast, and in supplying bulletins to the commercial
stations. Wynne claimed: "we were assured that Mr Moses himself,
submitted the recommended schedule to the conference, and that it was
not recommended by the military authorities".44

Following the Gullett Conference of 18 September 1939, the ABC
were again seen as being behind the breakdown that occurred in the
agreement over the rebroadcast of BBC bulletins. The Conference had
agreed that the rebroadcasts should be of 10 minutes duration. Within
days 2GB, 2SM and 2GZ were disregarding it and rebroadcasting them in
full for up to thirty minutes. Moses wrote to Wynne advising him that
the ABC would therefore do the same. In Wynne's view:

we did not regard Mr Moses' s letter ... as a very courteous
intimation or request, and we really summed it up as meaning
that the Commission had given the B class stations permission
to depart from the schedule without consulting us, and then
had immediately used that departure as an excuse for telling
us they proposed to do the same thing.45

Although Cleary professed that he had no foreknowledge of Moses's
action, and in fact claimed that he himself was responsible for ordering a
return to the original schedule, it was at this point that he saw an
excellent opportunity of using public opinion as an ally in a direct
frontal challenge to the newspapers. At a time when the Australian
public was anxious for news of the war, Cleary noted the outcry over
the fact that the bulletins were not broadcast in full. He believed that
the public blamed the press for this situation, and there was probably
much truth in this assumption because the Sydney Morning Herald felt
the situation so acutely that it published a long article defending its
position and blaming the Commission.46 It was correct in claiming that

44. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 21 October 1941, p.327.
45. Ibid., p.330.
46. 30 November 1939.
Cleary had declined an offer to negotiate for the longer duration. The ABC and the BBC believed, at this time, that the broadcasts should be freely available, and questioned AAP's right to decide otherwise. AAP claimed it was able to restrict the broadcasts, because it held Australian rights to the Reuters's material contained in them. If the ABC had negotiated a fee for the additional five minutes it was tantamount to acknowledging AAP's claim, and the Commission contested this on both legal and moral grounds. The correspondence between the ABC and AAP and the evidence given later to the Gibson Committee about this dispute suggest strongly that it was in Cleary's interests to go along with the ten minute BBC broadcasts for as long as it suited him, that is, until both the Government and the public had rallied to the Commission's cause and forced AAP to allow full broadcasts without fee, thus nullifying the claims they had to copyright. Cleary believed, as did others, that for AAP to ask for any fee at all for full BBC broadcasts in wartime was indefensible.

The newspapers of course believed strongly that the ABC was behind the campaign of vilification on this matter. Writing to Cleary, Sir Keith Murdoch in his capacity as Chairman of AAP said:

was it fair of you or your colleagues to charge the newspapers, or permit them to be charged, with having prevented the Commission from rebroadcasting Daventry [BBC] sessions at greater length? Would it not have been fair to admit and state publicly what is clear in your correspondence - and is restated in your letter under reply - that you did not desire a variation in the schedule...47

On 4 December 1939, the Commission played its trump card. It wrote to the Postmaster-General, E.J. Harrison, advising that as well as dispensing with the AAP service, it proposed to use the BBC bulletins in full.

This will oblige the AAP to say whether it claims the right to prevent us from using these bulletins, and also whether it will endeavour to make us pay for the right now that we propose to dispense with the AAP cable service and discontinue the payment for that service.48

47. Murdoch to Cleary, 15 December 1939, Australian Archives, AAP File No.2, SP314, B5, S1.
48. Memo Cleary to Harrison, Australian Archives, AAP File No.2, SP314, B5, S1.
Cleary once again confirmed the brinkmanship principles that motivated him when he later told the Gibson Committee:

at the outbreak of war Australian Associated Press itself told the Government that it would waive its rights to the British Broadcasting Corporation bulletins so that they could be re-broadcast free of charge. In view of public outcry AAP eventually fulfilled that promise. The Commission had decided to clear the air ... It decided to dispense with AAP cable news, and ascertain whether, in fact, the BBC bulletins could be re-broadcast free of charge or not. It did so, and found that the bulletins were not free of charge.

His subsequent letter to AAP "was to draw [its] fire". 49

Despite apparent confirmation of the Commission's view that AAP did not hold rights which could prevent BBC rebroadcasts, both from the BBC itself and from the Attorney-General's Department, AAP was eventually, after many months, able to provide documentary evidence to validate its claim that the Reuter's agreement with the BBC provided that the Corporation had the right to rebroadcast in Australia only if AAP did not lodge an objection. The Commission, from April 1940, paid AAP £3,000 per annum for the BBC bulletins, recouping half of this from the commercials which took them also. The Commission recognised that "legally, the company would have been able to prevent the Commission from broadcasting the bulletins without making payment". 50

Cleary, however, wanted to keep on fighting, maintaining that no objection had ever been raised by AAP with the BBC, and that it would not dare to do so because this would mean that Australia would be the only country in the world unable to rebroadcast BBC bulletins. But he claimed that he needed Government support and failed to get it. Cleary was obviously upset by the outcome. It added substantially to a mood of disenchantment with Canberra, which was paramount when the decision was made in 1942 to make a major shift in news policy, a point to be elaborated later.

49. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.34.
50. Ibid., p.37.
(iii) The Threat to Establish an Independent News Service

As it tried to evade or challenge the restrictions imposed on its news service by its unsigned agreements with the press, the Commission simultaneously spoke of collecting its own news if the necessity arose. To some extent this appears to be bluff, but behind it all was the distinct possibility, in the Commission's eyes, that the Government might be sufficiently sympathetic and sufficiently hostile to the press, to provide the financial backing necessary for it to do this.

Pamela Mitchell has pointed out that the origins of these moves are as old if not older than the Commission itself. The Commission's predecessor, the Australian Broadcasting Company, the private company formed to run the national service of A class stations under the Bruce-Page legislation of 1928, had trouble with newspaper restrictions on the use of news and in its Annual Report of 1930 it made it plain that it was considering embarking upon a competitive service. At the first conference between the ANC and the ABC on 8 July 1932, the first Commission Chairman, Charles Lloyd Jones, stated "the Commission must retain the right of building from other sources whatever additional news may be necessary to complete their service". 51

On 1 October 1932, J.P. Williams, the first General Manager of the ABC wrote to H.P. Brown, Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, outlining the negotiations which had led to the first agreement with ANC in September. He described the first demands of the press and their restrictions as producing a hopeless situation:

51. Quoted by Delamore McCay, Evidence, Gibson Committee, 20 October 1941, p.301. There is no reference to this statement in ABC files.
they were only forcing us into competition. I told them that with my own press knowledge I could start immediately with a service of our own in all States, which would be considerably stronger than the restricted news which they were permitting us to use. This apparently had its effect as the Press again sought a conference.52

Neither Cleary nor Dixon therefore were the architects of either the policy of trying to force concessions from the press, or of the policy of independent news collection. These were institutional attitudes, already strongly held, before either came to the Commission. Each added the particular thrust of his personality and experience to these policies; Cleary, the pugnacious administrator, who as Chief Commissioner of N.S.W. Railways, had clashed with J.T. Lang, the State Premier, and Dixon, the journalist with thirty years experience which had revealed to him the evils of newspaper monopolies.

From the days of its inception, the Commission had been encouraged in its attitudes by influential members of Parliament in Canberra. Mr (later Senator) W.G. Gibson, the former Postmaster-General, and later Chairman of the Gibson Committee, told the House in the debate on the Broadcasting Bill:

> the news service provided at present over the wireless is not so satisfactory as it might be ... The Commission ought to be able to take steps to improve the news service. If the newspapers are not prepared to give a better service, the Commission might establish its own news service for the benefit of licence-holders.53

It is indeed possible that the Commission looked for a lead from Canberra as it argued with the newspapers. This certainly appears to be the case in 1935, the year of real crisis in the relationship. Early in that year, the press complained of breaches of the agreement by the ABC.

52. Australian Archives, Australian News, File No.1, SP314, B5, S1.
53. CPD, 10 March 1932, p.965.
Following the bitter dispute over whether or not an agreement had been reached on earlier evening bulletin times at the conference between the Commission and the ANC on 3 October, the Commission further charged the ANC with allowing the commercial stations preferential treatment. The ABC gave the ANC notice that the agreement with ANC would be terminated unless its conditions were accepted. These included an Australian news bulletin at 7.30 p.m. and the tightening up of restrictions on the commercial stations. The Commission at first said it would terminate the arrangements with ANC on 30 November, but later deferred this to 31 December, after which date it said it would collect its news independently and free of present restrictions.

This was the year in which the Government had reacted strongly against the growing monopoly control of commercial broadcasting and brought in regulations to prevent it. The press, which had taken over a large number of stations up to this point were particularly affected and launched an attack on the Government claiming that it was fearful of the commercials stations overshadowing the ABC. Curnow suggests that the Postmaster-General's Department believed that a monopoly

54. See p. 39.
controlled for example by the press, could threaten the Department itself. Although not all members on the Government side supported the new regulations, and they were eventually watered down, a great deal of resentment against the growing power of the press was evident, and it was in this context that Parkhill made his attack in the House. It is highly probable that the ABC was emboldened by events in Canberra to make its move.

Having done so, the Commission obtained support in Canberra from two sources. From H.P. Brown, Moses received an assurance that the Postmaster-General intended to ask for press rates for overseas and local cables to be applied to the ABC "so that, if the necessity arose, it would be able to organize its news service".\(^{56}\) Having received this advice, the Commission immediately wrote to the ANC, confirming its decision to terminate. The second gesture of support came from Archdale Parkhill himself. A week after his speech in Parliament, Parkhill wrote to Cleary enclosing a copy of the schedule he had tabled in the House, listing multiple interests in commercial broadcasting stations as at 1 November 1935.\(^{57}\) Parkhill said:

> if the Broadcasting Commission were to arrange its own cable service and collect its own news, it would be conferring a tremendous benefit on the public and provide a national service in regard to communications of inestimable value.\(^{58}\)

Parkhill pointed out that AWA had interests in twelve stations and the Melbourne Herald group in eleven.

But at a higher governmental level the ABC was disappointed. The Postmaster-General, Senator A.J. McLachlan, did not respond favourably

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56. W.J. Cleary, Evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.25.
57. See CPD, 3 December 1935, pp.2365-7. It is reproduced as Appendix D.
58. Parkhill to Cleary, 10 December 1935, Australian Archives, Australian News, File No.1, SP314, Box 5 (Sl).
to Cleary's letter asking for press rates. Cleary believed the Government by this time did not want to side publicly with the ABC against the press. He later said:

we took a stand against an organization that was very much more powerful than our organization, and which had means of obtaining publicity for its own views which we would not use over the air, and we also made representations to the Minister, in whose hands the matter lay, for some relief, which would not have been a privilege, but which merely would have brought us into line with other organizations. We failed to get that relief.

Both Parkhill and Cleary approached the Prime Minister J.A. Lyons in mid-December to put the ABC's case in the dispute. Cleary followed up his interview with a letter. Versions of Lyons's part in what subsequently followed differ. According to Cleary the Prime Minister told him he would not intervene. According to Sir Keith Murdoch, the Prime Minister personally asked him to move the evening news time in accordance with the Commission's wishes.

Mr Lyons approached me and said that he would like a settlement of the evening news question ... Mr Lyons asked us in a very nice way to try broadcasting the news on the air at 7.25 p.m. and we agreed to do it. We are not unreasonable people.

Cleary believed that A.H. Stuart of the Sydney Morning Herald put pressure on other members of the ANC to bring about a settlement. However, Delamore McCay, secretary of the ANPA, was able to quote from letters from Murdoch in his evidence before the Gibson Committee, and the extracts show clearly that, in addition to a compromise by Cleary, "it

59. Press rates for overseas communications were not granted until January 1939, and for internal communications, not until May 1940.
60. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.24.
was Sir Keith Murdoch who initiated the move which resulted in the
rapprochement and ended the deadlock." Lyons therefore was
instrumental in bringing the two parties together again in agreement,
but it is equally clear that the proposition of the Commission running
its own news service did not appeal to him.

From this point on, the Commission never again took such a hard
line in threatening to sever contacts with ANC. Only in 1941,
did it make a similar threat again, and that was clearly a bargaining
ploy designed to put pressure on the ANPA when continuing negotiations
on agreement had reached a stalemate. It would be very easy to
interpret the Commission's stance in 1935 also purely as tactics
designed to call their opponents' bluff. Cleary made a significant


63. Cleary's record of his interview with Lyons shows that the Prime
Minister was only interested in getting the parties together again.
There was no discussion of the implications of having an independent
service. See "Chairman's Interview with the Prime Minister", 14 December
It is not clear precisely when Lyons approached Murdoch, or when
Murdoch changed his mind over the evening news broadcast. As the
talks of 23-24 January 1936 between ABC and ANC also broke down
over this issue, the new initiatives must have taken place between
that time and 12 May of the same year, when Cleary wrote to Holtz
in such a manner as to imply this was no longer a matter of
dispute. Holtz in his replies also did not refer to the question
and suggested he draw up an agreement on the lines agreed upon.
This was the agreement which eventually took effect from July
1938 (see Appendix B). Cleary wrote to Parkhill, Lyons and
McLachlan after the breakdown in January, and it appears therefore
that Lyons took action soon afterwards. See Cleary to Parkhill,
Cleary to McLachlan, Cleary to Lyons, all 4 February 1936;
Cleary to Holtz, 12 May 1936; Holtz to Cleary, 16 June 1936;
Holtz to Cleary, 15 July 1936. Australian Archives, Australian
News, File No.1.

64. At the Commission meeting of 26 February 1941 it was resolved that
"the ANC be informed that the Commission holds itself free to
supplement the present services, and that furthermore, the Commission
is not prepared to consider the present arrangement binding, pending
their consideration, for a longer period than three months".
statement which reveals the Commission's thinking on this point.

"The Commission [he told the Gibson Committee] would have had great difficulty in running an independent service at a few minutes' notice, but it believed that if it began to respond to pressure unfairly applied, the whole service would soon be sold out ... It did not dare to hope that it would be able to put on an effective service in three weeks, but if the necessity had arisen it would have told the listeners just how it had been forced into difficulties and thrown itself on their mercy as to whether they should put up with a poor service for some time in order to make the future secure.65

This was the earliest crisis in which the ABC was involved, and the period of relative calm in the relations with the press which followed up to 1939 shows that it had repercussions. Smith says:

every ... crisis over what broadcasters should do in a given historical moment has been intensified by the knowledge that the whole central institution would be irrevocably damaged or sustained by the decision over the contents of a programme. The entire history of broadcasting is a history of these crises, each causing a wave of special caution, sometimes lasting for years, inside the organisation.66

Curnow comments that the Commission's news negotiations in the 'thirties were anomalous when compared to the care taken in the relations with other outside organisations. Clearly the Commission saw extreme danger in its failure to provide what it saw as an adequate news service. It had very little control at all over its news sources and yet it recognised that these broadcasts were the most vulnerable section of its output.

News can damage a broadcasting organisation politically and financially. It should reflect the institution's values, and those values in turn are based on the values of the society in which it was founded. In order to stay in business, the broadcasting organisation has to have the support of the political community in which it

65. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.25.
operates and the society which it serves. It has to reach a fine point of balance between the two. Its output should not impair its survival. If news does not accord with the institution's own views of the environment in which it has to operate, there are obvious problems. The institutional view is that its news must be 'objective', that the selection of news items should be "an internalisation of the broadcasting organisation's ... sense of political realities. It expresses, it almost ritualises, the organisation's own picture of the society to which it is broadcasting". 67 However, if the organisation has virtually no control over its news, it does not represent the institution's values but only those of the source from which it comes. The institution runs the risk of damaging its relationships with those on whom it depends for survival by using it. If the news is suspect, slanted, biased, coloured, this is tantamount to breaking the rules under which it was set up and its very existence is threatened.

So it was with the ABC in 1935 and Cleary obviously was aware that the news did not fit in with the organisation's concept of its role in Australian society. The content was dangerous to the ABC politically, because of the strong groundswell of opinion against the press which provided it, both from the Government which was alarmed at the monopolistic tendencies of the press, and the Opposition which simply saw newspapers as anti-Labor. And its broadcast times and the fact that the material was dependent on newspaper edition times, gave rise to growing criticism from the public. The Commission had only one journalist at this time so there was no control even at the editing stage. Selection by announcers was haphazard. Here was Cleary's

67. Smith, Shadow, p.98.
dilemma. He had to demonstrate to the political community at large that the ABC was not responsible for the product which brought it most criticism. Yet he had little bargaining leverage having no news organisation, and having failed to win significant Government support. There was as yet no concept of supplementing the news from the press sources. A supplementary role for broadcasting journalists was only just beginning to emerge overseas and in a very limited and experimental way. It was a matter of taking a service from the newspaper groupings which controlled the ANC and AAP or providing a completely separate service. There was real purpose in the Commission's stand, but it can hardly have expected any other outcome.

From this point, there was a change in tactics. The goal of greater news independence was not lost sight of, but the approach to it would be more gradual. A small news staff would be formed which would be the nucleus of a news service, and which would in the meantime editorially select and rewrite the newspaper material.

(iv) The Right to Supplement

"Members of the Executive" wrote Delamore McCay of ANPA to Cleary in 1940:

would be prepared to discuss sympathetically the question of some elasticity in the duration of news sessions and other minor adjustments suggested by the Commission, and in their turn they would ask the Commission to give serious consideration to a plan whereby its own news-gathering activities would be confined to the Federal Roundsman [Denning]. Any extension of this 'supplementing' has caused, and seems bound to cause, an intrusion of the competitive aspect which the newspapers have never conceived to be a policy or an objective of the Commission. Yet they feel that the result is inescapable, if no definite bound is set to the Commission's direct news-gathering.68

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68. McCay to Cleary, 16 August 1940, Australian Archives, Australian News, File No.2. SP314, B5 (S1).
From 1939 onwards the question of the ABC supplementing the news it took from the newspapers further complicated the relationship between the two and effectively prevented the signing of an agreement. This impasse was one of the major problems taken up by the Gibson Committee in 1941-42. 'Supplementing' had not been mentioned in the verbal agreements and the negotiations up to this point, but the appointment of Denning in Canberra alarmed the press. It has already been pointed out that the question of radio newsmen 'supplementing' agency news was no longer an issue in Britain and the United States at this time. Although the volume and impact of this supplementary material alarmed the British press during the war, the press did not attempt to stop it and could not have done so if they had tried. In the U.S. agencies and newspapers had also come to terms with radio in both areas and both settled down to profit from the increasing demand for news as the European crisis worsened. Why was it therefore, that the Australian press saw itself threatened by the Commission's newsgathering and made every effort to stop it?

One answer to this question lies in the nature of the 'supplementary' service which the Commission embarked upon which was unlike those overseas, and allied with this, its concept of what kind of news service it should have. The Commission was obviously influenced in these matters by the man it appointed in 1936 as its 'news expert' - Frank Dixon.

Dixon wrote to Cleary, whom he had supported in his editorial column in the Maitland Mercury, towards the end of 1935, at the height of Cleary's first battle with the press, and at a time when the Commission had already issued its ultimatum, saying it would collect its news independently. Dixon suggested that the ABC set up its own news service, just at the time when the Commission was threatening to do this. Dixon

says Cleary told him at his first interview, "it would be my task to lay the foundation of a service that would enable [the Commission] to carry on if the papers forbade the use of their material". Dixon assured the Commission that this could be done.

I told them ... that I felt the time had come when the Commission with its means of getting instant news to the people, should set up its own news-gathering organisation, collect and prepare its own news and broadcast it to listeners all over Australia at times that were known to be best suited to the listening habits of the people ... there was no mystery about supplying a news service. It merely meant money and staff.

Dixon was told he was expected to advise the Commission how it should act in the event of a showdown.

Although Dixon suggests strongly that it was he who suggested an independent service, the evidence is to the contrary. The Commission had already taken its line on this. In appointing Dixon, it was taking the first steps in this direction but relied on him for guidance from that point on. Although he was unquestionably strongly opposed to the big newspaper monopolies, Dixon had in fact an open mind about the type of service the Commission should adopt. In February 1936, he wrote to Moses suggesting three possibilities. These were: (a) the supplementation of the existing newspaper material; (b) an independent coverage of capital cities with additional material to be supplied by country newspapers; and (c) a service from a newsagency. (c) was his recommendation and he particularly suggested Australian United Press.

70. Dixon, ABC, p.9.
71. Interview with Dixon, 13 January 1976.
72. Dixon to Moses, 18 February 1936, "News", R17/6/4. The full text is reproduced as Appendix E.
but it was small in size and not geared to supplying a national coverage. Dixon appears to have had the idea that the Commission, by subscribing to it, could have built it up into a genuine national agency but this did not eventuate. There is no record of any approach to AUP until 1944 when the Commission decided to take the agency coverage from Canberra for a trial period of three months, but was forced to terminate the agreement under pressure from the Labor Government. Dixon says the contract was Denning's idea, but there is a clear indication in correspondence that Dixon admired AUP and late in the same year gained Moses's approval to approach it to provide a full comprehensive service. AUP said however that they could not do so. Had an 'objective' agency cover of internal events been available in the 'thirties, it would certainly have changed the direction of ABC news policy by giving the service a basic acceptable cover, while allowing it to supplement it in time in its own way. Overseas, in this situation, that supplementation had taken the form of broadcast 'observer' reports from the spot, done on a selective basis. In the ABC it was not to be.

Dixon was obviously the first to put up the idea of supplementation to the Commission, but there is no indication of any early approval. By 'supplementation' it is clear that Dixon simply meant a separate cover of basic news, also obtained from the recognised 'sources'. This would bring about an improvement in the volume of news and would enable the Commission to be more flexible in broadcast times, because it would be able to use its own news when it wanted. The sources, such as Government departments, would be prevailed upon to give their news to the ABC at the same time as the newspapers. An extended news service could be built up in this way. Here is the origin of the ABC's competitive news stance which alarmed the press. News collection, using methods similar to newspapers, was embarked upon as a device to escape the
restrictions imposed by the press on bulletin times and durations and also to give the ABC coverage between edition times. To do this it was necessary to cover the same major rounds and in the same way. There was no concept of selectively supplementing in voice what the newspapers provided.

The concept of the voice reporter was not unknown to Dixon but he did not see a purpose for it. The more urgent task was to obtain an alternative, faster service. Dixon's chief interest and order of priorities are revealed in a letter he wrote to Moses in March 1936. He attached a clipping from the British Trade and professional magazine, The Newspaper World, saying that it indicated that the Commission was on the right track in considering setting up a fuller news service. The article said:

It cannot be denied that millions are now taking their news through the ear rather than through the eye. Enterprising young reporters and sub-editors with inspired vision of the future are practising voice production with the idea of becoming radio reporters, and I understand that news editors are to be approached with a view to ascertaining their reaction towards a reporter who also broadcasts.73

Dixon had underlined only the first sentence quoted, although it was the remainder that was novel and pointed in new directions.

It was the idea of the ABC news as an alternative newspaper that appealed to Dixon and he does not appear to have treated the microphone as a serious adjunct. It was the microphone that was used overseas to describe and explain, to add another dimension of personal experience.74 Its neglect by ABC News emphasised the highly factual

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73. See Dixon to Moses, 17 March 1936, R17/6/4. The article is from The Newspaper World (London, 1 February 1936).

74. For a good example of the heightened effect, see the transcript of a broadcast by Dimbleby, in Dimbleby, Dimbleby, p.86, describing what he saw during the Spanish Civil War.
nature of its service. Dixon in fact suggested to Moses when he joined the Commission in August 1936, that the ABC was just like a newspaper, and that the News Department ought to embrace all other departments, with the Editor in control. In Maitland, he said, the social reporter, the music reporter, the sporting reporter all worked directly to the Editor. Moses was not in favour. Dixon returned to the newspaper model frequently, and in 1938, when he proposed for the first time a national bulletin prepared in Sydney for relay, he called it "An Australian Newspaper".

The 'supplementation' of Australian news proceeded very slowly because of doubts whether the agreement would allow it. A correspondent was engaged in Darwin at the end of 1936, and at the end of the following year, an arrangement was made with the Canberra Times for a service of parliamentary news. As mentioned previously, Dixon instead concentrated his energies on the development of alternative sources of overseas news, which were allowed under the agreement with AAP. These, of course, were cabled accounts of major international events, in precisely the same form as the agencies supplied, though briefer. A faster service could be obtained this way because this material was not subject to the delays inherent with AAP material which had to appear in newspapers first. The success of this venture encouraged the adherence to the form that Dixon favoured - 'straight', edited, brief and 'factual'.

The Commission meanwhile continued to be worried about the effects of its news on the politicians in Canberra. In Cleary's words:

> the Commission had been feeling the need for some direct representation at Canberra, because important events were occurring at the heart of politics, and we were uneasy about the freedom from unconscious bias of newspaper reports from Canberra.75

75. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.25.
When Lyons claimed the press had misrepresented him in March 1939, and asked the Commission to appoint a representative in Canberra, Dixon for the first time was able to get a full flow of reports from Government departments and from Parliament in direct competition with the press. From May 1939 when he was appointed, the Commission relied less and less on newspapers for news from Canberra. So successful was Denning, in satisfying the Commission's requirements that it was immediately seen as a concentrated attack on the news field by the newspapers and a development that could go no further. The impact of Denning can be gauged from a report submitted to the Acting General Manager, T.W. Bearup, by Dixon in August 1941. Of sixty-five Australian stories claimed to be run first by the ABC, Denning was responsible for at least two-thirds, perhaps more, because the sources are not obvious in every case. 76 Clearly, with its own man in Canberra, the Commission gave news from the capital prominence. That news consisted of Government or party statements or announcements, or military communiqués.

It was the Commission's own news and it accorded with its ideas of the political realities of survival and with which it felt much happier and more confident. Dixon had instructed Denning that he wanted "a summary of every important story that broke at Canberra, irrespective of the day or time". At this time:

the value of independent cover of events had been demonstrated to the Commission; and there were so many official statements being issued by the Commonwealth Government that the ABC's Canberra representative Warren Denning, was able to supply us with much interesting material. 77

76. Dixon to Bearup, 20 August 1941, "General Manager", SP286, Bundle 6. See Appendix F.

77. Dixon, ABC, p.32.
This appears to have been Denning's role; the fast, accurate, impartial summarising of official statements. Cleary in fact refers to the bulletin of news from Canberra as 'the Canberra statement'. The newspapers called him a roundsman. Although he also wrote commentaries, Denning's news work was that of a newspaperman. He did not broadcast in the bulletins. The supplementary task undertaken by the Commission's first staff reporter was therefore the daily political round which meant he covered every story of significance side by side with the other newspapermen. In fact, it was of course, not a supplementary service, but an alternative one, and was immediately seen as such by the press. Denning showed for the first time in Australia that, if it embarks on a competitive role, radio can usually beat the press in getting news to the public, given equal opportunities.

Getting news first enhanced the Commission's reputation in the eyes of the public. Moses acknowledged this several years later when he said "it does not enhance the Commission's prestige if the news sessions are a long way behind the news. We must be right up to date. We must be in front of the newspapers if possible".78 The Commission was not slow to advertise its new found prowess. In the programme for an orchestral concert in Melbourne a page was devoted to listing nine stories which the ABC had been first to bring to the Australian public. This was proof, according to Lloyd Dumas, the Managing Director of the Adelaide Advertiser, that the Commission's "object is not only to give the news to the public, but also to beat the newspapers and to establish the Commission as the prime channel for the dissemination of news in Australia".79

78. Summary of Evidence to the PSCB 1943-44 (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1944), 14 January 1944, p.124.
The Commission immediately found its position strengthened in Canberra. In May 1939, the same month he took up his appointment, Denning reported to Dixon that the Postmaster-General, E.J. Harrison, had taken a special interest in the Canberra news. "You will be interested to know that every Minister with whom I have discussed the service has shown great enthusiasm for it, as well as private members and the Labor Leader, Mr Curtin, and members of his party." There was another aspect of Denning's appointment which was important to the Commission. Through him, the Commission had on-the-spot access to the Government, and the reverse also applied. Denning was a valuable go-between throughout most of the war years. Of Denning's appointment Cleary later said:

we indicated [to the Government] that we should be glad to have a representative there for the purpose of maintaining direct contact with the Government and to make us independent of the press for our Canberra news, particularly ministerial statements that might not be published in the press.

Denning's appointment was a fait accompli which the press could do nothing about. The Commission added a journalist and a cadet to its Canberra staff in November 1940. But it could do little by way of providing a supplementary service elsewhere in Australia because of newspaper opposition. It had journalists in each state who mainly undertook sub-editing work, but also gathered news on Sundays. Occasionally local events were covered such as major bushfires. But the Commission was elsewhere frustrated. Dixon recounts that he sent a reporter to Parliament House in Sydney during a political crisis to ensure that the ABC's report was accurate, but the matter reached the ears of the newspaper proprietors and Dumas sent a telegram of protest to Moses, who told Dixon such 'breaches' should not occur again.

80. Denning to Dixon, 22 May 1939, "News Files", SP314, Box 1.
81. Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.108.
An excellent account of the task of the early newsmen is provided by R.H. Morrison, an announcer who joined the ABC in 1939 in Adelaide. Soon after he was transferred to the News and Publicity Department. His job was to go through the pages of the Advertiser, cut out news items, and stick them onto pieces of paper so that the announcer could read them. Later they found time to rewrite them.

We just cut out what we thought was suitable and that meant of course that in compliance with the early ideas the Commission had about news propriety we excluded all those sordid things which nowadays are part and parcel of any and every news service. We discriminated, choosing the weightier items, the cultural items and that sort of thing, clipped them out and then away they went for the given few minutes on the air.

Morrison later rose to become News Editor, South Australia.

From the moment the success of Denning was obvious the Commission saw this method of 'supplementation' of the newspaper stories as the answer to its protracted squabbles with the press. If the press could be persuaded to accept this gradual expansion of the ABC's news service, the Commission would no longer have to contemplate the expensive task of setting up a largely independent service. This would still require assistance from the Government, but with Denning relaying all Government statements, the Lyons Government seemed no longer concerned. In October 1939, Moses assured Dumas that "we do not propose to build up an independent news-gathering organisation".83

82. Transcript, ABC Archives recording.
83. Moses to Dumas, 19 October 1939, Australian Archives, Australian News, File No.2, SP314, B5 (S1).
In its support the Commission quoted the Ullswater Committee report into the BBC, which saw 'supplementation' as highly desirable. "We have considered, in a general sense, how the broadcast news service can best be safeguarded against the risk of extraneous influences", that report said.

It is in our view important that freedom of choice as to the sources of news should be maintained, and the Corporation should continue to supplement the service obtained from agencies by sending out its own correspondents and by drawing information from other authoritative sources.84

There is no indication that the Commission realised the different type of supplementation that the BBC indulged in at this point. If it did, it did not care to point it out.

The Commission moved cautiously because it was still unsure whether it had the power to supplement without breaching the agreements. It could not see why it should have the right to supplement in respect of overseas news and not Australian news. As the months went by, the Commission became more and more conscious of the value of its independent service from Hugo Jackson, who had been appointed as full-time correspondent in London in September 1939. In the first six months of 1940, Jackson was responsible for the ABC beating the newspapers with a succession of important stories, which included Finland's agreement to Russian peace terms; the resignation of the Daladier Government in France, the German invasion of Denmark and of Holland, the latter story being used by the ABC before the BBC had included it in its overseas service.

Throughout 1940, the ANC refused to countenance any extension of ABC news gathering in Australia. The agreement lapsed and was carried on on a monthly basis. The ABC offered to keep strictly to all other

84. Ullswater Committee Report, p.27, para.82.
restrictions if it was allowed to gather some of its own news but
this offer was refused. The ANC pressed the ABC for an explanation of
what it meant by 'supplementation', claiming it implied the setting up
of an independent news-gathering organisation, which the Commission had
said it did not want. The ABC would not be specific.

At a meeting in Melbourne on 25 February 1941, between the ABC
and ANPA, Cleary put the ABC's position.

In view of the remarkable developments that had occurred in
broadcasting in Australia, the Commission could not bind
itself for a long period not to extend its news-gathering
activities, but that if the newspapers were prepared to
continue their service, the Commission would rely on it
preponderantly, and would not establish a completely
independent service.85

It was as far as the Commission was prepared to go. When no agreement
eventuated, the Commission reverted to its stand in 1935 and once
more threatened to do without the newspaper monopolies.

This time, however, circumstances had put the Commission in a
weak position. A new Commission had been appointed in January 1940,
for a twelve month term only because of the Government's intention to
pass new broadcasting legislation. When, by January 1941, that had
not eventuated the Commission was asked to continue for a further six
months, in the expectation that the new bill would be brought in in
meantime. The Australian Broadcasting Commission Bill of Senator McLeay
was introduced on 19 March 1941, in the middle of the Commission's new
and vital round of negotiations with the press. It lapsed, and the
Commission was asked to stay in office for a further six months. As
this happened the setting up of the Gibson Committee was announced on
26 June 1941. Its terms of reference were to enquire and report upon
broadcasting within and from Australia, and particularly on the need
for any changes in existing legislation and practices, the adequacy of
the ABC and commercial stations, and the standard of the broadcasting

85. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 10 July 1941, p.28.
of news. Plainly in these shifting circumstances, and with the future of the Commission and of broadcasting generally rather cloudy, the Commission was in no position to press on with its challenge and the status quo continued until the Gibson Committee reached its conclusions.

One other event had occurred which also weakened the Commission's bargaining position with the press. An Act had been passed the previous year which had severely cut the ABC's revenue. Introduced by the Postmaster-General, H.V.C. Thorby, on 21 August 1940, the bill reduced the ABC allotment from licence fees from 12 shillings to 10 shillings. The cut was later severely criticised by the Gibson Committee because no effort had been made to secure information on the Commission's contractual obligations. Cleary believed the press played a big part in bringing this about, through a campaign in the Melbourne Listener In. He told the Gibson Committee bitterly "a simple way to subjugate a difficult Commission is to reduce its revenue, because even a stiff-backed Commission without revenue cannot do much good".

By mid-1941, the Commission was once again in a state of great uneasiness about its news service. As far as Australian news was concerned, it had not been able to advance beyond the point achieved in 1939 though the demands for news were increasing. In the year ending 30 June 1941, news totalled 20,179 hours of programme time, or 12.68 per cent of programme output. A year earlier the figures had been 14,218 or 9.49 per cent. Yet the Commission, for all the improvements, was

86. Ibid., p.29.
87. As a result of the agreement between the ABC and AAP of 15 April 1940, the ABC had the right to rebroadcast BBC bulletins in full. It terminated its old agreement with AAP for the supply of cable news at the same time, thus giving itself complete freedom in the broadcasting of overseas news, which henceforth it took from its own sources, BOW and the BBC. See Appendix C.
still heavily dependent on the newspapers. Some of its news it could stand behind, some it could not, and this was in wartime. Cleary was convinced that the newspapers' news was not straight. He said:

we felt that newspaper reports were coloured, either consciously or unconsciously, by selection, exclusion or otherwise. We felt that, while we did not want to set up a large newsgathering organization, we had to have some sort of check on the newspapers. 89

It was Cleary who emphasised the partial nature of the newspaper news columns. Dixon was always more concerned with the practical problems presented by them. Dixon's view was

however stern a newspaper may be in its insistence on accuracy, it cannot avoid at times printing incorrect information. A radio bulletin compiled from the newspapers will reflect these inaccuracies ... Much of the news in the papers is unsuitable for the air. 90

Once again the Commission was finding it difficult to maintain a satisfactory relationship with the Government and with its listeners. Its Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 1941 remarked upon the big increase in listener response in those critical times. Their sensitivity to what was broadcast was evident in the reactions the Commission received.

Under such circumstances, the maintenance of the confidence of the Australian public in their national stations by the presentation of contemporary news and comment which will be at once non-partisan in a political sense and yet indicative of national sentiment, has been a matter of more than usual difficulty. The Commission has, however, within the limits of its constitutional powers, striven to meet the situation with the impartiality which is required of it on the one hand, and, on the other, the necessity of acting as a forthright voice in a national emergency. 91

91. ABC, 9th Annual Report, p.4.
This was its way of saying that it found difficulty in maintaining its independence in the face of the government's wartime demands. It was even more essential in this context that its news should mirror the balance the Commission was trying to achieve between Government requirements and listener sensibilities. It was an institutional tightrope the Commission was walking, yet much of its news still came from sources outside its control.

(v) Irreconcilable Attitudes

Unlike the situation in Britain and the U.S.A., the Australian broadcasting system placed a public broadcasting instrumentality in a competitive relationship with a string of commercial stations. Many of the commercial stations were in fact owned by the newspapers which gave the Commission its news. Thus the Commission throughout its contractual relationship with the press was on guard against what it saw were attempts by the papers to give their own stations preferential treatment. A clause guaranteeing that no commercial station would receive favourable treatment over the ABC was always insisted upon by the Commission. The Commission frequently produced 'evidence' of breaches by the commercial stations and demanded that the newspapers exercise more control over them. The breaches were cited by Cleary as reasons why the Commission itself occasionally broke the rules. This is one of the main reasons why the Commission was so sensitive in its dealings with the press, and one of a number of seemingly insoluble issues which arose because of the deep distrust between the two sides. In fact it heavily contributed to that distrust.

The BBC could be indifferent to its lack of morning and midday bulletins in the 'thirties, because there was no-one else to provide them. From the beginning, however, the ABC realised that any shortcomings in its news service, when compared to the commercials, would have a direct and
vital bearing on its standing in the community, and ultimately on its attempts to build its image up to the point where its survival was assured.

To the newspapers, the Commission's insistence on equal treatment was simply a device for ensuring the ABC did not slip behind its commercial competitors. Murdoch and his fellow members of the ANC were proud of their stations, which they regarded as pacesetters. The newspapers always claimed that they acted to stop any breaches by their own stations but that these occasions were few and minor. E.G. Knox, the President of ANPA told the Gibson Committee:

the newspapers are willing to exercise whatever checks they can upon commercial stations in order to prevent them stealing any marches on either national stations or other stations. They can and will control those stations which are owned by them. They cannot accept unreasonable responsibilities with regard to other commercial stations, but they will join with the Commission and the Government in devising a scheme to prevent any preferential treatment and to remove any possibility of unfair competition in the news world.92

Such a scheme did not eventuate, though Cleary hoped the Postmaster-General's department might initiate a system of supervising the non-newspaper stations. Both Mitchell and Curnow point out that it is far from certain that the newspapers connived in any way to give their own stations preferential treatment. While breaches did occur and were constantly used as a bargaining lever by the ABC in its talks with the ANC, it is also less than certain that the newspapers had as much control over their own stations in this matter as Knox suggests. What is probable is that the small news staffs employed in some stations themselves made efforts to be first with the news. It would be surprising if some enterprising journalists did not, though we will have

92. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 20 October 1941, p.303.
to await long overdue research into the history of commercial radio news before we have conclusive evidence. It is difficult to imagine for example that any newspaper would have authorized the venture by 2GB of sending reporters to Parliament House in Sydney in 1939. The experiment does not seem to have been repeated because the ABC did not produce any subsequent illustrations of this practice. This would have amounted to 'supplementary' news gathering, a principle which was being hotly fought by the press at the time.

If the press resented the imputations of unfair play with its commercial stations, the Commission equally resented the disparaging remarks about its competence in setting up an independent news service. The now well-known letter from A.C.C. Holtz, Chairman of the ANC, to Cleary stung the Commission and stiffened their resolve. Holtz wrote:

it is impossible for the Commission to provide a satisfactory service for its listeners without the co-operation which the newspapers are still prepared to give ... Any effort by the Commission to collect its services must inevitably lead to the improper use, directly or indirectly, by the Commission of the newspaper's facilities.

It was on receipt of this letter that Cleary announced the Commission would set up its own news service, and it was shown to Lyons when Cleary saw him in December 1935.

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94. Holtz to Cleary, 21 November 1935, Australian Archives, Australian News, File No.1, SP314, B5 (S1)
95. Cleary believed it was clear proof of the monopolistic tendencies of the ANC. In his reply of 6 December 1935, Cleary wrote: "the Commission finds it hard to believe that you have realised the asounding implications of these statements. A recognition of this monopolistic claim would debar not only the Commission, but also all newspapers outside your conference group from publishing news of any happening ... The Commission ... suggests that its listeners would consider your claim to a monopoly to be an urgent reason for, rather than against, the establishment by the Commission of an independent news-gathering organisation". Australian Archives, Australian News, File No.1.
The attitude of disbelief that the ABC could be seriously competitive with the newspapers persisted up until it got its fully independent service in 1947. Dumas for example said, "it is not the opinion of a single member of the conference that an independent news-gathering service, if established by the Commission, might very seriously interfere with the circulation of the newspapers". Knox felt that the Commission would find nothing to supplement. "I do not think that the Commission in twelve months could get a dozen good items which would escape the net of the Australian newspapers." The newspapers still believed at this stage that broadcasting could never supplant the press as a medium for the dissemination of news and therefore they took the position that they had nothing to fear from the ABC. They maintained a consistent position of offering no objection in principle to the Commission setting up its own service, but said that if it did, it could not continue to take the newspaper material. The press felt reasonable certain that the Commission would not break away completely, but the spectre of a supplementary service, particularly one such as Denning provided from Canberra was another matter. Knox put it best:

A choice must be made by the Commission. They cannot expect us to give them benefit of all our costly organisation and allow them to pick and choose where they will send men with the one object only - of collecting stories, not of extraordinary happenings, but of particular items of ordinary news which they can put over ahead of publication in the press.

It was a fear that the Commission, with a minimum effort, could show the press in a bad light, by broadcasting stories before they appeared in print. This is a belated recognition of the fact that the nature of

97. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 22 October 1941, p.337.
98. Ibid., p.336.
radio is such that it can always be first with the news. That prerogative, Australian newspapers believed, must still be reserved for the newspapers. If they were not always first, the public, it was believed, would lose faith and interest in the press. They would have liked the radio stations to be contented with a 'pointer' service of brief headlines, to whet the appetite of the newspaper reading public, but neither the ABC nor the commercial stations were content with this.

At the time of the Gibson Committee hearings, newspaper executives felt they had perhaps over-reacted in the early nineteen-thirties to the threat of radio news and strongly implied that the conditions were too restrictive. In Murdoch's words "we may have been too fearful". But McCay and Knox both claimed that there had been an impact on newspaper sales due to radio's activities and that newspaper progress had been retarded. Early newspaper arguments for continuing controls on the broadcasting of their news were summarised in an important document which the ANC drew up for their meeting with the Commission on 23-24 January 1936, as efforts were made to repair the breakdown that had occurred in relationships in 1935. In this statement, the ANC agreed the Commission had a right to broadcast news, but claimed newspapers also had the right to control the use of their news so that it could not be used in ways they considered to be injurious to them. They denied they were monopolistic, said they rejected suggestions that they had acted in bad faith, and reserved their right to comment on the ABC.


100. Quoted in full by McCay, Evidence, Gibson Committee, 20 October 1941, p.307. See Appendix G.
The last right which was claimed referred to bitter resentment the Commission was feeling at newspaper attacks on the ABC. Cleary always claimed that whenever there was a major problem between the Commission and the ANC or AAP, the newspapers launched a campaign. During the 1935 crisis, The Age, for example, said too much news on the ABC showed lack of enterprise and was making the service tedious. At the time of the dispute over the shortened BBC news bulletins, it was the Sydney Morning Herald which rose to the defence of AAP. The press prominently featured any criticism of the ABC. The Commission, in principle, decided that it could not use its own service to reply and was therefore at a disadvantage. On the one occasion when it did hit back in a broadcast, the speech, by the Vice-Chairman, Herbert Brookes, was not reported in the newspapers. Cleary found it very difficult to get the Sydney Morning Herald to carry his reply to its attack and was incensed that in its article, the Herald had revealed details of the ABC's contractual arrangements with AAP, and what it was paying for its own cable service from London.

Another major issue which rankled with the Commission was the newspapers' insistence that they could not put a price on their Australian service beyond the £200 per annum which had been agreed upon in 1932. The newspapers were able to maintain through the 'thirties and 'forties that this was only a 'token' payment. Cleary was able to show the Gibson Committee that despite the ABC's requests over many years for them to put a higher price on the service and provide more for it,

101. 14 October 1935.
102. 30 November 1939.
103. A report was carried only in Smith's Weekly, 10 March 1937.
they had never responded. It was a fairly obvious tactic by the newspapers to give the impression that the Commission was getting something on the cheap, and therefore could hardly make too many demands. As Knox put it, "when we make that news available for broadcasting, either free or for a token payment, we are entitled to require that the conditions shall not be injurious to, or interfere with, our legitimate interests".104 Dixon was of the opinion that this impasse was crucial to what followed. "Had the papers agreed in 1936 as they did in 1946, to full use of their material in return for adequate payment, I have no doubt the matter would have been settled then, and there would have been no independent service".105 This, of course, makes no allowances for the unsatisfactory nature of the service and, as we have seen, this was a matter of real concern for the Commission.

The press was extremely resentful of ABC allegations of bad faith. It was the ABC contention that the newspapers backed out of the agreement reached in 1935 because of pressure from Murdoch, that more than anything else destroyed mutual confidence. In press eyes it was an attack on the integrity of a great and established industry from an upstart inexperienced public instrumentality. It hurt the newspapers just at a time when they were under pressure from a number of sources. It is significant that so many pages of evidence from all the ANC members are devoted to answering this specific charge. It gave the impression they were heavily influenced and controlled by Murdoch and Cleary's evidence that he had received behind the scenes support from Stuart of the Sydney Morning Herald added an additional divisive note. Murdoch, McCay,

104. Evidence, Gibson Committee, 22 October 1941, p.335.
Dumas and Knox all attacked Cleary personally before the Gibson Committee and it seems clear that the origins of this ill-feeling go back to the Cleary interpretation of that meeting in 1935. All claimed that he was difficult to negotiate with, and that they could certainly reach agreement with any other neutral chairman if one were appointed to oversee future negotiations. They tried to paint a picture of dissension between Cleary and Moses, and went on to suggest that there were certain megalomaniacal tendencies in the ABC Chairman.

We always have thought that Mr Cleary has it constantly in mind to demonstrate to the public that the Broadcasting Commission is greater and more important than the newspapers as a news-disseminating agency.106 Cleary, it was said, was out to damage the reputation of the newspapers as a satisfying news medium. While these charges seemed to do nothing to damage Cleary's reputation and could even have enhanced it, judging by the way he was subsequently praised by both parties in the House, they did appear to hurt him personally. In his last appearance before the Gibson Committee he went to some pains to put the record straight. He had always acted, he said, with the full authority of the Commission and in full cooperation with his news staff, and General Manager. He said:

It is an unjust suggestion that I had some personal mania for building a large news organization, and it is a positive fact that all the time I have been a member of the Commission every proposal for an alteration in connexion with the news has originated from the staff. That is without exception.107

This brings up an important point. Curnow and, more particularly, Mitchell, suggest an ambivalence in the Commission's attitude towards news at this time. Dixon, it is said, pressed for an independent service, regardless of cost, while others, particularly Commission members felt

the cost was too high. This, Mitchell goes on, resulted in the bitter dispute between the Commission and news service from 1942 onwards. With respect to Miss Mitchell, she is quite wrong. There is no evidence of any clash within the ABC on this point. From the early days of the service, there was a realisation by all concerned, that some form of Government aid was necessary if the news was to become largely self-sufficient. Until the Government was ready to concede the need for this, it could not break away from the press. In the meantime, the Commission felt it could work gradually towards greater self-sufficiency by forcing concessions and building up a small staff of its own. While Dixon certainly pushed for increased independence, there is nothing to suggest that he too, did not accept the need for some form of Government assistance. The point will be made in subsequent pages that it was only when the Commission became finally convinced that this would not be forthcoming, that it looked for an alternative.

It is true that at times Moses appeared not quite as enthusiastic about an independent news service as Cleary and Dixon. The Gibson Committee heard evidence that Moses had been more willing to concede points to the newspapers. But equally there were other occasions when Moses took the initiative in challenging the press, particularly over the BBC broadcasts, and it is clear that he at all times backed Commission policy. It would be easy, in view of the personal antagonism between Dixon and Moses at a later date, to see Moses as a discordant element in Commission policy at this time, but the evidence seems to disprove this. Right through this period Moses expressed confidence in Dixon and his staff. "I can assure you that you yourself have my

108. For further evidence see Curnow, Wireless and Broadcasting, p.350. Australian Archives also contain an interesting example. A draft of a letter from Moses to Holtz, sent to Cleary for approval, has had the words "[the Commission] does not wish to set up a news gathering organisation" crossed out. Draft is dated 25 November 1938, and the letter finally sent on 23 December 1938. Australian News, File No.2, SP314, B5 (S1).
complete confidence, and yours is a department which has caused me less personal worry than any other" he wrote in 1938. 109 In 1940, as he prepared for enlistment, Moses told Dixon:

I should like to congratulate you and all the members of your staff on the fine work recently carried out by your department. As you know, the news session are regarding (sic) by the public as some of the most important in our programmes, and I feel that the speed with which you are able to make Australian and overseas news available to listeners has brought considerable credit to the Commission. 110

This was followed the same year by a more significant letter written to Dixon when Moses was in camp at Bathurst.

It is fine to feel that I shall go overseas with the good wishes of a team of men whose work, though less spectacular, is perhaps more effective than that of any other department in the National broadcasting service ... I wish you good health to maintain your fight for a really independent, objective and accurate news service. 111

These sentiments do not show any disagreement at all with the Commission's policy of developing a news service which was its own and which could therefore enhance the Commission's standing.

ABC files and the evidence given before the Gibson Committee show how closely Dixon and also Moses were involved in both internal and direct external negotiations with the press. Recently Dixon confirmed that Cleary, Moses and himself had all seen eye to eye on news policy at this time. As far as Moses was concerned he" would have approved anything I said or did in favour of news at the time as long as I did not suggest he was prompting me or even knew what I was doing". 112 As there was no basic internal disagreement on policy within the ABC at

109. Moses to Dixon, 8 December 1938, in Dixon's personal files.
110. Moses to Dixon, 6 May 1940, in Dixon's personal files.
111. Moses to Dixon, 8 December 1940, in Dixon's personal files.
112. In a letter from Dixon to the author, 1 October 1976.
this time between the key figures and the Department involved, no study of policy implementation is possible. The Commission policy merely mirrored the organisation's actual behaviour of forcing concessions from the press while working towards the eventual establishment of its own independent news service either by breaking with ANC or a gradual process of attrition. It is only possible to study implementation when a programme has to be followed through to achieve fruition. "Implementation may be viewed as a process of interaction between the setting of goals and actions geared to achieving them."\textsuperscript{113} When the Commission set new news goals in 1942, a different situation arose because a chain of events had to be set in train to achieve them, both internally and externally. Thus a study of implementation is possible and will be attempted in chapter two.

The ABC and the Government

The ABC had been heartened that the Prime Minister Lyons had confirmed its own views of the nature of the press, in the attack he delivered on the night of 2 March 1939. Claiming that the newspapers had failed to report the facts of a statement he had made on a standing army for Australia, he asked them to indicate in future where news ends and comment and guess-work begins.\textsuperscript{114} He therefore had had to ask the ABC to give him time on air to tell the people what the true situation was. The press were annoyed and argued that the Government should not use the ABC for propagandist purposes. "[The people] will not tolerate even its partial conversion into a vehicle of political propaganda."\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Pressman and Wildavsky, \textit{Implementation}, introduction, p.xv.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 2 March 1939.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 4 March 1939.
After the euphoria that followed Denning's appointment and favourable Canberra reception had died down, the Commission soon realised that this was not the official signal for a large scale move into independent reporting. It had, with Government backing won an important victory in obtaining better bulletin times at the Canberra conference of 4 September 1939, only to have the Government acknowledge the residual powers of the press over their material at the Gullett Conference, which the press had called for. Cleary had failed to obtain substantial backing for his argument that far from providing BBC bulletins free in accordance with the British Government's request at the outbreak of war, AAP had in reality made a charge by loading their fee for the cable service. Cleary claimed that the BBC service should be unconditionally free. But the Government did not want to get too involved and Gullett told the conference that it was not the intention to interfere further and that he was sure the conference had ended all cause for concern. The Government wanted to get things settled and get on with the responsibilities resulting from the war.

But when Cleary attempted to prove his point by doing away with the AAP cables to see whether BBC broadcasts were free, he struck trouble with the Government. The Government disagreed with his tactics, feeling the matter should be left to the Attorney-General to discuss with AAP directly. Postmaster-General Harrison told Cleary that he should never have written his ultimatum to AAP and asked his departmental officials to try to intercept the letter in the post. The letter arrived but matters were taken out of Cleary's hands anyway. In vain the Commission protested that the matter was one for negotiation between itself and AAP. Cleary told Harrison "[the Commission] holds that this is a matter which properly falls within the scope of its powers under the ABC Act, and it can only assume that the Government's intervention in the negotiations
has arisen through a misunderstanding of the Commission's responsibilities".116 But the Government continued to conduct its own enquiries and it was only when the legal position had been established to its satisfaction, that it handed back to the Commission the task of making the resultant agreement. It was the first of a series of blows the Commission was to experience from the hands of the Government from this time on.

In May 1940, the Government amended the Post and Telegraph Rates Act to provide for press rates for messages intended for broadcasting but in June the heavy hand of the Government was felt again. Sir Keith Murdoch, who had been appointed by Prime Minister Menzies to head the Department of Information, took over the main evening news bulletin of the ABC and gave it to his staff to compile. According to the ABC "many listeners expressed preference for the 'straight news' presented by the Commission".117 Cleary sent all complaints received by the ABC to Murdoch who, according to Dixon "was painfully surprised at listener reaction".118 Murdoch claimed the programme had been undermined by the ABC and by his political opponents. After a month it was handed back to the ABC News Department. The incident enhanced the prestige of the ABC news service but said little for the Commission's standing with the Government. Cleary had told Dixon that he was fearful at the time that the whole of the ABC would be taken over by the Department of Information.

So concerned was Dixon at Murdoch's takeover, that he sought out John Curtin, Leader of the Labor Opposition, and in a meeting on 9 July 1940, urged on him the desirability of the Commission having its own independent news service. Dixon urged him to see Menzies and

116. Cleary to Harrison, 5 February 1940, Australian Archives, AAP File No.3, SP314, BS (S1).
117. ABC, Eighth Annual Report, p.20.
118. Dixon, ABC, p.46.
have the service restored to the ABC as soon as possible. Dixon describes the meeting thus:

I felt it was a unique opportunity of putting to the leader of the Labor Party the arguments that I had put so many times to Cleary, Brookes and Moses. Curtin, being a journalist, readily grasped the importance of the points I made - he knew from personal experience how often his party suffered this kind of treatment by the press. He knew probably much better than I did how unfairly Labor had been treated by the press and this made it easy for me to drive home the point that the ABC was the only organisation in Australia which could ensure equality of treatment with other parties ... I felt after the interview that my case had been well received and my points thoroughly absorbed and that when Labor came to power I could expect action. 119

Dixon did not seek Commission approval for this meeting and it turned out to be the first of several important clandestine appointments with Labor politicians that he was to keep in the following years.

In April 1941 Curtin attacked the press in the House in the debate on the Australian Broadcasting Bill of Postmaster-General McLeay. He accused ANPA of being responsible for the unsatisfactory nature of the ABC news service, and said that the press generally coloured facts and events in order to justify editorial policy. The ABC he went on, was not allowed to collect its own news in Australia. He then said, "I propose that news services should be established by the Commission independently of the newspapers ... We should make it mandatory that the Commission shall provide an adequate and independent news service under its own control". 120 It was the newspaper origins of the news that Curtin was concerned with and the possible suppression of official statements. He felt it should be able to enter into contracts with newsagencies.

It was not clear what degree of independence Curtin at this time envisaged, because in the same speech he urged that the Commission should come under the direct control of the Minister of Information. Dixon feels that his meeting with Curtin influenced his remarks and there seems a likelihood of this, because Curtin was the only member of the

120. CPD, 2 April 1941, p.579.
Labor side to speak in this vein during the debate. Senator Collings had earlier sought an amendment along these lines, but did not speak to it. In fact the day before he had urged the abolition of the Commission and the nationalisation of broadcasting in order to foil the activities of the capitalist press. This was also the tenor of the remarks of Arthur Calwell, and Senator Amour, the only other speakers from the Labor Party before the Bill lapsed. Only Curtin proposed an independent news service, but the ambiguity of his remarks matched the subsequent indecision he was to show on the issue.

The Government had not supported Senator Collings's amendment and the Commission began to worry about growing interference with its news from Canberra. On 28 April Curtin had himself complained about the paucity of coverage given to a statement he had made about Labor's dedication to the war effort. In fact the ABC had devoted a quarter of its state bulletin to the statement, an indication of the nature of the news at this time. In July, the Acting General Manager of the ABC, T.W. Bearup, sent a directive to Dixon criticising the practice of devoting the bulletins to statements and counter-statements by political leaders. He said that names of Ministers should not be used in formal statements emanating from departments, a reference to the growing appeal to politicians of having their names linked with various aspects of the war effort. On 26 August, there was a flagrant attempt to make use of the ABC news to influence United Australia Party and Country Party members of Cabinet to throw their support behind Menzies, whose leadership was

121. Curtin had, however, supported the concept of an independent ABC news service as early as 1937. See Labor Daily, 19 February 1937.

122. CPD, 27 March 1941, p.327. The Collings amendment read "The Commission shall provide an adequate and independent news service under its own control in addition to any contracts or arrangements it may make in respect to news services".
at that time being threatened. Denning reported to Dixon:

shortly before 9.30 p.m. Mr J. Winkler, who was acting as the Prime Minister's publicity officer in the temporary absence of Mr Dawson, came to me and said he wanted to to work a 'stunt'; that I should broadcast a story saying the Labor Party would not support any non-Labor Prime Minister; the idea being that Mr Menzies would contrive to have Ministers 'innocently' gathered around the wireless in his room, and possibly be influenced by this public indication of the Labor Party's attitude.\(^2\)

Winkler suggested that a special news bulletin be put on air to carry the story. Denning referred the matter to Dixon who refused to go along with the plan. Denning, however, subsequently wrote a story based on this information.

On 30 September, C.H. Holmes, the Director of the Department of Information wrote directly to Bearup complaining about a story in which a Labor MLA from Queensland had been quoted comparing Menzies unfavourably with the new Prime Minister Fadden. Dixon suggested to Bearup that it was not any business of Holmes's.\(^1\)

The problem of the news from Canberra being overloaded with ministerial statements continued and in September, Bearup called for recent stories together with the originals of Government releases. Dixon claimed any criticism was unjustified. His staff, he said, were exercising their judgement in using or rejecting statements. Cleary complained bitterly when statements by Dr H.V. Evatt and Frank Forde, both prominent Labor members were included in a Saturday midday session. Dixon claimed this was due to the fact that he did not have adequate staff. The error of judgement had been made by a casual.

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123. Denning to Dixon, 27 August 1941, SP286, Bundle 6. The text is included as Appendix H. together with the news story written by Denning.

124. For earlier examples of parliamentary interference with news see Cleary, Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.115.
In October, the Fadden government fell, and Curtin formed his Labor Government. The new ministers began immediately to look for full and unquestioning coverage of their statements on ABC news. It became obvious almost immediately that the service failed to come up to their expectations. On 7 November Curtin wrote to Bearup complaining that his speech in the budget debate had failed to be reported in the ABC's 7 p.m. news, whereas that of Menzies was. The fact that his speech had been reported at length in two later bulletins the same evening failed to mollify the Prime Minister. The ABC explained that a report of his speech had not been received in time for the 7 p.m. session.

An even more significant incident occurred on 14 November, when the 7 a.m. news session from the ABC's Brisbane station, 4QG, carried an item from the Courier-Mail of the same date, alleging there were widespread complaints in the Labor Caucus about the methods employed by army recruiting officers. Senator Collings immediately protested to Postmaster-General Ashley, saying:

> it seems to me quite wrong that national broadcasting stations should be allowed to retail exactly the same matter to the public as the strongly anti-labor press does ... If the national stations must obtain their news from the columns of the press, some action should surely be taken to prevent the use of matter of this type. We are the Government and the national stations are our servants.

On 21 November, Dixon produced figures for Cleary to disprove allegations that Labor was not being treated fairly. From 9 November to 15 November inclusive, 9,360 words of Labor material had been used, compared to 1,503 from the UAP. He added "I should say that since Labour (sic) came into power in both Houses, the percentage has been something like that every week. This is not because the news compilers

125. See Curtin to Bearup, 7 November 1941, SP286, S11, 2, "News Comments and Enquiries".

126. Collings to Ashley, 20 November 1941, copy in SP286, S11, 2.
favour Labour (sic) but simply because the Government of the day makes the most news". This is the early evidence of the strong Government orientation of news which Dixon and Denning felt was natural and proper. More will be said of this in later pages.

On 7 December, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, and on the 10th, the battleships HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse were sunk off the Malayan coast. The ABC were first to bring this latter story to the Australian public, in Dixon's view the biggest scoop of the war. But because it was based on a Japanese official statement, there were immediate repercussions before the British government confirmed the incident. Curtin prepared a denial which was prepared for broadcast but fortunately an intervening BBC bulletin carried the story of the sinkings and Curtin's story was not used.

On 16 December, the Government began to directly intervene in the broadcasting of news by the ABC. There would be a five minute bulletin of news from Canberra at 7.10 p.m. after the overseas news. The longer Canberra bulletin would allay the effect of rumours and unauthorised statements. The following day the Postmaster-General, Senator Ashley, issued a further statement. Midday bulletins would be broadcast at 12.30 p.m. and 1.30 p.m. consisting of 10 minutes overseas news, 5 minutes for Canberra statements and 5 minutes for state news. The newspaper vitally affected by the latter statement was the Sydney Sun which for years had resisted the Commission's appeals to allow a broadcast before 12.50 p.m. The newspapers were not consulted about

127. Dixon to Cleary, 21 November 1941, SP286, S11, 2.
128. For the full story see Dixon, ABC, pp.58-60.
the new arrangements, and they firmly believed that it was another example of ABC deviousness. Dumas said: "I am satisfied that the Commission was to blame. We were not present at the interview, but we have reason to suspect that it took advantage of the situation in order to have the 12.50 p.m. time changed". 129

On 27 December, Curtin announced a major shift on Australia's foreign policy, away from dependence on Britain, and placing much greater emphasis on the struggle against Japan in the Pacific, and on the importance of the relationship with the United States. 130 The necessity for making Australians aware of the difficult task ahead made him very concerned about the distribution of official statements.

In the first weeks of 1942, with the war crisis deepening, the ABC ran foul of two senior Labor ministers, Beasley and Ashley, and this brought to a head the Government's mounting anger over problems with the dissemination of official news. On 4 January, a statement by Beasley commenting on a Washington announcement on Allied cooperation in the Pacific, was crowded out of the 7 p.m. bulletin. It had been prepared for inclusion and had in fact been run in the 12.30 p.m. news. However by 7 p.m. additional comments had been obtained from other ministers and there was no time for Beasley. Statements were included by Curtin, Army Minister Forde, Evatt, and Hughes of the Opposition. Dropped for time reasons were Beasley, Makin and Drakeford. Beasley was the only one to complain but he did so in no uncertain terms. He


rang up Bearup and demanded that the play then being broadcast, be interrupted so that his statement could be read. According to Cleary's record of the incident Bearup was abused by Beasley, when he said this could not be done. Eventually the statement was read at the end of the play. The following morning Beasley again attacked Bearup in very strong language over the telephone.

He finally said that he and Dr Evatt had been dissatisfied for some time with the ABC, which did not seem to know there was a war on, and that they were going to 'clean the place out from top to bottom'.

Bearup, on Cleary's advice, reported this exchange to Ashley. On 6 January Cleary and Bearup were told to attend a conference in Canberra the following day, attended by Evatt, Beasley and Ashley, senior officials of the Department of Information and the Chief Censor. At this meeting Cleary managed to calm Beasley down after he demanded Bearup's dismissal and also managed to explain to the three ministers that it would be impossible to include every Government statement in the bulletin unedited without reducing to an absurdity. Cleary suggested Denning closely liaise with the Government so that he would be in a position of knowing confidential background and thus be able to sub-edit statements in accordance with that knowledge. Cleary also suggested that Government statements would receive more widespread and effective distribution if the commercial stations relayed the Commission's main 7 p.m. bulletin.

At the conference Cleary was given instructions by the Government to follow the new foreign policy line, in which emphasis was to be placed on the defence of Australia. The number of BBC commentaries, rebroadcast on ABC, were to be reduced, because of their repetition of

131. "Conference, Canberra: Wednesday, 7th January", a record unsigned but undoubtedly prepared by Cleary, SP314, Box 1.
British policy positions. ABC news programmes should stress that:

- the safety of Australia is paramount; that Australia must be defended to the utmost against attack and invasion; that such defence depends preponderantly upon the acceptance of a strategy which attaches great importance to the utmost resistance to Japan in the Pacific; that not only must the Australian people be impressed with this point of view in order that they may give their best, and not underrate our danger, but that America must be influenced.132

The Commission realised that the Government had the power to require the Commission to broadcast, or refrain from broadcasting any matter under Section 20(1) and Section 51 of the Broadcasting Act of 1932.

Cleary was told that if Denning had too many statements or if statements were too long he was to consult Evatt or Beasley. The Government wanted more bulletins containing Canberra statements, and subsequently it was agreed these would be carried in bulletins at 7.45 a.m. and 10.00 p.m., in addition to those already contained in the two midday bulletins and the main bulletin at 7 p.m. The Canberra statement within the 7 p.m. bulletin was extended to eight minutes, and provision was made for further extension if necessary, in order to avoid disputes such as that with Beasley. At the conference Cleary had told Beasley that these extended bulletins would infringe agreements with the press. According to the record of the meeting, "Mr Beasley said he could not believe that the Commission would allow such an agreement to stand in the way of the broadcasting of Ministerial

132. Cleary to Evatt, 8 January 1942, SP 314, Box 1. Following strong criticism by Beasley and Evatt of the efforts of the Department of Information in facilitating wider news coverage of the Government, the Conference also resulted in the handing back to the Commission of Radio Australia, which had been taken over by the Information Department in mid-1940. It reverted back to the Department of Information from 1 April 1944 but was handed back to the ABC by the Menzies-Fadden Government on 1 April 1950. This thesis does not deal with news broadcasts on Radio Australia. An examination by the writer of the files relating to Radio Australia reveals that its bulletins followed much the pattern of those within Australia. However considerable pressure was brought to bear on News Commentaries. See ABC Archives, 29/1/5, "Overseas Shortwave Service - Relations with Department of External Affairs".
statements". Cleary was careful to spell this out as a Government instruction in a confirmatory letter he subsequently wrote to Evatt on 8 January. The result of these additional Canberra bulletins was obvious. Cleary reported "Ministerial statements unquestionably increased in number. They became a feature of the bulletins. Names of Ministers were being mentioned, two and three and sometimes four times in one bulletin". He also felt the Commission's reputation and independence were being dangerously undermined. He later told the Broadcasting Committee that the result of the meeting of 7 January was that the Commission "was subject to and, indeed, as events proved, actually came under a definite day-to-day, hour-to-hour control by a Minister or some sub-committee - in other words, by the Government - that it was in a position of not even resisting if requests were made or instructions given to broadcast matters which might be politically controversial". The instructions that the news had to follow the Government's foreign policy line "shook the Commission very much".

Within weeks, complaints that the ABC was simply carrying Government propaganda began to arrive at the ABC in increasing numbers. There were so many that Cleary himself prepared a standard letter which went as close as he dared to telling people that matters had been taken out of the Commission's hands. It read:

From [your letter's] terms it is evident that you assume that the Commission is entirely responsible for all broadcasts that are made from its stations. This is not so. The Act under which the Commission works gives an overriding authority to the Government through the Minister. In these circumstances I am sure you will understand that it would be improper for me either to indicate whether, and, if so, to what extent, such authority is exercised, or to express an opinion on the merits of the broadcasts to which you take exception.137

133. "Conference, 7th January", SP314, Box 1.
134. Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.110.
137. Cleary to Bearup, 4 February 1942, SP314, Box 1.
Almost immediately after the showdown with Beasley and Evatt, the ABC ran into trouble with Ashley. This was unfortunate for the Commission, as Ashley had appeared very sympathetic in the trouble with Beasley. On 8 January, Ashley had issued a statement for broadcast, in which officials of the Miners' Federation were quoted as instructing their members to end their strike and return to work because of the need for coal in the war situation. There would be serious repercussions, it was said, from the Government, if the order was not carried out. Ashley had telephoned the story direct to Bearup in the afternoon and was therefore astonished when it did not appear in the 7 p.m. news. When he telephoned the ABC's New South Wales Manager, Basil Kirke, he was told that the item had been submitted to the censor who had refused to pass it. There was at this time a blanket censorship ban on references to industrial disputes. It was now Ashley's turn to attack Bearup, and he did so in strong terms. The Commission was now becoming aware of the personal differences between Labor ministers and the struggle for influence within the Government. Cleary rang Beasley about the matter, in the light of the authority given Beasley on 7 January. According to Cleary:

He said that we had done quite right in refusing to broadcast the statement about the strike; that I could take it as quite definite that he and Dr Evatt were authorised to instruct the Commission in matters of broadcasting policy; that he would speak to Senator Ashley to make this clear.138

Although broadcasting was a matter which came within Ashley's portfolio, he, and the Commission, were to be given more first hand evidence in subsequent years that the real power lay elsewhere within the Labor camp.

Cleary conveyed the instructions to his news staff. Dixon immediately saw the opportunities it opened up for the expansion of the service. In a memorandum to Bearup he pointed out that many ministerial statements were issued in Melbourne, where many Departments were still located. Also Ministers frequently came to Sydney where they were liable to want to say something. He therefore argued for a strengthening of the staff to handle this material. Also, because the Government stipulated that Federal news could only be included in the Canberra bulletins, there would now have to be greater efforts made to fill the State bulletins with worthwhile material. Dixon urged the appointment of an additional twenty-five men. He foresaw for the first time that he would have a genuinely 'national' bulletin emanating from Canberra, with important State items being sent there for inclusion in it.

We must take care that the Canberra service is something more than a mere propaganda outlet for the Government of the day. No doubt it will always to carry a certain amount of propaganda whatever Government is in power; but that propaganda should be subtle and should be carried on a bright and informative news service. If we build that kind of service now we shall be able to face a change of Government not only without embarrassment but with confidence that the new Ministry will feel under an immediate debt of gratitude to the Commission for having at hand a means of reaching a large audience at almost any time. We CAN build that type of service and build it quickly if we are given adequate staff.  

This estimate could not have come at a worse time. The Commission was just beginning to realise how much extra they would be paying out in journalists' salaries as a result of their joining the Australian Journalists' Association in 1941. Increased salaries under the award were costing the Commission an additional £7,000 per annum, at a time when its total annual expenditure was just over £700,000, and because

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139. Dixon to Bearup, 12 January 1942, SP286, Bundle 6. Dixon's emphasis.
journalists were given a five day working week to fit in with the conditions of the other ABC staff, a big overtime bill was developing in order to cope with all the bulletins which were spread over seven days. These were new and unforeseen costs associated with the news service. In addition the cost of the overseas cables were mounting too. The Commission therefore went along with Dixon's scheme only as far as it thought absolutely necessary, to the tune of another £5,300 per annum.

In his letter to Evatt of 8 January, confirming the instructions given at the meeting the previous day, Cleary wrote, "it is not desired that criticism of domestic political policies shall be suppressed", but he added that on military or security matters involving high policy, dissenting comment would not be permitted. The clear impression Cleary had was that it was only in these areas and in foreign affairs, that the Government wanted compliance. The events of 31 January and 1 February 1942 proved him wrong. E.J. Ward and Senator Cameron of the Government, had issued statements on the 31st, replying to statements, of the previous day, by Spender and Menzies of the Opposition. Neither Spender's nor Menzies's comments had been carried by the ABC. The Ward statement said Australia had its 'guilty men' in high places who had, in the past, neglected the interests of the country. He strongly attacked Spender in this context for allegedly failing to build up the country's fighting strength when he had been Minister for the Army. It was strong stuff. Evatt insisted both statements be used and they were. Spender then replied quoting chapter and verse of Ward's performances in Parliament before the war in which he opposed the Government's defence programme. Nothing less than panic gripped the

140. Cleary to Evatt, 8 January 1942, SP314, Box 1.
Commission's staff. After a hectic round of 'phone calls, Spender's statement was run at great length on the morning of 1 February. Ward began preparing a reply and Denning became very concerned. He telephoned Dixon.

He said he was very worried over the way things were shaping. I told him that as far as any future statements were concerned, we intended to put the responsibility on Dr Evatt and Mr Beasley. If they insisted on the statements being used, we would use them. We did not, however, wish to be placed in a position where they would not give a definite 'yes' or 'no' but leave the decision to us.\textsuperscript{141}

It was probably the lowest point ever reached by the ABC news service. Ward's reply alleged that Spender had had his brother-in-law released from an internment camp. It was toned down before it was used on the evening of 1 February, and it was run together with a statement from Fadden attacking the ABC for broadcasting political propaganda. Both statements required another full round of consultations between Dixon and his staff and senior officers, with the censor involved also. Spender's further reply to Ward was used later the same evening. In the meantime, Evatt and Beasley had complained about the ABC's deletion of the name of Spender's alleged brother-in-law. Senator Ashley had replied to Fadden and this had been run also. Late the same evening Dixon issued an instruction that no more statements were to be broadcast and there was to be no further reference to the dispute.

One of the noteworthy aspects of the affair had been that the ABC's Canberra news staff had felt obliged after each statement to ring the man being attacked to see if he wanted to reply. On 2 February, the Canberra Times made particular mention of this fact when it launched one of the strongest attacks ever made on the ABC's news service. It said:

\textsuperscript{141} Dixon to Bearup, 2 February 1942, SP286, Bundle 6. See Appendix I, for the text of Dixon's report to Bearup.
at a time ... when Australia was deeply concerned with the withdrawal of Australian forces from the mainland of Malaya and the Japanese attacks developing in other regions of the north, the nauseating details of a political dog fight which appears to have been promoted by the ABC's news service, could scarcely have found a less appropriate time or place for presentation.

It went on to claim that ministers had been incited by the ABC to give provocative comments and it alleged a conspiracy was being practised against the Australian public by the ABC and the Government. It related the dispute directly to the Canberra conference of 7 January and condemned the practice of statements being issued in the names of ministers, in order to gain some personal publicity from war operation. It went on:

the position as it stands is that the ABC by fawning upon ministers and pouring adulation on its political masters is able in turn to embark on extravagant extensions of its staff which no news bureau conceived on sane and anything like self supporting lines would ever dream of.

In his statement Fadden had called the ABC's Canberra news:

blatant Government propaganda ... By permitting the session to be used in this way the ABC is doing a great disservice to the nation and is tending to create political disunity.142

Ashley agreed. He said he was not in favour of a repetition of what had occurred. He appreciated that the ABC took special trouble to present both sides but "nevertheless the object of the Canberra session is likely to be defeated if this kind of 'news' is included".143

Here was the ABC again endangering itself by alienating its political and community support. Cleary was deeply concerned about the trend of events which had led to the misuse of the only ABC independent news gathering operation within Australia. The Canberra bureau, which had been the example of the 'supplementation' the news

142. Daily Telegraph, 2 February 1942.
143. The Sun, 2 February 1942.
service was seeking, was not capable of resisting pressure from ministers. Two years later as he gave evidence in support of the ABC maintaining its right to choose its own news sources, he provided proof of the indelible impression left by these encounters with Governments in Canberra and of his perception of the ways in which the ABC could be unscrupulously 'used'.

If a Minister or a party desired to express a definite point of view either in a broadcast or by regular subtle repetition and emphasis, it is obviously not suspected by people who are listening to the news service ... They are disarmed. If a news service is capable of being influenced by a Minister or a party, the influence that is desired can be exerted very subtly and may have a considerable effect upon the mind of the listeners. It could get beneath their guard.144

A gap was beginning to open up on this issue between Cleary and Dixon. Dixon saw the new relationship with the Government as a way of obtaining the long sought support necessary to build the service up to the point where it could break away from the press. He was sanguine about 'propagandising' on behalf of the Government - any Government - as long as it was done subtly. Cleary saw great dangers in becoming so heavily dependent on the Government. He thought any news service which achieves growth in order to help the Government in power, loses its independence commensurately. Dixon's policy, and one which he actively pursued as head of his department, was 'news not views'. By this he meant Governments make news because they do things. An Opposition is relatively powerless and therefore it can only expound 'views' which are not usually newsworthy.145 The Commission, on the other hand, became more and more concerned about maintaining a proper 'balance'. More will be said of this discrepancy in outlook on news in a subsequent chapter but the origins of the break occurred at this

144. Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.114.
145. Interview with Dixon, 13 January 1976.
point in ABC history. In his book Dixon gives a good illustration of it when he says he told Richard Boyer, then a Commissioner, at the height of the Ward-Spender affair, that he thought Spender's reply to Ward on 31 January "had no news value". It was on Denning's advice that it was used.

According to Dixon, the days that followed showed that some Government ministers did not agree that the ABC had been misused. Evatt disagreed with Ashley and Curtin felt that Spender and Menzies had started all the trouble with their original statements. A few days later the ABC at Curtin's insistence cabled away to London for a story based on an article by Hannen Swafer which alleged the Opposition were inspiring an overseas whispering campaign against the Government.

On 10 February, at the Conference on Newspaper and Broadcasting Activities in Relation to the War Effort, in Canberra, attended by newspaper executives, the ABC, and the Federation of Commercial Broadcasting Stations, and chaired by Curtin, Knox and Cleary clashed over the future of the ABC's news service, when Knox suggested an agreement be worked out between the two. Cleary pointed out to Curtin, who was chairing the meeting, that if the Commission lost its right to take its news from press sources, it would have to set up a costly service of its own which might be beyond the Commission's means. He then repeated the position the Commission had always had on this issue:

If the Government considers that we should set up independent news services rather than tie our hands, then the Government should come to our aid, or give a direction, but if it says 'We cannot help you financially; it is not an important issue; make the best arrangements you can', that will be sufficient lead as to public policy.

146. Dixon, ABC, p.72.
The Commission could not have put its position plainer. But Curtin's reply, though reassuring to a degree, was hardly the lead the ABC was looking for. He suggested in fact that press agreement was still necessary for any expansion of the news service.

I think the principle must be accepted of the broadcasting instrumentality having a news-agency (sic) of its own to supplement such matter as it uses from the newspapers. It seems now to be a question of how far that ancillary organization of the ABC would meet with your approval.

At a conference in Canberra on the following day, 11 February, between the Department of Information, the ABC and the Federation of Commercial Broadcasting Stations, Cleary officially produced his offer to provide a nationally relayed news bulletin 'free' to the commercial stations. Dixon, who was present, says the commercial radio representatives were overwhelmed by the offer. It was made compulsory for them to take the Canberra news sessions in the 7.45 a.m., 12.30 p.m. and 7 p.m. bulletins. They could take overseas bulletins also if they wished. The Government provided the landlines. ABC correspondence makes it clear, as has already been pointed out, that Cleary had suggested the move privately to the Government the month before. However his version later was that the commercials had put up a suggestion that they take an official news service from the Government. This is supported by Dixon who says Cleary saw that the ABC's news service could be taken over by the Government, hence his counter-proposal. In the event, it seems that Cleary saw this move as strengthening the ABC's position at a time when its independence was being undermined.

The news service was roundly criticised both internally and externally when on the first day of the nationally relayed Canberra news bulletin, 16 February, it missed one of the major stories of the

148. Ibid.
war - the fall of Singapore. Dixon blamed the Programme Department for failing to broadcast the speech of Churchill, in which it was announced, direct on air, but his own report to Bearup shows his sub-editor failed to monitor the speech. According to Dixon, Cleary was highly critical of this failure. Dixon recovered some prestige when, in the last week of February, it was first with the news in Australia of Major-General Gordon Bennett's escape from Singapore.

Smith's Weekly reported

what the ABC is so pleased about is not so much the fact that it got there first with the story, as that the daily Press, unable to get the news from its own sources, had to go to the ABC for it - or 'pinch' it from the broadcasts. 149

At the same time, however, another serious press attack had been made on the ABC, this time by the Sydney Morning Herald. It said the ABC news carried an intolerable number of ministerial statements of little interest. More serious it said was the growing tendency to flavour the bulletins with propaganda. "The ABC is not, and must not be allowed to become an organ of the government of the day, either for the purpose of advertising Ministers or commending their policies." 150

It was in this continuing atmosphere of disquiet about its news service that the Commission awaited the report of the Gibson Committee. It had been holding hearings since 3 July 1941 and it completed its report on 5 March. Cleary may have already heard, as Dixon had, that opinions seemed to be hardening on the committee against the Commission having its own news service. Previously the chairman Senator Gibson, Sir Charles Marr, and Dr Grenfell Price had favoured at least an independent Federal and State parliamentary service, but now felt that any form of independent service would become the plaything of politics and that the Commission should sign an agreement with the newspapers. 151

149. 7 March 1942.
150. 24 February 1942.
The Commission was in two minds. It did not want to be dependent on the press for its news yet it did not want an independent service to be established if it was going to prove to be a device for manipulation by the Government. Even while the Gibson Committee was still deliberating it began to investigate alternatives to a largely independent service - alternatives based on overseas experience which would give the Commission a different type of news service, which the press would be prepared to agree to. At its meeting in Melbourne on 28 January 1942, it had discussed with S.H. Deamer, Editor of the ABC Weekly, and formerly Editor of the Melbourne Herald and Daily Telegraph, proposals for changing the concept of news presentation so that the emphasis would be on special observer reports from reporters who were broadcasters. These new ideas were very much on its mind when the Gibson Committee report appeared.

The report said it had no doubt that the Commission policy was one of establishing its own news service, and that Denning's appointment was a preliminary step towards this. It found that in the protracted negotiations over the agreements, "there was obstinacy on both sides, neither being prepared to give way".152 Noting that there had been an estimate of £60,000 per annum put forward as the cost of the Commission providing a reasonable Australian news coverage, it said it failed to see how it could find this sum unless there was a Government subsidy. Instead, it said: "we believe the Commission and newspapers should reach a fair and reasonable arrangement".153 The newspapers should continue to provide their service for £200 per annum, but there

153. Ibid., p.21.
should be no restrictions on the times or length of the Australian news services. The Commission should not extend its news service or "supplement" the press services. Although it thus advised that the ABC should continue to get its news from the press, the Gibson Committee did leave the question open for the Government to answer if it chose. By pointing out that only the Government could find the money for an independent service, it left a loophole open. But the Government was not prepared to act. Senator Ashley told the Senate in the following month, as he introduced the Australian Broadcasting Bill 1942, based on the Gibson Committee report, "the Government fully supports the views expressed by the committee". 154 Beasley similarly endorsed the committee's findings in his second reading speech in the House of Representatives.

To the Commission, this was accepted as a clear lead from the Government that it did not want an independent news service. Cleary said later:

we we felt that it would be wrong, unless we had a stronger lead from parliament, unless Parliament had done what both Mr Curtin and Senator Collings proposed it should do - namely compel the Commission to set up an independent news service - to insist upon getting an independent service. 155

The Gibson Committee had, however, been more favourably disposed to the ABC in other directions. It had noted the interference there had been in the Commission's operations from the Governments in power in Canberra and said it was most important that it should not become the monopoly of the Government of the day.

154. CPD, 29 April 1942, p.582.
155. Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.112.
There is no evidence to lead us to believe otherwise than that the Commission has exercised its great powers with calm judgement and measured impartiality, and such difficulties as it might have encountered could only have arisen through an itching desire on the part of Ministers to assert their authority in a manner that Parliament never intended and never should sanction.\footnote{156}{Report of the Gibson Committee, p.12.}

It therefore recommended an amendment to Section 20(1) which would require the Minister to put in writing an order to the ABC to transmit material deemed to be in the national interest. Also it said the Commission should be required to mention any cases in which the Government had used its powers under sections 20(1) and 51, in its annual report.

On the subject of ministerial statements, the Committee urged that departmental names be used as the source, rather than the names of the Ministers concerned. No speakers, it said, should be named in reports of parliamentary debates or question-time. It also strongly condemned what it called "the use of the broadcasting services for personal recriminations".\footnote{157}{Ibid., p.23.} The Committee reported that it had sent a letter to Curtin in which "it strongly and unanimously urges the Government to confine the Canberra broadcasts to official and factual statements of value to the nation and encouraging to national unity and morale, and to prohibit the broadcasting of individual opinions".\footnote{158}{Ibid.}

The results stemming from these recommendations will be examined in subsequent chapters.

Flushed with the success and harmony its members from all parties had enjoyed, the Committee also suggested that the principle of having a Joint Committee on Broadcasting be perpetuated. It said a Standing
Committee should be established which would advise the Minister on broadcasting matters. Matters could be referred to it by the Minister or either House. The Commission or the Federation of Commercial Broadcasting Stations could ask the Minister to submit any issue. It was an attempt to reconcile ABC independence with the principle of parliamentary control.

Summary

As the Parliament began to debate the new Broadcasting Bill in April 1942, the Commission had reached a watershed in the news policy it had pursued up to this time. From its early days the Commission had been aware that its news was a vital component of its programming and which accorded it more criticism than any other. Because of the competitive nature of Australian radio, the Commission had felt keenly that it had to match the commercials in this area, in order to maintain public and political confidence. It resented and was suspicious of the restrictions imposed by the Australian press, which together, through newspapers and AAP, provided the only source of national news in Australia, and which controlled a significant proportion of the commercial stations which competed with the Commission.

From its inception, the Commission felt uneasy in an institutional sense about having to rely on newspapers for its news, as the press was widely condemned for its 'monopolistic' nature and the partial nature of its reporting. There being no national news agency which could supply Australian news, the Commission sought political and public support for a policy of 'confrontation' with the newspapers to try and obtain better programme times for news, which were more in accord with listener requirements. The press resented the criticism made of it, and the tough bargaining position of the Commission, and the breach widened when allegations of 'bad faith' were made. Distrust of, and hostility towards, each other became a real barrier to agreement.
The Commission made the threat of breaking away from the press monopolies and establishing its own news service and at the same time threw out feelers to the Government for support. Sufficient support was not forthcoming and the suggestion was ridiculed by the press. Feeling the lack of bargaining power, the Commission embarked on a policy of developing a small news service in the hope that in the long term it could become largely self-reliant. From the time of the establishment of its own Canberra correspondent in 1939, the Commission saw the real possibility of 'supplementing' press news and thus providing an objective service which was more in accord with the Commission's role of enlightening society through entertainment, of endeavouring to enlarge the interests of its listeners through ever-improving quality of material offered. Given the experimental nature of the broadcasting system and the frequent attacks made on the ABC in Canberra, the Commission felt keenly the need for its own style of news which it could verify as authentic. The coming of war accentuated this need.

The press opposed 'supplementary' reporting by the ABC and urged it to either rely entirely on press news or 'go it alone'. The circumstances of the appointment of the ABC's Canberra correspondent were such that he had to concentrate on sending back Canberra 'statements' in case the press missed them or misreported them. From the beginning the news service therefore took on a highly 'factual' and government orientated approach, which was endorsed and supported by the first ABC news editor who was largely 'newspaper' influenced and who saw that only an alternative roundsman approach could give the Commission more news to put on when it wanted, with the bonus of occasional 'scoops' thrown in. The Commission took up a competitive stance.

159. ABC. 1st Annual Report, for year ending 30 June 1933 (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1933), p.29.
Wartime governments began to be very conscious of their access to radio through the ABC's Canberra bureau and Ministers were anxious that their names were kept in the public eye. The independent reports of the ABC from Canberra became more and more subject to Government interference. As the war situation worsened, Government demands for more and more statements to be used, together with insistence on the following of a Government 'line' reduced the ABC's independence still further. The Commission became alarmed that an 'independent news service' might be subject to Government manipulation. At the same time it became increasingly aware that the goal of Government backing to enable it to set up such a service was as far away as ever. It saw its News Editor as perhaps too willing to go along with Government demands in the hope that his news service would benefit in terms of funding.

The Commission looked therefore for a way out, particularly to what had happened overseas, where radio news services had sorted out their differences with the press, by taking basic agency services, and supplementing them with special broadcast reports from observers on the spot. These made use of radio's own techniques, while not appearing to be competitive with the press.

The Commission was searching for a news position which would be satisfactory to the politicians and which would serve the public better. It wanted a news service which would accord with the political realities, which would serve the politicians without being pressured by them, and which the public would not see as being 'propaganda', from either the newspapers' point of view or the government's. Its view of what was to be done differed markedly from its News Editor's view and the next four years would be spent in a dispute which would see which of these two had read the political climate more accurately and which was the more effective in marshalling support.
CHAPTER 2

THE NEWSPAPER AGREEMENTS OF 1943 AND 1946

Implementation

In the period between 1942 and 1961, the Commission was responsible for three major news policy initiatives. The first was the decision taken in 1942 to limit its news activities and reach agreement with the press on the supply of news. The second, taken in 1946, was the defining of its news objectives in the light of the Government decision to legislate for a completely independent news service for the ABC. Linked with this was the necessity of coming to terms with its News Department and gaining its confidence. Strained relations between the two had resulted from the internal dispute over the necessity for an independent service. Third was the Commission's attitude towards the visual presentation of news, which was formulated with the advent of television in 1956.

Pressman and Wildavsky have distinguished between policies and programmes. A programme is a policy in which certain goals have been set and in which events have been set in train to secure them. A programme is a policy which has been acted upon instead of merely stated. Implementation is the accomplishment of a policy which has become a programme. That accomplishment depends on the ability to ensure that the links in the chain of events necessary for carrying out of the programme are not broken or weakened so as to endanger it.

They paint a pessimistic picture of the chances of a policy being successfully implemented. They point out that the number of points at which the programme must be cleared effect its chances of fruition because the participants involved are motivated to differing degrees.
This causes delays and the momentum is frequently lost. The greater the number of participants, the greater the probability of delays.

Because even a straightforward policy decision is therefore subject to a complex chain of reactions, it is essential that its formulation be accompanied by attention to the necessary means of carrying it out. When it is assumed that the machinery for doing this will operate without any further action or attention to detail, or appreciation of the problems of successful implementation, then it is usually doomed to failure. They conclude "the remarkable thing is that new programmes move at all".\(^1\)

In the three cases examined in this and the following two chapters, it is possible to study implementation because each policy decision had goals attached and a programme was initiated to reach them. The number of points of clearance in each case was relatively few but frustration was associated with all three. One failed completely, and another was never successfully brought into being. The Commission's experience with news policy seems to bear out the accuracy of Pressman and Wildavsky's findings. There was insufficient attention paid to initiating action designed to achieve the goals set. Nor was there sufficient understanding of the unpredictability of the decision making process. Even when difficulties became obvious they were frequently not isolated and dealt with. The Commission does not appear to have appreciated the necessity for linking policy with implementation.

The Chairman

We have seen that W.J. Cleary was a political strategist, adept at manoeuvring for support, and an extremely tough bargainer. He was

unwilling to compromise, believing passionately that the Commission's rightful role in society could never be achieved unless the undermining activities of the press were revealed for what they were and stopped. He offset the adverse effects stemming from the unsatisfactory nature of the news service by shrewdly and successfully appealing for political and public sympathy for the Commission's plight. He was less successful at gaining actual backing for the independent news service he sought, but he was the pragmatic tough leader that the Commission needed at a time when it came in for a great deal of criticism from the press and associated consumer groups for its alleged extravagance and the inadequacy of its programmes.²

R.J.F. (later Sir Richard) Boyer, who succeeded Cleary in 1945 had an entirely different character. Boyer was an idealist with little knowledge of the rough and tough business and political world from which Cleary had come.³ Son of a clergyman, and with university instilled ideals of liberal humanism, he had sought isolation after service in World War I on a property near Charleville in central southern Queensland. In his biographer's words "the result was that Boyer ... was curiously

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2. See for example the remarkably sustained and almost unanimous campaign waged by the press in January 1937 to reduce the wireless licence fee. They complained that the ABC spent too much money, with too little to show for it (see The Mercury and the Sydney Morning Herald, 20 January 1937), and called for changes in the ABC personnel and methods (see the Adelaide News, 29 January 1937). Both Smith's Weekly (10 February 1937) and the Labor Daily (19 February 1937) linked the campaign to the ABC's efforts to secure its own news and to the fact that Cleary's first term as Chairman was due to end on 3 July of the same year. According to The Sun (24 January 1937) the Housewives' Association, the Listeners' League, the Taxpayers' Association and the Australian Council of Trade Unions were uniting in a campaign to have the fee reduced. However little seems to have eventuated from this 'campaign' apart from a well-publicised protest about ABC extravagance and profits by a delegate to the Australian Natives' Association Annual Conference, reported in The Argus, 19 March 1937.

3. Cleary was general Manager of Tooth's Brewery, 1923-29.
innocent of the day-to-day rough and tumble of public life". He became interested in international affairs during his overseas trips in the nineteen-thirties, saw potentialities for agricultural sales and became a successful lobbyist for the pastoral industry. On a trip to Hitler's Germany in 1935 he had noticed the effects of the use of the mass media for propaganda purposes and it made a deep impression. Again in Germany in 1939, he was convinced of the dangers that could arise from the misuse of radio.

From this point on, he became convinced of the need to guard against Government control or Government monopoly of broadcasting and the necessity for reducing even parliamentary supervision to a minimum. While conceding that a single broadcasting authority might be more efficient, he felt that efficiency should take second place to ensuring that radio serves democracy instead of endangering it. Allowing one group to control radio could threaten our way of life.

Soon after becoming a Commissioner in 1940, he expressed his views in this way:

An interest, either a majority or a minority interest, with complete control of the air even for a limited period can, as has been proved, perpetuate itself by blanketing dissent and aligning opinion in its own favour. This can be achieved by radio technique in many subtle ways not discernible to listeners. In news and commentary, for example, opinion may be formed merely by the exclusion of or ignoring of unfavourable items or opinions. It is possible, therefore, for a short period of radio misuse by a single broadcasting authority to stultify the normal democratic processes of popular judgement.\(^4\)

It was these views, allied with the belief that radio, properly used, could play a unifying role in society, that prompted his acceptance of his position as Commissioner. They were to dominate his thinking throughout his association with the ABC and affected his approach to news and his relationship with Frank Dixon.

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Boyer's influence was paramount during the period in which the ABC became responsible for its own news and began to think more deeply about defining the nature of this product. He affected news thinking in two ways. First, he was concerned with the expression of minority viewpoints and second, as already indicated, he saw it as solidifying society at a time when new ideologies were threatening it. The first tempered what Nordenstreng has called the 'parasitic' mirror role which the Commission had adopted in relation to Governmental activities. The second is what Cohen and Young have called the centrist version of the mass manipulative model of the media, in that Boyer's view of the role of the ABC affected the selection and presentation of news. This is the unwitting bias related to an area of social consensus which has so concerned media analysts in recent years and is in turn related to the institutional ethos which Boyer evolved as his answer to the perennial problem facing broadcasting organisations - that of ensuring survival in the political environment of his time. Yet there was not total submission to the consensus. Boyer's attitude to the Communist Party is an interesting example of an attempt to come to terms with the organisation's responsibilities to its audience, as he saw them, while running some risk of public and political censure. A fine sense of political balance is required in these circumstances.

Before examining the results of the Commission's decision to restrict and alter the nature of its news service in 1942, it is necessary to first summarise the events of the last nine months of that year.
The Australian Broadcasting Act, 1942

With only a few modifications, the Government adhered to the recommendations of the Gibson Committee when it drafted its new bill to determine the future of broadcasting in Australia. The Commission gained an increase in its share of the licence fee, to raise it from 10s to 11s, while in Clause 23 it was required that if the minister directed the Commission to include or omit any matter, it had to be confirmed in writing and this would be mentioned in the ABC's Annual Report. The Commission was given the unqualified power to decide when and in what circumstances political speeches should be broadcast, resolving a confusion which existed in the previous Act. The Act set up the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting which "will provide Parliament with a means of keeping a more watchful eye on the development of the broadcasting services". 6

The Committee was empowered to investigate any matter affecting broadcasting if it was referred to it by the Minister, by Parliament, the ABC or the Federation of Commercial Broadcasting Stations. The Committee itself in its first report outlined its functions in this way:

Comprising representatives of all parties, of all States and of both Houses, the Standing Committee is a democratic instrument which provides Parliament with its own medium to assist it in forming a judgement independent of the Minister, the Government and the broadcasting authorities. It establishes a means for unprejudiced discussion of broadcasting problems on behalf of Parliament in an atmosphere from which party barriers are substantially eliminated. 7

Although it was based on the non-partisan character of the highly successful Gibson Committee, party barriers were not eliminated from the work of the PSCB. This applied particularly to News matters, and in the two substantial reports which it made on proposed agreements between the ABC and the press it divided on party lines. It is now apparent that

it interfered over much with the purely internal affairs of the Commission during the five years in which it prepared and presented its seventeen reports. As Mackay says:

the existence of the Parliamentary Standing Committee was a threat to the prestige and status of the Commission, who should not have been required to work under conditions that would normally have applied to a state department.8

The investigatory zeal of the PSCB stems in part from the beliefs of the Chairmen who were appointed. Senator S.K. Amour and Arthur Calwell both favoured much greater control over broadcasting than the 1942 Act had allowed. As we have seen, both favoured nationalisation of broadcasting in 1941, in line with Labor Party platform, and during the debate on the 1942 Act, both had expressed regret that the Government had not seen fit to carry out this policy.9 They were not alone. The Minister for Aircraft Production, Senator Cameron, suggested that only the war had prevented the takeover of broadcasting, the Government presumably wanting to avoid any divisive moves of this kind.10 The Commission therefore was left in no doubt as to the ultimate aims of many influential members of the Labor Party. Calwell summed up in this way:

8. Ian Mackay, Broadcasting in Australia (Melbourne University Press, 1957), p.52. See also W.H.N. Hull, "The Public Control of Broadcasting: The Canadian and Australian Experiences", Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Vol.28, No.1 (February 1962), especially pp.121-23. Hull says (p.122): "The Committee lost the confidence of the broadcasting world. It antagonized various groups, but especially the ABC, by its almost unending requests for information". However, he feels it might be time to consider resurrecting the idea, with improvements, perhaps along the lines of the Canadian Parliament's Special Committee.

9. For Calwell's remarks see CPD, 2 June 1942, p.1873. For Amour's, CPD, 30 April 1942, p.658.

10. See CPD, 30 April 1942, pp.685-86.
the Parliament is entitled to protection against the capricious use of power by the Commission. The Minister is the responsible agent of the Parliament, in seeing that the Commission does not do what may be undesirable from a public point of view.11

The PSCE was to prove one of the most substantial barriers to the carrying out of the Commission's new news policy. But this was not immediately obvious in the latter half of 1942 as the Commission instructed two of its senior staff members to compile a report on the future of the News Department.

The McCall-Deamer Report

Deamer, the Editor of the ABC Weekly, had had wide journalistic experience, while Robert McCall, the ABC's Acting Federal Superintendent, had recently returned from a period with the BBC during which he had observed that organisation's approach to news gathering and broadcasting. Together they produced in only two months a document which is nevertheless extremely detailed and provides one of the best ever records of the working of the news service in the days before it became fully independent. It was compiled in conditions of great secrecy and Dixon was effectively excluded from the deliberations having only a half-hour talk with the two men before they commenced. The report itself was withheld from him until April of the following year and only then sent for his perusal because of his frequent requests. It is dated 12 October 1942 and was considered by the Commission in the same month. Deamer was given approval to make initial contacts with the press on the lines envisaged in the report immediately afterwards, and the Commission subsequently endorsed this. Yet Dixon was assured by Bearup in a meeting on 22 December that the Commission had made no decision on the report. Dixon asked that his views

11. CPD, 3 June 1942, p.2098.
be considered by the Commission. "As you have always accepted me as your expert adviser on news, it surely naturally follows that I should be asked to comment on any recommendations that have been made regarding the future of the Commission's news services." 12

It has been pointed out how closely Dixon had been involved in all Commission and management deliberations on news up till now and had in fact been accepted as the authority on the subject. His advice was sought before any move was made in respect of the negotiations with the press, and his reports had triggered off new rounds of argument and negotiation. For example, it was Dixon who effectively held up the imminent signing of the agreement with AAP in 1939, by pointing out to Cleary that special correspondent reports filed through AAP for the newspapers, which the ABC could not use, were reducing the numbers of AAP messages received in Australia, and thus reducing the value of the agency's service to the Commission. Dixon was now ignored at a time when the whole future of news was under discussion. The Commission certainly made this decision deliberately, and it clearly stemmed from the growing disparity of views between the Commission and Dixon and his newsmen over the desirability of having a news service which was so heavily influenced by the Government and so heavily geared to the carrying of official statements. News which served 'authority', particularly in times of war did not disturb Dixon for he reckoned that by gaining official backing and recognition of its role, the ABC news service would gain the funds it needed for expansion which in turn would mean eventual 'independence' from the big press monopolies. This was the only 'independence' Dixon recognised. Cleary, however, had a different concept of 'independence'. He believed that a news service which was so dependent on winning Government favour, as the ABC's 'independent' news

operation in Canberra had been, could only weaken the organisation in its attempts to win a greater degree of 'independence' from the Government. 'Independence' to Cleary, meant keeping the Government at arms length, even if it meant in the short term, some continued reliance on the press. Boyer, then a Commissioner, had similar views, perhaps even more strongly held than Cleary.

The McCall-Deamer Report remained a confidential document for many years. It was quoted from but was not given to the PSCB as a document in evidence. Miss Mitchell has referred to it briefly in her recent thesis but omits any reference to one of its most significant recommendations - the shift from straight news reporting to 'observer' reports of major events by special correspondents trained in broadcasting. McCall and Deamer were simply suggesting that the ABC should use the special voice-report role for its correspondents as had been done by overseas radio organisations.

McCall and Deamer had been asked to determine the Commission's total expenditure on news services and recommend ways and means of consolidating and improving the news services. They agreed in their report that they had begun from a pre-conceived idea of the type of news service they thought the ABC should have.

From the outset they included in their assessment certain activities of the Talks Department which they felt should be included with News. These were News Commentaries, and the activities of wartime 'observer' correspondents who were sending back recordings for broadcast, such as Chester Wilmot. News Commentaries had at one time been the News Department's responsibility, but had been removed from Dixon's control in 1940. All these activities they concluded, cost £63,029 per annum, but a much better service could be obtained by spending less.

13. It is 23 pages long, in the form of a memorandum to the Acting General Manager, dated 12 October 1942. The relevant file is SP314.8.10/0/8, Box 4, "Mr McCall".
The answer they thought lay in abandoning the concept of having a large news-gathering organisation which could never provide a coverage as comprehensive and reliable as a newsagency or newspapers. Instead, the Commission should concentrate its resources on the more vital and distinctive presentation of news by training special editorial staff in the radio medium; by training announcers as special news readers; by developing field broadcasts far more extensively. It is in this direction, as overseas broadcasters have recognised, that radio can best obtain listener-value from news ... the separation of straight news from commentaries, and the departmentalism which segregates observers and the writers of straight material, are artificial. They noted very appositely: "it has not been easy for the Commission to plan a long-range news policy while there have been frequent changes in Governmental supervision of radio and uncertainty regarding the stabilisation of the Commission as a body". They forecast that the difficulties in negotiating with the press were over because the ABC had demonstrated that it could collect the main news of the day by itself if it wanted to and the newspapers had become increasingly nervous about charges that they constituted a monopoly. In any case, extended radio news bulletins had not affect their circulations.

The report suggested that negotiations be opened for the full world coverage of AAP, which, it was reckoned, would cost much less than the cost of the Commission's present cabled reports from London and the United States. Australian news could be obtained from ANPA but war releases could be sent direct by the armed forces to the ABC and the newspapers would have to provide a special service of messages from Canberra. It is to be noted that McCall and Deamer envisaged that the news service still take its basic material from the newspapers. The report did consider taking an agency service from AUP but thought that this was a minor agency, lacking sophistication and the national outlook of the metropolitan dailies.

14. McCall-Deamer Report, SP314.8.10/0/8, Box 4, p.16.  
15. Ibid., p.15.
The report was highly critical of the nature of the Commission's reporting and coverage arrangements in Canberra, still the main source of its independent news gathering, although there were roundsmen working in Sydney and Melbourne by this time. It found the staff in Canberra excessive for the amount of news produced, but recognised that reporters had to attend a great number of parliamentary sessions and ministerial interviews because no news could be missed without the danger of incurring complaints. This would be the position as long as the Commission was dependent on its own resources for Canberra news and therefore had to cover everything that appeared likely to produce a story.

McCall and Deamer also came down strongly against the practice of having the Australian news transmitted from Canberra. Following the Government decision of December 1941, that news be transmitted from Canberra nightly, 16 other material of national interest was relayed by newsrooms in other states to Canberra for inclusion. This was the beginning of the first nationally relayed bulletins of the ABC. However, McCall and Deamer found this operation wasteful and time-consuming. Following the Canberra conference of 11 February 1942, 17 five bulletins a day emanated from Canberra on six days of the week, two on Sunday, and the Canberra staff had to be enlarged to cope. By the end of 1942, there were eleven journalists reporting and sub-editing yet McCall and Deamer found that when Parliament was not sitting, which amounted to three-fifths of the year, less than five per cent of the news originated in

16. See Chapter one, p.83.
17. See Chapter one, p.94.
Canberra. Even when Parliament was sitting only thirty-six per cent of the news originated in that city. All the other material had to be 'phoned and telegraphed from elsewhere, mainly Sydney. They accordingly recommended that these bulletins emanate from Sydney.

The Report concluded that the Commission should withdraw completely from overseas news gathering and rely on AAP, and the BBC bulletins. However, it wanted the AAP news fed direct by teleprinter to the ABC newsroom, not taken from the papers and advocated no restrictions on its use. As for Australian news, it also implicitly recommended an end to news gathering activities such as those in Canberra, and instead a new agreement with ANPA for the direct transmission of news from that city, in addition to the continuation of the old arrangements for taking news from the papers. But McCall and Deamer obviously thought there might be difficulties in ending Australian news gathering from Canberra, because they put forward an alternative in case the proposal was rejected. This amounted to a drastic reduction of staff in conjunction with the decision to run the Australian and overseas news from Sydney.

18. This is not, of course, an indication of the amount of Federal political material being transmitted. Many Federal Departmental offices were located in Melbourne and statements issued there were transmitted to Canberra for inclusion. Also, particularly in times of Parliamentary recess, Ministers issued statements while in their own electorates or while travelling. The ABC's Melbourne office had a permanent Federal roundsman, while the Sydney office too had to pay a great deal of attention to Federal political stories originating in that city. In any case, the McCall-Deamer figures were calculated over one week only and seem disproportionately low. When Deamer repeated them in an article in the Sydney Daily Telegraph of 3 May 1945, Dixon said they amounted to 'a stupid lie'. He wrote: "About that time our sessions normally ran to at least 20 minutes and the Canberra session, which consisted of Australian news only, never exceed (sic) 8 minutes. The greater portion of this originated in Canberra; the balance was telephoned from Sydney and Melbourne. Mr Jost's estimate is that 60 per cent of the recess news originated in Canberra; Denning says he agrees with this". (Dixon to Bearup, 3 May 1945, SP 286, Bundle 6).

19. Effect was given to this recommendation in mid 1943. Separation of Australian and overseas news was ended at the same time.
News broadcasts, observer units, and commentaries should come under the News Department and these combined facilities would be used to present a major production between seven and eight p.m. called Australian Radio Newsreel. This was to be modelled on BBC Radio Newsreel and aim at the feature presentation of news. The report foresaw possible difficulties with the AJA but said that even if reduction in staff was not possible, there would be savings in reducing overtime, allowances and travelling expenses. Journalists would be used in the preparation of the Newsreel, the material for which would come from the observers in the field. In the body of the report is this noteworthy statement:

In our opinion the Commission should be able to convince the newspaper proprietors that our field of news presentation is quite distinct from theirs and that they should not suffer in any form acting as our news-gathering agents.\textsuperscript{20}

Here is the first clear recognition within the ABC that its reporting style and approach had caused the problems with the newspapers over 'supplementation' and that they could be ended with the adoption of the overseas technique of using radio newsmen in a special 'observer' or voice-report role which was non-competitive and selective.

The Commission's News Audience

There is every indication that the Commission and management were very conscious of listener reaction as expressed in letters.\textsuperscript{21} No letter

\textsuperscript{20} McCall-Deamer Report, p.20.

\textsuperscript{21} All letters were sighted by the senior personnel to whom they were addressed. Most were addressed Manager, and the N.S.W. Manager, Kirke read them and passed them on to Dixon for direct reply. Those addressed to the General Manager or Chairman had to be returned with Dixon's draft replies attached. A significant number of letters were sent to the Postmaster-General, and sometimes to other Ministers. They would be forwarded with requests for draft replies by the Director General of Posts and Telegraphs. To these the Chairman or General Manager usually replied. From mid-1943, all Dixon's replies had to be seen by the Controller of Public Relations and the General Manager, apparently because of the frequency with which he remonstrated with those offering any criticism of his service.
was unanswered. Those that were critical received considered replies, some of them at great length. In the early years of the war, when response was greatest, letters averaged between forty and fifty per year. This was a large proportion of the total mail received by the Commission, revealing the great public interest in hearing the latest news about the war. As the Commission recorded:

The peculiarly intimate character of the relationship between radio and the people in these times of high tension has greatly increased the responsiveness of listener reaction to all matter broadcast over the air. This has been evidenced by a much greater sensitivity in both favourable and unfavourable reaction according to individual taste.

There were many letters which simply wanted information and throughout the war, news staff built up considerable goodwill by sending copies of news items to those that requested them. The comment that was offered was however almost always unfavourable. Up to 1941, there was obviously discontent related to the restrictions still caused by the various press agreements. Listeners wanted more news, at better times, fewer press acknowledgements. There were many letters complaining about the cutting of the BBC news broadcasts which the ABC was forced to do in 1939-40 at the insistence of AAP. One-sixth of all letters in 1941 drew the ABC's attention to errors in, or complained about, stories which the news staff had taken from the newspapers. Triviality and banality were other regular allegations.

In 1941, there began a trickle of complaints about the nature of the official news being included. There were too many politicians' opinions, it was said. Minor local news was sometimes run hard up against big war stories. People obviously felt there was an anti-climactic element in —

22. The letters are contained in SP286, S11,2.
23. ABC, 9th Annual Report, p.4.
much Australian news at a time when Europe was locked in combat. What they wanted, was some order of priorities in the news which made common sense - an element of news judgement, which did not divide overseas and Australian news up into approximately equal compartments which had to be filled each day. This, too, was a reflection of the Commission's unhappy relationship with the press, which had resulted in separate agreements for Australian and overseas news and separate schedules for broadcasts in each category which represented the interests of the press more than those of the public.24

It was unfortunate that this artificial separation according to geographical formula was made more obvious by the Government's decisions in December 1941 and January 1942 to begin and then extend the Australian news compiled in Canberra - the 'Canberra statement'. These bulletins, relayed from all stations in Australia from 16 February 1942, carried, as we have noted, a large number of Government and political statements and announcements including Australian war communiques. At the conference of 11 February 1942 at which it was agreed that the commercials take these bulletins, it was decided that the Australian news would precede the overseas segment. At the time, as Dixon frequently pointed out subsequently, the Japanese threat to Australia was at its most extreme, and there was a certain logic about having news of the Pacific theatre given prominence. As time went on, however, and emphasis shifted about from one war area to another, listeners were increasingly irritated by having to sit through several minutes of Government statements from Canberra before hearing of the war news from the western and eastern fronts in Europe, particularly when the tide began to turn against Germany.

24. See Appendices B and C.
Listeners' letters of 1942-43 show increasing anger at this apparent lack of 'news judgement'. The newspapers, too, contained many letters which were critical of this arrangement. As one listener put it:

For months now we have had to listen to the parish pump items from Canberra in which no one is interested at this critical stage of the war ... Here is a sample: How much a day we are spending on the war - the value of carrots as a diet for the armed forces - the squabble over the abuse of the security regulations and so on. Why divide the news anyway? Why can't we simply have the 'news' arranged by someone who knows news value in its real sense.25

McCall and Deamer drew attention to the rising tide of public discontent in their report saying: "The comparatively minor local items which inevitably, are included in the Canberra compartment are regarded by listeners as an intrusion, while they are waiting on reports on major aspects of the war from overseas".26 Many felt that the arrangement for news was pure propaganda for the Labor Government.

Although from mid-1943, the artificial division between Australian and overseas news was ended and the entire national bulletin emanated from Sydney, the ABC's image seemed to have been considerably tarnished. It seemed obvious that the Commission lacked control over the shaping and order of its news items. The listeners who believed this were justified. When the Canberra and overseas news was merged, it was only after Moses had sought and secured Curtin's approval at a meeting in Canberra on 27 May 1943, and it was subject to the proviso that after the major news items were given, the order of the remainder should be Australian news first, and overseas news second.27

The whole episode must have had a strong impact on the Commission. It was never afterwards subject to as much public and press criticism. The idea of obtaining its hard political news from press sources, and

25. Hugill to Editor, Sydney Morning Herald, 7 July 1942.
27. Reported by Moses to the Commission at its meeting of 21-23 June 1943. A temporary palliative had been adopted in December 1942 of giving a brief headline summary of all war news before the Australian bulletin. This did not stem the tide of complaints.
removing itself from some of these political pressures must have seemed very attractive. So, too, was the idea of removing remaining press restrictions on bulletin times, which would be secured under the proposed agreement, and also new concepts of news presentation which would help win back listener support and help reassert Commission independence.

The period was damaging to the Commission's news reputation for the rest of the war. It confirmed in many minds the propagandist nature of ABC news and the Commission's lack of control. The ending of the Canberra statement removed the most extreme form of political interference, but when the national news continued to be interlarded with simple government statements, public criticism continued, although at a lower level. The 'official' flavour of the Australian news was to some listeners monotonous. Some 'trivial' Australian news still contrasted oddly with other major material. In 1944, six of twenty-three critical letters were still complaining of too much governmental emphasis in bulletins or failure to give the news items in proper priority. In 1945, the volume of listener complaints dropped considerably. It is not clear why because the nature of the news coverage did not appear to change. It may well have been due to the fact that listeners were becoming used to the nature of the ABC News. Also, in that year, many of the commercial stations again opted to present their own news service thereby offering a greater news choice on radio.

But as the listener complaints dropped, the amount of press criticism of the service increased. So did the criticism from Opposition members of Parliament. When, in 1945, Boyer approached Curtin to try to resolve the future of the ABC news services, he was as convinced as ever that many people in the community believed that news
remained under Government control. He was fortified in this belief by the adverse public response from 1942-44 to the method of reporting the news from Canberra and the prominence it was given, and also by the elitist outcry from press and some politicians. Boyer was far more friendly with newspaper proprietors than was Cleary and was more influenced by them. It was a combination of all three that Boyer referred to when he later spoke of "lack of confidence on the part of the community". The total number of listeners' letters might not have been great but they reflected and reinforced the considerable misgivings which the Commission had developed about its news service and firmed the resolve for a new approach to news-gathering and reporting.

The 1942 News Policy Decision

The Commission considered the McCall-Deamer Report at its meetings in October and November 1942. They accepted the principles contained in it and authorised Deamer to make an unofficial approach to Murdoch to obtain his reaction. Before the Commission policy could be successfully implemented, there were three key decision points at which agreement had to be obtained. The first was the press itself. The second was the Government, because the contracts envisaged with the press exceeded five thousand pounds and the 1942 Act, Section 21, said that the approval of the Minister was necessary in these circumstances. The third was Dixon himself although this would not have been immediately obvious at the time. Unquestionably, the Commission felt that if it successfully cleared the

28. This development is dealt with at greater length later in this chapter, as is political and press criticism. The grounds for much of the press bitterness are further explained in Chapter 5.

first two hurdles there was nothing that Dixon could do to stop the policy becoming effective. It was only when difficulties were encountered with the Government that Dixon was involved to a greater degree than anticipated; first, as a key witness at the hearings of the PSCB, and then more directly as he began to lobby key Labor ministers.

The News Agreements

To make things easier for the Commission, Cleary did not take part in the discussions with the press from this point on. Deamer was deputed to break the ice and he was well qualified to do so as he knew Sir Keith Murdoch well. He saw Murdoch on 23 October and found him very receptive to the ABC's proposals. He did not see any problems in the Commission taking the full AAP service without any restrictions on usage and felt ANPA could supply the special basic cover of Canberra news that was required. He agreed on the necessity of providing this material free from any bias or coloration. Deamer explained that the ABC's own reports would be in future in the form of broadcasts.

McCall and Deamer were right in assuming that the press were ready to come to terms. They believed the newspaper mood had changed since 1941, because the press now knew the ABC could obtain all the main news of the day without their assistance, and because the possibility of 'scoops' was now limited by the increased use of official communiqués. McCall and Deamer also felt that the press were not anxious to incur more ire from the Labor Government because of their 'monopolistic tendencies' - something that was bound to occur if the old disputation arose again over newspaper contracts. In addition, the extended radio news coverage in wartime had not appeared to interfere with newspaper circulations. But perhaps most important was the appeal to the newspapers of the 'observer' concept which

30. Henderson claims that the newspapers refused to meet Cleary at about this time. Henderson interview, 10 February 1976.
appeared to mean that the Commission would abandon the hard news gathering field and thus reduce the level of direct competition. The ABC was also removing the possibility of the Government at some time providing substantial subsidies for it to set up a large independent news gathering organisation, on competitive lines.

By February 1943 two agreements had been drawn up which provided everything the Commission had asked for. For £5,000 per annum the ABC would get the Australian broadcasting rights to the full AAP overseas cable service. It could in turn relay its news containing that material to the commercial stations recovering up to a maximum of £2,500. There was to be no restriction on form, quantity, length or frequency of news bulletins containing AAP material. The ABC agreed to restrict its overseas news activities to broadcast reports by observers but retained the right to cable to Australia any important story the AAP had missed. The AAP had the right to publish with acknowledgement any report from an overseas ABC correspondent. The agreement was for two years.

The separate agreement with ANPA for Australian news was to cost the ABC £2,700 per annum. For this amount a separate cover of Federal political, departmental and parliamentary news would be provided as well as news releases from the armed forces. The Commission retained the right to publish Australian and New Zealand news from the papers of the ANPA members, and could also request the special cover of any event by a newspaper as long as it met any extra expenses involved. There was also to be absolutely no restriction on the use of this material. Clause 7 said:

31. The Agreements are reproduced as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 of the 4th Report of the PSCB, 13 March 1944 (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1944). I have included them as Appendix J.
The Commission shall be entitled to employ news observers [as distinct from reporters or news-gatherers] whose activities shall be confined to actual broadcasting or recording for broadcasting except that ... when a broadcasting or telephone channel is not available [they] shall be entitled to telegraph or cable scripts for recording and rebroadcasting.\(^\text{32}\)

The ABC could broadcast any Government statement supplied directly to it. The Agreement was also for two years.

The Commission felt it had now done all that it could in the circumstances. It had followed the recommendation of the Gibson Committee that it should re-open negotiations with the press in order to secure a formal agreement. It had, apparently, the Government's approval for this, since the Government had endorsed the Committee's recommendation in Parliament. It had calculated that there would be an enormous saving by signing the agreements. The current costs of its news service were £31,729 while the news agreements and associated costs would come to only £10,200. Some of the money saved would be applied to the development of the 'observer' activities and improving news presentation.

The Commission had thus removed the factors which had increasingly worried it since its Canberra service began to expand - that of the accelerating cost of independent news-gathering, and the cost of cables from overseas. It thought Dixon's estimate of £60,000 to set up an independent service, given to the Gibson Committee, was probably the absolute minimum required. Expansion of its other programme commitments, which also came with the war, meant that demands on its budget were growing, and News seemed to be getting a disproportionate share.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., p.17.
To those who queried the apparent abandonment of the principle of having an independent service because of the unsatisfactory nature of the Australian press material, the Commission replied that in the Agreement it had gone some way towards resolving this problem by obtaining news direct from newspaper reporters in Canberra, the most sensitive centre of news-gathering. The Commission's opinion was that news normally became opinionated or coloured after it had gone through the editors' hands in the newspaper. Cleary put it this way:

getting access to original news unaltered was very much different from the thing we had fought, namely quoting news after it had been put in the press in the say in which the editor in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth or Brisbane felt it should be published.33

By placing the emphasis on 'observer' broadcasters the Commission claimed it was not evading its news responsibilities:

Under this Agreement the Commission does not forfeit its independence. By the retention of observers, it is still in a position to check the possibility of exclusion of news, and correct any tendentiousness in the news supplied to it by the newspapers ... the Commission retains complete independence as to selection and presentation of news and as to the number of observers it employs.34

The Commission could point out that now all existing restrictions on its freedom to broadcast news had been swept away. It was, moreover, excited by the prospect of a new type of news presentation in which broadcast reports by its special men would be incorporated in the news bulletins. For the first time, it could point confidently, because it was now better informed, to the BBC example with its semi-expert supplementation of agency and official material, its correspondent-observers

who ... are broadcasting reporters rather than news gatherers in the ordinary sense ... If programme arrangements permit, these men come on the air themselves; otherwise their material augmenting the agency cover of the events is incorporated in the news bulletins.35

33. Cleary, Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.112.
34. Ibid., p.100.
35. Ibid., p.104.
It knew far more too about the United States where, the Commission pointed out, the networks derived their basic news from agencies, just as the BBC did, and "like the British Broadcasting Corporation they supplement the agency news with special commentaries or field broadcasts; the proposed agreements would enable the Commission to provide similar supplementary material". 36

Although the Commission felt it had at last found a way out of its news problems, it was slightly uneasy about the reaction of the Government, but this seemed to be related more to the money question than the principle involved. On 13 November 1942, Bearup reported to the Commission about a meeting between himself, Cleary, Deamer and McCall at which the subject of ministerial approval had been discussed. It was decided that:

to introduce the Minister at this early stage would create complications. It was therefore decided, subject to the approval of the Commissioners (which has now been obtained) that we should go as far as possible with AAP - even to the point of agreement subject to Ministerial approval ... When the parties were ready to finalise the arrangement, we would suggest to the Minister that he would call a conference formally to conclude the deal. He might even give his approval there and then, as he did in the case of the National-Commercial station agreement for the Canberra session. 37

It was thought that if the Minister was informed in writing too soon, he might seek 'outside' advice and cause difficulties. A letter Cleary prepared for sending to Postmaster-General Ashley, on 8 January 1943, advising him of the negotiations, was never sent. This is further evidence of Commission uncertainty about Government reaction. It was only after the agreements had been drawn up and approved by both parties that Cleary

36. Ibid.

37. Bearup to all Commissioners, 13 November 1942, SP314.8.10/0/8, Box 4. Bearup's emphasis.
advised Ashley on 5 March. The following week Moses was summoned to appear before Ashley who told him Cabinet was disturbed about the Australian news agreement. 38

The Reaction of the Government

The Labor Party had given evidence of some division of opinion over the future of broadcasting in Australia in the Parliamentary debates of 1941 and 1942. Some, such as Amour, Calwell and Beasley wanted to go further than others and take over broadcasting completely. All were united however in desiring closer government supervision, even control, over the existing system. But there were personal differences too, over the extent of that control, and in particular, the degree of independence the Commission was to be allowed in respect of its news service. The Commission should have been more aware of these internal party characteristics than it was. It had had first hand experience of the quixotic nature of Labor's approach when it failed to receive Curtin's backing for an independent news service in 1942. Yet there is nothing in ABC files to show that it was prepared for the reaction to the agreement within the ranks of the Labor Cabinet. At the end of January for example Cleary conceded that there would be political scrutiny and criticism of the arrangement in the early stages of its operation and for that reason suggested the agreements should be worded so that they could be terminated by either party after eighteen months or two years. If the agreements did not work successfully neither side would feel tied down. But there is no indication that anyone anticipated that the Government would refuse

38. On 11 February 1943, Curtin had announced Moses' Army so that he could resume duties as General Manager. He returned to the ABC on 8 March 1943.
to approve them. The Commission can, therefore, be said to have failed badly in its appreciation of the political climate in Canberra and the extent to which the Government had come to rely on the ABC's Canberra bureau for the transmission of Government speeches and statements. It also failed to really appreciate Labor's distrust of the press.

The Commission's confidence was based on Section 25 of the Broadcasting Act, 1942, which was taken over word for word from the 1932 Act:

The Commission may collect in such manner as it thinks fit news and information relating to current events in any part of the world and may subscribe to news agencies.

Section 21, which the Government was to use as its authority read:

Notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, the Commission shall not be empowered to enter into any agreement involving any expenditure by the Commission in excess of five thousand pounds, or extending over a period of more than five years, unless the approval of the Minister thereto has first been obtained.

The Commission's reading of this clause was that it amounted to financial supervision only and was to guard against improper financial practice.

The Commission's agreements with the press up to this point had been for amounts of less than five thousand pounds and it had never had to go to the Government for permission to enter into them.

The outcome of the meeting on 25 March 1943, between Ashley, Beasley, Evatt and Ben Chifley from the Government and Cleary, Moses and Deamer of the ABC, came as a shock to the Commission. Beasley, who had so intimidated Bearup the year before adopted the same tactics. According to the ABC record of the meeting: "Mr Beasley ... adopted a somewhat aggressive attitude, his opening remarkd being 'Well Mr Cleary, this is a snide sort of thing you have tried to put over us'". The Commission's confidence was based on Section 25 of the Broadcasting Act, 1942, which was taken over word for word from the 1932 Act:

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no doubt that the Government would not agree to the Commission coming to any arrangement by which it took news from Canberra from other sources. The Commission had to retain its news-gathering activities there. Cleary agreed to discuss with the press a revision of the agreements to allow it to do this.

At the subsequent meeting in Sydney between Ashley, Cleary, Moses, Deamer (now Controller of Public Relations for the ABC) and Rupert Henderson, one of the Joint Managing Directors of AAP, it was clear that the newspapers resented the implication that they could not supply a satisfactory service of Parliamentary and Governmental material. Henderson, in fact, alleged that the newspaper journalists, who would provide the ABC with its cover, would provide a less coloured service than the Commission was receiving from its own staff. "He amplified this remark by saying the newspapers felt that instead of giving an impartial news service the commission's news bulletins were becoming more and more merely a vehicle for Ministerial 'hand-outs'. " Henderson then said that the newspapers were envisaging establishing an agency to provide a complete cover of Canberra news. "Ashley said that if this were done he would have no objections at all, and would not press for a separate independent service in Canberra for the Commission." Any hope that the Commission may have had for salvaging the agreements after all, after this meeting, were dashed by the subsequent aggressive stance taken by the press. Henderson subsequently confirmed that the newspapers were setting up an agency in Canberra, but at the same time told Moses and Ashley that unless this agency was used to

40. Moses to all Commissioners, 29 March 1943, SP 314, 8/10/0/8, Box 4.
41. Ibid.
supply news to the Commission the Australian News agreement could not be concluded. The press could not agree to the Commission obtaining its news separately from Canberra, and if this matter was not settled, there could be no agreement with AAP either for the supply of overseas news.

It was made plain soon afterwards that Ashley's assurance did not represent the views of his more powerful colleagues. In April and again in May, Ashley returned to the previous stance of the Government. There could be no agreements unless the Commission collected its Canberra news itself. In vain, the Commission pointed out that the agency service, to be run by AAP, would be completely impartial because it would be used by newspapers supporting or opposing the government. To be satisfactory, it would have to be one hundred per cent accurate. The Commission pointed out that AAP had agreed to the ABC having its own broadcasters in Canberra to supplement the agency service. The agency could absorb most of the ABC's Canberra staff.

On 8 July 1943, Cleary acknowledged that an impasse had been reached and he sent a memorandum to Ashley asking that the two related questions - the merits of the proposed agreement and also the powers of the Minister and the Commission - be referred to the PSCB under the terms of Section 85(2) of the Broadcasting Act. He argued that the power conferred by Section 21 was not intended to give the Minister the power to veto an agreement altogether. To do so would make meaningless the power given to the Commission in Section 25. The memo continued:

The Commission submits that the general and over-riding tenor of the Act is to charge the Commission with responsibility for its programmes, and in particular to secure it against political direction in respect of its programmes. News is a vital department of programme activity. Stripped of the freedom to determine the sources of its news, the selection from such sources, and the composition of its news bulletins, the Commission could not accept the responsibility imposed on it by Parliament for the presentation of an independent and impartial news service.42

42. Cleary to Ashley 8 July 1943, SP 314, 8/10/0/8, Box 4.
Cleary found it particularly disconcerting that the Commission could be made completely free of Ministerial or Government direction in respect of the broadcasting of political speeches, or any political matter, under Section 89, while the Government was apparently still permitted to determine the sources of the ABC's news bulletins.

The Labor Government was quite prepared to allow the Commission to take all of the rest of its news from press sources, but was not prepared in any way to allow the press to interfere with one of its key avenues for communicating with the electorate and for publicising its activities - namely, the ABC's reporting from Canberra. The bare, factual repetition of Government announcements, in a service which had no inclination to see its role as anything beyond this, did not have to be 'coloured' in any deliberate fashion. The very nature of the bulletins at this time were supportive of the Government, and Labor recognised this.

The question is why did the Commission fail to comprehend political realities at this time and appreciate that the nature of the news service it proposed did not measure up to the Government's expectations and therefore posed an immediate threat to its independence. After all, it had recognised all along that depending on the press monopoly for its news adversely affected the credibility of its bulletins, left the Commission open to attack from the political community at large and left its audience dissatisfied. Now it still proposed to depend on the newspapers for all its Australian news, apart from that emanating from the Federal Government. Whether or not Labor agreed with this part of the Agreement was immaterial. It left some of the basic cause of the news service's problems still in existence. An agency service from Canberra appeared to satisfy the basic need for a neutral factual coverage from that sensitive area. The Commission had never had cause to complain before about the strict impartiality of AAP's service from overseas, which it had taken in the 'thirties. Its only concern was its access to
that material. There was no reason to suppose that an AAP service from Canberra would be any different to other major world agencies on which radio organisations abroad relied so heavily. But because AAP's membership was similar to that of ANPA, in Labor's eyes it was damned from the start. Labor was not concerned with the niceties of definition of the aims and approach of an agency as distinct from a newspaper. It simply saw the press monopoly working from Canberra under a different guise and influencing the Commission's factual, unquestioning service on which it had come to rely.

Smith says "[the broadcasting institution's] most important problem is to engineer its own survival and to find some point at which it can make bargains of style and content with the civil power". 43 Perhaps the real cause of the Commission's failure in 1943 was its unwillingness or inability to maintain contact with the Labor Government, and so make bargains. We have already seen how strained the ABC's relations were with the Labor Government when it came into power, a conflict which was also over the nature of the news service. It seems highly probable that the Commission became wary and extremely cautious in its dealings with the Government from this time on. It certainly was over the agreements, almost clandestine. It was this demonstrated lack of confidence in the Government, which the Commission displayed, which in part provoked the reaction, summed up best in Beasley's outburst. To Labor, the Commission had acted in an underhand way.

So Labor forced the ABC to come to terms with political realities. The 'independence' given to the ABC in regard to news was never a reality. If there was a conflict of views over the nature of the news service, the Government must prevail because it had the ultimate power over

43. Smith, Shadow, p.72.
the Commission's resources. As Smith says "all broadcasting begins with a franchise granted by government and depends for its continual existence on periodical renewal".44 For a while the Commission had failed to realise that its relationship with the Government is the most crucial tie of all. By apparently downgrading the importance of Canberra news, by its acceptance of an agency service, the Commission was demonstrating its own order of priorities - that Canberra news could and should be handled in the same way as other news, and had no particular priority. By exhibiting institutional beliefs of this kind, it was placing itself in some peril. Dixon, Denning and others of the newsroom were much closer to the Government over this period than the Commission and it was their concept of news which prevailed, not the institutional viewpoint which the Commission had arrived at. The Commission wanted to depoliticise its news, because it recognised that to many of its audience it smacked of Government propaganda. To appeal to its audience and win back their confidence it wanted a new style of news presentation, which explained events more and put them in context. This, in fact, is the typical conflict over audience concepts which Smith describes. For a period, the Commission took the broadcaster's view of the audience as its own, and neglected to examine closely enough the audience envisaged by the politicians in Canberra. Normally the institutional viewpoint of the broadcasting organisation is a delicate compromise between the two. In 1943, the Commission tipped the balance too violently to one side.

44. Smith, Shadow, p.140.
We have seen how Cleary up till 1942 had continuously involved himself in a series of well-publicised confrontations with the press while simultaneously calling for more independence for his news service. This had the effect of mollifying criticism because it evoked strong sympathy for the Commission's position. Edelman would define this as symbolism of the condensation type evoking a response because of what it means in terms of the psychological needs of those it is aimed at. Repeated controversy of this remote type can produce quiescence in some and arouse others. But as long as it is couched in terms of threat and reassurance it will inevitably produce political docility, because it is beyond the capacity of disorganised groups to have access to the decision-makers. In a sense, the constant threat to the Commission that appeared to come from the press, probably helped the organisation survive in the 'thirties. The conflict symbolised that all was well in the sense that the Commission was doing all it could. It was all over-simplified in these terms, but more effective as symbolisation by being so. Criticism of the ABC's news service was undoubtedly lessened by the dramatic setting in which the dispute with the press was set. Once the conflict with the press was no longer in evidence, that is, after the Gibson Committee Report, and an amicable agreement reached, the Commission was no longer able to put its position in these terms of crisis. It is possible to apply Edelman's theories in reverse in this case. Failure to talk of the press in terms of threat and the Commission's stance in terms of reassurance could have alarmed Labor politicians who had been lulled into a sense of security because the conflict fitted their preconceived ideas of the nature of the newspaper proprietors. The symbolisation had satisfied their psychological needs. Reconciliation of press and ABC increased, rather than lessened, tension.
The PSCB

The Commission leant heavily on Deamer in the evidence given before the PSCB. In their opinion, he had replaced Dixon as the expert whose guidance they should rely on. Deamer was forthright, perhaps too much so, given Labor's majority on the Committee and the fact that it was chaired by Senator Amour. He expressed in no uncertain manner, the Commission's feelings about the way its news service was being used by the Government in Canberra.

Individual Ministers [he said], being concerned with their own statements, and not realizing the cumulative effect of these statements, are inclined to press them beyond a fair thing ... the position still remains that our staff is there as a semi-governmental staff, with Ministers thinking in terms of their own departmental, not necessarily their own personal publicity. The cumulative effect of these statements by Ministers was to make the Canberra service a series of government statements.45

This was tantamount of course to saying the ABC's Canberra news was simply a publicity medium for the Government. Deamer did not endear himself to Labor members either by his accusations of political intimidation, first by Beasley, and they by E.J. Ward, the Minister for Transport and External Territories. Deamer produced as evidence letters which had passed between Ashley and Moses relating to accusations by Ward that Deamer was the man responsible for the deletion from the news of a statement Ward had made on the filling of the post of Governor-General. Moses objected strongly to the naming of Deamer by Ward, "The Commission feels that such procedure is apt to be intimidatory and is opposed to proper discipline inasmuch as an officer may feel that he has a responsibility to some one outside the Commission".46

46. Moses to Ashley, 2 December 1943. Quoted in evidence to the PSCB by Deamer, 14 January 1944, p.131.
He denied Deamer was responsible and demanded to know where Ward had received his information. Ward did not answer this. This to the Commission, was clear indication of connivance between ABC journalists and Labor ministers. Deamer, for obvious reasons, was hardly popular in the ABC News Department at this time. Beasley had given the first evidence of behind the scenes dealings of this kind when he had frankly told the ABC delegation at the meeting on 25 March 1943 that he had had discussions with ABC news staff. A great deal more evidence was to come to light of the extent to which Dixon and his staff lobbied for support outside the ABC during the next three years.

Deamer was not the only one to criticise the nature of the ABC's news service during the enquiry. Moses himself felt obliged to mention the fact that the service had contained numerous 'errors' to which he had drawn attention - 'errors' which had not come from the press but from the Commission's own sources. "Our own mistakes are so frequent that I think we should not say that other people make mistakes and we do not."47

But the Commission case ultimately failed because neither Moses, Deamer or Cleary could adequately or convincingly explain the advantages of the 'observer' concept over the old-style newspaper copy approach. In addition, the argument had been put in such a way that 'observer' ideas were invariably coupled with the phrase 'vacate the news-gathering field'. Cleary had himself used the phrase in correspondence and evidence but ultimately it was seen to be doing the Commission's case great damage. It suggested that the press had at last succeeded in forcing the ABC out of news-gathering altogether and implied that the 'observers' would play only a very low key news role. The phrase was not included in the agreements which had only differentiated between 'observers' and other

reporters. The agreements merely said that the ABC was entitled to employ 'news observers' who would confine their activities to actual broadcasting. There was no attempt to restrict their activities beyond that, nor to restrict their numbers. As Eric Kennedy, the Acting President of ANPA said: "there is nothing in the present agreement which would prevent the Commission from having representatives in every part of Australia". The point became so crucial that in January 1944, Deamer and McCall were instructed to locate the origins of the phrase and to find out whether the press or the ABC had used it first. The answer was that it was a mutually agreeable way of expressing intentions when it was first used back in 1942, during discussions between the two parties.

Moses had put the 'observer' idea this way:

We should be able to project into the homes the actual news stories told on the spot rather than read from a bulletin the facts set out in a newspaper ... there is a lot to be done in the broadcasting of news services. It is being done by the big American services. They bring voices from all over the world to the microphone.

He envisaged the Australian Newsreel bringing in voices from Port Moresby, Perth, Sydney and Melbourne, all in the space of a few minutes.

In Canberra:

the basic report of the proceedings of Parliament may run into many thousands of words. It is intended to be an accurate and impartial report of what is occurring. That would be the work of the news-gatherer. Our observer might note an outstanding remarks by a member, and will put it on the air. So one man is responsible for the basic report and the other gives it an interpretation or background, for the purpose of making it more informative and interesting.

This was the crux of the Commission's intentions. Not only to apply the new broadcasting skills and technical facilities to news work, but

49. Moses, Evidence, PSCB, 13 January 1944, p.117.
50. Ibid., p.123.
also to add a new dimension to news. The Commission wanted to
background and explain the news beyond the brief factual statement.
Deamer also made this clear when he advocated that the Government
statements be put in a separate session, divorced from general news
bulletins. McCall saw that report and actuality could be combined:

The BBC's technique would be the technique that we are
hoping to exploit. Instead of reporting what General Montgomery
said, since it would get the report of what he said on the
tape machine [teleprinter] the BBC would have a man there to
report what he saw and have a microphone there.51

The Commission was, of course, simply putting forward ideas based
on techniques which were widely used during the war overseas but it was
facing two problems. The techniques were being suggested some eight or
nine years after their adoption abroad, and the Department which would
use them had already evolved a technique which was completely at variance.
The previous chapter explained that a fast, factual highly competitive
style had been developed as a result of Dixon's own ideas and the
frustrations of being forced to wait for newspaper publication before
broadcast. There being no idea of a news gathered in any other way than
by typed or telephoned copy, Dixon's men had concentrated on being faster
and more 'accurate', than the press. To some of them, the 'observer' idea
was a threat, because it involved the use of quite different expertise than
subbing or writing copy for a news announcer to read.

In the circumstances, the Commission's decision to exclude Dixon and
his staff from all discussions on this plan make no sense at all. The
feeling of threat was amplified by so doing and the Commission immediately
forfeited any chance of obtaining co-operation. If Dixon had backed the
plan there might still have been a chance of the Commission policy being
successfully implemented because a PSCB verdict in its favour might have
persuaded the Government to rethink its attitude. But Dixon's evidence,
together with that from the AJA, ended the Commission's chances.

The Attitude of Dixon

From 1942 onwards there was a sharp deterioration in Dixon's relationship with the Commission and other senior ABC staff. This coincided with the increase in influence of Deamer. Dixon became increasingly argumentative and resentful. The most serious clash which left long-lasting scars was with Bearup and the Commission over the question of the use of Ministers' names. It is worth recounting briefly because it marks clearly the end of Commission confidence in Dixon's being able to control or discipline his Canberra staff in line with its thinking. And in questioning Dixon's professional judgement for the first time, the Commission had revealed to it the man's extraordinary tenacity and capacity for argument on questions of principle. The Commission should have been very uneasy about this sudden break with its head of news and his bitter reaction at the time when it was considering a radical new approach to its news. But if it was uneasy, it gave no sign of it.

We have earlier traced the beginnings of Commission concern about the increasing use of ministers' names in statements emanating from Canberra. 52

At the end of February there was a curious exchange between Curtin and Denning which revealed that Curtin himself felt the practice of using Ministers' names had gone too far and was giving the Government a bad name. Through his Press Secretary, Don Rodgers, he conveyed his anxiety to Denning. Denning's immediate reaction was one of extreme defensiveness. His written reply shows that he was quite unable to see that factual

52. See Chapter one, pp.80-81.

53. Curtin's action may have been partly triggered by a letter he had received from the Gibson Committee. (See Chapter one, p. 98.)
repetition of statements and names was in any supportive of the Government or individual Ministers, in the sense that it could be called 'propaganda'. Coverage that was 'factual' and 'fair' was the simple accurate repetition of Government decisions or actions. To have the name of the Minister as well was important for it added to the statement's 'authority'. 'Propaganda' to Denning was the deliberate angling of news to favour one particular side. The reporting of Government activities at great length was not bias. It was 'factual' recording of the decision of authority which was 'news', and if the government got the lion's share of the bulletin, this was the normal order of things. They acted, while the Opposition merely talked. Denning wrote:

I want to give you a direct and personal denial that there is any deliberate propaganda either for or against the Government in these sessions. Right from the start they have been intended to be objective, factual and fair. I have staked my own reputation on their being so, and still do. I am aware that the ABC's news organisation has met with a lot of newspaper criticism. There is one simple explanation of this, which I believe to be the true one - that the ABC is now in competition with the newspapers in the distribution of news.54

From this point both Dixon and Denning began to see any criticism of the pro-Government nature of news, as being newspaper inspired and therefore not to be seriously considered.

Nevertheless, Denning thought that because of Curtin's concern he should take some action and he took it upon himself to cut down the use of names and statements on occasions were attributed to: 'the Minister for Supply', or 'the Minister for the Army' without names being given. This did not go far enough for the Sydney Morning Herald which said:

there is certainly an intolerable deal of wordage which seems to have no other purpose than to obtain publicity for some Federal Ministers, especially junior Ministers, whose statements often have little interest and no importance. On occasions, the diminishing audiences for these 'national' sessions are even regaled with the Minister for So-and-So - invariably and repeatedly mentioned by name - has no further information to release at present.55

54. Denning to Curtin, 24 February 1942, SP 341, Box 1.
55. Sydney Morning Herald, 24 February 1942.
On 9 March the Gibson Committee recommended that, as in Britain, the names of departments be used rather than those of the Ministers concerned, and that in reports of parliamentary proceedings, no names at all should be given. Dixon and Denning thought this went too far and no action was taken. On ABC news it was almost always 'the Minister' whether named or not. The ABC's Canberra staff apparently found it impossible to make the transposition to 'Ministry' because nearly all statements were issued in the name of 'the Minister'.

Dixon never saw the need for dropping the Ministers' names in any circumstances. He argued that Ministers' names should always be used, and he disagreed with what Denning had done. "It seems to me that in even partially omitting Ministers' names we have yielded to a few newspapers and other critics who had an axe to grind."56 Dixon particularly objected to Bearup's ruling in April 1942, that there should be fewer references to ministers by name in State bulletins. These were mainly references to State ministers.

So strong was his reply to Bearup on this, claiming that the ABC was getting out of step with the rest of the broadcasting world, that Bearup sought and received Commission backing and Dixon was reprimanded for his failure to ensure that Ministers' names were not used as frequently. Dixon later believed that this incident marked the point at which the Commission began to consider how to remove him.

On 13 May 1942 there was another curious illustration of the Labor Party's personal and ad hoc approach to broadcasting when Ashley informed Denning that the Gibson Committee's recommendation on Ministers' names should be adopted in full. Denning protested that a ban on the mentioning of Ministers' and parliamentarians' names would have the most serious repercussions on the reporting of events in Canberra:

56. Dixon to Bearup, 14 April 1942, R17, "GM Management - Unregistered Correspondence re. News from GM".
It could mean, in effect, that the Parliament may become, for all practical purposes, ... so far as broadcasting is concerned, completely anonymous. One cannot help feeling how dangerous this could become. The people, especially in war time, are entitled to know who their national leaders are, and with what authority they speak; reduced to complete anonymity the Parliament may lose contact with the minds of the people. 57

Bearup immediately issued an instruction that no Ministerial names were to be used, either Federal or State. Dixon protested vigorously once again, particularly at the inference that Ashley could issue an instruction concerning the non-use of State Ministers' names. For two weeks however the ABC news did not contain a parliamentarian's name. Dixon commented on one ludicrous aspect:

I should like ... to tell the Minister that despite his ban on the use of Ministers' and Members' names in Parliamentary debates, these names are still being broadcast throughout Australia in the BBC news sessions ... This week, for example, the BBC mentioned by name Mr Curtin, Mr Fadden and Mr Hughes. We, on the other hand, were merely permitted to refer to them as the 'Prime Minister', the 'Leader of the Opposition' and the 'Leader of the United Australia Party'. 58

The Commission then took a step which was ominous for Dixon when it asked Denning to draft a letter to the Prime Minister, outlining the Commission's objections to Ashley's instruction. There is no question that Dixon resented this being done, and in turn asked for permission to see the Minister. The Commission turned this suggestion down. Dixon was hurt too by the fact that the Commission was for the first time refusing to leave something to his discretion and professional judgement.

The matter was resolved to some extent when Curtin was prevailed upon to comment on the situation when asked a question in the House by Harrison. Curtin was apparently ignorant of Ashley's instruction for he

57. Draft memo Denning to Curtin. No date but apparently written 13 May 1942, R17. I have only been able to find the draft of this memo which was sent to the Commission for approval. A letter was subsequently sent along these lines and the Commission expressed its full confidence in Denning's ability to handle the situation.

claimed that the Commission had acted on its own initiative in banning
the names. He was obviously informed of the true situation within the
next 24 hours because on the following day, 28 May, he gave the House
what he called 'additional information'. Again, he did not mention
Ashley's instruction but he made it clear that the Government would
henceforth let the Commission use its own discretion.

It is not my intention to direct the Australian Broadcasting
Commission what it shall do; for my own part, I think a
commonsense handling of the use of names will meet the case
and that the ABC therefore should be free to exercise
editorial discretion.59

The difficulties, however, were not entirely at an end, and
throughout 1943 and 1944 Dixon received complaints from management and
Commissioners that Ministers' names were being used in purely
departmental context. They were more isolated than before, but ABC
staff obviously continued to experience difficulty in following
instructions to cut back on the use of names, undoubtedly because of
the pervasive scrutiny of the Ministers themselves. As Dixon was to say
repeatedly:

They point out, however, with some justification that it is
now very difficult to decide just what is a routine announcement,
simply because Ministers, no doubt for publicity purposes,
issue even the most ordinary statements under their own names.60

They could strike trouble very easily with a misjudgement as they did on
20 March 1944 when Forde, the Minister for the Army, protested strongly
that his name had been omitted from a statement that men of the 9th
Division were to be given extra leave.61

59. CPD, 28 May 1942, p.1803.
61. Copies of this news item showing the changes made after Forde
complained are included as Appendix L.
Dixon's arguments about Ministerial names angered the Commission when it was extremely depressed and upset by Ministerial interference with its news service at the beginning of 1942. He was, in their eyes, more sympathetic to Ministers' wishes than they thought desirable when the ABC's independence was under threat. But the Commission apparently did not see the danger signals and did not envisage what strong support he could call on and the effect he would have on the PSCB.

In retrospect it is possible to appreciate how beautifully Dixon played his cards. He gave the impression in front of the PSCB of being reluctant to answer questions on internal ABC matters and to embarrass or disagree with the Commission viewpoint. He was ordered by Amour to answer and received an assurance by Cleary that there would be no victimisation if he spoke his mind. We now know that the real ammunition, namely the facts required to fire at the Commission, had been given in great detail to the AJA for its submission by Dixon and his Victorian News Editor, Gil Oakley. It was left to Dixon to give the impression of total bewilderment at what had happened and to emphasise how successful his news service had been.

It almost immediately emerged that Dixon had not been consulted about the terms of the agreements or the way in which they would work. This failure to consult the head of the News Department clearly made a bad impression. He then proceeded to explain how the 'observer' principle would, in his view, adversely affect the present working of his news system. 'Observers' could not obviously 'supplement' the news, in the way it was needed. 'Observers' could not attend to the instant 'flashing' of news to the sub-editors in time to be included in the next bulletin. Dixon claimed that the ABC news frequently beat the newspapers and did not miss anything of any importance.
He was strongly supported by Syd Pratt, General Secretary of the AJA, and Jeffrey James, Secretary of the N.S.W. District of the same association. Pratt's evidence consisted of one of the strongest attacks ever made on the metropolitan newspapers and matched Labor's views perfectly.

It is patent that at present much news from overseas is distorted or suppressed either fully or in part to conform with the political policy of the daily press, which is preponderantly one-sided. It is equally impossible regarding Australian or overseas news to obtain a balanced picture from reading the papers ... From whatever angle an approach is made, an abandonment of its news gathering activities by the ABC would be a national tragedy, placing the publicly-owned "voice of Australia" in the power of a monopolistic few who serve private ends.62

He took up the traditional AJA line against syndication or agency news cover claiming that it meant that only one version or opinion of all news would be received throughout Australia of events in Canberra once AAP began its service. The AAP service would simply mean the ABC would be repeating the views of the newspaper monopolies. Like Dixon he emphasised the desirability of a strictly accurate, factual, fast service which required special skills of condensation and writing. Deamer was later to state that the new approach would be slower but more thorough, a fact which was seized upon by Dixon and his supporters as an admission of its shortcomings, because they saw speed as the special attribute of radio, and attention to accuracy as the special attribute of the ABC's news service. Thoroughness at the expense of speed did not appeal at all because it would mean the loss of the competitive edge against the newspapers. It is noteworthy that after the war the BBC moved to a deliberate policy of avoiding 'scoops' and instead concentrated on providing a more authoritative and considered approach to news. To Dixon in 1944, 'scoops', particularly from overseas, were conclusive proof of the success of his approach to news.

The AJA evidence went beyond mere attacks on the press. It contained an impassioned defence of the ABC news service and its staff, which went into such minute detail about internal decisions and incidents that it was obvious that the material had been supplied from within the ABC. In fact, the whole AJA submission was prepared by ABC journalists. Oakley, the Victorian News Editor was a federal committee-man of the Association, which had its headquarters in Melbourne. He and other AJA members began to actively lobby the Labor Government in an attempt to persuade them to set up an independent service. Dixon and journalists in other states were also involved, and a considerable amount of evidence was collected. In Melbourne, the conspirators frequently met the Customs Minister Senator Keane, to plan their campaign, the meeting place being the New Treasury Hotel. According to Oakley, Labor ministers told the AJA to play down the question of the cost of an independent service as it might alarm the electors. They guaranteed that the money would be found when needed. Finally: "a case of 70 to 80 thousand words submitted to the Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting by the AJA was compiled and copied in the Melbourne offices of the ABC. The work was done by journalists then on its staff".63

When the AJA presented its evidence it was transparently obvious to the ABC commissioners and management that the news staff had leaked confidential information to the union. There is, in the ABC's Federal Reference Library, a copy of the summary of evidence 1943-44 which bears a number of marginal notes in Moses's handwriting. Passages are marked and alongside them are such comments as 'could only have come from ABC files', 'could only have come from our staff' and 'could only have come from Federal News department'. One such passage reads:

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63. J.G. Oakley, ABC Archives Recording, October 1969.
during the recent session of Parliament you will recall the day when the big raid was made on Rabaul, when Mr Curtin made his statement on Australian foreign policy, and Senator Keane made his statement on lend-lease. That was all very big news. The general manager, Mr Moses was asked for permission that day to run the news a little longer in view of the importance of the items mentioned. He replied that he had made up his mind that a rule he had laid down should be obeyed ... No extension of time was allowed.64

The circumstances of the preparation of the AJA document provide first hand evidence of the degree to which the News Department and its staff sought protection from the Labor Government. This in turn invited the continuing interference of Labor ministers in the Commission's news policy. It was an alliance of mutual benefit. News Department and Labor Government needed each other. To the Commission it was evidence of disloyalty on a scale which defied belief. Only its news staff had an outside union to fight their battles in this way and to lobby with politicians. It reinforced the degree of alienation which the Commission was beginning to feel about its News Department. It was the activities of news in responding too eagerly to the demands of the Government which was threatening the Commission's independence. The collaboration of its journalists with the Government emphasised the rightness, in the Commission's eyes, of its attempts to restructure its approach to news and get away from its dependence on traditional journalists and traditional methods of news-gathering.

The AJA evidence also provides a glimpse into the minds of ABC journalists of the time and the resentments they felt at their treatment by ABC management. The Commission, it said, did not appreciate its staff who are represented as men who have left the sullied waters of the newspaper world for the cleaner shores of ABC journalism. Here was the first expression of a Departmental ethos or code based on antipathy towards the standards of the newspapers, and the need for creating something better.

64. Pratt, Evidence, PSCB, 5 November 1942, p.28.
With it, the news staff were groping towards their own concept of audience needs, quite independently of the Commission. It was a professional creed. Its evocation at this particular time seems to add point to Sigal's theories which see such sets of values as reducing newsmen's uncertainties. The ABC's news was under considerable strain during this period because of public and newspaper criticism and Government pressure. The conventions which it adopted of 'fairness', 'objectivity', 'accuracy', and 'impartiality' can be seen as legitimising its choice and presentation of news and deflecting outside criticism. Sigal points out that the convention of 'straight', non-interpretative, strictly attributable reporting is one such method of laying down procedures to be followed but one which guarantees the source a hearing regardless of his veracity or the validity of his statement. The incessant relaying of official statements was the major criticism of ABC news at this time, yet here was a recitation of values which legitimised that form of news. The American media had a similar code to justify the factual cover of the communist-hunting activities of Senator McCarthy in the nineteen-forties. The concept of 'balance' came later, and it was to emerge in the ABC with the advent of Richard Boyer as Chairman. Pratt of the AJA had this to say of ABC staff:

Many members of my association have joined the ABC news staff believing that it offered them the ideal which every decent journalist cherishes, the opportunity to present the news as it happens, fairly, impartially, and free of political or sectional bias, or commercial inhibitions.65

To this was added example after example of newspaper 'errors' or omissions which had embarrassed the ABC's newsmen because they had accepted them. Standards based on opposition to those of the press became the driving force behind ABC journalists from this time on. James of the N.S.W. Branch of the AJA emphasised the antithesis even more sharply than Pratt:

65. Ibid., p.27.
[The radio news staff] say that never have the newspapers proved more ineffective and never have the people showed (sic) so little faith in them. They attribute this to the fact that the people have become tired of speculation and want to be told the truth ... They claim that through its policy of giving straight, hard news at the sacrifice of colour, the ABC's news service has established a magnificent goodwill.66

The AJA was an immensely strong and influential ally for Dixon and his staff in their battle with the Commission, and gave sympathetic Labor ministers a great deal of ammunition to use against the newspaper proprietors. It is significant that although the AJA subsequently did not give evidence before the 1946 hearings of the PSCB, its arguments against the press agreements advanced in 1943 still influenced that later hearing substantially, and were referred to frequently.

For Cleary the savage and determined way in which the news staff had rebelled against the new Commission news policy must have been painfully obvious when he heard James voice their feelings thus:

The Employees of the ABC radio news service, the men whose bread and butter are at stake, consider that newspaper interests occupy too large a place in the minds of some members of the Commission who are not sympathetic towards their own news service.67

The irony of this statement is obvious. Eighteen months before Cleary had been attacked before the Gibson Committee by the newspaper proprietors for his determination to build up a competitive news service. Now he was under attack from his own staff for selling out to those interests.

I am entitled to say that when a man gives evidence before a body of this kind about five people who do a public service and who, as far as the world knows, are giving a good service, and when that evidence makes defamatory statements that those members are false to their trust and are too interested in newspaper interests, he should be answered with the reply that his evidence is false and malicious. I would say other things, but it is unnecessary for me to do so.68

66. James, Evidence, PSCB, 9 November 1943, p.38.
67. Ibid.
68. Cleary, Evidence, PSCB, 9 November 1943, p.38.
Dixon, Pratt, James and later Ezra Norton, of the Sydney *Truth* and *Sportsman*, all spoke as if the ABC were abandoning the news field entirely and this was the view eventually accepted by the PSCB. Norton for example said:

"if the Commission is not permitted to appoint its own independent representatives to give their interpretation ... it would be wrong in principle. The ABC should have continuous access to the Press Gallery and all other channels for dissemination of political news." 69

Norton, of course, was not a member of ANPA and his *Mirror* was strongly competitive with the newspapers that were. His siding with Dixon and his attack on the press monopolies must be seen in that light. But here was a newspaper proprietor who spoke the same language as Dixon on this issue, and there is no doubt that he was a valuable ally. His version of the 'observer' principle, which he shared with others, was, of course, quite incorrect. There had been no suggestion that the access of 'observers' would not be permitted to any press facilities or that any restrictions would be placed on them. The only requirement was that they should broadcast their version of events. There was consistent evidence that the Commission had failed to adequately get this point across. It is perhaps not so surprising in view of the fact that the advantages of treating news in this way had never been demonstrated in Australia as they had overseas. In Britain and the United States these broadcasting ideas had originated within the departments themselves as logical extensions of current practices. In Australia, the Commission had tried to force them on an unwilling Department from above.

In Dixon's book there is an illustration of the kind of service which the news service was then providing and the way in which it met with official approval. When Curtin arrived in the United States in April 1944, an ABC newsman immediately telephoned the Acting Prime Minister, Frank Forde for a statement. "Forde telephoned back a few minutes before

the 6.45 a.m. bulletin with a statement on Curtin's mission. Forde told me afterwards that the first portion of his statement was coming through the receiving set in his room as he was dictating the final words, and yet we got it all in without a break. It wasn't a long statement either! Forde often quoted that as an example of good work on the part of the ABC news staff. The 'observer' proposal meant so little to Dixon both during and after the Committee hearings that it receives no mention at all in Inside the ABC.

The 1944 PSCB Reports

The Reports of the PSCB were entirely unsympathetic to the ABC's point of view. They recommended the retention of Section 21 of the Act, saying that it would be unwise for Parliament, through the Minister of the Government, to relinquish control of matters affecting high policy. "These limits on the Commission's independence are clearly intended to give Parliament ... some control over the Commission's activities. That control, if it is to be effective, must cover, in our opinion, not merely the expenditure and procedure aspects of propositions submitted by the Commission under the ministerially reserved powers, but also the very policy underlying the propositions themselves." 71

The report on the news agreements made much of an apparent failure by the Commission to adhere to one of the recommendations of the Gibson Committee. This was that the Commission should not extend its Australian news-gathering services beyond that now established. 72 The PSCB contended that this meant retaining the present news set-up in Canberra, not disbanding

70. Dixon, ABC, p.120.
72. Emphasis mine.
it. It doubted whether the 'observers' would be able to check the accuracy and impartiality of agency news and felt that the combination of agency and 'observers' would slow down the Commission's service. The PSCB arrived at its own definition of 'observers'. They were, in reality, it said, commentators, and it was distrustful of the whole idea, because it might prove to run counter to the principle of 'straight' unembellished news reports.

We believe that in a democracy it is far more important that listeners should be given 'straight' news so that they may form their own independent judgment, than that they should receive observers' commentaries.

It went on to warn, that if the Commission persisted with the 'observer' idea, the men involved would have to be watched carefully to make sure they were impartial and "to see whether it is possible to make them a success without giving cause for complaint in striving for descriptive effect". 73

It supported the establishment of a separate news-gathering service by the ABC and recommended immediate additions in all States to the present 'straight' news-gathering arrangements. It could see no barrier to the ABC obtaining general news from the press providing independence is retained in the collection and use of all parliamentary matter. Its most important recommendation was as follows:

We consider ... that the ABC should approach the news question from the long-range view of a determination ultimately to set up its own completely independent news-gathering organization, and that it should not commit itself to any course of action which would prevent the logical development of this aim when and as the necessary man-power and finance become available. 74

73. 4th Report of the PSCB, p.15.

74. Ibid.
The Government had been alarmed at any reporting of their activities which went beyond the factual regurgitation of speeches and announcements. In 1970, Karl Nordenstreng noted that attempts to place events in perspective were still causing problems between groups in authority and broadcasters. His contention is that reporting which is confined to 'fact' alone does not in itself guarantee accurate coverage because it is only impartial and objective in relation to the groups whose actions are being reported. "Those who have become used to being 'objectively' covered by the mirror media are now annoyed at being presented 'in perspective', which is likely to be perceived as 'biased' however balanced it may be". 75

The PSCB report of 1944 marked the end of ABC attempts to introduce any form of 'voice report' into bulletins on a systematic basis for nineteen years. From this point on, the interview, the actuality and the 'observer' broadcast were left to the non-journalists of the Talks Department. Talks began a programme called "News Review", a truncated version of the "Australian Newsreel" proposal which provided an outlet for reports from a small team of 'broadcasters' who had been sent overseas to cover the various war theatres. They were quite distinct from the 'war correspondents' who were News Department journalists. The correspondents sent the hard 'spot news', usually be cable, while the 'broadcasters' sent back recordings. While there was some interchange of material, the demarcation lines between the 'broadcasters' and the 'journalists' were clearly drawn in 1944 and the News Department was not to have access to microphones, recording machines or production facilities for many years. We have earlier noted that 'News Commentaries' which provided elementary production experience, were removed from Dixon's control and given to Talks in 1940. The Commission's plan for 'observers',

and commentaries to be under the control of News would unquestionably have widened immensely the Department's experience and perspectives. In Britain, and in the United States, News Departments of broadcasting organisations contained some of the most active and famous broadcasters of our time. It was the News Departments which had set the pace in new broadcasting techniques. It was their demands for more mobile and portable apparatus for recording purposes 'in the field' which produced a whole range of new equipment which was to revolutionise news production methods. After the end of the war it was the ABC's Talks Department which eagerly absorbed and utilised new ways of presenting 'voice reports' and interviews, which began to use tape machines, and as a consequence do more and more location work. 

It was the Talks Department which was services with tapes, using the new portable recorders, from the battlefields of Korea and Malaya. The News Department restricted itself to written copy for news bulletins which were read by an announcer. It was the logical consequence of the approach to reporting which had begun in the late nineteen-thirties.

This thesis will not examine 'News Review' or the output of the Talks Department. However, it should be noted that 'News Review' while being an efficient production which made the best use of evolving techniques did not really pretend to be a "news" programme in the sense that it was required to be up-to-the-minute. It took a leisurely approach to its news-gathering, being mostly content to follow up yesterday's news stories. It was in fact more of a "magazine", particularly in relation to local material. It suffered because its men were more trained in production and presentation techniques than in any 'news sense'.


77. The author was a reporter and producer of 'News Review', 1957-60.
It did not therefore compete with news bulletins in any way, nor did it add a great deal to any comprehension of the news of the day. It did not attempt much analysis or backgrounding, being mostly content with 'descriptions' or straight interviews. However the Talks Department and its 'News Review' programme posed both a challenge and threat to the News Department in later years and this will be examined in a later chapter.

The Second Round of News Agreements

In June 1944, Postmaster-General Ashley summoned Cleary and Moses to tell them that Cabinet was dissatisfied with the news service. In telling them this, Ashley directly linked the restoration of 1s to the ABC's return from licence fees, which Cabinet had just approved. "He mentioned casually that 'in agreeing to restore the second 1/- to the Commission, Cabinet had decided that this restoration should operate for a term of one year only until they saw what steps we took to improve the news service'." 78

Cleary pressed Ashley for the reasons for the dissatisfaction, but Ashley was evasive, saying only that more detail was needed. Cleary's own assessment was that the sudden criticism was due to the fact that Evatt and Calwell wanted longer treatment of their statements and that Calwell and Amour were pursuing a personal vendetta against a man called Moline, of the ABC Weekly, who for some reason, they now believed had replaced Deamer as Controller of Public Relations. Deamer had resigned in May. Moline was Polish and a friend of Deamer's. Cleary wrote:

78. Cleary to all Commissioners, 2 June 1944. Attachment to minute of Commission Meeting of 12-14 July 1944.
It is likely that when the question of the news service came up for discussion in Cabinet, reference was made to the Commission's employment of a so-called 'Communist' and 'foreigner'. It will be recalled that Calwell insisted that Moline had changed his name and was not Australian born, also, that he was assistant to Deamer on the Weekly. He may believe that Moline's influence extended beyond the Weekly to the news services, as Deamer controlled this also, and that now that (sic) Deamer had gone his mantle has fallen on Moline. 78a

It was continuing evidence to Cleary of what he called "Cabinet's violent interest in the news service". 79

In view of this development and the Committee's decision on the newspaper agreements one can only say that the Commission decided to react in a defiant, if not foolhardy, manner. In its 12th Annual Report it criticised the fact that none of the Committee's reports had so far been discussed in Parliament.

Failing a lead by Parliament, the Commission considers itself bound to preserve the constitutional position, that is to say however much it may respect the views on policy expressed either by the Minister or the Committee, it should not accept such views as mandatory, or accommodate itself to them against its independent judgement, on matters the responsibility for which has been laid upon it by Parliament. It should 'steer by its own lights'. To do otherwise would be to abdicate from its statutory obligations. 80

It repeated its argument that there was no ground for considering the proposed news agreement would weaken the integrity or efficiency of its news service. There was once more no indication from the Government that it was going to provide the money for the independent service which the Committee had recommended.

Dixon's new estimate for an independent service was between £70,000 and £80,000, but Moses himself felt it would be in excess of £70,000.
£120,000, double the £63,000 being spent at present on news. Before the Committee, both Dixon and Moses were in agreement that the Commission could not afford that amount without ignoring its other commitments. Finance was becoming an increasingly critical question for the Commission as the war drew to an end. The method of financing by allocating it a fixed sum from licence fees was proving totally inadequate in coping with the natural growth of broadcasting services.

Although McCall and Deamer had criticised Australian United Press in their 1942 report, they had recommended an agreement with that agency for news from Canberra and Armed Services Headquarters if it proved not possible to secure an agreement with ANPA for Australian news. Cleary and the Commission therefore decided to give Denning permission to negotiate with AUP for a basic service of rounds, interviews, handouts and general news during the 'off' periods in Canberra. These were in the early mornings, at night when the House was not sitting, and at week-ends. The Agreement was concluded and began on 28 August 1944. It was for three months and could be terminated by one month's notice. The cost was £10 per week.

There is only scant information in ABC files on this agreement, but it seems clear that the Commission felt that it had to respond to the rebuff from the PSCB by emphasising that it had the right to negotiate such an agreement without prior Government approval provided the amount involved was less than £5,000. It had to demonstrate that it still had the right, as provided for in the Broadcasting Act, to secure news from whichever source it deemed necessary. The saving involved was only small, ranging from £6 to £14 per week and this emphasises the symbolic nature of the agreement. The Canberra news staff would still cover Parliament when it was sitting and would be alerted by AUP when any big news break occurred when ABC men were off duty.
There was a typical element of Cleary confrontation in the
agreement. It was, of course, quite contrary to two of the key
recommendations of the PSCB which stated that:

the ABC should maintain the present scope and range of
Australian 'straight' news-gathering arrangements and extend
them further [and further] ... we see no reason why the ABC
should not enter an arrangement with the daily newspapers for
the supply of general news ... provided that complete
independence is guaranteed in the collection, treatment and
broadcasting of all parliamentary matter. 

The Canberra news staff was reduced by two as a result of the Agreement
and the AUP service was heavily geared to Parliamentary matter.

It was hardly surprising therefore that within a month of the
beginning of the agreement it was the subject of questions in the
Parliament from Labor members who were among the keenest supporters of an
'independent' news service for the ABC, namely Senator Amour and A.D.
Fraser. Amour gave details of the agreement in his question to Ashley
thereby revealing that 'leaks' from ABC news staff were continuing. He
alleged that the Commission was ignoring the recommendations of the PSCB
and suggested that if the Minister did not have the power to intervene,
the Act should be amended to enable him to do so. Ashley in his reply
gave further evidence of the differences that existed between him and
some of his senior Labor colleagues on this issue. He defended the
Commission's decision, claiming that it did not run counter to the
PSCB's views, though he was on shaky ground in doing so. He showed no
inclination to intervene.

82. See *CPD*, 14 September 1944, p.762.
By January 1945, however, Labor pressure on the Commission to discontinue the agreement had become intense. Moses recommended to the Commission that, "in view of the opposition to it of both the Government and members of the Parliamentary Committee, it might well be politic for us to allow our present arrangement with AUP to lapse".\(^{83}\) McCall on the other hand sharply disagreed but the Commission accepted Moses's advice.

The AUP affair was the most conclusive evidence so far that the rights and safeguards of Commission independence with regard to news were illusory. News relating to the Government could not be collected as the Commission saw fit but only as the Government saw fit. It did not matter that AUP was an independent agency, divorced from the newspaper monopolies. It could not be relied upon in the same way as the Commission's service could be, because it was less subject to political pressure. While there could be some argument as to whether Section 21 gave the Government power to veto news agreements on policy grounds if they exceeded £5,000, Section 25 giving the Commission power to collect news as it saw fit was unequivocal and theoretically binding. The fact that the Government could still work behind the scenes to frustrate an agreement which the Commission had every right to conclude made a travesty of not only Section 25 but also Section 23, which required any Government directions to the ABC to be put in writing and included in the Commission's annual report. The Government was able to direct the Commission in this matter quite effectively without any reference to Section 23 and the Commission presumably was too inhibited at this time to do much about it.

Following this further humiliation with AUP, the Commission had no time to plan further moves before W.J. Cleary stepped down from his position as Chairman on 31 March 1945. There have been many theories

\(^{83}\) Moses to Commissioners, 11 January 1945, attachment to minute of Commission meeting 22-24 January 1945.
about his resignation. Dixon believes it was a clear case of his disgust at the disloyalty of his Chief Executive Officer, Moses. The evidence for this is that Moses apparently did not seek Commission approval before fixing a figure to be paid by the commercials for taking the ABC's news bulletins. E.R. Dawes, who was appointed a Commissioner in 1944, and became Vice-Chairman under Boyer, believed that it was as a result of resentment at his treatment by the PSCB, both in its enquiries in the news agreements and into the ABC Staff Regulations. Dawes also believed that Cleary was annoyed at the way Moses was recalled from active service, without consultation with the Commission. He also mentions that Cleary was disconcerted at the way in which staff members had communicated directly with the PSCB to put their case. His vague words to the press on his departure about his no longer being able to rely on the loyalty of his staff might refer to these incidents, involving journalists, just as much as to Moses. When a definitive history of the ABC is written these questions might finally be answered.

84. This thesis does not deal with the complex question of the negotiations for acknowledgment and payment from stations taking ABC news. Moses appears to have fixed a payment figure which the commercial stations regarded as too high. They then entered into separate arrangements for the supply of news with the press. The Press strongly criticised Moses for negotiating for the sale of bulletins which contained news taken from the papers, without consultation with ANPA. It was alleged by both Henderson and Calwell that Moses had acted without Commission approval in fixing a figure. The Government was disturbed by ANPA's tie-up with the commercial stations and said landlines for relaying such bulletins were unavailable. See R32/2, 'Chairman's File' and CPD, 10 May 1945, pp.1569-1573. Commercials which opted for a service independent of the ABC started broadcasting their own bulletins from May 1945.

85. See E.R. Dawes, ABC Archives Recording, 27 January 1962. This theory was also advanced strongly by H.L. Anthony in a speech in the House, the month following Cleary's resignation when he said: "the record of evidence taken by the Broadcasting Committee would convince any reader that any self-respecting man of integrity and strength could not for long tolerate the kind of treatment which Mr Cleary received". See CPD, 7 March 1945, pp.390-396.
What is of interest in connection with news policy is that, from this point on, the relationship between Dixon and Moses became very sour, a point which will be examined further in the next chapter.

In April 1945, McCall reported that the only recourse open to the Commission with news was to renegotiate the 1943 agreements with AAP and ANPA, so that with both overseas and Australian news, the Commission was given the right to specially supplement either using its own men or other sources. An independent news service could not be considered, he said, because of manpower problems and high costs.

This was the point of view adopted by R.J.F. Boyer as Chairman. But Boyer, unlike Cleary, was not just going to hope the Government would go along with the agreements when they were drawn up. He was determined to sort out the crucial matter of the principle involved before negotiations started.

Eric Kennedy of ANPA had told the PSCB that officers of the ABC had confided to him their worry at the increasing number of complaints about the political bias of the reporting of news from Canberra. There seems no reason to doubt this. In Boyer's view, "the sensitivity of the public to a Government-controlled news service as expressed in the public clamour of that period was genuine and could not be wholly attributed to Press hostility". Boyer was concerned that following the Commission's failure to implement its 1942 News policy decision, the impression would be reinforced in the public's mind that it was a propaganda medium serving the Government. He believed that unless the Commission could be seen to be in charge of its own news, it would lack credibility. This in turn could

86. Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.
87. Boyer's appointment was announced by Curtin on 12 April 1945.
88. R.J.F. Boyer, "The ABC News Agreements with the Press", personal note dated 3 April 1946, R32.2, "Chairman's File".
weaken the Commission's standing and endanger it. In the 'thirties it had been a question of wresting control from the press. Now it was a question of wresting control from the Government, because Ministers were still convinced that the ABC provided their only chance of reaching the public without their statements and intentions being distorted. Boyer however recognised that the Labor Government's obsession with maintaining firm supervision over ABC news was motivated by the fear that it would become just another vehicle for the anti-Government press monopolies. Boyer was determined to have an agreement with the press which would meet with Government approval thus demonstrating to the public that the Commission had reasserted itself and was responsible for its bulletins once again. To be acceptable to the Government the agreement would have to give the Commission, at the same time, maximum freedom to supplement with the eventual aim of becoming as self-sufficient as possible. The agreement was essential to clear the air. He told the PSCB subsequently:

The Commission ... decided that one of its major responsibilities, if the criticism and questionings of both the government and the public were to be allayed was to try to clean up this problem of its news sources. It had poisoned the relations of the Commission with the press and the government and led to confusion and lack of confidence on the part of the community.89

Boyer had recognised, as Cleary had, that News was the flash-point of the whole of the Commission's output. The Commission had forfeited a degree of public confidence up to 1939 because of the unsatisfactory nature of its press sources and its press-imposed restrictions. From that point on, there had been evidence of public dissatisfaction because of over-attention to Government hand-outs.

As well as Government criticism when statements were not used, the Commission was coming under increasing attack from the Opposition for the nature of its news service. It had begun with Menzies in 1942.

Every time I listen to the Canberra news session it has in my opinion, consisted almost entirely of Government propaganda ... it has been commented on not merely by me but by most people who have spoken to me.90

By 1945 these protests had grown into a crescendo. H.L. Anthony launched an attack on Government interference with the ABC in his speech in the House in March.91 In July, as negotiations with the press were getting under way, Fadden claimed his major speech on the housing situation had not been adequately reported. There was every reminder of general dissatisfaction to the Commission.

Before accepting his appointment Boyer therefore decided, in consultation with his fellow Commissioners to seek assurances first from the Prime Minister, John Curtin. At his interview with Curtin, Boyer stressed:

the very embarrassing position in which the whole Commission had been placed by the refusal of the Government to give it its trust in a matter so critical as that of news services which in our view required the objective judgment and unfettered control of the members of the Commission more than any other aspect of national broadcasting if the Australian public were to retain its faith in the integrity of the Commission and of the Government of the day.92

Boyer requested: "a public statement of the policy of his Government in respect to the position of the Commission in regard to its trust as laid out in the Act with special reference to news services".93

90. _Daily Telegraph_, 24 August 1942. See also Senator Leckie, _CPD_, 19 July 1944, pp.153-4.
91. See also footnote 85.
93. _Ibid._
Although Boyer believed Curtin's statement which followed was quite unequivocal and clearly removed the difficulties which had arisen from the invoking of Section 21 by the Government, circumstances were to prove otherwise. In retrospect, one can say that subsequent difficulties arose because it does not specifically mention news as Boyer requested. It is couched in general terms:

The healthy and beneficent function of national broadcasting and the maintenance of public confidence in the system must rest in all matters touching these values, solely on the integrity and independent judgment of the persons chosen to determine and administer its policy, and not on either review by, or pressure from, any sources outside it, political or non-political ... all sections of the Act should be read in the light of the above general intent of Parliament in the establishment of the Commission.

In conjunction with this Boyer received a promise from Curtin which is not mentioned by Bolton and which is only referred to obliquely in evidence to the PSCB.

The Prime Minister also gave me a verbal undertaking specifically indicating that when the Commission presented a new news agreement, his Government would recognise that the responsibility in this matter belonged to the Commission and that it would be approved.

Curtin died on 3 July but there is nothing to indicate that Boyer had any inkling that this would effect these apparently firm undertakings. He had certainly taken much greater care than Cleary had to clear the hurdle of the Government in respect of implementing Commission news policy but he seemed no more aware than Cleary of the extent of the differences existing in the Labor ministry over this issue. Curtin himself had always maintained a certain ambiguity on the question of an independent news service and we have seen how the Commission was misled in 1943 and 1944 into thinking that

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Ashley's moderate stance was a representative one. Evatt, Beasley, Calwell and Amour had demonstrated how powerful they were as a group in influencing the direction of Labor's broadcasting policy and it is surprising that the Commission did not try to reach some informal modus vivendi with them on the newspaper question. Instead Boyer tried to resolve the question by getting a ruling from the Prime Minister but this was certainly not the way to deal with the Labor Party.

When the Commission finally did approach the Postmaster-General, Senator Cameron to ask for his formal approval of the new agreements, it could point to the fact that the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner, Professor D.B. Copland, had himself decided on a fair price which both parties had accepted. After the ABC and the press had disagreed over terms, it was ANPA who suggested the approach to Copland. The press wanted £30,000 for a combined overseas and local news service, while the Commission argued for £17,500, £10,000 of which was for the AAP overseas news and £7,500 for Australian news from ANPA. Henderson told Boyer that in asking Copland for an independent judgment "we are anxious to establish a relationship with the Commission which will prevent any future misunderstanding or disagreement. We are desirous of co-operating and assisting the Commission in its national task". 96

Copland considered £12,500 for the AAP service was the appropriate figure and £7,500 for the news from ANPA. He stipulated that the terms should be renegotiated "if there is a departure of more than 10% from existing practice of wordage used of frequency of broadcast by the ABC, the charge should be reviewed on application by either party". 97

96. Henderson to Boyer, 3 August 1945, Australian Archives, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1, "News Negotiations for Agreements with News Agencies".
97. Copland, "Determination of Charge for News Services (Local and Overseas), supplied by the AAP to the ABC", 22 October 1945, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1.
Boyer's letter to Cameron of 23 November 1945 was brief and to the point. He pointed out that all the matters which were previously the subject of disagreement had been resolved, and he asked for immediate approval to coincide with the next Commission meeting. There is no record of any contact or meeting between the Commission and its officers with members of the Government on the subject of the press agreements between this date and the occasion of Boyer's meeting with Curtin. Clearly Boyer was convinced that the word of Curtin was all he needed.

Cameron's subsequent request to know more of the details of the agreements before he could approve them was a blow to the Commission. As far as Boyer was concerned, Cameron was obviously unaware of what had taken place. He asked to see him personally to explain the background. On 4 April 1946 Boyer and Dawes met Cameron and the new Prime Minister, Ben Chifley, at which meeting Chifley suggested that he would be satisfied with the agreements if it could be shown that they met all the objections raised by the PSCB to the previous agreements in 1944. Boyer's understanding of the meeting is conveyed in a letter to Cameron.

You will recollect that it was agreed that the question ... should be referred to the Committee for a 'quick look', to use the Prime Minister's words ... Mr Dawes and I take it that this will require merely the examination by the Committee of the terms of the present agreement in the light of such objections [to the previous agreements] without the taking of formal evidence. 98

Boyer sought confirmation of this from Chifley and was told, "I am quote satisfied if the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting feels that the proposed Agreements meets all the objections raised by it to the previous Agreement". 99 Chifley did not refer to the "quick look" he had mentioned earlier, nor did he pre-empt the Committee hearing by

98. Boyer to Cameron, 5 April 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1.
99. Chifley to Boyer, 12 April 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1.
agreeing to restrict it in any way. The decision on whether or not the Commission had succeeded in meeting all the previous objections would be left to the PSCB, and as that Committee was headed by Senator Amour, who was known not to be sympathetic to the press, the agreements were once more thrown into the melting pot.

Nevertheless, Boyer felt the Commission case was unassailable. The 1944 PSCB Report had raised no objection to an agreement with AAP for the supply of news from overseas provided the Commission maintained staff correspondents in London, the U.S.A. and Canada, to provide an independent viewpoint. It should not also exclude the possibility of an Empire-wide exchange of news by national broadcasting organisations of member countries. Boyer was able to show that the new AAP agreement gave complete freedom to the ABC to establish correspondents in any part of the world, did not rule out an Empire exchange and even allowed the ABC to subscribe to other news-agencies.

As for Australian news, the PSCB had previously said the ABC should not relinquish its right to collect news independently, should maintain and extend its present 'straight' news-gathering arrangements and should maintain complete independence in the collection, treatment and broadcasting of Parliamentary material. If these conditions were satisfied it could see no reason why the ABC should not get its news from newspapers. Ultimately, however, the Commission should aim to set up its own completely independent news-gathering organisation.

Boyer now replied that the new agreement covered all these points. The ABC had not given up its right to collect its own news in any area, had maintained its service and expanded it, and had purchased the right to view news in the newspaper offices and select or reject it according to its independent judgement. Parliamentary news would continue to be handled by its own staff.
The Press

After having apparently won Labor Government support for the agreements at his meeting with Curtin, Boyer turned his attention to the press. Here there were two major problems to settle. First was the question of the ABC's staff gathering its own news and second, the extent to which the newspapers wanted to be associated with the ABC's own news collecting activities, in view of their belief that the ABC's Canberra reporting was biased and consisted of Government propaganda.

The first proved not to be difficult. For six years the press had opposed supplementary news-gathering of a 'competitive' hard news nature by the ABC. Now they were prepared to forego this old objection if the Commission paid for press services at their full value, that is, what other subscribers were paying. The real stumbling block was the question of acknowledgment.

By this time, even the old press 'friends' of the ABC were convinced that the ABC's Canberra reporters had taken 'factual accuracy' to mean that publicity handouts were simply to be reproduced without any further enquiry. Smith's Weekly, which had so strongly championed Cleary's cause against the news monopolies in the 'thirties voiced its concern.

When a Minister makes a statement to a political roundsman it is not necessarily accepted at its face value. The reporter's duty is to verify it and be satisfied that it accurately states the case. If he finds it does not accord with the facts, his public obligation is to ascertain what is true and to print nothing but the truth. He is the check between the Minister and his paper's readers. Merely to pass on 'hand-outs' is not to fulfil his proper function. Reporters who take what is offered them are known as 'trained seals' in the writing game; they swallow what is tossed to them. From ABC 'news' that now goes over the air from Ministers, their reporters are undisguised 'trained seals'. That anyway, is the impression listeners get.100

100. Smith's Weekly, 15 July 1944.
Ezra Norton had also changed his mind. The Sydney Daily Mirror, one of Norton's papers, said that in the past many freedom-loving Australians had backed the idea of an independent news service for the ABC. But now:

it must be said that the Australian news services of the ABC have become merely a medium for distributing the rubber stamp handouts of the Federal Government. Now, every day, the well-known phrase 'Here is the Australian news' is followed by a series of departmental blurbs, announcements and apologies ... They are seldom in themselves news-worthy and they are frequently tinged and often more than tinged with special propaganda.101

ANPA and AAP took a consistent line from the beginning of the new round of negotiations with the ABC that they would prefer the Commission to set up its own independent news service. Henderson, who was now Chairman of both press organisations, sent the following telegram to Boyer: "In view Government's hostility and undesirability any association involving affiliation with an organisation subject to political control we would prefer Commission to establish its own service".102 He went on to say that if the Commission wanted a service from the press it would have to be subject to agreement on terms of acknowledgment and separation of the Commission's own services from the news obtained from press sources. Boyer believed that it would be impossible and undesirable to separate the two news services in this way.

The Commission desires me to point out that the right to supplement either overseas or local news either (a) by our own staff, or (b) by the purchase of other news sources, clearly implies a mixing of news items from all sources in either an overseas or local bulletin.103

Eventually Henderson dropped this requirement.

101. Daily Mirror, 4 July 1944.
102. Telegram Henderson to Boyer, 20 June 1945, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1.
103. Boyer to Henderson, 23 August 1945, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1.
The agreement Boyer obtained from Henderson gave the Commission everything it asked for. It gave the Commission complete freedom in the news-gathering area while allowing ABC journalists access to newspaper offices to select news as it reached the newspapers from their news-gathering staff. According to Henderson the newspapers found Boyer a very different man to deal with than Cleary. Boyer they found to be gregarious and astute. Cleary had been dour and unfriendly. Boyer was friendly with Murdoch and with Angus McLachlan of the Fairfax company. Henderson claims that Boyer came to him and pleaded for the newspapers to provide a service, arguing that mounting costs of the existing service were throwing too much of a burden on the Commission's finances and "the setup of the ABC was such that the political lobbying, the pressures and the staff were beyond the capacity of the Commission to control". Henderson says that Boyer was worried by the activities of his staff in cultivating Labor ministers.

Another factor which apparently convinced the press that it should come to an agreement was the Commission's involvement in negotiations with other organisations for the supply of news. In September 1945, Moses and Dixon had talks with Norton about the supply of both overseas and Australian news from the Truth and Sportsman company which operated the Daily Mirror. The Mirror was not part of ANPA and got its overseas news independently of AAP. Nothing came of these discussions.

104. Interview with Rupert Henderson, 10 February 1976.
105. The Daily Mirror quoted prices of £180 weekly for its overseas news and £100 for its Australian news. Although these were rejected by the Commission at its meeting of 5 December 1945 on the basis of cost alone, clearly the proposed method of delivery would also have been unsatisfactory at this time. The Daily Mirror wanted the news taken from its pages, as soon as published, whereas the Commission wanted press news before it had passed through the hands of editorial staff. The December Commission meeting was told that the Mirror wanted to terminate its long-standing arrangement with ABC under which news could be taken from its columns for £25 per annum. This seems to have been in operation from either 1941 or 1942.
Dixon at the same time discovered that United Press's contract with AAP had ended and the big American agency was now able to sell its services to any buyer in Australia. Previously AAP had had exclusive rights to UP's material in Australia. In addition Associated Press, the other American agency was also looking around for prospective Australian customers when its contract with AAP expired in the middle of 1946. Dixon wanted both services bought by the ABC for feeding into the ABC's London office. The Commission authorised the opening of negotiations with United Press just at the time when the actual contents of the agreements with ANPA and AAP were being drawn up. By November McCall, now Assistant General Manager, and Moses were envisaging taking UP and AAP services from abroad, ending the Exchange Telegraph service, the British Official Wireless transmissions and the payments to AAP for Reuters news in BBC bulletins. Dixon was also pressing for the ABC to take Reuters directly into the London office. In January 1946, the Commission decided not to approach AP and Reuters because of the stage negotiations had reached with ANPA and AAP. In the newspaper world it is impossible to maintain secrecy for long over such feelers and talks. Henderson says the newspapers knew about the Commission's moves and that they considered there was the possibility of very real competition in overseas news as a result.

**The Head of News**

Frank Dixon's testimony and that of the AJA, based on inside information before the PSCB, had successfully thwarted Commission attempts to obtain agreements with the press in 1944. He had shown then that he

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106. The Exchange Telegraph agency service was taken by the BCC's London office from 1939 onwards. It was one of Jackson's key sources of information.
had powerful allies outside the Commission and would not hesitate to use them. With the new agreements, the Commission was faced with a decision concerning Dixon's role. It finally chose to involve him in working out the details, but only at a very late stage when the principles had been agreed upon.

So, although talks between Boyer and the newspaper proprietors had begun in May 1945, Dixon was not told of the negotiations until October when he was 'astonished'. From the very beginning Boyer had sought in broad terms access to the newspapers' source of news, that is the right to go into newspaper offices to see the news before publication. Henderson had immediately agreed to 'proofs' being available to ABC men within the newspaper offices. The workability or desirability of this system of gaining access to news was not discussed between the two men. It was left to McCall and Dixon to work out the details.

In November 1945, Dixon prepared a list of his requirements for access to news within the newspaper offices. It was quite formidable and would have made any newspaper proprietor blink in disbelief. It placed demands on the newspapers which would have been disruptive to their routines. Dixon wanted news breaking close to bulletin times to be telephoned direct to the ABC by the newspaper reporters. As well as 'proofs' he wanted to have access to 'overmatter', that is, material set up for publication but not used, and also all other unused copy. Duplicates of all news phoned in was to be made available. Dixon was, of course, concerned with maintaining speed of reporting above all else. This, he regarded, as the main attribute of his radio news, and he was concerned that this would deteriorate when having to be fed from the newspapers. Hence he was demanding the constant feeding of material as soon as it arrived in the newspaper offices and asking that the newspaper reporters themselves assume much of the responsibility for this.

When Dixon and McCall saw Henderson on 6 December, it was obvious that the practical difficulties, if Dixon stuck to his requirements, were considerable. It would be difficult to supply unused copy, drop copies could not be guaranteed for every story, and Henderson was not agreeable to having newspaper reporters phone copy through to the ABC direct. It could only be made available to the ABC man assigned to the newspaper office. Henderson was taken aback by the ABC's demands for a continuous and instantaneous news flow and it was finally agreed that the Commission should put its own men not only in the Sydney Morning Herald office, but in the offices of the Daily Telegraph, the Sydney Sun, the Melbourne Herald, and the Melbourne Sun-Pictorial. Dixon calculated that this would mean the employment of seven journalists at least. He thought the extra costs involved were not worth it.

It is obvious ... that there will be an appreciable increase in news costs in the new arrangement, over and above the actual payments to AAP and ANPA. It is impossible to say, at this stage, whether the additional material received will be worth the extra cost. In point of speed a newspaper service cannot be a substitute for our own direct service.108

Dixon told McCall that he would oppose the agreement even if it meant his leaving the ABC.

The Commission proposal was in fact cumbersome and unworkable. Dixon may in fact have carried his demands beyond what was necessary, in order to make Henderson appear to be the stumbling block, but there was but there was much truth in what he said. The arrangement could only have worked in either of two ways. The office of a paper such as the Sydney Morning Herald could have prepared a bulletin of radio news for the ABC from its own sources, or the ABC could have begun broadcasting its news from the office of the newspaper itself. These would have been practical solutions, but they would not have satisfied Boyer, Dixon or the

108. Dixon to McCall, 7 December 1945, SP724, Box 38. 15/1/1.
Government. The Sydney Morning Herald was preparing a news bulletin for 2GB, Sydney at this time and other papers were supplying other stations which had also decided not to continue relaying the ABC News. But Boyer wanted access to news at the source before publication to avoid the problem of the editorial 'colouring' of newspaper news. Dixon could not have abided losing his editorial responsibility in this way, and the Government, presumably, would not have stood for it. So it was not discussed as a feasible solution. Later, the commercial stations were to begin broadcasting their own news from newsrooms within newspaper complexes, supplementing them with their own reports. But this would hardly have accorded with the desire for the ABC to show that it was in control of its news services. The ABC insistence on having immediate access to every word of every story flowing into a newspaper and the telephoning of this material to its own team of sub-editors in time for the next bulletin was simply not practicable as far as the newspapers were concerned. As pointed out earlier, these were problems faced because of the lack of a nation-wide domestic news agency in Australia, which could have provided an instantaneous cover of news, direct to the ABC's offices by teleprinter.

Dixon was asked to substantiate his claim that it would be cheaper for the Commission to gather its own news. He prepared a long case for an independent service which the Commission considered in January 1946. He argued that the ABC should look to sign separate contracts with British United Press (BUP), AP and Reuters, instead of AAP. This would cost more than the agreement visualised with AAP but:

if we take the AAP service we shall be receiving a service edited in London to suit the policies of the main papers subscribing to it. I should prefer the news to be edited to suit the Commission's policy of a fair deal to all parties and interests.109

109. Dixon to McCall, 8 January 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/1.
This is the first occasion that Dixon had evinced any doubts about the impartiality of AAP's overseas service and was very much in line with AJA thinking on this question. It has been pointed out already that the ABC had not questioned the neutrality of AAP during the period in which it had subscribed to the service.

But Dixon's ammunition was directed mainly to attacking the agreement for Australian news. He drew attention to the Commission's gradual build-up of its news staff in most states, mostly due to the establishment of parliamentary roundsmen to provide a coverage of Federal Government matters in Sydney and Melbourne, as well as Canberra, and of State politics as recommended by the PSCB in 1944. He claimed that if the extra people required to work in the newspaper offices under the proposed agreements were instead added to the present news-gathering staff in each state, the ABC would be completely independent of the press in the capital cities. If £4,000 per annum were paid to a network of eighty stringer correspondents in the country, the ABC would be fully independent for all its Australian news for a little more than the cost of the ANPA agreement. Dixon summed up the position by saying:

The Commission has gone so far into the independent field now that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for it to withdraw. The additional cost of making the service completely independent of the papers would not now be great. If we miss the present opportunity of establishing our own service, it may well be that the newspapers will force the price up each time the contract comes up for renewal, so that eventually the Commission will be paying more than an independent service would have cost it.110

The logic of this appealed to Moses and he recommended that the Commission reconsider the question of the Australian news agreement, because of the heavy cost of engaging the extra staff. The Commission

110. Ibid.
however merely decided to defer the operation of the agreements, when approved, until the new financial year. There is no doubt that from this time on, a genuine uncertainty became apparent in the ABC approach to the agreements. Boyer and the Commission wanted the agreements finalised to underline the point of principle involved. The Commission had to demonstrate that it alone should determine the sources of its news and the Government should recognise this. When, however, it was demonstrated by Dixon that an independent Australian service would cost about the same as the ANPA agreement, the Commission was on very thin ice in arguing its case. It could not forcibly condemn its own news service either publicly or before the PSCB. Yet behind the scenes it was frightened at the prospect of an independent service being forced upon it, which would continue to be subservient to Government wishes, and which, as it expanded, would increasingly eat into Commission finances. Before the subsequent hearings of the PSCB it felt obliged to pay lip service to the principle of eventually having an independent news service, in accordance with previous findings of the PSCB and Dixon's figures which showed this was possible for Australian news therefore placed it in an invidious position. When the PSCB saw that Moses himself wavered on the question of the desirability of the Australian news agreement, the Commission case did not look very plausible at all.

Being aware of Dixon's considerable reservations, and recognising that the ABC was on very difficult technical ground, McCall and Moses decided to seek his advice on the framing of the agreements. This was made more necessary by the rush to prepare them in January and February 1946, after Cameron had requested details before giving his approval. Several of his suggestions were later incorporated in the agreements. By this time, he was fighting the agreements tenaciously behind the scenes, yet he was obviously anxious to have 'a bob each way' and get the best deal possible if the agreements were forced on him.
Dixon is an excellent illustration of how the inherent attitude of one important participant in a policy decision can affect the outcome. Pressman and Wildavsky point out the necessity of finding out the degree of urgency and commitment of each participant. Recognising that the probability of agreement by each participant at each decision point must be exceedingly high for any policy to have a chance of being successfully implemented, they show that a combination of certain characteristics possessed by a major participant can spell disaster for the project. Conflict itself reduces the chances of success but when the recalcitrant participant has a considerable degree of independence, when he cares a great deal about the outcome, when he is a strong character, with considerable resources which he is willing to bring to bear on the issue, then maximal delay will occur. With this kind of serious delay progress dissipates. Dixon's contacts outside the ABC gave him a degree of independence, and his political and union friends could be called resources of considerable strength. He was highly motivated in a negative sense about the agreements. He was a danger to the Commission policy on the agreements from the outset, just as he had been in 1943-44. This time the Commission tried to involve him more in the details of the agreements but not in the actual decision itself. Just as Cleary had done, Boyer was to underestimate the resources at Dixon's disposal.

This time Dixon had an ally on the Commission itself. J.S. Hanlon, Editor of the Australian Worker, and a journalist of long standing, had been appointed by the Labor Government to the Commission at the same time as Boyer became Chairman. Hanlon was the closest-ever equivalent in

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111. Hanlon was a foundation member of the AJA, and a strong Labor man. In retrospect it is impossible to view his appointment at this time as coincidence, and it is highly likely that he was appointed to ensure that the ABC's Canberra news service was maintained intact and that genuine moves were made by the Commission towards a fully independent service. A strong attack by Hanlon on ANPA, alleging it was seeking an Australian monopoly of news broadcasting services appeared in the Australian Worker, on 9 May 1945, three weeks before his appointment, and this might well have brought him into the Labor Government's calculations.
the ABC to Lord Reith's hated and despised 'Red Woman', the BBC Governor, Mrs Snowden.\textsuperscript{112} According to Reith, Mrs Snowden wrecked his relationship with the Chairman of the BBC Board, Lord Clarendon. According to Moses, "Hanlon was the only man in my time that was completely disloyal as a member of the Commission".\textsuperscript{113} Hanlon maintained very close contacts with one or two ABC journalists, and according to Moses, would immediately divulge confidential Commission decisions on news matters to these friends in the News Department. Dixon was introduced to Hanlon by these journalist contacts and close liaison was maintained over the progress of the news agreements. Hanlon strongly supported Dixon's argument for complete independence for the ABC's news service but warned that apart from himself, the News Department had no support on the Commission. When news of Copland's decision on the terms of the agreements were announced, it was Hanlon who urged Dixon not to give up. Hanlon also considerably weakened the Commission case before the PSCB by arguing against the agreements, although as Boyer limply pointed out, he had, as a member of the Commission, agreed that they should be accepted.

By the end of 1945, Labor politicians in Canberra who had always taken a keen interest in the ABC's news service, knew that some kind of permanent solution to the perennial problem with the Commission was now necessary. Both Calwell and Amour approached Warren Denning in Canberra and expressed a desire to know more about Dixon and his ideas. They wanted to know whether he could be trusted to run an independent news service if the Commission was given one. Denning believed that if they saw and talked to Dixon in private he would convince them of his opposition to Murdoch and Henderson and so they would back the independent service. The meetings were arranged. Calwell went to Dixon's house in Sydney one

\textsuperscript{112} For Reith's experiences with Mrs Snowden see Charles Stuart (ed.), \textit{The Reith Diaries} (Collins, London, 1975), especially pp.140-52.

\textsuperscript{113} Moses interview, 8 February 1976.
Sunday. Dixon says: "I convinced them that I wasn't a tool of Murdoch or I wasn't seeking a little cheap notoriety and that I wasn't prepared to sell out to the highest bidder". Dixon became a lifelong friend of Calwell's from this time on and they corresponded for many years. Amour asked Dixon to visit him at his home, also in Sydney. He also was convinced that Dixon would not let the Government down and another friendship developed. Dixon cannot now remember the precise dates of these meetings, which are not mentioned in his book, but they appear to have taken place in early 1946.

Amour, who was Chairman of the PSCB, later told Dixon that if he put up a strong case against the agreements before the Committee, which would stand up to questioning, then the verdict was bound to go in his favour, and Government legislation to provide for an independent service would result. Significantly, Amour dissuaded Dixon from giving his evidence in private, assuring him that the Commission promise that there would be no victimisation, made in 1943, still applied. Amour said:

that evidence given in camera would be of little value; the same testimony given in public would have much greater weight. Recognising that there was public concern about the official slant of the ABC's news service, Labor realised there was need to show there were very good reasons for interfering once more. Dixon's evidence was therefore crucial.

115. Dixon, ABC, p.156.
As Dixon had been the main foil of the Commission decision to seek newspaper agreements between 1942 and 1944, it is inexplicable that Boyer could make the same mistake as Cleary and try to push the new agreements through against Dixon's total opposition. It would seem logical for the Chairman and management to try to win Dixon's support, right from the very inception of new policy moves as he was in such a key position. But as we have seen, in 1945 as in 1942, he was kept in the dark until it was thought it was too late for him to block the agreements. One possible explanation is that they thought any information given to him might in turn be conveyed to Labor ministers in Canberra who would then try to block Commission moves before they gained any impetus. But Boyer was so ingenuously confident of the assurances he had received from Curtin that this seems unlikely. What seems more likely is that the relationship of the Commission with Dixon had by this time slumped to such a low point that it was thought it was useless to try and reason with him.

The acrimony caused by the internal controversy over the use of Ministers' names has been noted. Dixon's evidence before the PSCB in 1943, added to the ill-feeling against him. But there was also a whole string of internal incidents from 1943 onwards which increased Dixon's isolation and sense of grievance.

The most serious problem as far as the Commission was concerned was the apparent inability of Dixon to check bulletin content before broadcast. Dixon claimed it was physically impossible to see all bulletins because of the burden of his administrative duties. Early in 1944, Dixon was prevailed upon by Deamer to recommend that a News Editor be appointed to assist him. It is clear from ABC records that this was regarded as an opportunity to remove Dixon from editorial control of the bulletins. He would be promoted to Director but given only mainly administrative work while the Editor would start tightening up bulletin control so that the
content would accord more with the Commission's wishes, and not Dixon's, or the Government's. "The Chief News Editor should be primarily responsible to the Director of News, but as his work would involve immediate decisions, he should be given the same authority to deal with news that Mr Dixon has enjoyed in the past." This theory, that nominal control over news would be exercised by Dixon and actual control by his Editor, proved to be one of the gravest miscalculations the Commission ever made about its news service and will be dealt with in the following chapter. Two years passed before it was put into operation but what is relevant at this point is that Dixon soon became suspicious of what was occurring and demanded explanations.

The Commission did not tell Dixon of its plans for him but it became apparent that some change was in the offing when it told him that he was to be called Federal News Executive and the new man to be called Federal News Editor. Dixon argued that this title appeared to downgrade his position. He actively sought the assistance of both the AJA and the ABC Senior Officers' Association in seeking clarification from the Commission of the new officer's duties and whether he (Dixon) was to continue to be in effective charge of the News Department. When no satisfactory explanation was forthcoming, the AJA wrote to Ashley, the Postmaster-General, requesting that Dixon's case be heard by the PSCB, the reasoning being that Dixon now felt that the Commission's moves against him amounted to victimisation because of the evidence he had given to the PSCB the previous year. As Cleary had given the Committee the assurance that Dixon could speak his mind without fear of retribution, Dixon argued that the PSCB should pass judgement on what had happened to him since.

117. Deamer to Moses, 1 May 1944, R32/2.
Ashley decided not to refer Dixon's cast to the PSCB. In January 1945, Dixon was given permission to appeal directly to the Commission about his reclassification. At this meeting Dixon was told bluntly that the proposed position of Federal News Editor would be senior to that of his new position of Federal News Executive. In this post his duties would be administrative as distinct from editorial. His appeal against this decision was rejected, the only concession the Commission was prepared to make being the renaming of the new senior post, Federal Editor, News Services. But Dixon, in keeping with the tenacity and single-minded pursuit of his goals that he showed throughout his career, saw another opportunity for overturning the decision. The PSCB was about to hear evidence on proposed ABC Staff Regulations from the AJA, and the ABC Senior Officers' Association. These organisations favoured the setting up of an independent board to hear appeals from the staff on disciplinary matters. Dixon persuaded the AJA to include him in its delegation so that he could put his own case forward as an example of the injustice of being allowed to appeal only to the Commission itself about one of the Commission's own decisions.

Cleary and Dixon clashed angrily when Dixon attempted to give his evidence. Cleary demanded that Dixon not be allowed to refer to his own case which, it had previously been decided, the PSCB would not hear. However, Amour the Chairman, allowed Dixon to summarise the facts and fire off a sharp barb at Cleary:

I think that you, Mr Chairman, a little more than a year ago, set in motion a train of circumstances that led to the present position, when you insisted that I answer questions before this Committee. That is a matter which is within the knowledge of this Committee. I am merely bringing to the Committee a record of some of the things that have happened since then.118

The Commission had in the meantime been making enquiries about the availability of senior journalists outside the ABC for the new Editor's position. None of the names submitted to them met with their approval. In July 1945, it was finally decided to abandon these enquiries while the newspaper agreements were being worked out. Clearly the crisis in the relationship between the Commission and its head of news could not be allowed to continue when it needed his help and perhaps even his support in drawing up details of the agreements. Also any perpetuation of the argument over Dixon's future would create quite the wrong atmosphere for gaining approval for the agreements in Canberra, since the Labor Government was now interested in Dixon personally, and in his survival, and the survival of the news service he had created. It was perhaps no coincidence that in November 1945, the month the Commission had approached Cameron for his go-ahead, Dixon was advised formally by Moses that he had been appointed Federal News Director. The statement of his duties had been drawn up by Boyer, Moses and Hanlon in committee, a clear indication that Hanlon would in future be keeping a close eye on what happened to Dixon. The statement appeared to leave no doubt that Dixon was in charge:

The Commission has ... decided to appoint a National News Editor who will be responsible, through you, for the form and content of the National bulletins ... It is hoped that this appointment will relieve you of the need for constant and detailed supervision of the actual compilation of our news broadcasts to enable you to give adequate time to the general planning of our news activities throughout the Commonwealth ... The Editor will be responsible, through you, for all decisions relating to the selection of items for our news session and for the preparation of this material for broadcasting having, for this purpose, immediate control and discipline of the staff of the Sydney newsroom.\footnote{Moses to Dixon, 26 November 1945, R17/6/4, Emphasis is the writer's.}
Hanlon's influence is clearly evident at this point for the statement, with its underlining of Dixon's ultimate responsibility, runs quite counter to what had been the Commission's intentions up to now in creating the new position in order to remove editorial control from Dixon. It was a sop to the politicians, to Hanlon and to Dixon to try to create some degree of internal harmony while the agreements went through. Yet Hanlon had to make one compromise. In the resolution appointing Dixon and detailing his responsibilities, a final paragraph stated: "That in the event of Mr Dixon's refusal to agree to this over-all policy of the Commission his services be dispensed with".\(^\text{120}\) Such was the need for Dixon's support, however, that this was not conveyed to him at the time. It was not until November 1946, a year later when the agreements had been shelved, but the problems with Dixon remained, that Moses saw fit to tell him of the ultimatum.\(^\text{121}\)

The statement of his duties that Dixon did receive reassured him but did not win him over. It seems likely that in winning this considerable victory with Hanlon's support, Dixon would have been more inclined to realise what powerful friends he had behind Hanlon in the Labor movement. It certainly did not indicate any change of heart on the part of the Commission which, with the exception of Hanlon, were to doggedly pursue the goal of wresting control of the bulletins from Dixon through the National News Editor from mid-1946 onwards. The statement of November 1945, however, with its precise wording was to make that task difficult and create enormous internal problems within the newsroom.

\(^\text{120.}^\) Minute of Commission meeting of 17-19 October 1945.

\(^\text{121.}^\) Dixon says of this: "According to Hanlon this rider was added at the request of vice-chairman Edgar Dawes". Dixon, ABC, p.144.
There is a mass of additional evidence to show the increasing distrust between Dixon and the Commission and the powerlessness of the Commission over its journalists and its news output. Although it was realised that he had to be effectively removed from the scene if the Commission was to re-establish control, his support outside and the vigour of his opposition made this increasingly impossible. For example, in October 1944, he had published an article in The Journalist strongly advocating an independent service. Although it was recognised that this was in clear contravention of staff rules which prohibited officers commenting on the ABC and divulging information to outsiders and that this gave the Commission the opportunity of suspending and perhaps dismissing him, it took no action after three months of deliberation.

In May 1945, the Commission made a feeble attempt to impose controls on the use of Ministers' names and statements when it ruled that McCall was to be the reference officer in these cases. All statements and references to members of Parliament were to be referred to him for approval before use, except in the case of reports of Parliamentary proceedings. The occasion for this step was the fact that statements by the Labor member Les Haylen had been used in seven out of nine successive Sunday night bulletins. Dixon in his book refers to this as an accident and 'a small matter'.

This produced an attack on McCall by Dixon in a long memorandum which sheds a great deal of light on the degree of freedom which Dixon had enjoyed for many years in making editorial decisions. It seems to indicate that for all its concern about the direction its news service was taking, the Commission and management felt very inhibited about directing him in political matters because the service had Government support. It is worth quoting at some length:

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122 Dixon, ABC, p.139. Haylen later admitted that he had deliberately used the ABC news to convey messages to his electors. See CPD, 9 August 1946, p.4105.
This is the first time during my nearly nine years control of the department that the editorial function has been taken out of my hands. From time to time I have referred borderline items to the General Manager, or the Acting General Manager, for opinion, and such opinion has always been very helpful; but until recently no direction has ever been issued to me concerning the use or non-use of an item except where the Commission itself was involved. The General Manager years ago laid down the broad policy that if I thought an item was news I should use it, and if not, throw it aside; the Acting General Manager once told me that when I referred an item to him, that he had no intention of 'usurping the functions of news editor'. Even the present Chairman of the Commission refused to give me a direction some years ago, when, in the absence of the Chairman and the Acting General Manager, I referred an item to him during the Ward-Spender controversy. I submit that such a comparatively small incident does not justify such a drastic step as the taking out of my hands and out of the hands of our senior sub-editors of the final editorial responsibility for news items not directly affecting the Commission itself. 123

News of McCall's new authority was swiftly relayed by News Department staff to their Labor backers in Canberra. The desired result was obtained on 20 June, when Haylen asked Acting Prime Minister Chifley in the House whether he had heard of these developments in the ABC. He desired to know:

Is it true that, under this censorship, if the Acting Prime Minister announced the end of the war with Japan in the corridors of this House, that announcement could not be broadcast to a waiting world if Mr McCall were at lunch, or were unavailable for any other cause? Does not this place too much emphasis on the importance of Mr McCall? 124

Chifley replied that he had been told that McCall was the new 'censor' and proposed to make enquiries. With the news service thrown under the spotlight once again in Canberra, the Commission thought it best to capitulate, rather than risk the larger design of the newspaper agreements.

123. Dixon to Moses, 8 June 1945, R17/6/-, "Appointment - Federal News Editor".

124. CPD, 20 June 1945, p.3326.
Dixon indicates that Hanlon was chiefly responsible for getting this directive altered at the very next Commission meeting. The responsibility for deciding to use statements by politicians was handed back to the News Department, with the proviso that when in doubt, matters should be referred to McCall.

Boyer was extremely upset the same month when his own news service failed to report a speech he gave in Canberra at a lunch given for him by Cameron. It was a speech devoted to pointing up the significance of the statement given by Curtin at his request in April and was therefore regarded by Boyer as extremely important. Because only five seats were offered to the eleven organisations represented in the press gallery, gallery reporters decided the boycott the lunch. Cameron issued a statement later in the day containing a précis of Boyer's remarks which was also not reported by the gallery. Denning, however, sent the story through to Sydney, but one of his reporters telephoned Sydney to ask them to kill the story and it was not used. Denning later remarked that if Henderson or Fairfax had been at the lunch, he was sure the Sydney Morning Herald reporters would not have ignored their remarks at the request of their colleagues from other papers. It demonstrates quite extraordinary independence of action by the newsroom of the ABC and must have confirmed in Boyer's mind the desirability of pushing through the news agreements. The contrast is obvious between the usual rapidity displayed by the ABC's Canberra newsroom in relaying Government statements and their acquiescence in refusing to use a story from their own Chairman, without even seeking an instruction on the matter. The news bulletins included the Boyer speech the following day, after Moses had ordered this to be done.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of the Commission's feelings of misgivings about its news service also occurred at almost the same time as the incidents described above, when talks between Boyer and newspaper
executives were just getting under way. In May 1945 a full-page article appeared in the *Daily Telegraph* which had been written by Deamer, who had resigned from the ABC in May 1944. He attacked the Labor Government over its refusal to let the Commission enter into the agreements with the press, and strongly criticised the ABC's news service in Canberra for being a "Ministerial stooge business". He repeated the old newspaper reasoning that the Commission could not set up its own fully independent service covering Australia and overseas without spending an enormous amount of money. His estimate was £1 million.

Dixon was incensed by the article and drafted a strong reply for the signature of Bearup, who was then Acting Manager. The Commission would not approve of it being sent. One can't help comparing this attitude with that of Cleary in the nine-thirties who was so ready to respond in kind to press criticism. Implicit in the Commission refusal to reply to Deamer was its agreement with his sentiments.

The PSCB Hearing, 1946

The hearing, which began on 24 June 1946, lasted only a week, and the Committee issued its report on 4 July. Dixon dominated the proceedings, and his self-confidence showed how close he was to his goal. He had been asked to make an impression by Amour and he did this chiefly by quoting figures to prove that the independent service was already almost a reality and certainly could be achieved by the spending of little more money than specified in the agreements.

126. Moses remained very friendly with Deamer after he had left the ABC to join the *Daily Telegraph* and frequently had lunch with him and with Cyril Pearl of the same newspaper. Personal communication, Cyril Pearl, 6 April 1977.
Dixon told the enquiry that the Commission was now 99 per cent independent of the press for its national news and gathered 40 per cent of its own State news. A great deal was made of Dixon's estimate of the cost of an independent service. Based on the facts given by Dixon to McCall in January, it had been calculated that the Commission could have an independent service for Australian news for an additional £16,000 per annum in addition to the £53,000 being spent at the moment. Dixon had also worked out the cost of implementing the ANPA agreement would be about £13,000 with the extra nineteen staff members required to man the newspaper offices. Added to the cost of the agreement, £7,500, it appeared that the Commission was about to pay in excess of £20,000 when it would cost much less to go it alone. In addition, Dixon argued that the ABC would be getting an inferior service from the papers. He criticised the unreliability of newspaper stories and returned to the old theme of the incompatibility of newspaper methods and edition times and his own demands for speed and accuracy.

I am strongly of the opinion that the proposed agreement is unnecessary, undesirable, and so far as the Australian portion of it is concerned, unworkable ... If radio means anything it means broadcasting 'hot' news. The fact that we can disseminate news all over the Commonwealth in a flash surely implies that. It would be a direct negation of the speed with which news can be broadcast if we were content to let 'hot' news go, and say 'we shall put it over in the next session'.

Dixon outlined the impossibility of the newspapers meeting the ABC's demands for access to news and envisaged a situation in which the Commission would have to cover just as many local stories when the agreement came into effect, as it did before, in order to ensure that it got the news it wanted at the times it wanted. Dixon made two other very effective points. In itemising situations in which embarrassment had been caused to the ABC because the news service had repeated "errors" contained in newspaper stories, Dixon struck at the very heart of the problem which the Commission

127. Dixon, Evidence, PSCE, 25 June 1945, p.353. The texts of the proposed agreements are Appendix M.
had created for itself by coming to terms with the press. It could never be entirely sure that its own news was accurate, uncoloured and unbiased as long as any of it was taken from press sources, which were still widely regarded as suspect. Cleary's innate feeling about the undesirability of dealing with the press monopolies was always the correct one, given the widely held views of the operation of the newspapers. It was all very well to deplore the way in which the news service had become used by the politicians but the answer was not to introduce a service which would be unsatisfactory for other reasons. Although the Commission had complete freedom to supplement under the new agreement, any kind of contractual arrangement with the press posed real problems if the Commission was to demonstrate its independence through an unbiased news service and one which would reflect its own ideas of community values. As Dixon put it:

even if we could get all this news direct from the newspapers at the times we wanted it and as promptly as we wanted it, there is still the principle that the Chairman mentioned yesterday, namely, the necessity for complete confidence in a news service. Mistakes are inevitable, but it would be better for us to make our own mistakes, rather than repeat those of others. 128

It seems certain that Boyer came to a realisation of the incompatibility of Australian newspapers and the national broadcasting service about the time of the PSCB hearing. He told the hearing:

"rightly or wrongly, in Australia there appears to be less public confidence in the reliability of the press than overseas". 129 He did his own case further harm by criticising press standards.

Normal press standards of judging news are not necessarily our standards ... we make our own standards having regard to the fact the Commission is a service organisation. Briefly we put it this way; the canon of judgement will be whether it is a service to the community for a news item to be broadcast. For that reason the news staff must keep a wary eye on sensationalism for its own sake. 130

128. Ibid., p.354.
130. Ibid., p.340.
Undoubtedly, the problems with the politicians and the growing awareness of the problems surrounding newspaper originated news caused Boyer to think much more deeply about news presentation and standards than his predecessor. He saw that standards needed to be set and adhered to rigidly if the Commission's news service was to win back public confidence. The PSCB hearings were the first time that anyone had tried to define publicly the aims of the ABC's news beyond mere platitudes. Boyer had by this time been working on a new policy directive covering both Talks and News and his remarks in evidence are illustrative of the need he saw for definition if the Commission was to avoid trouble over News in the future. He told the PSCB:

The policy of various papers decide the news value of items. We have no policy like that. We are trying to set a standard of completely non-policy news, the criterion of which will not be that it is sensational or that it serves to highlight something in which we are interested. Whether we succeed or not is for the people to judge, but that is our objective.\(^\text{131}\)

He was making his own position in relation to the agreements quite untenable in talking this way but already he had arrived at the position of seeing that the only type of news service which would be politically and publicly acceptable was one which set its own standards quite independently of, and at variance with, those of the press. This was going right back to the position that the infant news service had taken in the 'thirties, that ABC and press standards were very different. It was, of course, difficult to argue that the ABC had the right to reach agreements for the supply of news from organisations which had such different standards to that of the ABC. The right to replace one unsatisfactory service with another was a contradiction. No amount of supplementation or checking could alter this anomalous position. Yet Boyer felt that even if the agreements lasted only for the agreed term of one year this was necessary to prove that the Commission ran its own news

\(^{131}\) Ibid., p.339.
service and not the Government. It was a classic dilemma. He had to win public confidence by demonstrating that the Commission decided its own news sources, yet the sources to be chosen would not, because of their nature, win the confidence he was after. It was very much in Boyer's nature, with his intense suspicion of Governmental manipulation of the media and his sense of the horrific possibilities that this presented for dominating people's minds, that he decided to confront Canberra first, and leave any problems with the press for later.

Nothing, [he said] could be more disastrous to the continued healthful existence of the ABC or more fatal to public confidence in the Commission's news service than the use of the power of ministerial review and veto under this financial clause in such a manner as to render inoperative the Commission's judgment and to vest in the Government of the day the making of the news policy which the Act has specifically imposed in the Commission.132

We have seen that Moses had been impressed by Dixon's argument that an independent service for Australian news could be obtained for approximately the outlay on the new contract with ANPA. The Commission had not heeded Moses's advice to reconsider the Australian agreement. Moses felt, however, that Dixon's figures were so relevant that he told the PSCB:

If these figures are accurate, I think they are important. We shall have the opportunity of examining them carefully before I make a considered recommendation to the Commission ... At the time the agreement was made it appeared to be quite reasonable and I did not realise that it would cost so much to implement until I had my talk with Mr Dixon in December.133

This revelation of uncertainty in Moses's mind about the desirability of the Australian agreement was very damaging to the Commission's case.

132. Ibid., pp.337-38.
In the following months, Dixon was accused of misleading the PSCB with his estimates, both within the ABC and before the PSCB. Moses believed Dixon's estimates were an important factor in influencing its decision. Dixon has counter-charged that he was tricked by Moses into giving him a figure which was lower than he had originally wanted, in order that Moses could discredit him in the eyes of the Commission. Certainly Dixon's figures were shown to be wildly inaccurate and caused the Commission further embarrassment as it tried to justify the additional expenditure in further hearings of the PSCB. In view of the controversy, they are worth examining in some detail.

All of Dixon's memoranda on the subject are rather vague but appear to boil down as follows. In December 1945 he had suggested that the proposed ANPA agreement would mean the employment of 7 additional journalists in the various newspaper offices. In January 1946, he told Moses that for an independent service the ABC would need 80 country correspondents, costing about £1 each per week. With the additional cable charges involved, the cost of this country cover would be £8,000 per annum. Another 7 journalists would have to be employed to strengthen present staffs. They would still need these extra seven men if the agreement were signed, and as well, the ABC would have to staff the newspaper offices with at least 18 additional men, costing between £8,500 and £10,000 per annum approximately. At the risk of missing some items, fewer newspapers could be manned with 15 extra men costing £7,000 to £8,500.

In April, McCall had summarised the position. Adding Oakley's estimate of extra men needed in Melbourne to Dixon's estimate for Sydney and the other States, it was concluded that 14 extra men would

134. See Dixon, _ABC_, p.149.
have to be employed under an independent service, costing about £7,000 per annum. Together with the £8,000 for country news, an independent service would therefore cost an additional £15,000. The cost of implementing the ANPA agreement, if all essential newspapers were manned, would be between £16,000 and £17,500. An independent service would therefore be cheaper if Dixon's figures were accepted. At this point some confusion arises. As a result of a telephoned request from Moses, Dixon put a revised estimate in writing on 19 June 1946. Thirteen additional journalists (6 reporters and 7 sub-editors) would be required for an independent service as against 7 additional sub-editors and 19 men who would be required to work in the newspapers under the agreement. The country estimates remained the same.

Moses' remarks to the Committee are based on the estimates given by Dixon in his memo of 19 June and he quotes Dixon as saying that a completely independent Australian cover can be obtained by spending £8,000 on country news and about £8,000 on additional journalists salaries (i.e. the cost of employing 13 extra men) making a total of £16,000.

Moses had not given Dixon's figures to the Commission before he revealed them before the PSCB, and he obviously thought that in this way he could put maximum pressure on the Commission to change its mind about the ANPA agreement. He certainly did not do the Commission's case any good by revealing publicly his own misgivings.

Speaking immediately after Moses, Dixon however chose to change his mind. He said that if the 19 extra men required to man the newspaper offices were instead added to the present news staff, an independent service would then be possible. The 19 would cost an extra £13,000 per annum. With the cost of the country news, an independent service would therefore cost an additional £21,000, whereas the cost of the ANPA agreement and its implementation would be about the same, £20,500. Added to the £53,000 which the service was already costing, this makes a total of £74,000. But
elsewhere he refers to the figure of £83,000 as not being excessive for a proper news coverage. This was the figure given by Boyer as the approximate cost of running the news service under the proposed agreements.

Amour then asked Boyer to provide in writing an estimate of the cost of implementing the agreements and of providing an independent service. In his letter of 29 June to Amour, Boyer said the Commission was unwilling to provide an estimate of its own for an independent service.

The Committee will understand that there are no figures whatever available to the Commission as to the cost of an independent local news gathering service for broadcasting. No broadcasting institution of which I am aware has yet attempted this task or of (sic) making an estimate.135

The Commission was either unaware of Dixon's more recent figures or chose to ignore them, because it gave Amour figures which were based on those given by Dixon to Moses on 19 June. The proposed Australian agreement would, according to Dixon, need for its operation an additional 7 journalists in newsrooms throughout Australia, plus nineteen more to work in newspaper offices. The Commission had calculated that the cost of implementing it would therefore by £18,362 in extra salaries, which added to the cost of the agreement itself, gives an overall cost of £25,862. The 13 extra journalists needed for an independent service (7 sub-editors and 6 reporters), would cost £9,336, which when added to the £8,000 for country coverage gives a total of £17,336. There was thus a considerable saving, according to Dixon, in going independent. His figures for the overseas service were less precise because the cost of negotiating agreements with AP and Reuters were unknown. Boyer made it clear that the Commission did not agree with Dixon:

135. Boyer to Amour, 29 June 1945, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2, "News - Inauguration of Independent Service".
What the Commission finds itself unable to accept, however, on present evidence is the assumption contained in these ... draft estimates that while it might require an extra 19 in staff to sight the news in the Press offices, it would require only six extra to gather the news themselves independently.136

The trouble that occurred between Moses and Dixon immediately after the hearing and dragged on for many months concerned the two differing estimates given by Dixon. Moses held that Dixon had misled him and the PSCB with his earlier figure which had strongly influenced it in its findings. Dixon had, however, given his revised estimate in public before the PSCB, so this complaint seems to have little foundation. Dixon claimed in his defence later that the Committee had already made up its mind before receiving the estimates and that therefore it was pointless to say that he misled the Committee. It certainly seems likely that between 19 June and 25 June when he gave evidence, Dixon was told by Amour that there was really no need to cut his estimates right back to the bone. He was probably told to merely keep his estimates for an independent service about the same as those of the Commission for the agreements.

It does not seem logical that Moses would want to 'trick' Dixon into giving lower figures than he (Dixon) wanted. Moses was genuinely anxious to stop the ANPA agreement and one way to do this was to effectively and dramatically show that the independent service would cost less. Moses was angry and embarrassed when Dixon later urged the appointment of the 19 extra men he said was needed and the impression one gets from the ABC files is of genuine surprise on Moses's part. It is almost as if Dixon's figures given to the Committee verbally on 25 June had been missed or overlooked. In any case, the argument over a mere 13 men soon became academic, when it gradually became obvious how wildly inaccurate Dixon's figures really were. The first year of the new service was to cost £155,000.136

136. Ibid.
Henderson and Murdoch thought the cost of the ABC's independent service would far exceed Dixon's estimate and that he was not competent to give one. Boyer quoted an unnamed Sydney news editor as saying that it would cost six times Dixon's estimate and require between 50 and 60 news-gatherers. It seems likely that Dixon's estimate did not amount to deliberate deception but rather resulted from over-enthusiasm and a too optimistic assessment of the degree of independence the service already possessed. It is extraordinary that the PSCB, in its majority finding accepted Dixon's figures when they were strongly contradicted by both the Commission and the newspapers. This appears to be further evidence that the minds of its Labor members were already made up about the end result.

In its findings the PSCB said Copland's adjudication on payments was irrelevant to the main issue which was whether the agreements would result in the community having complete confidence in the ABC's news service. It felt the agreements would fail in this respect because important news might miss bulletins and because news obtained in newspaper offices was not necessarily free from editorial bias. It referred to the evidence of the AJA before the Committee in 1944 to the effect that journalists were sometimes directed by their newspaper to supply news in accordance with its policy.

Boyer had been cautiously in favour of an independent service in his evidence, and the PSCB made much of this in its report. However, it is clear that Boyer was under an obligation to say this in order to comply with the recommendations of the PSCB's Fourth Report. He also tried to make it clear that such a service would have to be set up gradually and on the Commission's own terms. He was clearly worried about the question of obtaining reliable staff as well as the necessary finance:
We propose to continue this process of extending and developing our own news-gathering service as and when finances and the needs of the service require. Such a process however, must necessarily take time in the securing of suitable and wholly reliable staff and is (sic) developing the machinery of such an undertaking having in mind the overriding necessity of securing the availability of all news in the Australian theatre ... This short term agreement allows the Commission a period within which both to test the satisfactory nature of the agreement itself and to see its way more clearly as to finances and personnel of its news gathering staff ... it is essential that an agreement of some sort be arrived at to enable the Commission's service to continue satisfactorily until such time as it might be independent of such sources. 137

The PSCB found that if the Commission had its own independent news-gathering service public confidence would result. It recommended that the necessary funds be found but did not say where.

After weighing the evidence, we are convinced that the Commission should have adequate means to ensure sustained public confidence in its activities by all sections of the community, and we agree with the Commission that payment of a lot of money is justified to secure that confidence by removal of any ground for remediable complaint. Just as it has a special charter in the Broadcasting Act to establish groups of musicians for the rendition of orchestra, choir and band music of high quality, so also, we consider, it should have a special charter in the Act to establish groups of journalists for attainment of its objective of independence in the sphere of Australian news, and, as far as possible, overseas news. To that end, we recommend that the Act be amended to provide that the Commission shall, subject to the Act -

(1) establish its own independent service in respect of Australian news: and

(2) procure its overseas news direct, through its staff abroad, from such overseas agencies as the Commission deems fit, as well as from independent sources as the Commission deems it desirable to use. 138


The 1946 Legislation

The Australian Broadcasting Bill of 1946 was introduced in Parliament four weeks after the Committee's report was tabled. In it, the Australian Broadcasting Act of 1942 was amended in respect of news so that the Commission was required to set up its own independent news service. The new sub-sections two and three of Section 25 read:

The Commission shall employ an adequate staff, both in the Commonwealth and in overseas countries, for the purpose of collecting the news and information to be broadcast in pursuance of this section.

The Commission may also procure news and information relating to current events in other parts of the world from such overseas news agencies and other overseas sources as it thinks fit.

Senator Cameron, in introducing the bill, made it clear that sub-section two meant that the Commission would have to establish its own news-gathering organisation. The Government agreed with the PSCB's majority finding that the Commission's journalists should attain independence in the sphere of Australian news and, as far as possible, for overseas news.

The Bill was pushed through the House at 5 a.m. on the last day of the Parliamentary session, 9 August 1946. There was a particularly high standard of debate and the Hansard record is a most revealing document about political attitudes to the Australian press at that time. The key speakers were the PSCB members from both sides of the House, but there were revealing contributions from R.G. Menzies, the Leader of the Opposition, and the young and promising Les Haylen.

With the 1946 election looming, it was obvious that the Opposition attack would concentrate on what it considered to be the unnecessary degree of urgency given the Bill and would link it with Labor's chances. It was alleged that Labor was simply ensuring that it would get the maximum coverage during the campaign from the ABC's news service, which would be used for political purposes. Senator McLeay linked the decline of confidence in ABC news and its lack of impartiality with the appointment
of Amour as Chairman of the PSCB. Menzies said:

Why, then, is the proposal put forward? Quite obviously it is because the Government believes that through a government instrumentality it can establish a news service of its own. The news collected will not be objective, but in ways and means suitable to the government of the day.\(^{139}\)

While this represented the views of the majority of Opposition speakers, not all agreed. Senator Leckie, for example, believed that the ABC had been politically coloured at one time, but was not so anymore.

Opposition arguments also centred around the alleged continual interference with the ABC by the Government. It was said the Commission's freedom of action to collect its news in whatever way it saw fit, guaranteed by the 1942 Act, was now being denied. Moreover, the PSCB in its investigation, had exceeded its terms of reference. Instead of merely advising on whether the proposed press agreements should be approved or not, it had gone further and proposed an alternative.

Opposition speakers saw little need for an expensive duplication of already existing press services, not did they see how the Commission could match the press in what it provided. The premise on which this was based was that the press in Australia were doing generally a good job. Menzies was particularly scornful of suggestions that overseas agency news was coloured against the Labor Government.

Yet this is precisely what Labor did believe. Haylen made it quite clear that his party felt that the post-war activities overseas of such men as Makin\(^{140}\) and Evatt had been misreported. Hence Labor wanted the ABC to make its own selection of overseas news for Australia and not rely on

\(^{139}\) Menzies, CPD, 9 August 1946, p.4101.

\(^{140}\) Norman Makin was a member of Labor's War Cabinet, Minister for Navy and Munitions 1941-43, Minister for Aircraft Production 1943-46 and Australia's first Ambassador to Washington, 1946-51.
AAP. Labor had a battery of former journalists in its ranks at this time and it was their convictions about the nature of the Australian press which added weight and authority to the Government's argument. They endorsed in no uncertain terms what the PSCB had already had to say about directions given to journalists by newspaper proprietors. Haylen told the House that most journalists present the news fairly but there were some who were simply prepared to do what they are told. Another former journalist, A.D. Fraser, took this argument much further:

There are from time to time such things as newspaper campaigns directed by the proprietors of the newspapers ... there are editorial directions that prominence be given to certain aspects of the news and that other aspects be played down ... It is particularly difficult for working journalists to be completely objective and impartial, and to follow what in their own minds is the correct course, when they are the paid employees of proprietors who hold entirely different views.

These arguments were not new and the substance in them had long been recognised. One can only say that the Commission approach to its news agreements of 1946 was extremely naive in believing that they could solve the problem of newspaper 'coloration' of news by gaining access to it before it had reached the editor's hands. News-gathering could be directed and controlled before that stage as well as after. Any news at all taken from the press was suspect of some degree of manipulation, particularly in Labor's eyes who saw the Australian press monopolies as being basically anti-Labor. It is not the purpose of this thesis to examine in detail influences in Australian newspaper reporting but merely to emphasise the genuineness and validity of Labor's concern that the monopolies that controlled the press could in any measure influence the Commission's news. Sigal has pointed out that although publishers play a minor part in the ordinary course of news-making, when they do intervene they exert considerable influence. "Even a whisper from a publisher

141. Fraser, CPD, 9 August 1945, pp.4109-4110.
resounds throughout the newspaper. Those trying to catch his eye can
turn an offhand remark of his into a policy pronouncement, a spur of
the moment notion into a full time campaign". Gerbner endorses this
saying that most journalists respond to the pressures and expectations of
the newsroom, including 'what the boss will think' than they do to any
generalised concept of readership or public interest. Labor's
theories about the way newspapers worked had some basis and because the
press in Australia was controlled by a few powerful companies, inclined
towards capitalism, for that party it was a quite untenable notion that
the ABC could form any kind of contractual news attachment with such
suspect sources. The Commission had realised the basic incompatibility
between Australian newspapers and the ABC's news service even when
conservative governments were in power, prior to 1942, but had allowed
its justified fear of Government manipulation and its despair of ever
obtaining sufficient Government finance for an independent service to
stampede it in the wrong direction. Given the political climate in
Australia in 1942-45 and the character of the Australian press, the
switch to a friendly contractual partnership with the press and the
apparent abandonment of the goal of the independent service aroused
political passions on the Labor side.

Calwell expressed it this way in the debate:

Whilst the commission administered that provision section 22 of
the 1932 Act in the spirit of the legislation, no trouble arose. Difficulties developed only when the commission began to tie
itself up with the newspaper interests ... The commission changed its mind only when the chairman became converted to the
idea of making an agreement with the newspaper companies, and no satisfactory explanation has been given for that change of
opinion.144

142. Sigal, Reporters, p.32.
143. See for example, Gerbner, "Institutional Pressure upon Mass
144. Calwell, CPD, 9 August 1946, pp.4116-17.
Attention has been drawn earlier to the symbolic nature of the struggle waged before 1942 between the Commission and the press. The Commission had always been tied to the press in some way for its news, but as long as relations between the two remained bitter, Labor could remain sanguine in the knowledge that whatever news was taken from the press, it did not represent the Commission's own choice of material. Parliamentary news was the Commission's own selection, but with the choice narrowed to Government speeches and handouts. When the Commission and the press buried their differences to come up with an agreement which each regarded as acceptable, Labor's suspicions were aroused immediately, because acceptance of newspaper news meant to some degree acceptance of newspaper standards and policy. Newspapers had policies which in some way affected what they produced. The Commission's news service must appear to have no policy. As Allan Fraser said:

> Monopoly control of the supply of news to the Australian public is a bad thing. It is a good thing when the public has a choice of a number of independent news services ... It is all to the advantage of the Australian public that they should have an additional news service, independently conducted by men who have no other end to serve than the presentation, fairly and honestly, of the news of the day through the great instrumentality of radio.  146

Smith has emphasised that the news output of a broadcasting organisation represents that organisation's beliefs about the values of society. Labor's 1946 legislation ended the anomaly of the Commission's news sources and made it responsible for its own news programmes. Cameron expressed the position precisely:

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145. See this chapter, p.133.

146. Fraser, **CPD**, 9 August 1946, p.4110.
The object [is] to fix responsibility on a publicly owned instrumentality, accountable to the community, for the selection of news which is broadcast ... by the nature of things, the commission will always be hampered in its efforts to secure independence in connexion with its news services, while it has to rely almost entirely on other parties for the provision of the information on which its news sessions are based.147

But while Labor could argue with conviction about the merits of the press, it was on very weak ground over the way in which the legislation had come about. Cameron could give no estimate of the cost of the news service beyond saying it would be considerable less than £200,000. Haylen said it did not matter how much it eventually cost, as it would be worth it. The Opposition estimated anything from £150,000 to £250,000. Henderson's figure of £110,000 was thought to be acceptable by the Labor side. Dixon's quote of £83,000, in other words the same cost approximately as of the agreements, was also mentioned by Labor speakers. It was obvious that no-one had any idea of the costs involved, yet the Commission was given no money to pay for it. Taking Dixon's words as gospel, Labor envisaged very little expansion in the existing news service for it to become completely independent, and several men mentioned the point Dixon had made in his evidence to the effect that it was not unreasonable for the Commission to spend more of its budget on news, because news was not getting as much as other programme departments. Dixon suggested in fact that news broadcasts could be expanded by fifty per cent without extra cost, apparently implying that costs could thus be reduced in other programme areas. The Commission was therefore faced with the prospect of reducing expenditure on other programmes to pay for its independent news service, the cost of which was unknown. This was to make other programme departments uneasy and hostile. This question shall be dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

147. Cameron, CPD, 31 July 1946, p.3320.
Conclusion

The Commission was so disturbed by the Labor Government's interference with its news service in 1941-42, the mounting cost of that service and the Government's disinclination to contribute to those costs that it decided to reduce its factual news cover and rely more on the press for its news. Press services would be supplemented by 'observer' broadcasters in line with news developments overseas. It was worried by Dixon's apparent acquiescence to Government demands in return for Government support for an expanded news department. It was concerned that an independent service under Dixon would similarly serve the Government for its own ends. In any case, Curtin did not want to spend large sums on an independent service at a critical time in the war, and he and the Labor government were satisfied once the Commission expanded its Canberra coverage so that it could carry all Government pronouncements, unlike the press which ignored some and questioned others.

Conscious of increasing audience dissatisfaction with its news service for its 'propaganda' carried on behalf of the Government, the Commission decided the only recourse was to come to friendly agreements with the press. Dixon and his department, already acknowledging their debt to the Government for its patronage, saw immediate threats to their existence, particularly from the 'observer' concept when it was linked with the apparent abandonment of factual news coverage, and so warned the Labor ministers most concerned with retaining an 'independent' news coverage from Canberra and most opposed to the press monopolies. By so doing, they gave Labor government the opportunity to intervene even more directly in the news area. In rejecting the agreements, Labor ministers maintained they had a right to supervise Commission policy and in the PSCB hearings, Labor members actually spelled out the type of news service the Commission should have, which should be 'straight'. It frowned on the idea of backgrounding the news through observer reports. This had the effect of endorsing
the news style already adopted by Dixon of factual news reporting in direct competition with the press. The 'observer' idea was abandoned and the news broadcaster did not become an essential part of the ABC scene as it had with overseas broadcasting organisations.

Boyer became chairman in 1945 and was deeply worried by the extent of the contact between his news staff and the Government and by the impression that the News Department was now controlled by the Government and not by the Commission. Recognising that there were Ministers who would oppose any further attempt by the Commission to reach agreements with the press, he sought and obtained assurances from the Prime Minister before beginning a new round of consultation. Boyer feared Government control and thought the agreements were necessary to demonstrate the Commission's independence to the community at large, even though he recognised there were drawbacks in dealing with the press. Boyer's moves were defeated because the forces against him were too strong. The new commissioner Hanlon was apparently appointed by Labor because of his opposition to the newspaper monopolies. He had to keep a protective eye on the News Department and Dixon, whom the Commission was now trying to shift into a less contentious position. Dixon came increasingly under the protection of Labor ministers with whom he had secret meetings and from whom he received assurances of support.

The Commission failed in its attempts to implement its news policy between 1942 and 1946 because it did not take sufficient care in obtaining clearance at the various decision points necessary for its programme to succeed. In 1942-43 it was initially too secretive with the Government and also paid a price for excluding Dixon completely from its deliberations, even though he and his staff had personal relationships with Government ministers and had strong outside contacts in their union, the AJA. In 1945-46, the Commission showed more awareness of political
realities in attempting to seek early government clearance, but on Curtin's death it failed to understand the necessity of bargaining with or at least approaching the Labor group who had consistently demonstrated their interest in, and their power over, Labor broadcasting policy. This group was not necessarily represented by the Postmaster-General, in any Labor cabinet. Henderson showed more awareness of Labor thinking and attitudes when he told the PSCB that he did not necessarily attribute the 1944 PSCB decision to reject the press agreements to Cabinet:

because in my discussion with Ministers I encountered a conflict of opinions. Some Ministers wanted what they regarded as an absolutely balanced news service, but they meant by that 'balanced against their rivals and in their favour'. In other words they wanted a service that would be available to them personally. A number of Ministers told me that quite frankly ... The late Prime Minister's attitude was that he wanted a great national news service that would be objective, impartial and free, but he said 'Of course, a lot of my colleagues would not agree with me on that. They just want something to publicize their activities'.

The Commission failed to reach any accommodation with Ministers opposed to the agreement or with Dixon himself. Although it moved against him internally on questions of administration, he was left with a considerable degree of independence in news selection, possibly because the Commission felt uneasy about this aspect in view of the support he enjoyed among Labor ministers. Independence of action and considerable resources which can be brought to bear to delay or prevent policy are strong indicators that a programme will be delayed and probably frustrated, and so it was with Dixon as a participant. He and his supporters prevented the Commission from gaining Government approval.

There is in the Dixon evidence before the PSCB a singular document which encapsulates his ideas on news-gathering:

There is no mystery about collecting news. The great bulk of the news is available at particular places. If you want colourful stories you can go after them, but in respect of the record of things done and decisions made it is merely a matter of getting officers to cover these things.149

Dixon was far more interested in the recording of decisions than he was in other kinds of news. The whole raison d'etre of the news service had been to provide a factual cover of Federal Government activities. His men were available to record speeches and receive press handouts for transmission. When Dixon was interviewed in January 1976, he confirmed that there had been considerable disagreement between him and Boyer about publicising Government activities. He agreed that Boyer had complained about Labor propaganda in ABC news bulletins and said:

I tried hard to convince him that Governments make news, and inevitably a Government will, because it does things, have to get greater prominence in news bulletins than an Opposition which is usually voicing views in opposition to Government policy. But Boyer seemed to think that there was no real justification for this, that we should still hold the scales evenly between them, irrespective of the fact that one was government, the other opposition.150

'News, not views' was common journalistic parlance in the 'forties, but Dixon seems to have had a special interpretation. His attachment to the idea that the news should serve the Government of the day because of its news-worthiness dovetailed neatly with Labor ministers' requirements of the ABC news service. The 'official' or 'Government' orientation of the service was strengthened by his concept of reporters waiting at predetermined outlets for news to become available. Carey is one of

of several writers who have pointed out how this 'objective', limited approach to news-gathering restricts the independence of the reporter and increases the likelihood of government manipulation:

The net effect of the press conference, the background interview, the rules governing anonymous disclosure and attribution to sources, and particularly the growing use of the public information officer within government, is to routinise the reporter's function and to grant to the source exceptional control over news dissemination. As a result ..., government sources [can] deliberately place messages without alteration before the public. 151

Sigal also concludes that the beat system which concentrates staff at routine official channels constitutes a mechanism for official dominance of news. Thus Dixon's theories about newsmakers and the method by which his news-gathering staff worked allowed the Government to dominate the Canberra news sessions and gave Labor every incentive to maintain the service's character. It was their key channel to the public. What gave Dixon immense satisfaction was a factual report filed by one of his own reporters which demonstrated the accuracy and speed which he felt were the chief attributes of a radio news service and which, in themselves, would guarantee public confidence in ABC news. He kept his own file of favourable comments on the news as a rebuttal of the criticism he received from the Commission, management and the press. When the Commission beat the new commercial news services with Government announcements, he would immediately inform McCall or Moses. On 10 July 1945, for example, he reported ABC news at 7 p.m. was first with the news that Chifley and Forde were both to stand for the Prime Ministership. He encouraged his staff to let him know of favourable Government reaction and on 24 August of the same year one of his Canberra reporters delighted him with news that Evatt was duly impressed with the almost instantaneous broadcasting of a statement about Australia's participation in the surrender ceremony.

of the Japanese in Tokyo. The reporter was handed the statement in Evatt's office, made use of one of his phones to telephone Sydney as the 1.30 p.m. bulletin began and had the satisfaction of hearing the item included in the same bulletin shortly afterwards.

Dr Evatt and his two publicity officers were nearby, and expressed amazement at hearing it come over the radio within a few seconds of my reading it over the telephone. They could scarcely believe their own ears, and said they had not thought it possible for any News Service to be conducted with such efficiency and speed.152

While Dixon had won the battle with the Commission over the independence of the news service, its very creation was to mean the end of his influence and career. For while he had understood the needs of the Labor Government and its fears of the press better than the Commission, he went too far in his news philosophy and his friendships with Labor politicians to be acceptable to the Commission when it was desperately anxious to prove the impartiality and acceptability of its new fully independent service. He represented Government manipulation just as the newspaper agreements came to represent press influence. As long as he was at the helm of ABC news, the likelihood of its being influenced by his friends, such as Amour, Haylen and Hanlon was extreme. His reliance on them was already very obvious when the 1946 Act was passed. It was to become more obvious in the years that followed when his position came increasingly under threat from the Commission and from Moses. The difference was, however, that after 1946, Labor became less interested in ABC News now that the threat of press control and influence had been removed permanently. As this happened, the Commission under Boyer's influence became determined that, as it was now completely responsible for its own news, the content of news bulletins would represent the new ABC

152. Plunkett to Dixon, 24 August 1945, SP286, Box 1 (S11), Bundle 25, "News Comments and Enquiries".
policy of absolute "fairness" and "impartiality" of coverage towards all political groups. The Government, according to Boyer, would get no special treatment. But for this policy to be effective, Dixon had to be removed from effective control and influence over news bulletins. The continuing battle between the Commission and Dixon is to be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

THE NEWS POLICY OF 1946

Boyer and the Role of the ABC

Having received the assurances from Curtin that he had sought in 1945 - namely that the ABC would in future be looked upon to take responsibility for its treatment of ethical, religious, political and aesthetic material - Boyer made these the subject of a new broadcasting manifesto. Unfortunately the trumpet call intended to alert Australians to the new ideology ended up by being extremely muted. It was the subject of the speech in Canberra on 20 June 1945 which was blacked-banned by the press. Boyer outlined the themes which were to dominate his approach to broadcasting, and in particular to news. The speech was intended to reassure politicians of the ABC's sense of community responsibility and thus ensure that the ABC was left alone in future. Boyer claimed that radio could either be used as a tool of party propaganda, as had happened in Germany, or as a great instrument of information. If it were kept free from political and sectional pressures, the ABC could present a balanced and impartial picture of events which would be a positive factor in building an informed, critical and cultured democracy. It could give people the chance to calmly judge the divisive issues which could so easily threaten the unity of the Australian people:

I think we all realise that in the post-war years, we, in common with all other countries, are entering a period in which grave and far-reaching issues of social and political policy will agitate the nation ... it is our hope that national broadcasting may stand solid and serene in the middle of our national life, running no campaign, seeking to persuade to no opinion, but presenting the issues fairly and fearlessly for the calm judgment of the people ... we shall, we believe, not only contribute most valuably to the healthy development of our democracy but serve as a much-needed centre of national unity.

The ABC was henceforth committed to a role of maintaining democratic consensus and the status quo. Serving 'national unity' can only mean preserving a single, united, coherent stance against the real or imagined threat of disunity caused by the advent of new social and political ideas. The ABC would help preserve the consensual values, on which Australian society was based, by ensuring there was informed but dispassionate presentation of issues. With such impartial presentations society would be better informed and thus better able to keep ignorance at bay. Boyer believed ignorance fueled social unrest and that the better informed the public were, the greater the likelihood of 'national unity' being preserved. Here again is the implication that the instillation of consensual values would reduce the likelihood of violent social change:

There is no medium apparently so providentially able to ameliorate national distrusts and promote greater understanding than the ubiquitous and instantaneous broadcast service ... At its highest and most courageous ... it can be a major weapon in the urgent struggle against ignorance and myopia. 3

Soon Boyer had to contend with a paradox in the role he was espousing for the ABC. To his mind, the ABC was to be a clearing house of national ideas so that the public could better judge the issues. It was therefore to present political broadcasts, discussions on matters of controversy, and its news, "fairly, impartially and fearlessly ... not only for the utility of national broadcasting to our democracy, but for its very survival". 4 But as the country moved into the era in which communism and militant trade unionism became burning issues, the ABC found that the confrontationist tactics of the left clashed with its own principles and that of the Parliamentary parties. It was a time when the Labor Government itself was under strain and threat from communist-led unions and when many senior Labor

men were themselves strongly anti-communist. Appeals to be tough on the communists came from both Labor and conservative sides of the political spectrum. The Commission had to answer the question whether national unity could better be preserved by excluding the communist point of view or whether all sides of the argument should be fearlessly presented to allow the public to make up its mind. If the communist side were presented would it prove disruptive? Even if it wanted to, could it be 'fair' to the communists without antagonising the politicians?

When Boyer became Chairman, he was faced with a number of unpleasant possibilities. One was that with the war coming to a close, Labor might return to the idea of nationalising broadcasting and taking over the ABC. The second was that the non-Labor parties might become so incensed by the ABC's handling of news that they might, when they were returned to power, either disband or radically alter the makeup of the Commission. It was necessary to persuade both sides that the Commission's survival was in the national interest. As Smith says, "the story of broadcasting is in many ways a history of how broadcasting organisations set about the task of staying in business". The advent of Boyer after the rough handling Cleary had received at the hands of the Government was the signal for one of the "constant readings of [the] society's political, moral and cultural state of mind" which the broadcasting institution must undertake. The Commission was worried by criticisms of its news and the erosion of its 'independence', particularly in news, by the Government. The ABC had to be responsive to its audience, and to the political community as a whole, not just a part of it. Its most sensitive product, its news, had to be the

5. Smith, Shadow, p.59.
commitment of the ABC's own beliefs and those beliefs had to mirror accurately those of the society which created it. Boyer's concept of the ABC as a symbol of national unity was intended to demonstrate that the Commission's sense of its social purpose was impeccable. It was intended to appeal to, and reassure, all shades of listening and political opinion.

To be effective, however, the Commission's own picture of society had to be absorbed by the newsroom so that credibility could be restored in the minds of the audience. To Boyer this meant rigidly defined 'impartiality'. To be the centre of national unity the ABC, "must preserve with scrupulous care its own non-partisan position". Hill has pointed out that an institutionalised ethos, involving an area of consensus covering central issues of politics and power, fundamental sanctions of society and sacred values, is one of the chief reasons of unwitting bias:

The institutional slanting, built-in not by the devious inclination of editors to the political right or left, but by the steady and unexamined play of attitudes, which, via the mediating structure of professionally defined news values, inclines all the media towards the status quo. The sources of this hidden consensus, he says, lie at the heart of political culture itself, which is based on legitimate procedures of political action within a parliamentary democratic system, pursuing interests without resort to open conflict and the maintenance of existing institutions on which the political culture is based. Boyer's concept of preserving national unity in the face of divisive issues was an official ideology which could be expected to incline news-gathering towards groups which were in accord with national consensus and away from events and groups which did not share it. By introducing his ideas of impartiality into the canon of ABC news values, he meant...
to stop the heavy inclination towards the reporting of Government as distinct from Opposition. He was not altering the supportive attachment of the ABC to the values of the establishment which embraced politicians of both parties. Impartiality in this sense means being impartial only to those people and events who conform.

Stuart Hood says of the BBC and ITN:

The political line of both organizations has remained the same. In practice it is the expression of a middle-class consensus politics which continues that tradition of impartiality on the side of the establishment so clearly defined by Reith. Impartiality is impartiality within bounds and is applied to those parties and organisations which occupy the middle ground of politics; where impartiality breaks down is when the news deals with political activities or industrial action which are seen as being a breach of the conventions of the consensus. 9

This became true of the ABC in its rational unifying role under Boyer but it was tempered slightly by Boyer's obsessive fear of the consequences of Government control of broadcasting and his consequent desire to ensure that the Commission did not entirely abandon significant minorities.

The Doctrine of Impartiality

Boyer realised that credibility had to be re-established in news to win audience support. "Credibility in the mind of the actual audience is the sine qua non of news. All else is either propaganda or entertainment". 10 To do so the Opposition had to be seen to be getting a fair deal. Boyer realised that "the freedom with which the broadcasters contact, invite and discuss questions with the Opposition is the touchstone of broadcasting independence". 11

that this freedom depends on a structure such as that of the BBC in which the Chairman of the Board can supervise in the public interest while leaving individual judgments to the organisation itself. The Governor and his Board, or, in the ABC, the Chairman and the Commission can look to a set of national interests and not just at immediate advantages to their organisation.

Boyer trod very carefully in his first essay into news policy. In May 1946, as the Commission wearily began to realise that its latest news agreements with the press were about to be referred to the PSCB, he drafted new Directives for both Spoken Transmissions and News. The News Directive was distributed for comments to the Controller of Programmes, Dr Keith Barry, and to Dixon, Denning and Leicester Cotton for comments. Cotton had been appointed to the position of National News Editor and commenced duty on 6 May. Fortunately, the draft directive, as well as the directive in its final form, have been preserved, so that it is possible to see the divergence of views and the affect it had on the final Commission decision.

We have already drawn attention to Boyer's pre-war experiences in Germany which had convinced him that not just one opinion should be heard on the radio, but many. Radio could thus enhance the democratic process, rather than threaten it. In his Directive on Spoken Transmissions, which concerned the work of the Talks Department, Boyer showed how dedicated he was to this principle. The repeated programming of a single speaker or commentator would tend to standardise public attitudes instead of presenting a variety of views which would acquaint listeners with the broad picture of the issues. Thus he was opposed to 'personality building' where matters of opinion were involved, even though it would cost the Commission some listeners:
People as a whole prefer the predigested output of a favourite pundit with a good voice and pontifical infallibility on regular sequence, and they are well served in this respect by some networks. Ours is perforce the hard way. 12

Boyer wanted a variety of speakers instead "to meet what is a grave responsibility in democratic nation-building". 13 Only thus could the Commission fulfil its purpose of aiding 'citizenship'.

Remembering that these documents were prepared by Boyer before the PSCB's findings of July 1946, it is interesting to note how, in the News Directive, he had already arrived at a position in which he saw the necessity of contrasting ABC news style with that of the press. We have already drawn attention to the fact that the journalists of the ABC had already devised an ethos which epitomised their opposition to press standards and opinions. Boyer now went some way towards endorsing this as Commission policy. The fact that he did this before the PSCB reported would seem to indicate that he had already realised the agreements were not a practical solution to the problems of ABC news and that his arguments in their favour were based on principle and nothing more. He rejected news judgments and standards which had pulled ABC in two directions - those of the press and Government departments. Instead the ABC required its journalists:

to select and present news with a degree of objectivity not called for in other organisations. Even the sense of news values should not necessarily follow that of current journalism in which the estimate of news value is often that of circulation-building for its own sake. 14

12. Directives, News and Spoken Transmissions, Commission minute of meeting of 5-7 June 1946. It is given in full as Appendix N.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
This required "the discarding of much journalistic habit of mind ... the Commission's news service should not merely be press news over the air". The newspaper practice of equating newsworthiness with 'sensationalism' would not be followed. When it came to determining the methods of selecting news, the Commission felt that the first principle which should be followed was that of 'community service'. The value of an item could be assessed by asking the question whether it was a service to the community for an item to be broadcast. One view should not be given prominence over another so that it would be impossible for listeners to recognise what the attitude of the news selector had been. Recognising that selection of news could affect public judgments, Boyer and the Commission determined that the methods used should leave the function of judgment entirely to the listener. Anything resembling 'comment' was to be avoided at all cost. The Directive gave as an example:

In the report of a statement by Professor Laski, the principle of legitimate identification would be served by describing him as 'Professor Laski, Chairman of the British Labour Party'. Inadmissible comment, on the other hand, would be - 'Professor Laski, the Left Wing Chairman of the British Labour Party'.

It is not precisely clear what Boyer and the Commission had in mind when they used abstract terms such as 'objectivity', 'community service' and 'sensationalism'. 'Community service', the basic criterion for news selection appears to be related to two other considerations, 'citizenship' and 'sensationalism'. 'Citizenship', that is, becoming a 'good citizen' was, according to Boyer, dependent on

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
the degree to which one acquired the desire and capacity to make 'independent judgements' on social, political and philosophical problems, instead of merely becoming the passive followers of demagogues. These judgements could only be arrived at by listening with tolerance and an open mind to the opinions of others. The Commission's 'educative function' was to present a broad picture of the issues without comment, so that the community could make up its own mind. Therefore one provided a community service by providing people with this raw material on which individual judgements could be based. But the raw material had to be sifted first. It should not be 'sensationalist' and the Directive clearly equates this term with 'startling'. The combination of both terms seems to mean 'disturbing', judging from the example given which suggests that news of 'good deeds' should take precedence over 'bad deeds'. Thus the ABC must never select news in accordance with the principle that "a criminal act by a person is regarded as having more news value than an act of positive beneficence (sic)". 17

News that was 'disturbing' could disrupt the harmony of family life. Boyer had deeply held beliefs about the impact of radio (and later television) on the family and on parent/child relationships. In his mind, it introduced unwelcome disruptive influences. Speakers:

come to us in the privacy of our own homes - they invade the sanctity of our family circle ... Present too are personalities and influences which never before in history could invade family life ... Who can doubt but that the steadying, even if conservative, influence of parent over child which has been the most constant factor in our civilisation hitherto has now to be shared with a variety of mentors, more vocal, more eloquent, and more persuasive. 18

17. Ibid. Boyer's views on this aspect of news are discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.
But if radio could "darken the mind and bestialize the instincts, it can also bring light and more inspiration". 19

The community was made up of, and was a projection of, the families it comprised. Their interests had to be paramount. Harsh and disturbing influences were, if possible, not to be allowed to disrupt the influence of parent over child which was so central to social order. Therefore news which was of service to the community would be that which consisted of the 'facts' necessary for opinion forming, but with heavy emphasis on the more positive aspects of man's nature. Valuable news was 'uplifting' news.

It is apparent that 'objectivity' meant rigid application of approved news selection methods. As well as applying the yardstick of 'community service', these included strict 'impartiality', and also giving news items priority and wordage in accordance with their 'intrinsic importance'. 'Importance' could only be judged according to 'community service' concepts already elaborated. The wheel has turned a full circle. In brief, it appears that ABC 'objectivity' meant adherence to the Commission's editorial policy. Reporters and sub-editors had to select and structure material in accordance with the Commission's news principles. The Commission's 'objectivity' was therefore to be different to newspaper 'objectivity', because each was subject to its own institutional policy. 20

We have already seen how the ABC news service was impelled in the direction of rigidly 'factual' news reporting from the days when it first began to collect its own news. Dixon had believed that the only way to get news before it appeared in the press was to compete actively with newspapermen on the regular rounds. His newspaper orientation and emphasis on speed and accuracy was reinforced by

20. ABC 'objectivity' is dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 5.
Government expectations of the ABC's first Australian reporters in Canberra, who were expected to do what the press did not - faithfully repeat official speeches and announcements. When the Commission did attempt to break away from this style and add the extra perspective of background through broadcast of 'observer' reports, it was opposed both by traditional ex-newspaper reporters on the ABC staff and the Labor politicians who viewed with suspicion any attempt to interfere with the approved method of factual repetition. Other factors which supported this approach were the conscious rejection of newspaper techniques of providing additional information and the constraints of radio news, in which items had to be severely reduced in length. The high cost of cabling overseas news from its London office meant that it too fitted this pattern, by having to be reduced to brief 'cablese'. By rigidly defining comment in this way, Boyer was emphasising this policy had Commission blessing and, in fact, he extended it further.

The Commission's news therefore had to rigidly conform to what Nordenstreng has called the "'parasitic' mirror role", in which it simply reflected events, instead of putting them in perspective. The mirror role is only 'objective' and 'impartial' in relation to those being reported - those who dominate or control society. It is thus likely to favour the status quo. Nordenstreng claims that the reliance on the audience to make up its own mind, having been given the simple facts, is frequently misplaced. He cites research that shows that there is little comprehension on the part of the audience when news is

21. The brevity of ABC news items is examined at length in Chapter 5.
broadcast. For many it is simply a ritual because the news lacks the informational background necessary for the transmission of information. Further, on the question of news selection, Nordenstreng says political decision makers are favoured because items of news are selected which are significant to them but to no-one else. Many Government announcements come into this category.

News presentation is 'institution-centred' rather than 'people centred'. Thus, since the general audience does not comprehend the message, the 'people' are unaware of the details of decision-making.\(^\text{23}\)

Nordenstreng favours far more specific people-orientation of news.

The primary criterion of news selection should be the extent to which the event described presumably affects the life of a large number of people, i.e. the extent of the effect of the event among the audience. In this case, we are applying an informational news criterion.\(^\text{24}\)

As we have seen, Boyer too favoured the selection of news which affected people, but only in the sense that it should serve the community in a beneficial way. The essential difference with Nordenstreng was the 'protective' view towards the audience, which emanated from Boyer's strong moral code. Nordenstreng by contrast argues that news cannot be restricted to that which complies with a particular ideology or social theory, nor can it be restricted to that which the audience wants to hear. In fact, he favours the inclusion of news which will 'disturb' set ways of thinking, and which comprises 'new' information, outside the normal stream of public opinion. In this way, the listener is receiving information which can change his world view.


\(^{24}\) Nordenstreng, "Policy for News", in McQuail (ed.), Mass Communications, p. 401.
As will be further demonstrated in this chapter, Boyer's view of the role of Government and public institutions in society was an uncritical one. This is emphasised in the Directive when, despite the considerable efforts to develop and confirm this new code of 'impartiality' his own preconceptions about the wisdom of those in authority caused him at times to unconsciously favour those in power. Thus, in the Directive, the Talks Department was told that 'balance' was only required from Opposition speakers when a new policy was announced by the Government or when it 'defended' a policy. The 'factual' account of a 'settled' policy by the Government would not need any Opposition comment. It was automatically assumed that any such 'factual' account would be 'truthful' and non-controversial.

With such views, if Boyer had been asked to comment on Nordenstreng's criteria it is doubtful that he would have endorsed the reasoning that 'perspective' was necessary in respect of those in authority. On the broad question of providing informational background, Boyer believed that such material was 'comment' which did not accord with the principle of the ABC being a neutral forum for ideas. 'Neutrality' was a political stipulation and there was no evidence that Boyer disagreed with it. On the other hand his views about 'comment' in news were at least partly due to the heavy political questioning and rejection of the 'observer' concept by the Government. He might not have been quite so dogmatic about the exclusion of 'comment' or 'background' if this had not happened, and might not have linked it so directly to political survival.

Also Boyer might have seen some point in Nordenstreng's argument in favour of the inclusion of minority viewpoints. Certainly his public statements, and to some extent his actions, up to 1948 emphasise his desire to allow minority viewpoints access to the ABC, but subsequent events were to demonstrate to him that it was politically and socially unwise, to proceed with this policy if those minorities
functioned outside and threatened the democratic framework. It can be maintained therefore that Boyer would have rejected some of Nicolaasen's critique but not all of it. To a considerable extent Boyer's freedom of action was determined by his assessment of the political climate in Canberra. The cautious 'mirror-image' approach to news which Boyer initiated was partly due to his own beliefs about the nature of radio, and of society, and partly due to political pressure.

When it came to ensuring 'balance' in political coverage, Boyer's fear of Government domination of radio drove him to seeking a precise mathematical equation of Government and Opposition material. The draft of the directive shows the extraordinary lengths he was prepared to go to, in order to achieve this. He was quite willing to drop items which were newsworthy in themselves, if no balancing statement could be obtained from the opposite viewpoint. If balance was not achieved, the prestige of the service would be destroyed.

The Commission feels that the prestige and standing of its news service depends much more upon the degree of objectivity and general balance of its news than upon the inclusion of all the items of the day. An ex parte statement for example, should well be deleted on such principle, or alternatively held over until an adequate balancing statement can be obtained.

He specifically wanted to redress the position of the Opposition.

In general it should be recognised that the natural broadcasting advantages of the Government of the day are such that the wishes of Opposition members, particularly the Leader of the Opposition, should be given consideration such as to create a near balance as possible, although a complete balance is clearly out of the question.26

The fact that Boyer thought such a radical transformation of the ABC's political coverage was necessary says much about the Commission's fears that unfair news was damaging its standing with at least the side of the political spectrum and with the public.25

25 Ex Parte News Directive, ABC Archives, "Group R9, News".
But it also revealed an ignorance of the practical side of news broadcasting, a weakness which Beyer had also shown in his proposals to station ABC reporters in the offices of newspapers. The paragraphs were dropped subsequently because of the representations of Cotton and Denning, who both complained that the deletion or holding over of statements for reasons of 'balance' was bad and impractical news practice. Cotton said

If the statement were held over, I consider we would be depriving our listeners of what might be a first-class news story, and one which it would be our duty to carry.27

Both men also questioned the desirability of seeking balancing statements in every case.28 Cotton felt this could best be left to the judgment of the man in charge. Particularly noticeable however were the very strong objections of Denning to these attempts to balance statements from the Government. He did not feel balance in the same bulletin was necessary, and felt the actual seeking of balancing material positively out of character:

If every controversial statement must involve our news-writers in scurrying around the lobbies seeking a contrary statement I feel that the ultimate effect would be most harmful.29

If the Opposition issued a statement however it would be used.

27. Cotton to Dixon, 22 May 1946, "Group R9, News".

28. The News Directive does not lay down any specific formula to be followed to achieve 'balance' beyond saying that where possible equivalent prominence and equivalent wordage should be given to opposing point of view. No period over which 'balance' must be obtained is given, and as Boyer's paragraph in the draft which proposed immediate 'balance' was dropped, it may be assumed that some degree of flexibility was allowed. In the Directive for Spoken Transmissions, the Commission admitted that it might have been too inflexible in the past on this issue. It went on: "It may, therefore, be accepted that the Commission is favourable to the programming of contentious talks without the immediate counter now thought essential, provided that over a reasonable period care is taken to present alternative views". (Commission's emphasis.) See Appendix N.

29. Denning to Dixon, 21 May 1946, "Group R9, News".
Denning's attitude to the place of Government in political news reporting was identical to that of Dixon. Thus he questioned the sentence in Boyer's directive which read, "the greatest care must be exercised that the power of selection should not be employed to give greater prominence to one view or policy than to another", claiming that:

This seems not to recognise the actual state of affairs in Parliamentary life where you have (a) a government actively at work making decisions - necessarily involving policy - and, in the course of its administrative life constantly coming before the people; and (b) Opposition parties which are not creating or originating news, but which have merely opinion to offer.30

It would be impracticable to obtain Opposition statements to match those of the Government on every occasion. The predominant weight in our democracy, according to Denning, must go to what the Government is saying or doing.

The Opposition has a point of view which is entitled to presentation, but on a level different from that of official pronouncements of immediately binding effect ... the Opposition must accept the implications of its minority position in the Parliament.31

This, he said, was the policy religiously pursued in Parliament since he first opened the bureau there in 1939.

When both the Head of News and his Canberra representative come down so heavily on the right of the Government to dominate the news and in fact eschew any need to actively seek an opposing view, the nature of the Canberra news during the war years can be clearly envisaged. The Labor Government's enthusiasm about the nature of ABC news is understandable and when one realises that for the three years, 1942-45, ABC bulletins were transmitted through all commercial stations as well, the value to Labor is inestimable. It was this

30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
attitude of mind which caused the Commission so much concern, yet to this point, it had only tackled the obvious results of such a policy, the repetition of Ministers' names, instead of attacking the ideology which was its cause. We have earlier noted how little control was exercised by the Commission in the actual implementation of news-gathering policy and that it was left mainly to Dixon to set the rules. This result of this, as previously mentioned, was the evolution of a philosophy within the news department itself. As Sigal notes, newsmen lack a body of theory but instead have conventional explanations for what they do. Opposition to newspaper practices and standards was a convention which sprang up in the very early days of ABC news. What Boyer had to say about this in 1946 was therefore nothing new to the News Department. But the essence of the deep differences which developed between the ABC News Department and the press was not just the question of 'sensationalism' or newspaper 'errors'. It went much deeper into the area of role conceptions. We have earlier remarked upon the heavy onus put on the ABC's Canberra staff to balance what the newspapers were doing and provide an unquestioning factual cover of official announcements. Sigal stresses that this kind of role, in which reporters are overly dependent on officials, imposes a considerable strain involving a conflict between the reporter's actual job and the part he would ideally like to play in society. An ideology or creed which justifies this anomalous position and provides a sanction for news gathered on these lines, reduces the uncertainty. Instead of having to decide what news is, he is provided with 'certified news' through the routine channels which enable those in authority to set the rules governing disclosures. The early ABC newsmen must have

32. Chapter 5 contains a detailed examination of the differing positions taken by ABC news and the press, and some of the clashes in which they were involved. It also examines the standards of 'objectivity' that each followed, and the consequences that followed from the disputation.
extremely reliant on these channels for their job was not only to report accurately but fast, which meant their constant dependence on officials was extreme. Australian newspaper conventions of the time were obviously very different. The role conception of the major newspapers was, more often than not, that of being 'an adversary of government', to use Sigal's phrase. This meant a dogged insistence on independence, a resistance to close alliances with statesmen, and the certitude that they "cannot surrender [their] permanent interests to the convenience of the ephemeral power of any government". The ABC newsman in Canberra could be classified, using Sigal's terminology, as 'neutral observer' and 'good citizen', in that he expressed no personal judgments, but could be prevailed upon to act in 'the national interest' when required. The ABC and the newspaper roles in Canberra were therefore quite antithetical. The more criticism of the ABC news, the more dedicated the ABC reporter would have been to his beliefs, in order to validate his news selection criteria. One can imagine the Dixon/Denning idea of news being related to Government activity, while the Opposition were merely capable of 'views', originating in these circumstances and being reinforced by contact between colleagues in the newsroom and by 'feedback' from Government sources themselves. We have enumerated examples of various Ministers and their staff expressing pleasure at the work of ABC newsmen in putting statements on air speedily, and voicing occasional displeasure if statements were not used or attributed to Ministers. Sigal points out that news sources are an important audience for any newsmen who frequently lacks any other kind of reaction, and that therefore there is a vested interest in maintaining a pleasant working atmosphere. In view of the heavy Government expectations of ABC news, and the gradually developing client relationship between the two, official reaction must have meant a great deal.

33. Sigal, Reporters, p.84. The evidence of Henderson and Murdoch before the PSCB in 1946 epitomised this attitude.
"Conventions in news support and reinforce the organisational routines of newsgathering and are lenses through which newsmen peer at events."\textsuperscript{34} Sigal's remark shows how self-perpetuating this process is. Conventions are devised to justify news selection methods and then ensure that they are maintained. These ABC conventions grew up within the News Department itself because of routines which had to be adopted. They developed into strong beliefs quite independent of the Commission, and, in the case of the Dixon/Denning attitude to Government news, in opposition to the Commission approach. They mirrored the conflicting approaches to the newspaper agreements and provide further proof that a departmental ethos can exist quite separately from the institutional viewpoint, and produce internal conflict.

Because of the opposition to those sections of the draft directive dealing with balance and the role of Government and Opposition, Boyer compromised. He abandoned the idea of dropping or delaying the broadcast of unbalanced stories, but he still retained the principle objected to by Denning, that of ensuring equal prominence to conflicting views. In fact he went further by ruling that the principle of equivalent wordage should also be adopted as far as possible. But he had to go some way towards recognising Denning's principle of Government priority. "It is quite obvious that Ministers actively carrying out the government of the country have more newsworthy statements to contribute than have members of the opposition."\textsuperscript{35} Boyer instead switched his attack to less contentious

\textsuperscript{34} Sigal, Reporters, p.93.

\textsuperscript{35} Directives, News and Spoken Transmissions.
ground by warning once again that Government Ministers can secure
unnecessary publicity through statements made by their departments.
He therefore decreed that a statement by a Minister was not necessarily
worthy of broadcast unless "the matter contained in the statements
themselves is of intrinsic importance and of public interest".36

While this still weighted things in favour of the Government, it
took some significant steps towards ensuring greater balance.
According to Denning, Opposition views on certain issues had not been
actively canvassed before. Now it was laid down that there were
occasions on which this was obligatory. It emphasised more
positively than before that the ABC was not obliged to include all
Government statements in bulletins, and embracing all was the principle
of equal prominence to opposing views. It had not tackled the central
issue of the overall favouring of the Government, but when one
realises that the Directive was compiled when the News Department's
relationship with Labor politicians had reached its deepest
conspirational point, and when the Commission appeared to be less in
charge of its destiny in news than ever before, it was a considerable
achievement. In its final form, it was accepted by the News Department
and this provided a useful foundation on which the Commission could
build a new, less acerbic relationship with its journalists, either in
the context of the news agreements, or, as appeared very likely in
June 1946, an independent service.

It was the concept of independence in news which began to worry
Boyer as soon as the 1946 Broadcasting Act was passed. He wanted to
make sure that the news staff, particularly the considerable number
who had to be appointed before the new service began, understood the
obligations underlying that term. These were, as Boyer understood

36. Ibid.
them, the endorsement by the Commission of the accuracy of each news item broadcast. Boyer feared that there could be occasions on which the news service might find that they did not have a desirable item of news which had appeared in the press, and therefore would be tempted to take it from the newspaper without checking. He wanted therefore to ensure that the new staff to be employed understood that this could not be done, without thoroughly checking out the facts first, and he wanted an adequate staff employed to ensure that such checking was carried out. He was worried too about the stringer correspondents who were to be engaged in country areas. If they were employed by country newspapers they might be tempted to feed material from their papers without verification. He felt therefore that the country stringers should not come from the country press. These views were expressed in a draft directive which this time he gave to Moses for his comments.

Moses was rather scornful of this latest attempt by Boyer at news policy making. He believed that the problems that Boyer envisaged arose because of his inexpert understanding of the workings of journalism.

In order to provide the best possible service I feel it is clear that the Commission must seek to engage the most competent staff and correspondents available from among those who have had training and experience in the news field. 'Independence' relates to the method of securing material by direct engagement by the Commission of the persons concerned rather than, as suggested by the draft directive, to the fact that those persons are or are not already in the news field.37

37. Moses to Boyer, 14 October 1946. Moses's emphasis. See Appendix 0 for text of Boyer's draft, which is undated, together with Moses's reply. SP 724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
Moses went on to point out that the engagement of country press men as ABC stringers would not bring with it the dire consequences which Boyer envisaged. It was standard journalistic practice for men to work for several publications at the same time. If they were engaged by the Commission they would be servicing the ABC direct as individuals, and this was not the equivalent of obtaining news from the paper for which they worked. And finally Moses thought it would be dangerous to employ non-journalists, as distinct from journalists, because standards would suffer. Moses was particularly amused at Boyer's attempts to define various types of news. Boyer had written "sources of news admittedly are varied and are not necessarily at first hand; for example, government departments and public institutions may be regarded as reliable sources of information requiring no personal check, the bona fides of such institutions being accepted in advance".38 To this, Moses replied, "would it not be dangerous to state in any directive to the news staff that this does not require checking? Government departments may well issue handouts angled to their particular policies that may not include all the facts".39 This indicates that of the two men a much firmer grasp of the nature of journalism was possessed by Moses. Also it shows that Boyer was not worried about the nature of the reporting from Canberra, but only interested in ensuring that coverage was given equally to both sides. Here he stresses his underlying belief in the established order of society, and this matches exactly his philosophy expressed in terms of the ABC playing a central role in preserving national unity. The News Department was obviously not going to get from the Chairman any


39. Moses to Boyer, 14 October 1946, SP 724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
instructions relating to a more probing and in-depth approach to its news-gathering as long as he preserved such simple beliefs in the credibility of the institutions of government.

No such broad directive as Boyer originally planned ever saw the light of day. But he was sufficiently worried by the country news situation to eventually persuade the Commission that action was necessary to at least ensure that country stringers understood their responsibilities. The Commission decided at its meeting on 4 December 1946, "that a Directive should be included in the contract of engagement of each of these correspondents that it is a condition of their engagement that the news items which they send to the Commission should be personally checked by them and should carry their personal guarantee of accuracy".40

Dixon and the Implementation of the 1946 Policy

The Commission now had the new policy as a framework on which to build its new independent news service. Its reservations about press standards made it quite suitable for the new set of conditions, even though it had been planned while the press agreements were still being officially advocated by the Commission. But the Commission knew that any attempt to ensure that the News Department was more 'impartial' and less susceptible to official pressure - in other words genuinely 'independent' - depended on its success in reducing Dixon's influence on news content and with the staff. His prestige within the Department was enhanced by his successful resistance to Commission policy. The

40. Every country correspondent still signs a contract which carries the words: 'We should like your assurance that you will make yourself personally responsible for the accuracy of every item you send in. As you are aware, the ABC places the greatest importance on the accuracy of items, and we obviously cannot contemplate any arrangement with you which does not ensure your responsibility for checking the accuracy of each item you send us'. A current contract form is included as Appendix P.
relationship of himself and Hanlon with Labor politicians who had successfully pushed through the broadcasting legislation was now closer than ever. The Commission was forced to turn its mind once more to the problem which had occupied it in 1944-45. It wanted to ease Dixon into a position in which his duties would be mainly administrative, without bringing down the wrath of the Labor Government, the AJA and the staff journalists down on its head. It linked the success of its new independent service and its policy of impartiality directly with its handling of Dixon.

First it tried to explain to the news staff that it welcomed the new independent service. But its main hopes rested on its new National News Editor, Leicester Cotton. We have earlier pointed out that attempts to find someone to fill this new post were postponed in July 1945 because of the necessity to end the dispute over its creation with Dixon at a time when the Commission wanted to present a united front over the press agreements. The Commission once again called for applications in early 1946, but after they closed its attention was drawn to an Australian journalist who was on the broadcasting staff of the British Military Administration in Malaya. This man, Cotton, had been in charge of the BBC's South American news service during the war, and prior to that had had wide experience on newspapers in Australia and in Britain. He had been an editorial executive on the London Evening News before joining the BBC.

The ABC flew Cotton to Australia for interviews after he had, at its invitation, submitted a late application. His appointment was announced in May and he told the press at the time that he was a believer in truth above all else:

41. See Dixon, ABC, p.163.
42. See Chapter 2, p.182.
The essence of the job as far as I can see is the presentation of uncompromising truths. The policy of the BBC throughout the war showed that, in the long run, the broadcasting of objective truths is more powerful than distortion or half-truths.43

But the circumstances surrounding Cotton's appointment proved nightmarish for the ABC and showed how close it went at this time to losing effective control of its news operation completely. Dixon, Hanlon and their Labor friends were convinced the Commission was still in league with the newspaper proprietors to hand the news service over to their control and they immediately saw Cotton as the instrument for carrying out this mission. As the Labor organ The Standard said:

The eager manner in which the newspaper columnists have since raced each other in their generalised build-up of this 'old schooltie' journalist from Geelong Grammar School ... is eloquent reflection of the delight in AAP circles in at last securing the appointment of one of their own nominees to 'control' ABC news bulletins and 'be responsible for the content' during the forthcoming election campaign.44

The Standard revealed that Hanlon had opposed Cotton's appointment and alleged he had been nominated by the Sunday Telegraph editor, Cyril Pearl. The Standard made a bitter attack on the Commission for paying his fares to Australia and asked why had Dixon been ignored for the position. The paper demanded an urgent parliamentary probe into the circumstances. Boyer and The Telegraph denied that the newspaper had had anything to do with Cotton's application45 and The Standard was subsequently forced to publish an apology to AAP. Cyril Pearl has recently confirmed that it was he who first suggested Cotton in connection with the National News Editor position, but denies his newspaper had anything to do with it. Pearl says that he had corresponded with Cotton for some time and knew he was interested in

43. Sunday Telegraph, 5 May 1946.
44. The Standard, 10 May 1946.
finding a position in Australia. He mentioned Cotton's name to Moses at a luncheon at which Deamer was also present. Later he says he was strongly criticised by his superiors for 'embarrassing' the newspaper by his action. 46

The AJA joined the attack on Cotton also and opposition came too from the Australian Legion of Ex-Servicemen and Women which said a returned ex-servicemen should have been given preference. Moses defended Cotton saying that he had been turned down for active service but had worked with the BBC in London right through the blitz. 47

In Canberra, Amour responded to the appeal from The Standard by attacking the Commission and Cotton, alleging that the Commission might have exceeded its powers by paying Cotton a salary of £1,200-400 per annum. This he claimed was high enough to warrant Government approval but it had not been sought:

"In addition, I understand that there are complaints from journalists employed by the ABC that Mr Cotton is not doing an effective job, but is re-organising the staff to the dissatisfaction of almost every one. I should like to know whether Mr Cotton was appointed to the commission's staff at the instigation of the editor of the Sunday Telegraph with the object of sabotaging the ABC's independent news service.

Amour's information could only have come from within the News Department and the speech, which was made during the debate on the Australian Broadcasting Bill was the clearest warning yet to the Commission that there were politicians who considered they had proprietary rights in the new independent service and would attempt to influence it in every way possible, even in staffing arrangements. It was plain also that there were men in the News Department were prepared to get Labor backing to maintain the old approach to news after the

46. Personal communication, Cyril Pearl, 6 April 1977.
47. See Truth, 5 May 1946 and Newcastle Morning Herald, 5 May 1946.
independent service had been created, just as they had done before. It was this evidence of the continuance of this relationship of self-protection and self-interest between Dixon and his staff and the Labor group centring around Amour, Calwell and Haylen which determined the Commission to dig in its heels and play for time in both beginning the news service and staffing it adequately, while they tried to carefully disengage Dixon from any position of influence. It was one of the most difficult and dangerous positions in which the Commission ever found itself. Now that it had responsibility for its own news, that news had to reflect Commission thinking and not that of some other group. But it found itself faced with a position which it had feared since 1942; that it would be given an independent service over which it lacked control and discipline. Instead of reflecting the institution's picture of society, the news service might well end up being based only on the professional conventions of ABC newsmen which were largely geared to Government activity. As Smith points out, the newsroom must take into account the broadcasting institution's approach to news, because the institution's view is related to survival within the political framework. The Commission knew that it had to respond to the political environment as a whole, not to one part of it. It had to take the long term view. If it failed with its new and highly controversial news service to build confidence in itself throughout the whole community, the distinct possibility loomed of a backlash which could threaten the life of the ABC. News remained its most crucial product, the one which more than any other affected the security of the organisation. As Smith says of broadcasting newsmen: "Their judgments are ... finely attuned to the pressures of society and to the needs of the enterprise which employs them". 49 The links between Dixon and some of his

49. Smith, Shadow, p.90.
journalists with Labor politicians had moved news too much to one side of the political spectrum. The danger was now far more acute because the Commission had always to a point been able to disclaim responsibility because not all its sources were its own. Now that no longer held good. The Commission had to stand or fall by the standard of its own news.

In engaging Cotton, the Commission hoped to find in him a man on whom it could rely to institute its new canon of news values. It also needed his advice on the type of staff it should employ for its new service. Proof of the confidential nature of these early discussions between the Commission and its news expert was provided in the most embarrassing circumstances. Cotton began compiling a secret report on his staff almost as soon as he took up duties, at the request of Moses. This report was taken from Cotton's desk by someone in the newsroom and given to The Sun, which published extracts and asked Moses for an explanation. Cotton had written "Personally, I would rather have half the staff with everyone a specialist than our present roster of possible to indifferent men ... While the rank and file of these [men] are adequate for the purpose, the standard is not such that any one of them shows promise of grooming for really important key positions".50 Cotton expressed his concern at the type of news being presented and was pessimistic about the chances of improvement. Moses confirmed that it was a document meant for himself and which was meant to remain confidential. He added lamely that Cotton was now better satisfied with his staff now that he had become better acquainted with them. It was a bad start for Cotton and did not augur well for his chances of winning the support of the staff away from Dixon. Moses commented later: "Frankly I felt sorry for Cotton. He had a very disloyal group of people working with him and they were doing their best to sabotage him". 51

50. The Sun, 25 August 1946
51. Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.
At the same time as it witnessed the internal and external efforts to get rid of its National News Editor, the Commission were provided with another singular glimpse into the thinking of Dixon. It became apparent that Dixon did not see eye to eye with the Commission about the concept of news independence. To him, independence simply meant freedom from the sources and influence of the press monopolies, represented by ANPA and AAP. It did not represent freedom from Government influence, nor did it mean complete self-reliance in news-gathering within Australia. Dixon believed the Government would simply provide whatever funds were needed to run the independent service and it transpired that he wanted to Commission to take much of its country news from the independent country newspapers. These facts emerged in his bitter dispute with Moses in the months following the passing of the 1946 broadcasting legislation, over the costing and financing of the news service.

There was a perceptible air of self-confidence in Dixon's first request for new staff after the PSCB's report had been published and the Government was preparing its new legislation. He wrote to Moses:

I assume, of course, that the Commission will bring the basic staff in Perth and Hobart to three each, and then spread at least nineteen men over the States as required. If press hostility, such as is now being experienced in Sydney, makes more men necessary, we shall, of course, have to get them. I regard the above recommendations as so urgent that I suggest you ask the Chairman to seek the immediate approval of the other Commissioners by telegraph.52

He also suggested the immediate appointment of several senior staff.

The Commission was in no mood to rush so hurriedly into the new scheme. It decided to stall for time while considering the options open to it. Moses took issue with Dixon's request for nineteen new men, drawing attention to the conflicting estimate of 13 new men given

52. Dixon to Moses, 11 July 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
in his memo of 19 June.\textsuperscript{53}

As the newspapers will give the Commission three months notice of termination of their service I cannot agree that we should go ahead hastily with the engagement of the staff for an independent service particularly as there now appears to be some doubt as to the number required.\textsuperscript{54}

In his reply Dixon emphasised that he believed the Government would simply pay whatever the service cost. He quoted from the PSCB report: "Cost is not the paramount consideration and even if it were necessary to spend [£110,000] it is not too high a price to pay".\textsuperscript{55} He implied the Government would expect the Commission to provide as many men as he wanted. He could see nothing strange in pressing for the larger number now, given the mood of the Government.

What more natural than that, following the rejection of the agreements, I should recommend the appointment, not of the smaller number which had been discussed with you earlier, but of the 19 which was generally accepted at the enquiry as the minimum required under the agreement.\textsuperscript{56}

Moses would not abide this argument, and he wrote: "I cannot agree that we should prepare our plans for an independent service regardless of cost: our aim naturally must be to obtain that service without wasteful expenditure".\textsuperscript{57}

By 16 August, Dixon had asked his State editors what extra staff they required and now suggested that 28 additional journalists might have to be employed, including a man at Newcastle. There might be suggestions that this estimate could be pruned further, but "In view of the stipulation in the Act that the Commission shall employ an 'adequate' staff, I could not recommend this".\textsuperscript{58} The increasing demands

\textsuperscript{53.} See Chapter 2, p.193.
\textsuperscript{54.} Moses to Dixon, 11 July 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
\textsuperscript{55.} PSCB, 14th Report, p.20.
\textsuperscript{56.} Dixon to Moses, 15 July 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
\textsuperscript{57.} Moses to Dixon, 15 August, 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
\textsuperscript{58.} Dixon to Moses, 16 August 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
for staff and the already obvious conclusion that the service was going to cost much more than he had estimated, were matters of considerable concern to the Commission, which for the past three years had been forced to seek annual grants from the Government to make up the discrepancy between operating costs and the amount it received from licence fees. It saw grave implications for its 'independence' in this ad hoc method of financing and had been seeking some longer term solution. A news service which was dependent on Government handouts would exacerbate this position.

Independent News and the Commission's Finances

The Broadcasting Act of 1942 had restored to the Commission 1s of the licence fee which had been taken from it in 1940. This once again gave the Commission 1s of each licence of 20s. This however did not prove sufficient to meet the rapidly increasing programme costs due to wartime obligations. The Commission wanted 12s of the fee and the PSCB, after an enquiry into ABC finances in 1943, recommended this. The Government however did not amend the Act to provide for this, as the Commission wanted, but instead decided to provide the extra 1s on a temporary basis by annual grants. The Commission felt that this gave the Government a powerful lever with which to influence ABC programmes.59

It maintained:

It is not desirable for major policy reasons that a service which above all things is expected to be non-partisan in character, politically as well as in other respects, be subject to the annual budgeting of the government of the day, on whose goodwill the adequacy or otherwise of the grant from consolidated revenue might easily depend. It the national system is to be clothed with that necessary independence of action and judgment in respect of controversial, and particularly of political matters, it is essential that it should be assured of its income direct from the public which it serves.60


In 1946, the Commission asked for 15s to be allocated to it, as part of an urgent request for a parliamentary review of the method of financing. It pointed out that fewer licences were being issued because the market was becoming saturated. Moreover,

the full weight of the inevitable financial position, however, is now being felt by the Commission with the return of its staff [from the war] and with the rapidly rising standards demanded of broadcasting in the peacetime competitive field, so much so that personnel retrenchment would be required to balance the year's accounts.61

The position was complicated by the fact that if the ABC were to receive more of the licence fee, the Post Office which ran the ABC's technical services would receive less. The Post Office was already incurring substantial losses because its share of the fee, the remainder, was proving inadequate as the Commission began to increase the number of its regional stations.

The PSCB considered the Commission's request but did not have time to come to any definite conclusion about the method of future financing before the election of the same year. It recommended that another special grant be made to tide the Commission over for another year, and urged the new PSCB to reconsider the question as soon as it could. The money allocated by the grant was £100,000 which was far below the £223,000 which the Commission wanted. It had to cut back its programme expenditure and budget for a deficit.

The 1946 Report of the PSCB made it apparent that there was some reluctance on the part of its members to amend the Act, and raise the overall level of the licence fee as well as the Commission's portion. Nor was it very happy about financing the future deficits of the Post Office in providing technical services from consolidated revenue.

There was a suggestion that the Commission should in future be financed from consolidated revenue instead of from the licence fee or

alternatively the Act could be amended so that the Commission could earn supplementary income from sponsored programmes. The sponsored programme concept attracted a good deal of attention and some favourable comment from Committee members, and this was obviously going to be more thoroughly discussed by the incoming PSCB.

Therefore, at the time that it became apparent from Dixon's new staff estimates that the independent news service was going to cost much more than he had anticipated, the Commission was faced with a financial crisis which it believed had great bearing on its independence. It disliked the idea of being dependent on the government each year for a temporary grant, feeling that this amounted to a threat constantly being held over its head. It did not like the idea of commercial sponsorship, because it felt that this would place the ABC in a position of having to pander to commercial interests. It wanted the licence fee funding system maintained as long as the ABC proportion was fixed at a substantially higher level by amending the Act, thus making its income a statutory obligation and making it apparently more difficult for governments to use financing as a lever. Never has the Commission's vulnerability to ultimate Government control of its resources been made more obvious, as the Labor Government left hanging any long term solution to the Commission's financing.

Dixon felt that the Government, having established the independent news service, would now simply provide whatever funds were needed. But the Commission, having received no such assurance from the Government, could see nothing but trouble if Dixon's estimates continued to be based on such bland assertions. To build a news service on needlessly extravagant lines would seem to throw the Commission more and more into a position of being dependent on the Government and of tempting the politicians to make a change in the method of financing which would sap ABC 'autonomy' permanently. The mounting costs of Dixon's News
Department threatened the long-standing licence fee reimbursement system, and raised the twin bogies of either permanent Government grants or commercial advertising. What made the situation worse was that Dixon had no sympathy for Commission thinking on this point. He apparently saw no dangers in the news service continuing to lean heavily on the authorities in Canberra for support. There is an obvious parallel here with his attitude in 1942, when he reasoned that if the News Department helped the Government, it would get the necessary backing it needed for expansion.

The Cotton-Dixon Dispute

It will be recalled that in 1944, management and the Commission had decided to appoint a News Editor, ostensibly to assist Dixon, but in reality to take over from him control of the content of the national bulletins. Originally the Commission had considered actually displacing Dixon as head of the Department but had decided that this was impolitic. By late 1945, Dixon, as Director of News, was made responsible for the overall supervision of the Commission's news services in all States and diverse administrative duties. The News Editor, still to be appointed, would be responsible for the supervision and preparation of all news bulletins emanating from Sydney, which included the National News. Moses likened the relationship to that between the Director of Music and the conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in which the Director was responsible for the planning and supervision of ABC music activities, but the conductor was given the responsibility for the work of the orchestra, discipline of the players, recommendations on selection of musicians, and seating of players. The

Editor would be in control of the discipline of news staff, rostering, recommendations on grading, and most importantly, the selection of items for inclusion in the bulletin. He summed up:

The engagement of a first class journalist of integrity of sound judgment, with extensive sub-editorial experience, as our National News Editor, should ensure that the Commission's main news bulletins would be worthy of a national organisation.63

The National bulletins, of course, contained nearly all the political news, and mainly consisted of Canberra material. It was this bulletin which was the most sensitive and dangerous for the Commission, and which they wanted removed from Dixon's supervision. The November 1945 statement of Dixon's duties left the ultimate control of bulletin content very much an open question because it specifically instructed the News Editor to work through the Director, in all matters.64

This obvious flaw in the plan to restrict Dixon's control of news became apparent within weeks of Cotton's arrival at the ABC on 6 May 1946. Cotton almost immediately began to issue a series of style and policy instructions to his staff which he called 'guidances'. They appear to provide further evidence that Cotton was under instructions to change and improve the approach to news-gathering in line with the Commission's policy of balance. It was not long before Dixon took issue over these 'guidances' and they became the signal for a running battle between the two men which was to last until Cotton's departure in February 1949.

The first 'guidance' was unexceptional, reminding journalists that they should be responsible, unsensational and 'factual':

63. Moses to Commission, no date, but almost certainly October 1945. R17/25/6, "Fitzgerald Committee Background, Book II".
64. See Chapter 2, pp.182-83.
We've got to make our bulletins at once authoritatitive and attractive yet interesting. It's a formidable job, but it can be done. If we can persuade our listeners that 'if it's the ABC then it's true', we'll have gone a long way towards fulfilling our ambition. That's why we can afford to make mistakes less than other stations, or the newspapers, and why minor errors, such as in grammar, assume a seemingly disproportionate importance.65

This reflected Moses's thinking at the time. He felt the bulletins contained far too many grammatical errors. Cotton went on to warn his staff about quoting newspaper opinion from overseas, claiming that unless one knew the political affiliations of individual newspapers, sweeping generalisations could frequently be misleading. He made it clear that he did not favour quoting such opinion normally, except when it served to explain points that the agencies had not made clear. Finally, he added a list of British newspapers with summaries of their political position.

Two weeks later, Cotton realised he had not got his point across. He issued another 'guidance' criticising a news item for its failure to balance newspaper comment on the French elections.

Let's examine today's 1.30 p.m. bulletin. Headlines - 'London newspapers describe the French election results as a vote for stability'. To support this we have 15 lines from the 'Telegraph'; 6 from the 'Times' and 2 from the 'News Chronicle'. Now this is a completely lop-sided sampling of the London newspapers ... It may be true that these comments were indicative of the general trend of press opinion, but our story does not bear it out. Our listeners, particularly if of 'Leftist' tendencies, would be quite justified in dubbing us one-sided. We cannot afford giving hostages to either camp.66

This drew the fire of Dixon who claimed press comment from overseas was an important ingredient of the bulletins. It also provided Dixon with evidence that Cotton was 'leftist' inclined and this worried him because he was strongly opposed to communism. In his book Dixon

65. L. Cotton, Guidance No.1, R17/25/6. Reproduced as Appendix Q.

66. L. Cotton, Guidance No.III, R17/25/6. It is reproduced as Appendix R.
recalls this concern:

I soon became worried over Cotton's approach to the job. He told me he favoured giving Russia a fair deal in the news, 'right up to the declaration of war if necessary'.

Dixon equated 'leftism' with communism, and he believed that the listeners of the Left did not warrant consideration.

Surely if we are doing our job honestly and conscientiously, we should not be seriously concerned over the opinions of sections of listeners, particularly those of 'Leftist' tendencies. It has never been our policy to appease listeners, and I don't think we should start now. Responsible opinion through the British Commonwealth regards Communism as a disruptive force; and as a national station we must take care not to align ourselves with it.

Cotton replied:

I am astonished at this statement which leaves me with no alternative but to believe that we should, in your opinion, be more concerned with the views of those of Rightist tendencies. As individuals living in a democratic country we are luckily entitled to our political opinions but surely as officials of a non-political establishment it is most improper for such opinions to be obtruded into our service for the public. My own concern is to see that this does not happen, that as fair a balance as possible is struck between all parties, and that the news shall be objective and impartial.

Cotton claimed he had been following the principles of the Commission's new News Directive, and he reminded Dixon that under the terms of his engagement, he was responsible for the content and policy of the national news bulletins.

Dixon's attitude on communism is well attested to. He gave evidence of his feelings to Moses in 1943. "I remember being rather shocked by him (sic) saying that, of course, we should never have been

68. Dixon to Cotton, 14 June 1946, SP286, Bundle 6.
involved with Russia at all. Much better we should have lost the war to Germany than to have been associated with Russia, these communists, in the war." When Dixon was asked to comment on the Commission's draft news directive, Dixon had little to say beyond asking for a ruling on communism. He suggested taking an approach similar to that he had taken before World War II when he had resisted the argument to give fair treatment to Japan and Germany. He asked whether the Communist Party should have equality of treatment with other parties and whether criticism of Russian policy should be balanced by using replies from the communists.

With recent experience to guide us, I suggest we should not carry our objectivity to the point where it is inconsistent with the best interests of Australia and the British Commonwealth. In other words, we should not 'lean over backwards' to be fair to those who, in similar circumstances, would not be equally fair to us. The plain fact is that in these days of pressure groups and propaganda we shall never get full credit for our impartiality; That, however, should not deter us from being scrupulously fair to those who we think deserve it.

That statement says a lot about Dixon's approach to news. He was highly authoritarian in outlook, believing in strong government and firm opposition to those whom he felt threatened 'law and order'. The newspapers with their unbridled attacks on Government were a disruptive element in society and provided a countervailing force to authority. It was his duty to serve and protect the institutions of democratic government. Just as he felt it his duty to prevent the communists from getting impartial treatment, so he felt it his responsibility to ensure the view of the newspaper monopolies were redressed and 'balanced' by a news service which informed the public quite dispassionately of government activity. In Chapter 5, examples will be given of the strong bias against newspaper proprietors in the

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70. Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.
71. Dixon to Moses, 22 May 1946, "Group R9, News".
ABC news bulletins prior to 1946. They too, did not deserve fair treatment. Although Dixon aligned himself with Labor politicians, his views seem more supportive of government as representing authority, rather than representing any particular philosophy.

In a comment on Cotton which Dixon has made more recently, further light is shed on his interpretation of the 'news not views' convention. It is clear that 'views' can be held to be any adverse comment on government or the institutions of power. Taken to its logical conclusion, it can conveniently be used to exclude any such comment. This was the yardstick used with the Communist Party by Dixon. To him, the Party's statements were pure propaganda and not news. It was a very subjective analysis. On Cotton he says:

Whether he followed the line of least resistance or whether he was in direct sympathy with them I don't know. It was there. It amounted to the same thing. They [the communists] got the publicity in the national bulletins during his term there. The point was that outsiders were complaining about it and it knocked sideways our claim to be objective and to concentrate on news and not views because they didn't have news. They'd meet ... there was a resolution there that they would do this which on the surface it might be something the average man would say, well fair enough ... but it was something which ... would win a certain amount of prestige or water down any opposition to them ... a kind of subtle propaganda.72

The dispute over 'Guidance No.3' went on until July. Dixon argued that he had overall responsibility for the form and content of bulletins, and claimed that as both Labor and the conservative parties in both Britain and Australia had rejected the Communist Party, and concessions to them would not be in accord with the thinking of the vast majority of people. Cotton retorted that Dixon was ignorant of the true meaning of the terms 'left' and 'right' and assured him that to be leftist did not necessarily mean being a communist. But Dixon had his own viewpoint.

72. Interview with Dixon, 13 January 1976. Emphasis is the writer's.
I am not greatly concerned about the Oxford dictionary's definition of 'Left' and 'Right'; this belongs to the past. What I am concerned about is the generally accepted Australian definition which places Communists and Communist well-wishers on the left and those opposed to Communism - irrespective of party - on the 'Right'. Obviously you are unaware of this, but you can accept my assurance that it is correct. 73.

In 1946, the differences between the right and left wings of Labor over communism were becoming very apparent. Dixon's two close friends, Hanlon and Amour were very much on the 'right' within the Labor movement, and his misgivings about Cotton were accepted and shared by them. 74

Cotton requested Moses's intervention in the dispute because by now the stream of memoranda from Dixon was interfering with his work. Moses asked the Commission to more strictly define Dixon's duties, "so that Mr Cotton may be left free to concentrate on the improvement of the content and presentation of our national news bulletins without undue interference". 75 Moses failed to get the clarification he desired from the Commission which in August 1946, was faced with the problems of implementing its independent news service and did not want such an early confrontation. But they were forced to review the matter once again in October, after a further flurry of correspondence between Dixon and Cotton, over 'factual errors' which Dixon had detected.

73. Dixon to Cotton, 2 July 1946, R17/6/4.
74. Amour was one of six Federal Labor parliamentarians who joined The Australian Labor Party (Non-Communist) which was formed in N.S.W. in April 1940 to oppose the left-wing controlled State Executive, whose supporters became known as the Hughes-Evans Labor Party. The split occurred because of a 'Hands off Russia' resolution passed by the State Executive, which ran counter to Federal Executive policy. See Crisp, Ben Chifley, pp.124-25. Hanlon's newspaper, the Australian Worker, was controlled by the strongly anti-communist Australian Workers Union. The Communist Party regarded the union as one of the main barriers to any extension of its militant influence. See Alastair Davidson, The Communist Party of Australia (Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, 1969), p.91. See also Hanlon's attack on the Soviet Union in the Australian Worker, 15 May 1946.
75. Moses to the Commission, 19 July 1946, R17/25/6.
in recent bulletins. In September, Moses had drawn Dixon's attention to the flow of memoranda and had told him that there was no need for him to feel any personal responsibility for what was contained in the National bulletins. "There would be no criticism of you for any omissions or commissions by the Sydney news staff from myself or the Commission." He felt Dixon's constant criticism of Cotton was unfair because he had hardly settled into his new position and had been kept busy interviewing staff for the new positions. Moses asked Dixon to stop addressing memoranda to Cotton and to take up any matters for discussion with Cotton with the new Assistant General Manager, A.N. Finlay. Dixon immediately complained this was not in accordance with the duties he had been given by the Commission and insisted on putting the matter before the Commission.

At the October meeting of the Commission, Dixon was told officially by Boyer that Cotton was responsible for the supervision of national bulletins and the Sydney staff and that it intended there be a real division of responsibility between the two. It urged that the two men should work harmoniously together and at Dixon's request agreed to lift the ban on correspondence. This did not go as far as Moses wanted, and the Commission was obviously reluctant to rephrase or redetermine the Director's duties in accordance with the General Manager's wishes. This can only be accounted for by the continued protection he enjoyed from Hanlon on the Commission and the knowledge that the Government was keeping a paternalistic eye on the ABC's preparation for the news service. At the same meeting Hanlon produced a list of recent 'factual errors' in news bulletins which, he alleged,

76. Moses to Dixon, 24 September 1946, R17, Box 1.
77. Finlay, formerly Manager for Queensland, took over the post previously held by McCall. His appointment was announced on 27 August, 1946.
showed that Cotton was not doing his job properly. Moses strongly defended Cotton saying that there had been a considerable improvement in bulletin style and content since he took over. Instead Moses referred to the unsatisfactory nature of the bulletins prior to Cotton's appointment, and the Commission took no action. Moses then decided, unilaterally it appears, without the knowledge of the Commission or Hanlon, to send Dixon a copy of the original Commission minute of 1945 setting out his duties and making sure that the ultimatum that was included in it came to Dixon's attention for the first time.

The lines were now clearly drawn. Dixon and Hanlon were determined to demonstrate that Cotton was inefficient and aligned towards the far left. Moses and Boyer were determined to defend him. Moses in particular saw great qualities in Cotton, which the news service needed.

Dixon himself had very considerable limitations. He was a man who had a very fixed mind about all sorts of things. Cotton was a man of quality. He was recognised as a man who was capable of writing well, had a good background, for editorship.

Another consideration which set Moses against the moves to oust Cotton was the tactics involved. Hanlon would repeatedly ring certain journalists in the newsroom, particularly a man called Maurice McCarthy, who was formerly employed on the *Australian Worker*, and inform them of Commission decisions regarding news. Cotton would first hear about decisions affecting his department, and frequently himself, from these men.

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78. The list, and Cotton's reply, from R17, Box 1, are Appendix S. In a letter to the writer dated 29 December 1976, Dixon confirmed that he had prepared the list at Hanlon's request. Both Hanlon and Dixon believed they amounted to deliberate 'sabotage' by Cotton.


80. Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.

81. This information is also from the interview with Moses.
deduced from a reading of Inside the ABC. Dixon's key source for all kinds of confidential information about Commission meetings and negotiations is Hanlon.

The Commission's failure to resolve the question of Dixon's responsibility for the National news impeded Cotton's efforts to introduce new ideas. He was subjected to constant pressure and a flow of complaints from Dixon about factual 'errors', which unquestionably reduced his capacity to personally check each bulletin, because of the time involved in replying. As a result there were many 'mistakes'. Hanlon returned to the attack in the Commission meeting of February 1947, when he quoted further examples of 'mistakes' and also alleged there had been failures in following up stories. To Moses's defence of staff shortages, Hanlon retorted that lack of discipline on Cotton's part was the real problem.

The Commission asked to see Cotton at its next meeting, in order to discuss with him the work of the Sydney newsroom. Dixon immediately claimed that any interview with Cotton, without his own presence, was extremely irregular. However, he was not called upon and after a long discussion with Cotton, the Commission asked him to recommend the type of assistance he needed in order supervise the bulletins more closely. It also resolved that Dixon should be reminded that written communications between himself and Cotton should be reduced to minimum. In passing this on to Dixon, Moses showed the degree to which he was prepared to fight for Cotton. It was he who had drawn the Commission's attention to the pile of correspondence which had prevented Cotton giving sufficient time to the bulletins.

I was obliged to report that I had noted from your files that you have been sending a considerable number of memoranda to him especially relating to the content of the bulletins ... it is unnecessary for you to raise with Mr Cotton questions relating to the detailed items included in [the national bulletins]. If there are any matters regarding the general work of the Sydney News Room that you would like to refer to the National News
Editor, most of these could be dealt with in short telephone conversations, thus saving the time of yourself, Mr Cotton and your respective secretaries. 82

The extent of the burden on Cotton can be shown by the fact that between 21 May 1946 and 19 April 1947, Dixon sent Cotton approximately 285 memoranda. Between 1 January 1948 and 10 May of the same year, Dixon bombarded him with 204 memos, and the total wordage from Dixon for the first two years of Cotton's period as National News Editor was well in excess of 100,000 words. 83

By April 1948, Finlay was again remonstrating with Dixon about the matter. Dixon was told that any matters concerning National bulletins should be referred first to him and he would decide whether they warranted investigation. Dixon responded by again referring to the November 1945 statement of his duties, and, in fact, urged the Commission to investigate the deterioration that had, he alleged, occurred under Cotton:

[The Commission] probably felt in 1946, before the National News Editor's weaknesses had been clearly demonstrated, that he was really capable of carrying out the terms of his contract by making himself directly responsible for the form and content of the National bulletins, but I doubt if anyone feels the same way now. There is ample proof that the National News Editor frequently does not know what was in a bulletin or where it came from, many hours after a broadcast. 84

It can fairly be said that some of the complaints which Dixon made about the service in national news under Cotton, both before the independent service began on 1 June 1947 and afterwards were valid and showed a number of relatively simple factual mistakes. Cotton frankly admitted the silliness of many of them such as getting ministerial portfolios wrong, or transposing House of Representatives

82. Moses to Dixon, 14 April, 1947, R17/25/6.
83. See Dixon to Moses, 29 April 1947, R17/6/4 and Cotton to Finlay 10 May 1948, R17, Box 1.
84. Dixon to Finlay, 5 May 1948, R17, Box 1.
for Senate. The frequent post-mortems which Cotton conducted did not appear to improve the situation. He was obviously unable to find time to check the bulletins beforehand as Dixon contended he should. In his defence, he was unhappy with the quality of his staff, particularly in Canberra, and there was obviously justification in the complaints he made that he had to spend far too much of his time replying to Dixon's memos. However to judge Cotton solely on this basis would be misleading. Rather he should be assessed on his success in bringing into the department new criteria of news selection and evaluation. We shall return to this point shortly. However, the number of factual mistakes that were made, and the frequent reference to them by Dixon and Hanlon, did reflect on Cotton's ability and probably helped Hanlon in his efforts to thwart Moses and defend Dixon's position. There were also failures to make adequate preparations for stories that were known to be about to 'break'. On 15 November 1948, for example, there were embarrassing delays in getting to air a news flash of the birth of Princess Elizabeth's first child, Prince Charles. The news was not broadcast in Sydney for ten

85. Appendix S shows other examples. Of the eleven 'errors' claimed to have been made three simple and glaring mistakes were admitted by Cotton - a date for Federal election nominations was incorrectly given for two days running, Darwin was transposed for Canberra, and the wrong month was given for the start of a Security Loan. Three other similar allegations were refuted by Cotton. Two of the other 'errors' were in fact claims that items had been repeated too often. Only two concerned 'news judgement', one being a question of the interpretation of events in the House of Representatives, and another dealing with the 'omission' of an 'important' item. Cotton again convincingly rejected both of these. Cotton's weakness and that of his staff appears to have been the failure to check measurable 'facts' in every story, and almost all of Dixon's complaints concerned instances of this. However, this had also been a weakness in the service prior to 1946 (see Chapter 5) and continued after he left, as will be seen later in this chapter. It has always been recognised by the news staff that simple errors of this kind are probably made just as, if not more, frequently in the press, but are far more noticeable in broadcast bulletins. Hence a much stricter standard of 'checking' dates, names, initials and formal positions is necessary.
minutes after it was carried by the BBC in its overseas service. In Queensland, commercial stations which were carrying a news service from the Courier-Mail, had the news on air nearly an hour before the ABC. This prompted the newspaper to carry a big advertisement the next advising their readers of this fact. It upset ABC relations with the Queensland Government. The Queensland Manager reported:

This very tardy advice to our Queensland listeners was particularly embarrassing because the Governor, the State Government, the Army authorities and the City Council all awaited our confirmation before putting into operation the plans which they had made in anticipation.

The Acting Queensland Premier, V.C. Gair, made the comment to the ABC political roundsman, "Well you were beaten again today. There's no doubt about you people, you have the ball at your feet and you are not taking advantage of it". The problem lay in the Sydney newsroom failing to send a telegram to Brisbane for 25 minutes after the news had first been heard, and omitting to book a phone call as a precaution. This kind of blunder gave Dixon plenty of ammunition, and helped to maintain him in a position of interfering with bulletin content, despite the Commission's commitment to Cotton.

In contrast, the charges made against Cotton that he was communist-influenced are nowhere substantiated. Dixon's allegations that communism began to creep into the bulletins during Cotton's period probably reflect the more conscious attempts being made to use balancing

86. See the Courier-Mail, 16 November 1948.
87. Sholl to Finlay, 15 November 1948, SP 286, Box 3, S2.
88. Groom to Denning, 16 November 1948, SP 286, Box 3, S2.
political statements wherever possible. There is no better illustration of the problems which confronted Cotton in attempting to achieve greater impartiality than the fracas which occurred over a report of a speech in the House by the strongly anti-communist Country Party member J.P. Abbott in April 1947. Abbott had secured an adjournment of the House to discuss what he claimed was increasing communist influence within the Commonwealth Public Service. ABC news bulletins of that day prominently featured Abbott's allegations in which he named 21 public servants as communists. In an item of twenty lines, only three were given to a Government speaker in rebuttal. In a nine line summary the following morning, one line only quoted a Government minister in denial. While this revealed a praiseworthy attempt to give an Opposition speaker some air time, it was hardly balanced in the way Cotton wanted, and revealed to him the strong thread of anti-communism which ran through some members of the staff from Dixon downwards. Cotton asked urgently for some balancing statement from the Government, but the Canberra staff did not supply one. He then came under attack for the item from two directions, the Government and the ABC anti-communist group led by Hanlon. In the House, S.M. Falstein asked why no report had been carried of the speech by Evatt in reply to Abbott. Calwell, in his reply was clearly surprised at such an occurrence:

I will certainly ask the Postmaster-General to consult with the Chairman of the ABC to learn why such a happening took place and to ensure against a recurrence. The purpose of the news service, as it relates to Parliament, is to give both sides of a case presented (sic).

The Commission, through the Postmaster-General, subsequently regretted

89. Text of the item from the 1.30 p.m. bulletin of 23 April 1947 is Appendix T.
90. CPD, 24 April 1947, pp.1594-95.
the omission of the Government’s reply. Hanlon, on the other hand, did not object to the lack of balance, but to the use of the words: "amidst heckling by Government members, Mr Abbott named". This, to Hanlon, was implied criticism of some Government members. The inference was that such members supported the Communist Party. Hanlon alleged this showed Cotton’s preference for leftist views, until Moses showed him the original teleprinter message from Canberra which was first to use the phrase. Thus Cotton had to contend with the hypersensitivity of Hanlon and Dixon over the issue of communism. Both men believed the worst of him. Hanlon in fact told Moses on one occasion that the number of ‘errors’ being made in the bulletins under Cotton indicated that he was sabotaging the news service. But as well as being a plant by the newspaper proprietors, he was also supposedly communist inclined. In the climate of feeling of the time, such contradictions did not seem to matter. In 1949, Amour expressed the degree of feeling about Cotton within the group which backed Dixon.

[Cotton] did such good work for the Communist Party in this country that Communists have told me that while he was news editor of the ABC news they did not depend upon The Tribune because they got better publicity from the ABC. He was there to destroy the independent news service of the ABC. I have nowhere been able to find any corroboration of this view, either from the material in ABC files or from people who worked with Cotton.

91. See CPD, 30 April 1947, p.1756.
92. CPD, 15 June 1949, p.968. This was after Cotton’s departure on extended sick leave in February 1949.
93. Former ABC journalist Ivan Chapman who knew Cotton well in the U.K., during his visit there in 1949, totally rejects the suggestion that he was communist or even leftist inclined. The conservative Rupert Henderson, for whom Cotton worked as Features Editor from 1949 onwards, was incensed at the allegation when the writer interviewed him. He immediately rang an old staff member of the Sydney Morning Herald who had worked closely with Cotton so that I would have additional confirmation of the injustice of the charges made by Amour.
The Weakening of Dixon's Position

Although the constant vigilance and interference of Dixon prevented Cotton from having the free hand in the preparation of National bulletins which the Commission had planned, the conflict between the two men eventually worked to the Commission's advantage. The divided control of the Department was recognised as severely restricting efficiency and morale, and the Government came round to the Commission's point of view that full control had to be vested in one man. The transformation of the relationship between Government and Commission which this represented took three years and involved eventual recognition by the ABC that it could not solve the question of the control of its news services by its own efforts but needed to win the confidence of the Labor Party to a degree never before achieved, so that it could obtain tacit approval to rid itself once and for all of Dixon's influence. At the same time there had to be a gradual weakening of Dixon's credibility and support.

We have earlier pointed out that the Commission did not want to be stampeded into starting its independent news service immediately the Act was passed. It was confused about how it should organise such a service, lacking confidence in Dixon and distrusting his political affiliations. Cotton was striking great trouble within the News Department, with some journalists being quite averse to working to him and not to Dixon. At a meeting with Cameron and Chifley in the days following the passage of the Act, Boyer had convinced them that the Commission would need to substantially reorganise its staff before the service could begin and would need to continue to take news from the press in the meantime. Cameron however made it clear that he wanted to be kept closely informed of progress. The Commission therefore had bought some breathing space, but not much. Dixon's
pressure to get started was matched by a campaign mounted by Amour in Canberra, who asked Cameron to explain the delays. 94

The Commission's uneasiness and anxiety to end any dependence on Dixon for professional advice was illustrated by its decision in August to approach several leading newspaper men to see if they would prepare reports on the staffing and general organisation necessary. Those approached declined to help.

At the same time, the Commission endeavoured to ascertain the legal position as a result of the Act. It was vaguely worded and did not precisely indicate whether the Commission was prohibited from taking any news from press sources within Australia. The Commission was particularly interested in finding out whether it could continue to take news from country papers for its regional news services and whether it could employ as stringers, journalists employed by the country press. From the Acting Secretary of the Attorney-General's Office came the answer:

In my view, the specific, and additional, power given by sub-section (3) of obtaining overseas news from overseas news agencies raises a clear implication that the collection of Australian news must be made directly by the Commission's staff and not from Australian news agencies. 95

By 2 December, Moses could report to the Commission that the Solicitor-General's Office and the Crown Law Office:

both ... stated definitely that in their view the Commission could not cull its regional news from country papers when the independent service is established. They felt there was nothing to prevent us from engaging on a part-time basis journalists who may already be employed by country newspapers. 96

94. See CPD, 7 November 1946, p.21 and 13 November 1946, p.117.

95. H.F. Whitlam to Boyer, 14 November 1946. Attachment to minute of Commission meeting, 4-6 December 1946. Emphasis is Whitlam's.

96. Moses to the Commission, 2 December 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
The confirmation that news from country papers could not be used pleased Boyer who felt that any scheme which permitted continuance of their material would undermine the concept of the Commission being responsible for the 'accuracy' of the news which it broadcast. As we have seen, he was less happy about using journalists employed on country newspapers, but he came round to accepting this in the interests of professionalism, provided they made the necessary declaration in their contract that they would vouch for the truth of the copy they supplied.

The ban on country newspapers did not please Dixon however, who felt this was not the Government's intention. Dixon's staff estimates from September onwards made provision for continued use of these press sources. This typical stubbornness on the part of Dixon once again aroused Moses's anger. Dixon felt confident that the official ruling would be in favour of the country press even though Boyer was against the idea. Dixon wrote to Moses:

How then can anyone be so dogmatic about it? I understood the Commission wished its independent news service to be carried out as economically as possible; as abandonment of the country papers will greatly increase our costs, I should have thought it would be to our advantage to do everything we could to retain them, even to seeking an amendment of the Act.97

This is quite consistent with Dixon's reasoning throughout his career, that press sources were acceptable as long as they were not ANPA or AMP. This view was not brought out at the 1946 PSCB hearings and might have been hard to substantiate had he done so.98 It was the monopoly press which he so strongly opposed throughout his working life, not the independent country press with which he had been so closely

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97. Dixon to Moses, 8 November 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
98. Particularly as his case leaned heavily on the undesirability of perpetuating newspaper 'errors'.
associated as Managing Editor of the Maitland Mercury before joining the ABC. This brought him now into direct conflict with Boyer again because the Chairman now felt that the only way to establish the news service's credibility was a total rejection of press sources. It was a strange transposition of roles at the end of 1946 - Dixon arguing in favour of continued reliance on sections of the press and Boyer arguing against it. Not only Dixon favoured taking news from the country papers. Two of his senior colleagues also did so, Oakley and Denning. The three:

were strongly of the opinion that we would be secure in continuing our present practice and moreover to discontinue using news from country papers would antagonise the Country Press, most of whom are well disposed towards us. In addition, by continuing to take our news direct from the Country Press, we would save a considerable amount of money, which could be used to advantage in developing news in other directions.99

Dixon's insistence on allowing for the possibility of taking news from the country press was one of the weaknesses in the staffing estimates he put forward to Moses. They were attacked for being inaccurate, careless, and lacking detail. It also emerged that Dixon was not to be given the unilaterial choice of staff that he wanted. His proposal that certain men be transferred immediately to senior positions in the States was rejected, as was his suggestion that the committee to examine replies to advertisements consist entirely of news men. His recommendation that the States be given the extra men they had requested, without further enquiry, was also turned down. Moses and the Commission were determined that the final say in news appointments was to be in other hands than Dixon's.

99. Finlay to Moses, "Preliminary Report on the ABC's Independent New Service following a meeting held in Sydney on 13, 14, 15 November 1946", 19 November 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
In November 1946, a Committee was established to consider requirements for the independent service, and to formulate a definite scheme to be followed. It was also to estimate the cost of the service. This marked the abandonment of Dixon's estimates and from this point on the degree of consultation with him on the independent service declined noticeably. The Committee consisted of Dixon, Denning, Oakley, and Cotton, with Finlay as Chairman. It considered that 34 additional journalists would have to be engaged in the major cities throughout Australia, including Canberra and Newcastle. Together with ungraded senior news staff this made a total news staff of 78, in comparison with the existing staff of 44. With additional typing staff the total cost of the new service in the cities would be £74,460, an increase of £33,604 on existing costs. The Committee considered three schemes for country coverage, dependent on the decisions on access to country press and country journalists. When this had been clarified the second of its schemes was accepted by the Commission, which involved the appointment of staff journalists in most of the Commission's regional stations, who would prepare regional bulletins for broadcast locally. They would be supported by stringer correspondents at a total of 168 towns throughout Australia who would supply news items from their area on a pay-if-used basis. They in turn were divided into two classes, the first to be based in the bigger centres, and numbering 58 would be paid an annual retainer of £20 and a lesser rate of 2s 6d per item. The second class, in 110 towns, would be paid no retainer but 5s per item used. With 9 additional regional journalists to be added to staff, the cost of this scheme was reckoned to be £24,014. The total cost of the new service, without taking into account the cost of contracts with overseas agencies, was £98,474. This was already way in excess of Dixon's highest suggested figure for the service of £83,000. The number
of stringers in country areas now found to be necessary was more than double the figure estimated by Dixon of 80. Significant also in the Committee's report was the decision to make all new appointments subject to selection by the Appointments Advisory Committee, a body which had the responsibility of recommending appointments of all staff, apart from senior positions. This Committee up till this time had played no part at all in the staffing of the News Department, a pointer to the degree of independence which the journalistic staff had enjoyed up until this time. At the time, Dixon apparently agreed that the Committee have jurisdiction, apparently in the belief that he would be on it. When he discovered that he was not, he protested at its involvement.

I think I am correct in saying that not one of the present 40 odd members of the news staff throughout Australia has been interviewed by the AAC - that is why I referred to the recent decision as 'unprecedented'. I had submitted a recommendation that I felt was consistent with normal news department practice and would have saved a good deal of time and possibly some expense.100

Moses's recommendation that the Appointments Advisory Committee consist of the Controller of Administration, A.L. Holman, the Director of Talks, B.H. Molesworth, and Oakley, was accepted by the Commission at its December 1946 meeting. They, or their deputies, toured Australia in subsequent months interviewing applicants for positions as journalists. At the same meeting, the Commission agreed to pay ANPA £2,500 per six months for continuation of its Australian news service, until the Commission's independent service began. The Commission also approved an agreement with Reuters for its full service, which included the British Press Association, for £10,000 per annum. A proportion of this was to be recovered from the commercial stations still electing to take the Commission's news. In October, the Commission had agreed to

100. Dixon to Moses, 16 January 1947, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.
take the full Associated Press service for £3,200 per annum, recovering 15 per cent from commercial stations. The contract with British United Press, also confirmed in October, was for 1,000 words daily for £2,000 per annum, with the agency receiving 10 per cent of total payments made by the commercials with a minimum guarantee of £1,000. The overseas service, consisting of an editor and six journalists in London, was estimated to cost £34,550 per annum, with the costs of contracts included as well as those of cables. When the Finance Department made an accurate assessment of overheads and incidentals, and added a figure for contingencies, the estimated cost of the service for 1946-47 was found to be £133,307 and the estimate for the service when it became fully independent was £155,000 per annum. The expenditure on the service in 1945-46 had been £55,719.

With hardly any figures to go on, the Commission had amended its budget in October 1946, to allow for expenditure of an additional £33,500 on its news. Its original budget for 1946-47 had not taken into account the cost of a fully independent service. In January 1947, confronted with more exact figures, the Commission had again revised its news budget upwards by another £14,000. In February 1947, Boyer and Moses again confronted the PSCB, which, on the recommendation of the 1946 Report of the Committee, was enquiring into proposals for financing the ABC. The three alternatives were to increase the Commission's share of the licence fee, to allow commercial sponsorship of the ABC or to continue to finance the difference between expenditure and the ABC's share of the licence fee by grants from the Federal Government. With the estimates of its news service as evidence, the Commission sought to have the Act amended to allow for a return of 17⅝ per licence, to give it an additional £373,000 per annum.
The 1947 PSCB Hearings

The Committee immediately queried the increased expenditure on news and the discrepancy between Dixon's estimate and the actual cost. Dixon came in for much criticism from the Opposition members. W.J. Hutchinson asked:

Was Mr Dixon arraigned and asked to explain the shocking miscalculation of the cost of the news service that he made? I should imagine that any executive head who was so hopelessly wrong in estimating the cost of a business would be put out the door. This man, who is news editor, should have an idea of the cost of getting news.¹⁰¹

Under cross-questioning from P.C. Spender, Moses gave the full story of varying estimates of Dixon and their generally unsatisfactory nature. Spender suggested that the misleading nature of Dixon's figures indicated that the Commission lacked control of its news service. Boyer responded:

It is an indication that we have control that the Commission looked at Mr Dixon's figures. We had Mr Moses's report on the figures. It was felt that Mr Dixon was unduly optimistic and we did not accept his figures.¹⁰²

Faced with the fact that the expenditure on news alone would add 1s or 2s to the Commission's share of the licence fee, PSCB members wanted to know whether the new service would justify the expenditure. Boyer and Moses were placed in a position to justify a decision which they had opposed on expenditure grounds only nine months previously. Clearly, however, Boyer was now committed to and supported the idea of the Commission being entirely responsible for its own news output. But he wanted to be allowed to get on with its organisation:

¹⁰² Ibid., 24 March 1947, p.67.
I really hope that controversy around it will not develop again, because the die is cast. I think advance has been made. Whether or not the disbelief of some sections of the community in the press is justified - on that I would not offer any opinion - the fact remains that there is a point of view that is at least critical of some press selection of news. That is a fact. There is a critical section in the community ... in my opinion it is a good thing that the ABC should be outside that area.103

These hearings marked the first time that the Commission was called upon to justify its expenditure on regional news. It was to be a recurring theme over the next three years. Boyer had favoured severing ties with country papers in order to totally end any dependence on the press, and his view had been supported by legal authorities. Boyer and the Commission now began to see the possibilities this opened up for developing closer contact with the Commission's regional listeners, who received very little in the way of locally produced programmes in their area. Instead they simply obtained programmes relayed through their local transmitter from the capital cities. The idea of a local news programme, prepared and presented by the local station was one way of rectifying this situation. Moses told the Commission:

there is a belief that metropolitan newspapers do not give sufficient attention to country items of news. There is a trend in broadcasting to give greater emphasis in country districts to local items of news. We believe that our regional stations have been rather too remote from the people in the areas that they serve. We want the people to feel that these are their stations and are not merely links with the city, and therefore we propose to place emphasis on local items ... We propose to give news of things that are actually happening on the day of broadcast, news of local interest which may not interest the rest of Australia but is of importance to the people of the district.104

Following on from the Commission News Directive of 1946, this was a genuine policy initiative by the Commission, which, as we have seen, was not supported by senior news staff, excluding Cotton. It was an

103. Ibid., 14 February 1947, p.20.

104. Ibid., 24 March 1947, p.71
attempt to satisfy an audience need, which had been sorely neglected because of the official emphasis the service had adopted. It was also related to building confidence not only in the new news service but also in the ABC itself, because its role in society was being increasingly challenged at government level as its demands on finances increased. The effect of this Commission decision, was to alter significantly the audience concept of the News Department. The impact of regional bulletins, and the increasing amount of country news in national and State bulletins from the new network of country correspondents, was immediately felt in rural areas and produced a wave of favourable reaction which substantially improved the Commission's status and answered the critics of the expenditure on its news service.

We shall go into this in more detail in later pages. Here is an example of a broadcasting institution having to evaluate itself an audience model which reflected its own needs and imposing that model on its News Department. Smith notes the essential conflict in any broadcasting institution between the institution's view of its audience and that of broadcasters themselves. The institution has to produce programmes which are acceptable to the political community as a whole and which are linked to society values. The news service up to this time was too much imbued with the concept of serving the Government by acting as its go-between with the electorate. The Commission wanted a service that was more related to the needs of the audience and not the Government. At the same time it was more conscious than ever before that it would be unwise to ignore or insufficiently appreciate governmental expectations of its news service as it had in the years 1942-46. While the usual pattern has been for broadcasting institutions to remind their broadcasters of the need to maintain cordial relationships with governments, it appears that the Commission, in view of the nature of the news service to this time, has had to undertake the task of ensuring that audience needs were not forgotten.
The report of the PSCB found that licence fees should not be increased in order to enlarge the Commission's share. This was unfair to the lower paid workers, and on country listeners particularly. It also rejected the concept of the ABC going commercial, saying that it would oblige the ABC to replace some informative programmes with lighter sponsored material and would lower the prestige of the ABC. It concluded that the existing method of continuing grants from consolidated revenue to supplement licence fee revenue was best for the ABC, but suggested these be on a three year basis, and not annually. This suited the ABC better than the annual grant system, but it did not appreciate the rider which was attached to this concession, which advised that

before a decision is reached on the amount to be provided from Consolidated Revenue to supplement the estimated receipts from the Commission's share of the licence fee, there should be an independent report by a senior official of the Treasury or the Auditor-General's Department, so that Parliament may be satisfied that there is adequate provision in the Commission's accounting system for regular periodical review by the Commission of each section of its activities, to enable it to determine whether expenditure is being advisedly incurred.105

The Commission ended up escaping commercialism, but otherwise got the worst possible result from the PSCB enquiry. The grant system was retained by the government and the proposal to make it three-yearly was rejected.106 But the idea of setting up an enquiry into the Commission's finances was adopted, thus prolonging the period of acute economic uncertainty for the Commission and emphasising its continuing dependence on the attitudes of the Government of the day.

105. PSCB, 15th Report, p.36.

106. The Government eventually gave the Commission £1,304,000 for year ending 30 June 1947, this being £400,000 more than that brought in from licence fees. Ref., Daily Telegraph, 5 April 1948.
The increased costs of its news service can be said to be chiefly responsible for the outcome. As Spender said in his Reservations on the Report:

This so-called independent service established under the Act, has resulted in an expenditure of money much in excess of that originally contemplated and approximately equivalent to the total ABC annual deficit which the Committee has been dealing with. 107

He criticised the Government for setting up the service without any idea of its eventual cost, which, he estimated, would eventually end up by being far in excess of £155,000. Nevertheless the majority of the PSCB found in favour of the news service despite its cost. It expressed its approval in a peculiarly convoluted way, saying that the difference between the cost of the projected newspaper agreements of 1946 and that of the independent service:

is equivalent to an average additional contribution per taxpayer of about one half-penny per month for a service in respect of which, and in relation to evidence from the AJA to the previous Committee, it could not be said that the Commission's employees are instructed to report happenings in a manner favourable to one or other of the recognised political parties pledged to achieve their aims by constitutional means. 108

The PSCB hearing appeared to weaken Dixon's credibility in Labor circles in Canberra. After hearing the evidence about Dixon's estimates, Amour wrote to Moses asking him to provide him with copies of all correspondence between Dixon and management relating to the costs of the service. Amour apparently believed that the Commission might have deliberately set out to undermine Dixon by either distorting the facts or omitting evidence which might show Dixon in better light.

On 18 March, Moses sent Amour an impeccably factual account of the Commission's negotiations with the press, with the Government and the PSCB from April 1945 onwards, and included all Dixon's memoranda on the

107. PSCB, 15th Report, p.41. The deficit was £70,000.
108. Ibid., p.38.
independent service from 8 January 1946 to 29 October 1946. Dixon himself had become concerned about the damage that had been done to his reputation. Not knowing of the correspondence between Amour and Moses he sent a telegram to Amour asking to appear before the PSCB to clear his name. Moses had not concealed anything from Amour and was able to point this out to Dixon with some satisfaction. At the same time he was angered at the impropriety of Dixon's action and the continuing evidence that Dixon was keeping his direct political contacts, even after the independent service had been legislated for.

Dixon was not summoned to Canberra to appear before the PSCB and the correspondence was not referred to in evidence to support Dixon's case. This suggests some doubt in the minds of Amour and the Labor members of the Committee about the validity of Dixon's argument that his figures had been manipulated by Moses and that he had been unjustly accused of being inaccurate and vague. Amour's own image had been dented by the emerging discrepancy between the figures of Dixon which the PSCB had accepted in 1946, and the actual cost, which was in the vicinity of figures he had rejected from leading newspaper men. His sensitivity was revealed when he called upon the President of the Senate, Senator Gordon Brown, to ban the reporters of the Daily Telegraph from Parliament House because of their alleged misreporting of the figures given before the PSCB hearings. Brown was critical of the Telegraph's reporting standard but would make no such ruling. 109

The Beginnings of the Independent Service

In July 1947, the Commission was advised of the makeup of the Committee of Enquiry into Certain Aspects of the Administration of the ABC, known as the Fitzgerald Committee. A.A. Fitzgerald, the Chairman, was a leading Melbourne accountant and Chairman of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, E.G. Bonner was Director-General of the Department of Information, and W.T. Harris was a former Assistant Secretary (Finance) of the Department of Aircraft Production and originally came from the Treasury. Its terms of reference were:

To consider whether the present administrative and financial organisation of the ABC is such as to ensure the discharge of the powers, functions and obligations of the Commission, as prescribed in the Australian Broadcasting Act, with maximum efficiency and adequate control and due economy of expenditure, and to report whether any changes are necessary or desirable in this connection.

The Commission's budget for 1947-48 was to be submitted to it for its consideration, and it was obvious that as news was the most controversial item of expenditure, the Committee would look at the efficiency of that Department.

The independent service had come into being six weeks before the Committee began its investigations on 1 June 1947. The change was heralded by a Commission news release which signposted the new direction in Boyer's thinking. The Commission, to survive, must evolve a distinctive character of its own, which set it apart from the commercial services, and which clearly demonstrated that it had a special role in Australian society. Thus the news service was "to make a distinctive and beneficial contribution to public information in

110. Cameron to Boyer, 7 July 1947, SP613, Box 3, 1/8/1, "Fitzgerald Committee".
this country". The idea of serving the community had been developed and expanded and was less ambiguous than in the news policy Directive of the previous year:

The political and financial independence conferred by Parliament on the Commission imposes the obligation not only of accuracy and objectivity in news, but also the development of its own standard of news values according to its estimates as to what information is of most service to the community. The final justification for a National Radio News Service must be found in the degree to which it refuse to seek popularity for its own sake and makes its aim the broadcasting of items that are of real value to the community.

In August, Boyer again amplified his views on the News Department's role in projecting Commission thinking on the ABC's relations with its audience. He warned that the Fitzgerald Committee enquiry now meant that the Commission had to justify its existence in the Government's eyes. The only way was:

- to seek to do things in a different manner, in a better way and with a distinctiveness and character that means that when people tune into the national service they know they are on a national station even in the midst of otherwise indistinguishable programmes.

He urged the news service to therefore develop its own sense of news values, rejecting 'sensationalism' and the seeking of popularity for its own sake. In Australia, he said, press standards had slipped, and therefore they must not set the pace for the ABC. Utility of purpose was the best aim. Also:

- we want to be scrupulous about avoiding, at all costs, our own preference of policy either individual or corporate ...
- we are serving the whole community, and I think we ought to keep in the back of our minds that we have no preferences, we have no policy and our news selection should be able to stand up to any criticism.


112. Ibid.

113. R.J.F. Boyer, Summary of Address to News Editors' Conference, 6 August 1947, SP724, Box 59, 15/1/17, "Harris Report and Associated Papers".

114. Ibid.
Here was an institutional ethos designed for survival. The politicians must not be alarmed or offended, and the Commission must be seen to have a unique role related to the society it served. That role was a unifying one, of acting as a neutral parliamentary-style forum for the expression of conflicting opinions. The Commission would stand outside the political, and social differences, of the community it represented.

It is of the utmost importance that such a service should be rendered, particularly during periods of high political and social tension, and the Commission feels that while it is able to retain public confidence in its bona fides in this regard, and to use the national service for the democratic processes of information and discussion, it is serving a purpose in our democratic development which is beyond estimation. 115

More and more the news service came to be seen as this ideal forum, presenting the facts in controversial situations briefly and dispassionately. The Commission came to realise that its news service represented an escape from the risks of criticism which were run every time it attempted to present any longer presentation of divisive issues, or any controversial speaker. The news service came to be seen as a safety valve or defusing device which was a convenient method of avoiding controversy. This became apparent in the events of 1948-49 which will be described below.

The advent of the independent service was not the happy occasion it should have been for Dixon. In April Cotton had suggested that one of the ABC's top feature writers should present a special programme on the night of 1 June, leading directly into the 7 p.m. news. The idea was acted upon, and a feature resulted called "This is the News" with actors' voices dramatising listeners, and the actual voices of News Department journalists. 116 Dixon was not consulted about the


116. The script, by Colin Simpson, and featuring Wilfred Thomas, is in SP613, Box 44, 15/17/13, "Independent News Service - Introductory Programmes".
programme. It appeared to him that a great deal was happening around him now that he did not know about. He wrote in melancholy vein to Moses:

It seems strange, to say the least, that no-one thought to tell me this documentary was being produced, let alone consult me about it ... Please don't think I am complaining about the lack of personal publicity. I hate publicity of any kind; but as I have had a good deal of unfavourable limelight in the last year or so, I thought I might have been put in a better light, for once in a way. What I do deplore, however, is our failure to rise to the occasion by telling the really interesting story that could have been told. We thus missed a fine advertisement for our news service.117

Moses, Dixon, and the McCarthy Affair

The attempts by Boyer and Moses to protect Cotton from attacks by Amour, Hanlon and Dixon were attempts, as we have seen, to reassert Commission control over its News Department and to impose a new code of news values. This was not the only attempt by Amour to influence the staffing of the independent news service and therefore its attitudes to reporting. Another important case arose in October 1946 and dragged on for a year, before the Government finally backed the Commission against Amour, and ruled that the matter was entirely within ABC jurisdiction.

It concerned the journalist Maurice McCarthy, who was, as previously mentioned, formerly employed on Hanlon's newspaper and privy to a great deal of confidential information about Commission decisions because of his close personal relationship with that Commissioner. McCarthy was also a personal friend of the Labor Minister, Frank Forde. On 2 October, McCarthy was reprimanded by Moses for allegedly complaining to Dr Evatt about the Commission's attitude to the question of permanency of ABC journalists. McCarthy,

117. Dixon to Moses, 6 June 1947, SP613, Box 44, 15/17/13.
according to the Commission, spoke to Moses in abusive and insulting terms in the presence of other officers, and was suspended, under the terms of the Staff Rules. He apparently failed to reply to the charges in the specified time, and the Commission meeting the same month decided that he should be dismissed. McCarthy claimed instead that he had the right to appeal under the terms of the 1946 Broadcasting Act which set up an independent Disciplinary Appeals Board for the ABC, but the Commission's attitude was that this was not possible because that section of the Act had not come into effect at the time of the offence. This view was upheld by the Attorney-General's Department. McCarthy was given a second chance to appeal under the former Staff Rules. According to the Commission he did so, and his appeal was turned down.

The affair proved to be a decisive tussle between the independent news lobby within the Labor Party centering around Amour, and the ABC. Both wanted to secure the backing of the Labor Government as a whole. As already pointed out, the broadcasting group centering around Amour which included Calwell, Haylen, Keane, Fraser, Beasley and to a certain extent, Evatt, had proved to be decisive in affecting Labor policy towards the ABC and its news service. It had proved to be more powerful than men who had held the portfolio of Postmaster-General and had been the catalyst within the Party for the legislation which introduced the independent service. Amour's strength derived from his position as Chairman of the PSCB, a position which he held continuously from 1943 onwards.

Attention has been drawn to the fact that the ties between Amour, Hanlon and Dixon became much more obviously related to their common position on communism as the war ended and the polarisation within the socialist camp became noticeable on this issue. McCarthy was also a
member of this close-knit circle, being a strongly anti-communist Catholic. Moses felt at this time there was a strong Catholic Action group within the News Department.

We did have strong ... Catholic Action groupings in the news staff. I think three or four of the senior people were obviously Catholic Action people ... It was a feeling that we had to break this rigid Catholic Action approach to our news was one of the reasons why we looked for a man like Leicester Cotton. 118

Dixon has since denied any knowledge of this group. 119 However, as the Commission was convinced such a group existed, and almost certainly this was mirrored in the briefing given to Cotton, this would explain a great deal of the animosity directed towards him over his Guidance No.III.

Early in 1946, Boyer and Moses had had strong evidence of the anti-communist viewpoint among some of the new staff, when they received a complaint from a woman who alleged strong bias in recent news bulletins against the extreme left of the Labor movement and alleged there was some discourtesy on the part of McCarthy when she telephoned to register her complaint. The immediate objection was over the terminology used to describe the journal of the Miners' Federation, Common Cause. The woman pointed out that this had been called "the communist newspaper, Common Cause" and that no reference had been made to the Miners' Federation. 120 She also claimed the news service had labelled other prominent union officials as "communist".

118. Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.
119. In a letter from Dixon to the writer, 26 June 1976.
120. Edgar Ross, editor of Common Cause, was a Central Committee member of the Australian Communist Party. See Davidson, Communist Party, p.135.
Dixon suspected that because the woman was so well informed that she might be a member of the Communist Party and discovered eventually that she was an official of a Communist Party branch. Dixon thought this would end the matter because this fact alone sufficiently discredited the woman. However, both Moses and Boyer refused to be put off in what they regarded as an essential matter of policy, and Moses insisted that the woman should have been addressed courteously no matter what her politics might be. McCarthy was incensed that the woman's charges were taken seriously and this incident no doubt provided some of the background to his outburst in Moses's office in October. 121

The dismissal of McCarthy was the signal for another campaign to be mounted in Canberra in order to have him reinstated. Haylen criticised the Commission's action in a question in the House in November. However, Cameron's reply showed he had no inclination to intervene. 122

In January 1947, however, the extent of the bubbling resentment against Moses was brought forcibly to Moses's attention. It was resentment brought on no only by his treatment of McCarthy but also by the gradual erosion of Dixon's authority. In that month, the Commission had decided to bring to Australia the London Editor, Hugo Jackson, in order to talk about the staffing of his office and the contractual arrangements with the agencies. Jackson had known Moses when they were together at Sandhurst. To Jackson's surprise, there were immediate attempts to draw him into a small ABC group including journalists which, he found, was plotting the downfall of Moses. Although Jackson's standing in the News Department was high, he did

121. The incident is in SP286, Box 3, S2.
122. See CPD, 7 November 1946, p.36 and 13 November 1946, pp.197-98.
not have any long-standing personal relationships with any of the journalists, and felt his prime loyalty was to the General Manager.

He reported the incident therefore to Moses.123

Dixon has always claimed that McCarthy was unjustly treated for two main reasons. First, he did not make his enquiry and complaint direct to Evatt, but to a member of Evatt's staff, who passed the information on and then relayed back Evatt's response. But although Moses may have been technically incorrect in upbraiding McCarthy for talking to Evatt, the substance of the charge still seems to be correct, for in approaching a member of Evatt's staff, McCarthy could still be accused of attempting to use political influence. The fact was that the complaint reached Evatt and he noted it. It would seem that in the light of Boyer's efforts to win a greater degree of independence for the ABC from the Government and in the realisation that the Commission had to reassert its control over its news, Moses decided to draw the line over the McCarthy approach to Evatt, and to demonstrate that these direct approaches to politicians by journalists must stop. The fact that the move against McCarthy was taken so soon after the passage of the 1946 Broadcasting Act seems to suggest that the Commission realised that the old collusive relationship between journalists and politicians was not only out of keeping with the concept of the ABC being entirely responsible for its own news, but endangered the Commission itself. Boyer attached critical importance to the news service as a vehicle for winning back public and political confidence. If the Commission could not stamp its new philosophy of broadcasting on its news service - that of being an impartial forum on controversial political and social matters - it could never achieve that distinctive unifying role which Boyer was now increasingly equating with political survival. It is interesting that Dixon saw nothing wrong

123. Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.
in McCarthy's dealings with Evatt's staff; the injustice in his eyes was the accusation that he saw Evatt personally. This was the Departmental attitude which Moses and the Commission saw they now had to bring to an end.

Dixon's second accusation over the McCarthy incident is that he was not given the opportunity to appeal to the Commission, even though Boyer had told Cameron that he had been given such an opportunity. This is most difficult to prove or disprove and the writer has not been able to find conclusive evidence one way or the other. However, this was the charge that Dixon made when he saw Cameron and made a personal appeal on behalf of McCarthy. This Canberra meeting was one of the last and one of the most conclusive political assignations in Dixon's career. Having put his case, Dixon was given first hand evidence of Cameron's total lack of sympathy for his point of view.

Cameron's comment was 'now you come here and expect me to believe that he did not have his right of appeal to the Commission?' I said 'I tell you exactly that. He did not have this right of appeal to the Commission'. 'You expect me to take your word before that of the Chairman of the Commission?' I'm afraid I can't do that'. And that was the end of the interview.124

The most the Government would do over the McCarthy dismissal was to explain to the Commission that there was nothing to prevent the Disciplinary Appeals Board hearing the McCarthy case when it came into being, if it and McCarthy agreed that it should. The Board's finding in this case would not be binding unless the Commission agreed to make it so at the time of submission. The Commission would not follow this course of action, claiming that McCarthy was given his full legal rights. Amour, however, pressed the fight to the end. He asked a series of questions about the case in November 1947 and finally asked Cameron to lay on the table of the Senate, Commission papers relating to the case. Cameron replied: "I ... have reached the conclusion that such a course would not be in the public interest".125

The McCarthy affair marked the turning point in the struggle between the Amour lobby and the Commission over the news service. The influence of Amour's group had declined since the Commission was given its independent news service by Parliament. They could no longer champion Dixon with the same certitude following the revelations over his estimates. Also the PSCB, which was Amour's power base, was coming under an uncomfortably hot spotlight from the Opposition and from the press and there was growing realisation that its days might be numbered. H.L. Anthony, who had previously defended the Commission's right to operate without constant interference from the PSCB, made a stinging attack on its methods of operation when its new membership was announced in December 1946. He complained that the Committee had exceeded the functions which Parliament had authorised it to perform. He went on:

I know of my own knowledge that its activities are bitterly resented by those who are responsible for the control of national broadcasting in Australia ... during the last three years it has become a meddlesome and interfering body and has taken upon itself to inquire into matters which are entirely within the province of the ABC. 126

He was supported by Archie Cameron who claimed:

it has developed into an entirely mischievous, pin-pricking and unnecessary body ... The Committee was an experiment. In my view, the experiment is a dismal failure, and the sooner the committee is abolished the better it will be for broadcasting. 127

Cameron's stand against Amour over McCarthy appears to be the first occasion on which the Postmaster-General had successfully stood up to the broadcasting lobby over ABC news since Labor came to office in 1941. Ashley had tried and failed. Cameron had seemed to follow Amour's lead in 1945-46 but there was a new independence in thinking

126. CPB, 6 December 1946, p.1155.
127. CPB, 6 December 1946, p.1156.
in the McCarthy case. It seems obvious that the Amour group could no longer depend on swinging other Labor Ministers and members behind it on its stance towards ABC news. We have remarked before that the Labor party sensed a threat as soon as a rapprochement was reached between the ABC and the press in 1942. In Edelman's terminology, those agreements increased tension in Labor ranks because the Commission's symbolic attitude over news was suddenly changed. Before, the Commission had complained about the press and blamed its shortcomings in news on press failings. This fitted in with Labor's concept of press manipulation and that essential conflict was therefore reassuring. The new condensation symbol for Labor members after 1942 became the goal of independent news for the ABC. In a situation where Labor felt uneasy because of the Commission's press agreements, support for independent news was forthcoming for Amour and his group. It served as the new focus of psychological tensions. Like all such symbols, it was blurred and lacked realistic detail. Hence, the lack of any insistence of proper costing before the Bill was passed, and the poor drafting which was not as explicit as it should have been about the intentions of the Government. After the Broadcasting Act, however, a new situation was apparent. Despite the efforts of Amour and like-minded politicians to continue to present the situation in ABC news as one of crisis and threat, the removal of any possibility of ABC agreement with the Australian press under the Act meant that many Labor politicians could no longer see it in those terms. Thus they were no longer the passive followers of the broadcasting lobby. As Edelman says: "Very likely it is not only the threats ... but the frequent and unremitting succession of crisis and detente ... that produces political docility". 128 Further, events couched in terms of

threat and reassurance "may well induce helplessness, confusion, uncertainty, and greater susceptibility to manipulation by others". The decline in influence of Amour's group in Parliament meant a concomitant rise in the status of the Commission, although this should not be over-emphasised because, as noted earlier, the uncertainty over Commission financing meant there were still very real constraints on its 'independence'.

The end of the image of ABC news as a possible threat to Labor did not mean that it necessarily met with the approval of Labor ministers when the independent service began. As we shall see, there were a number of complaints about the nature of the reporting as Labor began to appreciate that it was beginning to adopt a new style aimed at 'impartiality'. It began to be obvious that they would never again achieve the preponderance of coverage that they had enjoyed during the war. It is significant however, that despite these individual attempts to get the news to toe the official line and to ensure Government views were taken into account, there was no consolidated Labor move to intervene on the scale and at the level that had occurred prior to 1946. This adds credibility to the view that Labor members generally felt reassured by the symbolisation presented by the establishment of independent ABC news. It represented the end of the possibility of press influence on the ABC.

129. Ibid.
The Fitzgerald Committee

Within weeks of convening for the first time on 18 July 1947, it became obvious to Moses that, as far as the news service was concerned, the Committee was going to look very closely at the size of the staff and the regional bulletins. Moses warned:

The Committee appears ... to be somewhat sceptical about the need for local bulletins - they feel that such bulletins could contain too many trivial items and are in any case of comparatively little interest to the bulk of country listeners. I assured the Committee strongly that this has not been our experience and that in fact many listeners appear to welcome any programmes which identify regional stations with their districts: but I am anxious that the Committee should have confirmation on these points.130

The Commission meeting of September 1947 recorded that among members of the Committee "There also seemed to be an impression that the cost of collecting country news is out of proportion to the results obtained".131

The charge of triviality was also at this time being levelled at some of the State bulletins by programme and management personnel. This in turn raised the question of whether the news staff were used to best advantage. Amid these allegations, overtime charges were rising, threatening to push costs above the amount already officially estimated. Moses perceptively deduced from a study of interstate reports that new reporters recruited from newspapers had little idea of the requirements of radio news. They were not taking into account the shorter length needed, the fact that only a handful of stories were used in each bulletin, and the type of story must frequently be different to that of the papers. He remarked particularly on the fact

130. Moses to all State Managers, 6 August 1947, SP613, Box 3, 1/8/1.
that two reporters in Perth repeatedly went backwards and forwards from their office to the vessel "Asturias", when she arrived in Fremantle carrying the first shipload of British migrants. Dozens of stories were filed from this vessel over 24 hours, and the Perth newsroom later expressed disappointment that so few were used in the national bulletins. He commented:

In covering this item a newspaper would no doubt have wished to give a considerable amount of space to personal stories ... and this would have justified a journalist spending time in collecting material ... For the purpose of our bulletins, however, I feel that we would not have wanted to give more than a short item stating that the ship had arrived carrying 1,700 passengers, this being the first big batch of British immigrants etc.132

Denning was instructed to visit Brisbane, Adelaide and Hobart to tighten up the approach to news writing and to organise the staff on better lines. In August he toured N.S.W. country districts to bring back first hand evidence of the value of regional news. He visited ninety towns and talked to hundreds of people. He returned convinced that these bulletins were building up regional consciousness:

which is more or less generally accepted as the future line of development in Australia. Thus the regional bulletins are fulfilling at the one time an informative and an educative function which ... could not be fulfilled in any other way. In my view the need is for greater emphasis on regional expression, for which the ABC's growing network on regional stations offers an outlet; any diminution in it would be the greatest possible disservice to country districts.133

Simultaneously all States were compiling reports which gave details of country reaction to the regional news. The ABC file of evidence given to the Fitzgerald Committee contains letters from progress associations, chambers of commerce, grazier associations, town clerks, shire secretaries, co-operatives, primary producers'
associations, and individual farmers. These were obtained in the first three months of the independent service and demonstrate a remarkable interest in the ABC's attempt to provide local news. State news editors who journeyed into the country to obtain their own first hand appraisal, struck the same response. There was widespread debate about the best times for the regional bulletins, there were countless offers to provide information, and many testimonials to the way in which the news had helped them in their everyday lives. Market prices, details of train movements, news of local council decisions, were all welcomed. Many of those who wrote to the ABC lived in isolated areas which were not well serviced by local country newspapers. The regional journalist in Toowoomba for example reported:

Last week the Rev. Father Wiewers of Cunnamulla, called to see me. He is in charge of one of the largest Roman Catholic parishes in Australia, his territory extending from Cunnamulla to the N.S.W. and South Australian borders ... He called to say how much the regional news from 4QS was appreciated by the isolated listeners in his parish. Most of them, he explained, rarely, if ever, received a newspaper.134

Tasmania, which had had only an elementary skeleton of state news coverage from the ABC up until 1946, restricted to whatever appeared in the Hobart and Launceston newspapers, also responded well to the new State and regional bulletins. The Tasmanian Premier Robert Cosgrove wrote:

May I express appreciation on behalf of the excellent service which the independent news service ... is rendering to the Tasmanian public. It gives an up-to-the-minute news coverage, which has hitherto not been enjoyed by listeners in the State, and it is a particular boon to country residents.135

The Victorian News Editor, Oakley, after a tour of country districts, reported that the order of importance which the people he met attached

134. Patterson to Wright, 11 August 1947, R17/25/6.
to news was regional news first, State news second, Australian news third, and overseas news last. In the first two months of the independent service, over 4,000 items were used in national and State bulletins alone from country correspondents, giving a distinctive new flavour to ABC news. 136

After talking to the Commission, management, and other officers, and visiting ABC establishments in several States and country areas, the Fitzgerald Committee completed its report on 5 March 1948. In general terms, the Commission was delighted with the Committee's findings which revealed no basic shortcomings administratively or financially in the running of the ABC, except for the news service. 137

The Committee noted the flow of critical memoranda from Dixon to Cotton and the fact that Cotton felt that the obligation to reply to these interfered with his duties, particularly the supervision of bulletin content. It said:

We think that the present division of duties militates against good service; and that it is essential that, subject to the Commission's policy decisions and the statutory executive control of the General Manager, there should be one officer in complete charge of, and completely responsible for, the news service in all its aspects.138

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136. Dixon had described the amount of country news in State bulletins in October 1946 as 'meagre'. See Dixon to Moses, 9 October 1946, SP724, Box 38, 15/1/2.

137. The Committee report said members "have formed the opinion that, in so far as the reasons adduced by the Commission for the adoption of the present form of organization relate to matters of organization, they support the Commission's view that an organization of the nature established is best fitted to meet the obligations of the Commission under the Act". Fitzgerald Committee Report (Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1949, p.50). Apart from the questions raised about News, the Committee found no other department was extravagant or overstaffed. It merely criticised some areas of Commission activity which it thought were not required under the Act, such as the Argonauts Club, dance music and Variety programmes, and Schools Broadcasts. It also drew attention to the fact that if the existing level of activity were to continue the Commission would have to receive more money.

The Committee reported that estimates for the regional news service were inadequate, and that this service was now costing about £6,000 more per annum than had been anticipated in November 1946. It said:

Whether the kind of country items now broadcast by the regional stations justifies an expenditure of £30,000 a year is a question which is beyond our reference, but obviously it deserves the closest scrutiny.\(^{139}\)

Towards the end of 1947, the News Reviewing Committee (formerly AAC) had recommended 10 additional staff for news based on the experience of all States since the service began. The Fitzgerald Committee felt however that there was insufficient evidence that the existing staff were fully and usefully employed. Nevertheless, it endorsed the independent news service in these terms:

The importance, prestige and cost of the National news service demand that it be placed as soon as possible and maintained at the highest level of efficiency in all respects.\(^{140}\)

In order that this should be done as soon as possible:

it is desirable that the whole news service and its organization should be overhauled in detail by an expert with wide experience in first-class journalism, both in its news-gathering and administrative aspects. We have formed this opinion because our examination has disclosed features of the service which do not adequately ensure efficiency and economy.\(^{141}\)

The News Department was therefore to come under examination once more.

The Government did not table the report immediately but instead appointed a Cabinet Sub-Committee to consider it. This was hardly an auspicious sign for the Commission which had expected the report would vindicate it in the eyes of the politicians and give it a much stronger case on which to argue for more financial independence. Boyer wrote to Cameron:

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139. Ibid., p.32.

140. Ibid., p.33.

141. Ibid., p.29.
As you know, the Commission has found itself in a rather unenviable position for the last 18 months in regard to its administration of this institution by reason of the uncertainty of our financial future. We would express the hope that in the light of the present report our submissions for future requirements and development of the national service be given early and, I trust, favourable attention.\textsuperscript{142}

Commenting on the criticism of the news service, Boyer agreed that an ideal organisational framework had not been reached. The present staff was the minimum capable of operating it. He explained:

I do not think it is fully realised that the Commission is collecting and broadcasting a complete news coverage from 6.45 a.m. to 11 p.m. This would be roughly the equivalent in press terms of a newspaper covering morning, mid-day, afternoon and late evening editions. I do not know of any single newspaper office which attempts such a continuous coverage and one can only conjecture at the staff that would be required.\textsuperscript{143}

As for the doubts about the value of the regional service, Boyer pointed to the appreciation of the service by country people. Boyer now saw clearly that the regional news was one real way by which the Commission could demonstrate its adherence to the idea of service to the community, thus giving it that special role which he saw was vitally necessary to distinguish it from the commercial stations. He told Cameron, "The news service in the country is ... without doubt the most highly prized service which the ABC renders ... one has to live in a country district to realise the importance attached to regional news".\textsuperscript{144}

It seems likely that the Government decision to withhold publication of the Report was caused by its surprise at its generally favourable remarks about the ABC. This may have prevented the Government from using it to publicly justify the changes it intended. Dixon claims that the Government was, at this time, seriously considering the nationalisation of broadcasting. Some evidence strongly suggests that the contents of the report were unexpected.

\textsuperscript{142} Boyer to Cameron, 25 March 1948, SP613, Box 3, 1/8/1.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid. According to Dixon, ABC, p.177, Chifley did not agree with the criticism of regional news.
Hanlon told Dixon that the Government expected him to provoke a crisis at a Commission meeting as soon as the report was in and to walk out of the meeting if necessary. This was an action:

that would give the Government an opportunity of enquiring into the set-up in the Commission and probably altering the set-up so that there would be more support for independent news but he had to admit that, when the crisis came, he felt ... that he mightn't get the backing from the Government and he was not prepared to sacrifice his position on the Commission in the circumstances.145

There may have also been the expectation in the minds of some Labor politicians that the report would favour Dixon and criticise the removal of national bulletins from his control. The Government delayed releasing the Report until February 1949, two months after it secured the enactment of the Australian Broadcasting Act, 1948 which made important changes in the membership of the Commission and in the financing of the ABC.146 If the report had contained any evidence which would have justified these changes, one would have expected that it would have been made public sooner.

Behind the scenes it was obvious that the Government meant to link the criticism of the cost of the news service with its decision to impose stricter financial controls on the ABC. The Commission felt the Report strengthened its case to be financed primarily from licence revenue instead of grants. But Moses had a rude awakening when he went to Canberra to see the Sub-Committee. For a start, Amour, who was not a member of the Committee was present. Moses's report on the meeting says:

I assumed that the Committee intended to ask me about the details of our case for additional revenue, but found on arrival that they wished to discuss the news service, particularly the country service.147

Amour and the others attacked the high cost of the news service saying

145. Interview with Dixon, 13 January 1976.
147. Moses to all State Managers, 17 May 1947, SP613, Box 3, 1/8/1.
that the Government had expected it to be much lower. They criticised the ending of ABC reliance on country newspapers for regional news and alleged that much country news was not being used. Moses defended regional news and pointed out that the Commission had had nothing to do with the Government's acceptance of Dixon's estimates.

By the end of September 1948, Moses had engaged W.T. Harris, the member of the Fitzgerald Committee, to conduct the enquiry into the organisational efficiency and costing of the news service, which the Fitzgerald Committee had recommended. But it was too late to change the course of action already embarked upon by the Government. The Australian Broadcasting Bill was introduced on 27 October.

The Act set up a Broadcasting Control Board which would supervise all radio stations. The Board would take the necessary action:

- to ensure that programmes shall be of reasonable extent and variety, that adequate and appropriate times are set apart for broadcasts of divine worship or other matters of a religious nature, that equitable facilities are afforded for the broadcasting of political and controversial matter, and that the advertising content of any programme is not excessive.\textsuperscript{148}

It would "review the allocation of frequency channels in order to ensure that they shall be used to the best possible advantage in the public interest".\textsuperscript{149} Cameron made it plain that the Board would mainly be looking at commercial stations, to ensure that they performed a "public service". But tighter controls were also to be exercised on

\textsuperscript{148} CPD, 27 October 1948, p.2134. The passage of the Act immediately effectively ended the work of the PSCB under Amour. The Minister was no longer obliged to refer to the PSCB any matter requested to be dealt with in this way by the ABC or the Federation of Commercial Stations, as he had been under the 1942 Act. The Government felt the Board's existence made the work of the PSCB unnecessary, and neither the Minister nor Parliament referred any matter to it again for investigation.

\textsuperscript{149} CPD, 27 October 1948, p.2135.
the ABC under the Act. It ended the funding of the ABC from licence fees and provided for financing "on the basis of the amount voted by Parliament after consideration of the annual Estimates". The Labor Government had consistently opposed the idea of the Commission having any greater degree of independence than that afforded any other Government financed institution. As Cameron said

it is considered that the financial activities of the Commission, as a public undertaking, should be subject to the same control by the Parliament as exists in connection with other government instrumentalities.

The Commission had always clung to the belief that licence fees guaranteed some independence from the Government, though this was largely illusory as the Commission's financial history from 1940 had shown. True, the level of income from fees was set by Act of Parliament, but Parliament had in the past arbitrarily reduced the portion which came to the Commission, and, since 1942, had refused to increase it. The requirement to submit annual estimates to Parliament was nevertheless felt by the Commission to be a great blow to its independence. In addition, it now had to suffer the indignity of having two senior public servants appointed to the Commission, P. W. Nette, First Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and P. E. R. Vanthoff, Deputy Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs. Finally, the Government refused to give the Commission control of its technical facilities, leaving these in charge of the Post Office.

150. CPD, 27 October 1948, p. 2137. There was however provision for the ABC to prepare a three year financial plan to enable it to work out its activities in advance.

151. Ibid.

152. Nette and Vanthoff took up their positions as Commissioners from 15 March 1949.
Boyer however managed to secure a last minute amendment to the Act which appeared to strengthen the Commission's powers in the area of political and controversial broadcasts. Section 89 of the 1942 Act was missing from the draft of the 1948 Bill.153 This omission would have had the effect of giving the Minister the power to order the Commission to broadcast material or refrain from doing so without restriction under Section 41. Boyer put it this way.

Had the bill been accepted in its original form, the Commission's discretion in political matters would have passed to the Minister under Section 41, or alternatively to the Minister through the Broadcasting Control Board through the general powers conferred upon it. As a result of our urgent representations on the matter, however, Section 89 was restored to the bill in an even more forthright manner than previously. In the 1942 bill the phrase 'subject to this section' was used, intimating that the section (89) was not limited by other sections of the Act. In the 1948 bill this section was made much more definite by being phrased 'subject only to this section'. In addition, the term 'political' was widened to include 'controversial'. The net effect, therefore, of the present Section 89 is to place the issue beyond all doubt that in political and controversial broadcasts the Commission's discretion is limited neither by the Broadcasting Control Board nor the Minister of the day.154

153. Chifley claimed that he did not know it had been left out. See Bolton, Boyer, p.174. This is substantiated in Crisp, Chifley, pp.268-69, in which the author claims that Boyer and Dawes threatened to resign if the clause was not restored.

154. Boyer to Moses, 31 August 1949, SP286, Bundle 6. Emphasis is Boyer's. The relevant section of the amendment reads 'Subject only to this section, the Commission may determine to what extent and in what manner political speeches or any matter relating to a political or controversial subject may be broadcast from national broadcasting stations'. See CPD, 12 November 1948, pp.2837-41 for the discussion on this clause. Chifley told Boyer that this was the first time a Bill had been substantially amended in Parliament without being referred back to the Labor Party. Crisp, Chifley, p.269. The apparent ease with which Chifley managed this, the strengthening of the clause which resulted, and the lack of any marked dissension in the discussion in Parliament, all indicate that this was not a real issue within the Party. It may well have been an error in the drafting of the bill.
Boyer considered this section to be a cornerstone of ABC 'independence'. He believed

The vesting of the difficult and delicate decisions in regard to the broadcasting of political, religious and other issues on which the community is divided in a body as representative as possible of the major divisions of opinion, and answerable to Parliament, is a notable, democratic development in the employment of a great medium in the public interest, and in the safeguarding of that medium from sectional use. The Commission since its first appointment in 1932 has considered the preservation of impartiality as its highest single duty and it is gratifying both to the Commission and its staff that after 17 years of operation, its charter in this important and difficult function has been so explicitly renewed.155

In the same letter to Chifley on 5 November, in which he had argued for the retention of Section 89, Boyer also expressed his concern about the impact of the two official Commissioners and the effect of the new financing system. He suggested that the voting power of Nette and Vanthoff be limited to non-controversial matters because of the possibility that they might simply represent the Government point of view. He also urged the Act be amended so that the ABC would be once again financed from licence fees. In his reply Chifley rejected both proposals. He failed to see how Nette and Vanthoff could influence the Commission, when they had only two votes out of seven. On the question of finance, Chifley could not envisage the Commission ever being in a position of having a degree of financial independence which would enable to to evade the influence of the Government in power. And he also directly linked the control of technical facilities with the maintenance of that influence. It was an honest statement of the reality of the situation. As a broadcasting institution dependent on the Government for its very existence, the Commission could never entirely disengage itself from Government control. He wrote155

whilst I appreciate your desire that it should be financed on a stable basis independent of whatever Government is in power, I do not think your proposals would achieve what you have in mind. In the first place it must not be forgotten that the National Broadcasting Service is composed of two vital elements - programmes and technical services - each of which must be suitable financed. To provide independent finance for the programme side and at the same time leave the technical service to be financed from consolidated revenue would not secure independence, since the Government of the day would influence the maintenance and development of the program service by the manner in which it allocated funds for the technical service.\textsuperscript{156}

After receiving this letter, and after the restoration of Section 89, the Commission decided not to carry the fight with the Government into the open, but to express itself satisfied with the outcome. It stated:

While disagreeing in principle with the appointment of permanent officers to a body which because of its need to arbitrate in delicate matters of political opinion should in our view be representative in character and of limited tenure, we appreciate the fact that these officers will bring personal and professional qualities of a high order to our deliberations.\textsuperscript{157}

While not abandoning the concept of a statutory form of income being best suited to retain the character of the ABC, it recognised the merit in the Government argument that expanding costs of broadcasting ruled out further dependence on a proportion of licence fees. It welcomed the Prime Minister's assurance that a three year provision of income would be guaranteed at all times.

The press attacked these views as "a parade of gratitude for small mercies [which] helps obscure the ABC's complaisance in relation to the withdrawal of a large measure of independence."\textsuperscript{158} The political scientist, Joan Rydon, four years later engaged Boyer in debate on

\textsuperscript{156} Chifley to Boyer, 11 November 1948, attachment to minute of Commission meeting of 24-26 November 1948.

\textsuperscript{157} R.J.F. Boyer, ABC Press Statement, 27 November 1948.

\textsuperscript{158} Sydney Morning Herald, 30 November 1948.
this issue claiming that the gains of the new Section 89 were completely overshadowed by other sections of the 1948 Act which deprived the ABC of any semblance of financial independence ... That section cannot be considered in vacuo; a Commission tied down financially will have little chance of asserting such independence as it is given in the field of political broadcasting. The ABC has now 'no independent means of support', that is, it lacks the power to assert itself in the fact of Government pressure ... It would seem that such discretion was only given when the Commission has been seriously emasculated by the loss of a great deal of its previous autonomy, when the Commission had been converted into a 'safe' body susceptible to Government and Parliamentary pressure and criticism.159

Boyer did not deny that the ABC had lost some of its freedom of action because of the new method of financing. As we have seen, the Commission had fought against the principle of annual grants, believing that the system put the Government in a more powerful position to influence the ABC. Boyer wrote:

Personally, I have always felt that the divorcement of the Commission from its direct nexus with the licence fee was a grave mistake, and that the independence of the Commission was more truly assured under the old system than the new.160

But he took the public position that this was not as important as the statutory rights now given to the Commission in respect of political and controversial broadcasts. He wrote:

Our independence ... is first of all the safeguarding obligation of ensuring that a national radio system is not used for campaigns - political, religious, or ideological. Indeed, the very reason for the delegation of discretionary powers in respect of political and controversial matter ... is to ensure just this. As a citizen, I should contest strongly any attempt which might be made now or in the future for granting a public radio or television service ... authority to use its facilities for the propagation of specific viewpoints on controversial or political issues.161

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Boyer's heavy concentration on the 'gains' of the 1948 Act in his remarks in public, and his playing down of the reverses it inflicted on the ABC can only be explained in terms of the very real need he felt to identify with and reassure ABC listeners. In his view, the ABC needed a separate identifiable national purpose to help preserve it in the face of suggestions of nationalisation and sponsorship. Audience support is an equally strong factor to political support in the broadcasting institution's struggle to survive. The implications of the 1948 Act were there for all to see despite the Government's assertion that it was acting to 'strengthen' the ABC. Boyer needed to reassure the public about the ABC's role. This, as Edelman explains, can be done through the use of symbolic language. Frequently renewed ritualistic assertion that the ABC's objectives were being achieved would, according to his hypothesis, reduce the intensity of interest in the matter. The threat to the ABC's independence was being checked according to Boyer, and this reassurance, expressed strongly but vaguely, would maintain quiescence. As Edelman says: "The public is not in touch with the situation, and it 'knows' the situation only through the symbols that engage it". 162 Boyer was identifying key abstractions such as "ABC discretion", "representative body", "public interest", and "preservation of impartiality", with the ABC. It is this "socially pathic" language, which encourages attachment to institutions when, in fact, those same institutions are failing to live up to these expectations. 163 It is

necessary at this point to look at the Commission's handling of the turbulent industrial scene of the nineteen-forties to see what degree of independence in the presentation of controversial issues it possessed, the extent to which Boyer and the Commission were prepared to let the ABC become a genuine political forum for contentious ideas, and whether the 'unifying' role would ultimately mean the exclusion of minority, 'divisive' viewpoints.

The Commission and the issue of Communism

Boyer had in 1946, given a strong indication that he did not plan to exclude the Communist Party from ABC microphones. On 24 April of that year the recently returned Australian Minister to the Soviet Union, J.J. Maloney, gave a talk on the ABC in which he criticised living conditions in that country and the generally harsh discipline there. His remarks were immediately challenged by the communist National Secretary of the Ironworkers' Union, Ernest Thornton, who had visited the Soviet Union the previous year. Thornton asked the ABC to allow him to broadcast a reply. At first the Commission turned him down, but two weeks later, Maloney urged Thornton to debate the issue with him on the ABC and Boyer agreed to the broadcast. The debate went on air on 14 May, and was widely reported in the press the following day. Boyer was the chairman, and although it was rather formal by present day standards, the broadcast was a genuine attempt to air current controversy. Dixon, predictably, thought the programming of the debate unwise. He felt Boyer's argument that the ABC had a duty to allow freedom of expression to all parties "sounded weak and unconvincing, particularly as at that moment the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, was flaying the Communists at the United Nations Conference in London".

164 Dixon, ABC, p.151.
The controversy over the Abbott statement in the House in 1947 was an indication of the extent to which the political temperature was rising because of the activities of communist trade unionists. Early in 1948, the Commission suddenly found itself with the responsibility of reporting impartially the first of the serious industrial crises which resulted from the start of what has been called the "Communist adventurist period". It was a severe testing time for the service, one which was watched intently by politicians from the right and left and by an Australian community which was becoming deeply divided.

In February, a strike of railway unions in Queensland was having serious repercussions on the State's economy. On 15 February, the Labor Premier, E.M. Hanlon, requested, and was given time on the ABC to deliver a talk on the strike. From one of the Disputes Committees of the striking unions immediately came a request that the ABC should allow the strikers' point of view to be presented. Boyer did not agree. Instead he produced a unique interpretation of the Commission's policy of allowing the public to judge divisive issues by presenting them fairly and fearlessly. The issues so dealt with were only those which produced a division of opinion between Government and Opposition. There was no room for the presentation of the point of view to which both were opposed:

165. See this chapter, pp.257-58.
166. Davidson, Communist Party, p.133.
167. The strike was led by a committee of communists and ALP unionists. See Davidson, Communist Party, p.133.
The policy of the ABC in regard to broadcasts by politicians is that where a party issue is raised by one party the opposing point of view may also be broadcast by the party in opposition. The case ... does not necessarily come within that category. The issues dealt with by Mr Hanlon are not party issues, and we have had no request from the opposition for time to reply in rebuttal. I understand Mr Hanlon was speaking on the industrial crisis generally as head of the State ... There is, therefore, no obligation for the giving of similar facilities to other parties, as the matter is not a party issue.168

Significantly, he urged the strikers to give any statements to the News Department where they would be "adequately handled".

On 28 February, the Queensland Government declared a state of emergency, which made it an offence punishable by law for any citizen or organisation to incite or counsel disobedience of the courts' decision ordering the strikers back to work. The Queensland Commissioner of Police told the Queensland Manager of the ABC, E.K. Sholl, that the broadcasting of inflammatory or inciting matter would come within the scope of the proclamation. Boyer contacted Whitlam, the Crown Solicitor in Canberra, who told him the ABC was obliged to observe Queensland law, even though it was a Commonwealth instrumentality. The Commission decided therefore that pending clarification, no news of the strike should be relayed to Queensland in the national news, though it would be carried in other states. Boyer wrote to Cameron:

I am sure you will appreciate the difficulties ... On the one hand we were vitally concerned to safeguard the rights of our news service and our obligation under our Federal Charter, while on the other we were faced with a legal position which we could not ignore on the advice given us by the Crown Law Department, short of a direct defiance of duly constituted law to which we were informed we were subject.169

On 1 March, Boyer flew to Brisbane to investigate and found that the Crown Law Office did not envisage the imposition of any form of

168. Boyer to Matzkoros, 27 February 1948, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/1, "Queensland Rail Strike".

169. Boyer to Cameron, 3 March 1948, 15/16/1.
censorship but was prepared to allow press and radio to broadcast and publish news of the strike provided such news did not amount to incitement. News broadcasts therefore resumed.

The cancellation of the broadcasts had however angered Cotton and some of his staff. A memorandum was sent to Finlay by Cotton and five of his duty sub-editors expressing alarm at the decision. It read:

The Commission's sovereign obligation in our opinion is clear and we believe that any potential encroachment on the carrying out of that duty should be the subject of immediate challenge ... While we recognise the sudden decision which had to be made in this instance, we are perturbed by what might be construed as a too-easy acquiescence with official wishes, and strongly urge that every possible means be taken to protect the supreme, if uncodified, charter of a Free Radio against minor statutory laws designed for other purposes.

The protest was a milestone in the history of the ABC's news service. It marked a clear break with the tradition that the news service should openly serve authority. It was an indication of the new role concept being adopted by ABC journalists, both as a result of the influence of Cotton, Boyer's ideas on impartiality, and the influx of new men since August 1946. Dixon was not told of the submission from Cotton and angrily opposed it when he was. He complained to Moses:

I should have expected that if it was a bona-fide attempt to safeguard the interests of our independent service I would have been invited to join in its preparation and then to sign it. I am as keen as any journalist to safeguard the 'freedom of the press', but I believe that in a democratic country my first responsibility as a citizen and a journalist is to support a government which is trying to preserve law and order ... Communists make a catch-cry of 'freedom' but when they gain power are themselves ruthless in suppressing it. German and Italian agents in Australia demanded freedom of expression before World War II, and at the same time they plotted against us ... the National News Editor and his staff would be better employed in ensuring that listeners receive a prompt and accurate cover of the news we are entitled to use than in defending the service against an imaginary threat to its independence.

170. Cotton and five others to Finlay, 1 March 1948, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/1.
171. Dixon to Moses, 5 March 1948, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/1.
On 17 March, a protest march against State anti-strike legislation was held by striking unionists through the streets of Brisbane. There was a violent clash with police which left two prominent communists injured and resulted in the arrest of five other marchers. That night, in Sydney, Federal officials from unions in a meeting chaired by Thornton condemned the Queensland Government and the police and called on the ACTU to organise a national protest. The manifesto urged workers to protect their right to strike and condemned moves to ban the Communist Party.

The ABC news item recording this event read in part:

Late this evening, a meeting of ten Federal Unions representing 200-thousand workers in the metal, mining, rail, waterfront and shipping industries, condemned what it called 'the savage treatment of peaceful demonstrators in Brisbane'.172

The implication that the convenors of the meeting had the support of all 200 thousand men was immediately criticised by Commissioner Hanlon who complained to Boyer. Dixon protested:

I feel that we are doing a great disservice to listeners by presenting such a provocative picture of the situation. It is not disputed that the officials of ten unions met and carried the resolutions mentioned, but to record their actions as we did last night, savours of irresponsibility.173

Amour objected and so did Spender.174 On 1 April, the Queensland Premier himself complained to the ABC about the coverage of 17 March. He enclosed a copy of a police report, which allegedly proved that the police did not use their batons against strikers and did not injure anyone. He claimed that the ABC had misreported these facts as well as the number of police involved. He added:

172. The complete texts of this news item and the earlier item of the same day describing the clash between strikers and police are Appendix U.

173. Dixon to Cotton, 18 March 1948, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/1.

174. As reported in the Brisbane Telegraph, 29 March 1948.
The Government of Queensland strongly resents the action of the ABC in this matter. Had the ABC been hired by the law breakers, it could not have done a more faithful job for these men, and it is considered that the manner in which the news items referred to were presented was calculated to inspire hostility amongst the people to the Government of the State and build up the prestige of the small group which was defying the law of Queensland.175

Commissioner Hanlon also involved himself further by alleging that the Brisbane reporters had lifted phrases from the press in their reporting and produced copies of newspapers before the Commission to prove his point. As the Queensland Premier had sent a copy of his letter to Chifley, Cameron wrote to Boyer on the Prime Minister's behalf asking for an explanation.

Cotton was satisfied that there was no deliberate attempt to slant the news, and put the mistaken emphasis down to the last minute rush in handling the copy. He and the Brisbane office consistently denied that they had got any facts wrong in describing the scuffle between policy and strikers and that they had lifted material from the press. But he saw the danger signals looming which indicated that any repetition of the dramatic writing of 17 March would invite more serious political pressures. He praised the writing of the stories of that day as bright, and sparkling but added: "it would be foolish not to recognise that for the National news it is better to be sober, correct, and even dull, on controversial issues than brilliant and irresponsible".176 The reporting had led "to a mental image of hundreds of thousands of unionists all over Australia rising and shaking their fists in anger. Such is the power of graphic prose".177

175. Hanlon to Boyer, 1 April 1948, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/1.
177. Ibid.
Commission at its meeting on 12 April expressed its concern about "the tendency to sensationalism" and about several other instances in which national bulletins had tended to deal with opinion rather than fact and to have lost sight of the fact that it is the Commission's aim to give listeners objective and factual information about current events without political, emotional or other colouring.178

To avoid mistakes in similar rushed circumstances, Cotton suggested to the Commission that a deadline be set for the completion of the bulletin so that the sub-editors would have time to read the copy carefully before broadcast. The Commission as a result decided that bulletins should be completed and handed to the announcer 15 minutes before broadcast time, and that no new material should be accepted by the subs later than 30 minutes before.179

This event marked the beginning of the insistence by the Commission on sober and unemotional reporting, now a long-standing ABC tradition in news. Boyer outlined the new emphasis to Cameron thus:

The treatment, even where factual, should be such as to prevent the intrusion of emotional overtones which may distort in one direction or another the judgment of those listening to the broadcast ... The incident ... has highlighted to the Commission the necessity for dignified, restrained and non-sensational reporting as incumbent upon us, ... Taken right through ... I am of opinion (sic) that the balance has been fairly kept, although in certain cases the treatment has been open to some criticism.180

Chifley and Cameron accepted the new assurances from Boyer. In Queensland, Hanlon also expressed himself satisfied. The affair occurred just as the Fitzgerald Committee report was completed, with

179. This was rescinded in October 1949. The story of the opposition to it is given in Chapter 5.
180. Boyer to Cameron, 23 April 1948, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/1.
its criticism of the expense of the news service, and it might well have proved more embarrassing to the ABC than it did. Although Dixon, J.S. Hanlon and Amour were angry about what they felt was additional evidence of leftist influence in news under Cotton, the Government took no action and thus emphasised the lack of any deep-seated disenchantment with, or fear of, ABC bulletins. However the consistent requests by the Government for full details of all aspects of ABC coverage, and the strong attack by the Queensland Premier were enough to induce a new caution in the ABC's approach to news. As well as being confined strictly to basic facts, it was now to be written in impersonal and sober style. This, of course, reinforced the simple reflective mirror-image role of ABC news and confined it even more rigorously to facts to the exclusion of background detail. Boyer was concerned at the tactics of those who had ignored democratic and parliamentary norms in favour of direct action. He did not resist political pressure and he took swift action to endorse it by ensuring compliance with the new requirements of 'unemotional' reporting. Yet he unquestionably had a few misgivings about developments. He had acceded to requests for air time from the Queensland Premier, who ended up making two broadcasts, but had refused time to the strikers. He had been perhaps too hasty in accepting the advice of the Queensland Police Commissioner over news broadcasts on the strike. All this was hardly being even-handed to minorities even if they were 'violent'.

Almost immediately after the controversy over the Queensland rail strike coverage died down, there occurred a striking instance of Boyer's ambivalence on the subject of communism and the dilemma in which he was placed. Pressures were working on him all the time to take a tough line towards the communists. His instinctive leaning towards consensual abhorrence of communist tactics impelled him in
this direction but his sympathies with 'minority' rights held him back. At the third of the annual Interstate News Editors' conferences in Sydney which began on 31 May, Boyer was asked by all the State news editors, and also Dixon and Denning, to ban all references to the Communist Party in bulletins. Cotton was the only dissentient. Dixon records: "News editors felt it would avoid misunderstandings if the Commission gave them authority to spike all Communist material". 181

According to the minutes of the meeting Boyer: asked news editors to use discretion in the handling of material supplied by the Communists, but he thought it would be wholly wrong to say we were not going to broadcast any statement issued by the Communists. So long as the Communist Party remained a legal organisation, he felt it would be a mistake to say 'these people are out'. We could not make a judgment like that. 182

In this Boyer certainly showed a determination to resist pressures which would undermine ABC credibility by a too obvious exclusion of the minority viewpoint. But the impulse to support established social and political values at time of crises was becoming predominant. For Boyer saw that the news with its reports restricted to a few brief sentences was the ideal outlet for divisive issues of this kind. Communist statements would be used in the bulletins, if newsworthy, and this would allow the Commission to say it was presenting the issues for public judgment. If statements from communist controlled unions appeared occasionally in news, it would provide the Commission with an excuse for resisting union appeals to be allowed to broadcast in reply to official speakers on industrial issues. Such a policy would help maintain "national unity", because the overwhelming preponderance of statements in news on industrial issues would come from Federal and State governments and public instrumentalities. Government and


182. Minutes of Interstate News Conference, 31 May-2 June 1948, SP724, Box 39, 15/1/17.
Opposition were after all united on this issue, and Boyer saw balance as mainly related to the parties represented in Parliament - the parties of the 'establishment'. Coverage would therefore be accorded the communists in news, but not enough to prove really divisive. The instructions issued after the Queensland rail strike coverage would help see to that.

The request of the news editors to Boyer reveals the divisions that had developed within the News Department, as the older journalists grouped around Dixon and many of the newly recruited ones around Cotton. Cotton's protest over the ban on news of the railway strike had shown a distinctive new grouping and spirit. But Dixon, who opposed it, revealed in the 1948 Editors' Conference that he still had much support. Keith Fraser summarises the position by saying:

the news service from its very inception split into two factions - the Dixon men and the Cotton men. This very silly arrangement of course resulted in what you would expect it to do. There was one big long sustained punch-up between the two factions and of course between Dixon and Cotton.  

It was the events of the following year, 1949, which showed the unreality of Boyer's expressed views on the degree of 'independence' which had been given the Commission under Section 89 as amended in the Broadcasting Act of 1948. They also revealed once more that the safeguards contained in Section 23 were not a substantial barrier to a Government determined to get its own way. Although the two incidents involved belong more properly to the sphere of the Talks Department, they resulted in a heavier responsibility being placed on the News Department to report the facts of controversy correctly but briefly, without interpretation, and are thus worthy of inclusion in this thesis.

183. Interview with Keith Fraser, 25 September 1975.
On 21 June, at the height of the national coal strike, J. Mack, the Director of the Advertising Division of the Treasury, rang the Assistant Controller of Programmes, Clement Semmler, and told him that Chifley wanted K.A. Cameron, the Chairman of the Joint Coal Board, to make a national broadcast through both the ABC and commercial stations. Although Mack acknowledged that he could only make a request to the ABC for such a broadcast, unless he wanted to make use of Section 23, he told Semmler that "it was 'as good as an instruction' [or words to that effect]." Semmler saw Moses, who "agreed that, in view of the national emergency we could not very well refuse". Cameron's fifteen minute talk was given at 7.15 p.m. on 22 June.

On the same evening, B.H. Molesworth, the Director of Talks was telephoned by Sullivan of the Miners' Federation who asked that a Federation spokesman be allowed to broadcast a reply. Molesworth did not mince words. He told Sullivan that the Commission had been instructed to make the broadcast and therefore was not responsible for it. Any reply would also have to be a result of Government direction.

For a short time it seems that Moses and others believed that the Government would confirm in writing that the Cameron broadcast was made under Section 23 and would therefore be reported to Parliament in the Commission's Annual Report. But as soon as Cameron, the Postmaster-General, received a request from the Miners' Federation to grant time, in accordance with Molesworth's reply, he made it clear that the Government would not accept the responsibility for the broadcast and would not make use of Section 23. He wrote to the Vice-

184. Semmler report to the Commission, 21 June 1949. Considered at Commission meeting of 20-33 July 1949. Parentheses are Semmler's. SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11, "Miners' Strike".

185. Ibid.

186. A draft letter for Moses's signature replying to the first of several written complaints about the ABC's failure to allow the miners' time to reply to Cameron, states clearly that the broadcast was made at Government direction under Section 23 of the Broadcasting Act. This was changed after it was queried by the ABC's Legal Officer.
Chairman Dawes:

If the Government had desired to have the broadcast arranged in the manner suggested by Mr Molesworth, it would have taken action pursuant to the power conferred on the Minister by Section 23 of the Australian Broadcasting Act to direct the broadcast of matter the broadcasting of which is considered to be in the public interest. You will, I feel sure, agree that this matter was very badly handled and calls for some explanation.187

The Government was not anxious for it to appear that it had ordered the broadcast, yet as we have seen, it had put the request in such strong terms that the Commission's officers had felt bound to agree.

The Commission was obviously not prepared to fight the Government over the question of allowing the miners to broadcast. The feeling of many sections of the community against the communist-led unions was intense at this time. Dawes supported the minister and told him that Molesworth should not have attempted to shift the responsibility for disallowing the miners' broadcast from the Commission to the Government. Dawes also revealed a policy shift by the Commission which further reduced the possibility of the dissident minority being given access to ABC radio to explain their stance. He told Cameron that because the ABC had not arranged the talk by K.A. Cameron it:

had no oversight over the matter he broadcast [and] we could not be responsible for what he said. The facts are that at the request of an officer of the Prime Minister's Department we made broadcasting facilities available, knowing that if these were refused, you as Minister had power in the Act to require us to make the facilities available. In these circumstances, I therefore, felt that we were not responsible to give broadcasting facilities to a counter viewpoint.188

The letter indicates ABC awareness of the fact that its legislative 'rights' were being ignored by the Government, but at the same time it felt, in the face of the communist 'threat', that there were heavy

187. Cameron to Dawes, 1 July 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
188. Dawes to Cameron, 12 July 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
obligations and pressures to take part in a consensual front of 'resistance'. It showed it was not willing to challenge the Minister and demand that he use Section 23 and so be identified as the man responsible for the broadcast. It was prepared to accept the Cameron broadcast under pressure and then concur in Ministerial wishes that it accept responsibility and thus save the Government embarrassment. Dawes confirmed this when, in referring to Molesworth's advice to the Miners' Federation, he wrote:

In my earlier discussions with Senator Cameron, I was well aware that this reply was the easy way out for us but would only embarrass the Government, and it was for that reason that I intentionally avoided such a reply.\textsuperscript{189}

But in accepting responsibility for the broadcast, the Commission still neatly avoided responsibility for according the Miners' Federation equality and impartiality of treatment, by saying that it had no control over the content of the talk and therefore was not obliged to allow a reply. The Commission now obviously realised that with feeling running so high, it could not run the political risk of allowing the miners or any other communist-led union to make a broadcast even if it so desired. The question of 'minority rights' was assuming less importance. Replies to ministerial broadcasts could be avoided on the grounds that they were not commissioned by the Commission, even though it accepted nominal responsibility for them. A standard reply was sent to numerous letters which were received complaining that the ABC had not given fair treatment to the miners. It read:

As the ABC did not commission this talk and did not engage the speakers or examine the script prior to the broadcast ... the Commission considers that it does not fall within the category of those which would receive the usual treatment accorded to broadcasts on controversial matters and that therefore it should not take any further action.\textsuperscript{190}

\textsuperscript{189} Dawes to Boyer, 12 July 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.

\textsuperscript{190} Moses to Blackburn, 5 July 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
We have earlier remarked upon Boyer's definition of the kind of controversy that the ABC would allow to be discussed at any length on air. The ABC was to be used as a national forum only on matters which were in dispute between Government and Opposition - which originated in Parliament. Here again was an issue on which Government and Opposition were united. There was no Opposition request to reply to Cameron's broadcast and therefore it represented the thinking of Parliament as a whole, in which the Communist Party was unrepresented. In Boyer's view, therefore, the Cameron speech did not warrant a reply. This represents a very restrictive definition of the minority groups, whose rights he had championed. If they were outside the orbit of national consensus and threatening accepted values of society, they were not acceptable. Yet Boyer was concerned also at the Government pressures and demands which gave the ABC the appearance to the public of being a passive official tool. There was no question of challenging the ultimate authority of the Federal Government yet he was stung by the apparent flimsiness of Section 89 on which he had placed so much importance, and he was no doubt also dismayed by the tone of the letters received after the Cameron talk. These questioned the credibility of many statements he had made about ABC 'impartiality'. One listener wrote: "As we have been led to believe that the ABC is a non-partisan body, it is all the more regrettable that this undemocratic denial should emanate from it". Another wrote:

191. Boyer was at his country property in Queensland at the time of the dispute over the miners' right to reply to Cameron and it was left entirely to Dawes to handle. Boyer later went on record however as agreeing with Dawes's actions in his absence.

192. Polkinghorne to General Manager, ABC, 2 July 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
If the ABC is sincere in its oft-repeated statements that it
is impartial, it then has no alternative but to give to the
Secretary of the Miners' Federation equal time ... Here is the
ABC's opportunity to show that its impartiality unlike that of
the daily press, which consistently takes the side of the
employing class, is genuine.193

The opportunity Boyer sought to show that the Commission had some
independence of action in controversial broadcasts quickly presented
itself.

In Queensland, Premier Hanlon decided he should make a broadcast
appeal to the miners in his State to return to work. He approached
the ABC and commercial stations and asked them to arrange a State-wide
relay. On 22 July, Barry sent a telegram to Sholl advising him that
the Commission had decided that it could not allow Hanlon to broadcast
on the ABC. The Commission acknowledged that its policy was to allow
Federal Government broadcasts in the present emergency, without giving
the communist-led unions right of reply, but thought that it could
hardly exclude the communists from replying to State Premiers without
losing credibility. The telegram read:

in accordance with our neutral position all internal Australian
disputes we unwilling be forced into position of being
compelled to grant requests for right of reply stop as
commonwealth instrumentality we feel justified in broadcasting
by ministerial request special announcements of commonwealth
government policy of national importance in relation to this
dispute without further obligation stop do not feel
however that outside this facility we would be justified in broadcasting
other speakers without allowing right of reply to dissident
minority.194

This produced an outraged reaction from Hanlon, the Queensland Opposition
and the Brisbane press. Hanlon alleged

Apparently they [the Commission] are more concerned keeping sweet
with the Communist Party than allowing the people to know the
truth of the situation ... Anyone who is neutral in a position
like this is not of much value as a citizen.195

193. Blackburn to Director, ABC, 29 June 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
194. Text of the telegram is included in Sholl to Moses, 25 July 1949,
SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
The Brisbane Telegraph accused the ABC of:

aiding the 'dissident minority' that is strangling Australia's economic life and endangering the future prosperity and well-being of the people of this country. 196

The Courier-Mail asked: "Is there no difference between a rabble-rousing communist and the elected head of a State?" 197

The criticism upset Boyer but he stuck to his guns. In reply he wrote:

The Commission's decision in this matter was entirely on the deep principle of ABC impartiality in all internal Australian disputes, however right or wrong the participants. This principle, I may add, is generally recognised and approved throughout this country in the knowledge of the grave dangers of abuse that may arise if the ABC's impartial position is forfeited. 198

Such were the pressures on Boyer over this decision that he felt obliged to make public his own feelings about communism and that of his fellow Commissioners as proof that the ABC was not communist influenced. He wrote:

I will admit that the decision in the present case was not an easy one. In our private capacities all of us on the Commission are wholeheartedly behind the Federal Government and Mr Hanlon in their attack upon lawlessness and communist intrigue. 199

This statement, which compromised Commission 'impartiality' at the same time as 'impartiality' was being expounded as the reason for the decision to prevent Hanlon broadcasting, is illustrative of the Commission's awareness of the dangers inherent in its decision. By refusing to allow Hanlon to broadcast it was alienating a section of the political

198. Boyer to the Editor, Courier-Mail, published 4 August 1949.
community. It could not have made the decision without some certainty that it was not going to be challenged in Canberra, the point at which its existence could be threatened. The Courier-Mail alleged that Boyer had consulted Chifley before making his decision. Although this was denied by Boyer, the Federal Government certainly showed little inclination to intervene on behalf of Hanlon. Nevertheless, Boyer took the precaution of writing a long letter of explanation to Cameron. It assured him that broadcasts of the Federal Government in the national emergency such as that of the Chairman of the Joint Coal Board required no obligation to grant the right of reply. But he pointed out that following the broadcast:

we received from a number of quarters requests either to attack or defend the miners, and the Commission found itself obliged to adopt one of two policies, namely either (a) to throw open its microphones to the protagonists of the dispute in as far a way as possible, or (b) merely to report the actual happenings in the crisis without entering the controversy. We adopted the second of these alternatives for what I believe to be very good reasons ... As a public instrumentality it would be clearly improper for us to make judgment on an issue of the day and open our microphones to one side while denying them to the other. Accordingly we felt that the wisest and most serviceable course to adopt was to remain outside the controversy altogether.200

This, of course, marked a significant retreat from the high-minded sentiments which Boyer had expressed on taking office as Chairman. He had found after four years in office that the fair, impartial, and fearless presentation of controversial discussions, which, in 1945, he had equated with Commission survival, was difficult to implement. Faced with an industrial disturbance which "was remarkable in our history in the degree to which the majority of people and political parties were opposed to the striking minority",201 Boyer realised that it was not easy to ignore the attachment to community values shared by the ABC with the State as a whole. It was not easy to ignore his own strong

200. Boyer to Cameron, 9 September 1949, SP724, Box 42, 15/16/11.
201. Ibid. Davidson, Communist Party, p.136 agrees that the populace showed great hostility to the miners.
leanings towards Parliamentarianism and the concurrent wish to avoid the disturbing influences and ramifications of direct action. He, at times, felt he was being pressed and pushed too hard to surrender all ABC principles but it was not easy to stand firm before a Government which clearly still had the capacity to frustrate Commission wishes, and stand in the way of Commission 'autonomy'. The decision to refuse Hanlon broadcast time can only be related to the clearly emerging impossibility, as the Commission saw it, of giving the communists any time at all. If State Premiers were to be allowed to broadcast on request without reply, Commission credibility would be seriously questioned. Therefore the Commission decision removed any possibility of being forced to give communist union leaders air time because of the incessant demands by local authorities to put the States' point of view. The Commission could challenge a State government because the inherent controls over the ABC, those of finance and technical facilities, did not rest in State capitals but in Canberra. It was, however, necessary for the Commission to have reached a level of understanding and confidence with the Federal Labor Government which would allow it to confront a Labor Premier without reaction. The Federal Government was assuredly convinced that the Commission was basically committed to the preservation of existing social beliefs and institutions against the inroads of those promoting disorder. Boyer's philosophy was recognised for what it was - basically dedicated to preserving the 'status quo'.

In some respects, the experiences of Boyer in 1948 and 1949 can be compared to those of Reith during the General Strike in Britain in 1926. Although Reith prevented a complete takeover of the British Broadcasting Company by Churchill he was forced to submit to Government demands and was prevented from putting Labor speakers on the air. It was the time of the Crawford Committee report which was mapping out
the future of broadcasting in Britain. As Smith says:

The programme decisions were heavily influenced at that moment by the realisation that they would affect not merely the course of the strike and the history of the nation but the possibility of the BBC existing at all in the future.202

Boyer was no doubt influenced too throughout this period by the Fitzgerald Committee Report, the pending broadcasting legislation which eventuated in late 1948, and the Harris Report of 1949. These factors impelled the Commission towards caution and stasis and prevented the realisation of the liberal ideals of Boyer. It is not the purpose of this thesis to evaluate in any depth the Commission's subsequent approach to controversy outside of news but it is worth noting that there was a widespread opinion that the ABC was over-cautious in presenting contentious matters, at least until the advent of the TV programme "Four Corners" in 1961. Delegates at the ABC's Conference of Advisers in 1953, for example, overwhelmingly urged the ABC to be bolder in its approach.203 Mackay remarks of this period, that insufficient attention was given to unorthodox views and there was:

a degree of timidity which robs the sessions of vitality and excitement... The ABC is eminently fair in its handling of controversy but it could on occasions 'live dangerously' by making regular provision for social, economic and political dissenters.204

Boyle says of Reith

The General Strike cost [him] his innocence. Henceforth he became less unwordly. His eyes moved towards the establishment, on the sound principle that what a man could not defeat he must join, if only to safeguard the creature he had fostered.205


204. Mackay, Broadcasting, p.74. The controversy over the broadcasting of a News Commentary by Rohan Rivett, which was critical of the Suez invasion, is also typical of this attitude. See Bolton, Boyer, pp.253-54.

The strikes of 1948 and 1949 in Australia seem to have had the same affect on Boyer. It was another instance of a broadcasting crisis in which the institution's actions were governed by the possibility of the ABC suffering irreversible damage if a wrong step was taken. As we have already noted, such crises result in a period of reactionary caution. This happened after the confrontation with the press in 1936, and it happened after 1949.206

The onus for handling controversial affairs rested more heavily on the News Department from 1949 than ever before. The News Department was to report dispassionately the events and statements of any controversy in the brief 'factual' style to which listeners had become accustomed. This would serve to show that the ABC did not avoid its obligation to present difficult and divisive issues, but they would be presented in a way which would not inflame, incite or emotionally disturb listeners. The Commission would thus not find it necessary to put provocative speakers on the air or analyse issues in any depth. Sholl had reported to Moses that Hanlon had been somewhat mollified to hear reports of his speech in the news sessions. Sholl remarked that the News Department probably presented his arguments better than

206. Although this thesis will not describe the development in detail, it should be noted that the Commission felt itself forced, under extreme Government and public pressure, to discriminate against the Communist Party in 1949 by ruling that it could not make any election broadcast during the campaign of that year. The Party had been allowed such a broadcast during the campaign of 1946, and in July 1949 the Commission ruled that it would follow the same overall policy for election broadcasts in November-December. In September the Broadcasting Control Board created a political storm by issuing a ruling that required commercial stations to carry all election speeches broadcast on interstate relay by the ABC. This raised the possibility of a national blanket broadcast by the Communist Party if the ABC decided to give it time. The Government forced the Board to withdraw the regulation and directed that it and the Commission meet to formulate an alternative policy. Following this, the Commission, at a specially convened meeting the same day, 28 September, decided that the Communist Party would not be allowed to broadcast because it did not have significant public support. This was hardly the exercise of the freedom Boyer thought he had won under Section 89.
he did himself in the speech which the ABC did not broadcast. The Commission later confirmed that the news service alone should have the responsibility of dealing with the events of the industrial crisis. The heavier the load on news, the greater the necessity for safe, prodent reporting, confined rigidly to facts and written in colourless style. It had to be inoffensive, and by the end of 1949, it had evolved an approach which seemed to perfectly mirror the Commission's own attachments to the underlying values of Australian society and which trod such a careful path in the reporting of political issues that the politicians were no longer obsessively concerned with it.

The newsmen's values had become finally shaped by the needs of the highly vulnerable institution which employed them. They had geared their approach to the institution's need to survive in a precarious political environment. It was this ultimate fusion of institutional and Departmental ideologies which removed news from the area of political controversy. From 1949, news was no longer the centre of political dispute. What political complaints there were concerned the output of the Talks Department rather than News. But to bring about this 'ideal' state of affairs, the Commission had to find a non-controversial head of news, whose views would match its own and who would be given complete charge of the Department. Dixon remained an obstacle, but his removal from any position of authority was made possible by the findings of W.T. Harris.

The Harris Report

Instead of "expert with wide experience in first-class journalism" recommended by the Fitzgerald Committee as being the type of man necessary to overhaul the news service, the Commission instead engaged Harris, a member of the Committee, to undertake the enquiry. He was regarded as

207. Fitzgerald Committee Report, p.29.
something of an efficiency expert but he knew little of journalism. Because of this, the critics of Harris's report accused the Commission of deliberately ignoring the underlying belief behind the Fitzgerald Committee recommendation - that news organisations are best evaluated by fellow newsmen. There is nothing on record to explain why the Commission chose Harris, but it seems probable that it had been impressed with his thoroughness during the Fitzgerald Committee enquiry. Also the Commission no doubt felt safer in leaving the investigation to someone who was already in a position to appreciate the overall financial situation of the organisation and the necessity to keep costs down, rather than bring in someone new who, as a journalist, might tend to be more impressed with appeals for more staff and better conditions from fellow journalists.

Before Harris was approached, the Commission had already decided that it should once again attempt to put one man in overall charge of its News Department. Moses reported to the July 1948 meeting of the Commission:

The Commission is aware that ever since we began planning the independent service I have been concerned about the effective direction of these activities and that I have considered that the present situation was not satisfactory . . . I feel that the only satisfactory solution lies in our selecting a thoroughly experienced man in whose judgment and administrative ability the Commission would have complete confidence, to take charge of the whole news service.208

The Commission agreed that provision for such a man should be made in its estimates and at the same time decided to invite Harris to investigate the news service. There is no doubt that the Commission looked to Harris to recommend the kind of restructuring that it had in mind.

208. Moses to the Commission, 27 July 1948, SF724, Box 39, 15/1/17.
Harris was sent a brief by Boyer. He was to:

report specifically as to whether ... the existing staff at our metropolitan centres is either excessive, adequate or inadequate to prepare and present a news service of the quality, reliability and frequency demanded of a national broadcast service.209

He travelled to all States interviewing news staff. Originally it was envisaged that Harris might take about six weeks to complete his report. However, it was soon obvious that he would take much longer. In the meantime, the Commission had decided to defer any staff increases. In December, Dixon pointed out that the staffing position was becoming serious. He wrote:

in every capital city ... it is understaffed, the office accommodation is insufficient and the communication facilities inadequate ... Many of the journalists are tired and others have become ill through overwork and strain. Loyalty, enthusiasm and a strong belief in the ideal of an independent service have kept many of our people hard at it during the past eighteen months, but the glamour is wearing off and men are leaving us to return to the daily papers.210

By February 1949 the report had still not been received and Dixon warned:

I feel bound to tell you, with a full sense of responsibility, that irrespective of what Mr Harris may report, the Commission will be compelled to engage additional staff soon to avoid risk of a breakdown in its service ... I cannot possibly accept responsibility for any breakdown or deficiency that may occur in the service if action is not taken immediately.211

This alarmed the Commission and Harris was requested to attend the next Commission meeting to outline his findings verbally, so that an immediate decision could be made to alleviate the news staff position. Harris reported that he would recommend that ten additional

209. Boyer to Harris, 23 September 1948, SP724, Box 39, 15/1/17.
211. Dixon to Finlay, 24 February 1949, SP724, Box 39, 15/1/17.
journalists be appointed. He would also urge the abolition of the present News Editor and Director of News positions, and the creation instead of two new positions, one of which would have editorial control over all bulletins and the other purely administrative duties. Harris recommended that Cotton be re-engaged in the new editorial post, "as he considered his qualifications were outstanding".\(^{212}\) The Commission decided to wait for the full report before acting on the reorganisation proposals. On the question of staff, however, it ordered the immediate engagement of four new journalists, and the inclusion of funds for all ten in the estimates.\(^{213}\)

In January 1949, Cotton had asked the Commission for sick leave to which he was not strictly entitled under the terms of his contract. He was feeling 'run down', and as he had a heart condition, his doctor advised immediate rest.\(^{214}\) The Commission granted his request and he sailed to the U.K. for an extended vacation. He had two months recreation leave as well and the total period of absence took him to the end of his two year contract. Cotton confidently expected to get the new editorial post and looked forward to taking on the wider area of responsibility. It Cotton's absence Oakley was brought up from Victoria to act as National News Editor.

Behind the scenes, it appears obvious that Moses and Boyer wanted to retain Cotton and make him responsible for the full editorial supervision of all news bulletins, as recommended by Harris. As soon

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213. This was well below the recommendation of the Interstate News Conference of 1948, in which the State Editors said they needed a total of 16 additional men.

214. He described his condition in this way to Ivan Chapman in London. Interview with Chapman, 18 January 1977.
as Cotton had departed, Moses began to constantly and directly intervene in the affairs of the News Department, as if to demonstrate its inefficiency and the need for tightening up control. He directed a stream of complaints about alleged deficiencies in bulletins to Oakley. Many of the 'mistakes' which Moses detected were relatively minor but there were two serious factual errors which indicated that there were shortcomings in both discipline and supervision, which, if not rectified, could elicit public criticism on a scale which might once again invite political intervention.

In March, there was a stop-work meeting of waterside workers, called to protest against the imprisonment of L.L. Sharkey, the National President of the Communist Party. Ashley, by now Minister for Shipping and Transport, rang Dixon to confirm that the ABC would cover the meeting. Ashley told Dixon:

the Government was pinning a lot of faith to it. They believed that it would be a decision not to strike and would be a distinct victory for the moderates and for the Government. It was really important ... We'll all be listening in Canberra.215

As Labor hoped, the men decided not to go out, and a story with this information was sent in a press telegram from Brisbane. However, the story when broadcast, had had the word 'not' removed, giving the impression that the strike was on. Ashley having heard directly from Brisbane that the strike would not eventuate was astounded at the ABC report and rang Dixon and Moses to demand an explanation. To Dixon, this was clear evidence that the sub-editor who had excised the 'not' was a communist sympathiser. Oakley agreed with him and the two men advised Moses to suspend the sub-editor. Moses did so but soon after came to believe that he had acted too precipitately. Representations were made to him from outside the ABC that the man was a capable journalist but had made an honest mistake. Also he came to realise

that there were inbuilt weaknesses in the system and in the chain of command which made such errors possible. In this case, he felt the Chief Sub-Editor should have accepted full responsibility for failing to pick the mistake before the bulletin was broadcast and he therefore asked the Commission to reinstate the suspended officer, and instead to reprimand the Chief-Sub. The former recommendation was turned down but the Chief Sub-Editor was officially reprimanded for inadequate supervision. The incident played right into Moses's hands because Dixon so strongly resisted Moses's attempts to review the case that he also was strongly reprimanded.

In April, another Chief Sub-Editor returned from seven weeks leave to be given a tersely worded cable from Brisbane, which puzzled him at first, but which, on reflection he thought was a major news story. It concerned the crash of an air ambulance attempting to fly a small boy with appendicitis to hospital. The plane crashed at Palmerville in North Queensland and had been reported extensively in the news bulletins of 26 and 27 February. The Chief Sub-Editor, out of touch with the news while on holiday, was unaware of this, and misread the cable so that the story, intended only to record that the Queensland Government had offered to pay half the costs of the replacement plane, instead came to mean that the incident had only just taken place. The crash was broadcast as having occurred on 4 April. Moses picked this up immediately and wrote to Dixon: "I shall be glad if you will let me know what action is being taken with regard to what appears to be a bad error, which must have made our service look very foolish, especially to North Queensland listeners". Dixon agreed and replied: "If some of our news men had set out deliberately to embarrass the service, they could hardly have done it more effectively than in the past couple of weeks".

216. Moses to Dixon, 5 April 1949, SP286, Bundle 6.
The long report by the Chief Sub-Editor on the incident drew attention to some basic flaws in the young news service. There was obviously no filing system which would have enabled sub-editors to refer to previous stories on the same subject. This being so, there was a requirement that all stories should be complete and self-contained in themselves, but this frequently was not the case and caused errors. It underlined the desperate state of the staffing position because the Chief Sub-Editor in this instance had only a casual to assist him and no-one else on whom he could rely in the evening shift. Moses was extremely sympathetic to the Chief Sub-Editor and not at all ready to immediately reprimand him as Dixon and Oakley suggested. He felt more and more that individual journalists were being made the scapegoats for the shortcomings of the men at present in charge of news.

On 5 April, Dixon wrote a long apologia for the news service to Moses, in which he claimed that it was not adequately staffed for the checking of news before it reached the public. The memorandum produced an explosive reply from Moses who recalled that Dixon in 1947 had opposed any increase in Cotton's Sydney staff on the grounds that his existing men were not being properly utilised. "Two years ago", he wrote:

> you considered that errors were caused by Mr Cotton's deficiencies as National News Editor, not, as Cotton then claimed, by staff shortage. Now, although a larger staff is available in Sydney to do the same work, you apparently consider that errors are caused by staff shortage.218

Dixon's reply hinted darkly that Cotton's supporters within the Department were trying to deliberately sabotage output to put himself and Oakley in a bad light:

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218. Moses to Dixon, 12 April 1949, SP286, Bundle 6.
If certain people who are making errors now, were making them before, what did Mr Cotton do about it; if they were not making them then, why are they making them now? I should hate to think that some of them wish to embarrass the service, but it sometimes looks suspiciously like it. 219

The Harris Report, when it was finally completed on 2 May, confined itself meticulously to its terms of reference. It recommended a number of measures which would, in his opinion, make better use of available staff and improve the quality of the end-product. As he forecast, ten extra staff were recommended. He thought all News Editors should regularly examine bulletins before broadcast, and not after. All reporters should work harder at limiting their copy to the length required instead of submitting material which needed extensive rewriting. Cadets should receive better training and be encouraged to attend university courses. A reference index of news items should be maintained and kept up to date. Harris thought any comments on the duties of the National News Editor were strictly outside the scope of his reference, but he was urged to provide such a report which he did separately. In this he made a number of suggestions aimed at reducing the work burden on the National News Editor, thus enabling him to spend more time going over bulletins before broadcast. He wanted much of the administrative work now being carried out by that officer to be shared by other members of the staff, particularly the Chief Sub-Editor. To end the inconsistencies in standards brought about by the divided control between the Director of News and the National News Editor, Harris believed that the standards laid down by Cotton ought to be the prevailing and only ones. The crux of his re-organisation scheme was that the Assistant General Manager should be in overall control of news and that working to him should be two assistant directors, one in charge of staff matters only, and the other assuming responsibility for content of the

news bulletins. This again did not go far enough for Boyer and Moses and Boyer urged him to endorse Cotton even more forcibly. Harris did so in a telegram sent on 4 May which read:

I feel it necessary to say after careful consideration that in my opinion Cotton is the only officer among those fully concerned in news service who has the capacity for ensuring that news bulletins reach necessary standards in all respects he has to my mind a broadness of approach and appreciation of quality in and type of news not possessed by any other such officer.\(^\text{220}\)

Harris's report was considered by the same meeting of the Commission which reprimanded Dixon. Having heard Moses claim that the correspondence he produced in evidence indicated Dixon's unsuitability for a responsible position in the news service, the Commission immediately turned to the consideration of the re-organisation scheme of Harris. The timing could not have come at a less propitious moment for Dixon and for Hanlon, his supporter on the Commission. Dixon was refused permission to address it on the re-organisation proposals and its ultimate resolutions came down even more heavily against him than Harris had done. The Commission agreed that the Assistant General Manager should control and direct the News Department, in addition to his other duties, and instead of the Director of News and National News Editor positions, it created an Editor-in-Chief to take charge of the news department and a Federal News Executive who would supervise rostering and the implementation of the overseas news agreements. Dixon was immediately appointed by the same meeting to the latter position. This was inferior in status to his old position of Director of News, but the Commission agreed that there should be no loss in salary.

The stage had thus been carefully set for Cotton to return from England as Editor-in-Chief. Dixon, having been so strongly criticised by the Commission and subsequently downgraded, would no longer be in any position to challenge him or interfere by constant criticism. The only possible obstacle to the Commission's plans was the Government,

\(^{220}\) Telegram Harris to Boyer, 4 May 1949, R17, Box 1.
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220. Telegram Harris to Boyer, 4 May 1949, R17, Box 1.
and it had seemed for some months now that the Government was less inclined to interfere directly with news, the more so since the establishment of the Broadcasting Control Board had effectively ended the work of the PSCB under Senator Amour. Boyer confidently wrote to Cameron enclosing Harris's report and drawing attention to its endorsement of the need for more, not fewer journalists, and to the division needed between the editorial and administrative areas of responsibility. Boyer added:

He [Harris] endorses the Commission's view that Cotton was an able and trustworthy occupant of the editorial position, and, as I mentioned to you in conversation, recommends his re-appointment.221

The position of Editor-in-Chief would however, be advertised widely to secure the best possible person. Boyer told Cameron he believed that Harris's report showed the correctness "of the general manner in which the Commission has sought to exercise its responsibilities to the Government in this difficult field".222

On 13 May Dixon was sent a copy of the Harris Report for his 'confidential' information, and also told at the same time that the Commission would not see him to discuss the reorganisation proposals. For the next two months, there was a flurry of activity in Canberra and Broadcast House as Dixon's friends rallied to protect him and to forestall any attempt to give Cotton complete editorial control of the Department. On 25 May Haylen asked a series of questions in the House about the Harris Report, Dixon's new position and his loss of status, and finally requested the Minister to find out whether Dixon was being victimised for his support of an independent news service in 1946. Calwell, replying for the Postmaster-General, left no doubt where

221. Boyer to Cameron, 12 May 1949, R32/2.
222. Ibid.
his sympathies lay. He knew Dixon, he said, and believed: "He is one of the most honest men in the employ of the ABC. My own feeling is that he has been victimised for his honesty".223

The same day Dixon urged Moses to reject the Harris Report. He based his attack on the fact that Harris was not a journalist, and that he had seriously under-estimated the needs of the service. The fact that all editorial functions were being taken out of his hands meant that the Editor-in-Chief would be given a heavier load than the National News Editor, particularly with the added burden of the supervision of all State bulletins. Dixon said he felt uneasy about the prospect of having so little work to do, because the Commission might in fact be trying to manoeuvre him into a position of being declared redundant. He asked why any reorganisation was necessary, because Oakley and he, acting as a team, had improved the bulletins. Sydney and Adelaide bulletins, he claimed, had won a greater share of the audience since Oakley took over.

As Moses had been trying to demonstrate the inefficiency of the service since Cotton's departure, he thought he should take immediate action to rebut Dixon's claims of a bigger audience. He asked the ABC's Research Officer to compile a confidential report on news audiences before the next Commission meeting. It did not bear out Dixon's assessment, finding that the Sydney audience remained steady. In Adelaide, news audiences had increased over the previous twelve months, but it was not known when the trend began.

Using this as evidence Moses submitted a report to the Commission claiming that Dixon's memorandum on the Harris Report showed evidence of inaccuracies. Moses said he had not implied as Dixon had alleged, that there would be little work for him to do once responsibility for State bulletins were removed from his control. And he accused Dixon of failing to do this job adequately when he did have the responsibility.

The day before the next Commission meeting was due to begin, Calwell gave the House the answers to Haylen's questions, which Postmaster-General Cameron had obtained from Boyer. Boyer had been so annoyed at Haylen's interference, that he had given Cameron only 'yes' and 'no' answers to all six questions. He had, however, provided additional information about the nature of the re-organisation, Dixon's duties and the allegations of victimisation for the Minister's own information. It is significant that Cameron incorporated all this information into the replies which were eventually given in Parliament, thus making the tone more moderate, but also allowing the Commission to state publicly its opposition to interference in its internal affairs. The last paragraph of Boyer's letter became the answer to the final question of Haylen, which raised the issue of victimisation. It read:

the Commission's view is that the allocation of duties of its officers is essentially a matter of domestic administration. The right of the Commission to determine what duties its officers discharge is, in our view, essential to the well-being of the organisation. There is no question whatever of victimisation as suggested. The re-allocation of duties I mentioned above was unanimously agreed to by the Commission after the fullest consideration.224

Calwell informed members that Cameron would not refer the matter to the PSCB, and he added no further comment of his own. Thus Cameron appears to have again asserted his authority on broadcasting matters and to have resisted pressures from the broadcasting group of Labor members centring around Amour.

Despite Cameron's disinclination to back Calwell and Haylen, the Commission decided that it should act to remove any suggestion that Dixon would suffer in any way from the Departmental re-organisation. The previous meeting had decided that the salary range for the Federal

224. Boyer to Cameron, 27 May 1949, R17, Box 1. See also CPD, 7 June 1949, p.591.
News Executive position would be lower than that for the Director of News, but Dixon was to be paid an allowance to maintain his salary at his present level. The dropping of the official salary range however meant that there was some doubt whether Dixon was any longer to be regarded as a senior officer in the ABC. By the time of its meeting on 8-10 June, the Commission had come round to the belief that this drop in status gave Dixon's lobbyists a lever with which to continue to criticise the re-organisation and prevent Cotton's appointment. It decided to reclassify the Federal News Executive position as the equal in salary to the old Director of News post. Dixon was to continue to be regarded and treated as a senior officer. It was, it was thought, a small price to pay to get the reorganisation under way, and out of the glare of the political spotlight. Dixon's duties were to remain purely administrative. This move by the Commission could well have been sparked by an article which appeared in The Journalist at the beginning of June, in which considerable emphasis was placed on Dixon's reclassification on the lower salary range, and in which it was alleged: "The changes have created unrest among the 90-odd journalists employed by the Commission in Australia".225 It was also reported that the AJA Federal Executive had written to Cameron to ask him to investigate the circumstances of the abolition of Dixon's position as Director.

The Commission's attempt to appease Dixon and the supporters he had at union and political levels was not successful. It failed again to appreciate his dogged capacity for resistance. On 15 June, Amour who had always so zealously protected Dixon, launched his attack on Cotton in the Senate for his alleged activities on behalf of the Communist Party.226 Amour also attacked the Commission for its:

226. See this Chapter, p. 258.
activities against Mr Dixon [which] amount to sabotage and victimization, and I say that the commission together with the big newspapers in this country are determined to destroy the commission's present independent news service. 227

He continued with a veiled warning to the ABC that there would be further trouble if Cotton was appointed to the new Editor-in-Chief position. He said: "Although I do not believe that they will re-appoint Mr Cotton, it may appoint him in spirit if not in name, and thus continue its endeavours to destroy its independent news service". 228 By this time, as we have said, there was little support within the Labor Party for the extremist view which represented that the Party must continue to be alert for the threat posed by a Commission-newspaper alliance.

The news service and the Commission's attitude towards news presentation, had satisfied all but the die-hard group which felt loyalty to Dixon and sympathy with his anti-communist viewpoint. Cameron refused to even answer Amour in Parliament. He told newsmen the following day that:

Senator Amour has a right to express his opinion. It does not stand to reason it is the opinion of the Government ... In making this change the Commission is exercising a right delegated to it by Parliament and the matter is right outside my jurisdiction". 229

Nevertheless he asked Moses, in Boyer's absence, for further details of the Commission's plans so that he would be fully informed if the matter was raised again. Moses sent him the history of the Harris enquiry, explaining that the re-organisation was necessary in order to more clearly define editorial and administrative aspects of the running of the department. The detailed direction of the editorial side, he said, should receive the full attention of one officer, and

227. CPD, 15 June 1949, p.968.

228. Ibid.

229. The quotation is from a report of the news conference sent by Jost to Nusyd, 16 June 1949, R17, Box 1.
he attempted to put a gloss on Dixon's new duties claiming they would have the effect of tightening control. Moses strongly defended Cotton saying that:

During his three years' engagement as National News Editor, we had no evidence to support the suggestion that Mr. Cotton was, in any way, associated with the Communist Party and the Commission considered, from close observation of his work, that he sincerely did all in his power to ensure that the news in the bulletins prepared under supervision was presented objectively and without bias. 230

Although Amour received no support from the Government for his view that the Harris Report was a deliberate attempt by the Commission to sabotage its news service and victimise Dixon, it now seems apparent that the accusations he made that Cotton was a communist sympathiser were enough to frighten the Commission into abandoning the plans it had to make him the new head of the News Department. As Moses pointed out, the Commission did not believe Amour's claims for one minute, but it appears to have realised that in view of the anti-communist feeling sweeping Australia at this time, it was inviting further political attacks which might in fact undermine its credibility both with the Government and the public, if it pressed ahead with its appointment of Cotton. At the Commission meeting of 20-21 July, the Commission considered the applications of sixteen men for Editor-in-Chief. Cotton's name was not among them. There is no explanation of this sudden omission in the minutes.

The decision to abandon Cotton must be seen against the background of the miners' strike. We have earlier drawn attention to Government demands for air time during the emergency presented by the miners. It was a testing time for the Commission when it had to join with the Government on the side of 'law and order'. Despite his commitment to minorities, Boyer found it impossible to consider giving communist union

230. Moses to Cameron, 20 June 1949, R17, Box 1.
leaders any broadcast time. Amour's insinuations were made just at the time the miners announced that they would strike if all their demands were not met. The next four weeks saw the beginning of the strike, hundreds of thousands thrown out of work, the rationing of electricity, and the running down of much of the country's heavy industry. Chifley called it the waging of "unnecessary and callous war on the community [in which] the whole economic and social life of the nation is approaching complete disruption".231 There was fear and anger at what Crisp has called this "blatant case of Communist manipulation of a union and assault upon arbitration procedures".232 In addition:

Such a chain of events strengthened many suspicions that the stoppage had its real setting in the wider contemporary efforts of the Cominform to hamper the post-war economic recovery in many western countries by synchronised trouble-making.233

Davidson agrees that the strike was 'disastrous' and "completely alienated the moderates who had once supported it".234 It was "the turning of the tide for Communism in Australia".235 Faced with its greatest challenge from the communist-led unions, the Chifley Government resorted to Draconian measures against the miners. Funds which might have enabled the miners to continue the struggle were frozen. Several leading unionists were gaol for refusing to reveal the whereabouts of union money they had withdrawn from banks. Troops were ordered in to work some mines. In this atmosphere of bitterness and with the

231. Quoted by Crisp in Chifley, p.362.
233. Crisp, Chifley, p.361. Davidson in Communist Party, p.136, denies this, relating the causes to the militant tradition of the miners and Labor's failure to improve their conditions.
Government determined to smash the influence of the communists in the unions, Amour's accusations took on an added dimension. Cotton's appointment, it was thought, might even cause considerable Government displeasure, given the rising tide of fear of international communism. The Commission could not risk another period of controversy surrounding its news service. It had worked hard to build up its reputation and this, it believed, could not be sacrificed because of any commitment to Cotton. It appears to have anticipated political trouble, and therefore acted to avoid it. It was the compromise which was needed to ensure that the re-organisation of the Department could go ahead unhindered in Canberra.

Some indication of the emotional climate that followed the miners' strike and its implications for the Commission, can be further gauged from two Commission resolutions which were approved in September. In the first, the Commission hurriedly acted to appoint a new stringer correspondent in the Queensland town of Collinsville, following allegations from the local branch of the Labor Party, made to the Postmaster-General, that the incumbent was a communist. The second agreed that it would be desirable for all its news staff to be investigated by the Commonwealth Security police.

On 4 August, W.S. Hamilton, 43-year-old Chief Sub-Editor of The Sun, was advised of his appointment as Editor-in-Chief. He was to be on contract for an initial period of three years. He was to be in charge of the direction of the news staff in all States, the form and content of the bulletins and was to be responsible also for ensuring that the Commission's news bulletins are of the standard appropriate to the national broadcasting service, with special regard to the choice of items used, their accuracy and objective treatment and their effective presentation in radio form with emphasis on a high standard of English.236

236. Moses to Hamilton, 4 August 1949. ABC Staff Files. "W.S. Hamilton".
Hamilton took up his duties on 29 August. At last the Commission could look forward to an era in which its policies could be implemented without argument, and applied uniformly throughout the service.

In London, Cotton received news of these developments in a letter from Moses. Chapman recalls that he was extremely upset. He wrote to Boyer expressing his dismay at the Commission's failure to appoint him to the new position. The Commission obviously felt some pangs of remorse. It agreed to pay for the transportation of his family to Britain to join him, and also to foot the bill for the shipping of his furniture and effects. But as it turned out Cotton had no need to avail himself of this farewell gesture. As 1949 drew to a close, he accepted an offer to become Features Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. He returned to Sydney and his new position in February 1950.

The Influence of Cotton

Although Cotton never succeeded in gaining the degree of control over news bulletins which he, and the Commission, hoped for, he nevertheless left an indelible impression on the service. We have noted earlier how he strove to introduce a hitherto unknown brand of impartiality of treatment for both Government and Opposition, in line with Boyer's thinking. Also, how he had tried to moderate right-wing influence within the department. We have also remarked upon the fact that by early 1948, he had gathered around him a group which no longer saw the purpose of ABC news as being a vehicle for conveying official, mainly Government, announcements to the public. It was this group which protested so vigorously against the Commission's too easy acquiescence in the advice of the Queensland Government.
Cotton's strong dislike of the simple repetition of official statements in news and his desire for a more informed, backgrounded news cover can best be illustrated by his early struggles to obtain control of the news staff in Canberra. Under the terms of his appointment, Cotton had control of national news bulletins but the staff under his control consisted only of those journalists working in Sydney. Journalists working in other States and Canberra were Dixon's responsibility. So, although Cotton had charge of national news, he was never in a position of authority over many of the staff who provided his material. This was particularly frustrating to him as far as Canberra material was concerned. There was a strong emphasis on news of the Federal Government in national bulletins, yet he was in no position to impose his views on those who collected it. The Canberra news staff had been appointed, and heavily influenced, by Dixon and Denning whose leaning towards official news has already been described.

In November 1946, Cotton complained to Dixon that the Canberra news staff were obsessed with the idea of relaying only 'official' news and were nothing more than "a kind of 'Court Circular'". The issue came to a head soon after the start of the independent service. In August 1947, Cotton expressed his concern at the inadequacy of the coverage of a statement by Chifley on bank nationalisation. He said:

I want, and am entitled to ask, as I asked some months ago, for adequate coverage - that is, an informed and rounded flow of authoritative material from Canberra, giving not just the bare facts of a handout, but an interpretation and explanation of the issues involved ... I want it understood that this is not a complaint against our Canberra staff, but against the present system by which our Canberra office becomes simply a reception bureau for handouts. The danger to an 'independent' service is too obvious to elaborate.

237. Cotton to Dixon, 6 November 1946, SP286, Box 8, S2. "National News Editor".

The same month he took Canberra again to task for failing to file a story on Chifley's comments on the dollar crisis. The Canberra journalist involved merely claimed that his news evaluation was different from, and better than, Cotton's.

Cotton fired off several other complaints in the days that followed, alleging for example that he had heard important Canberra stories on the BBC which had not been filed by ABC staff. Canberra claimed inadequate staff was one of the reasons for the shortcomings, but it was also stressed that Cotton's requests ran counter to traditional ABC news-gathering policy, in the capital. There is an interesting illustration of the two approaches in the correspondence which followed. Cotton had claimed that the Canberra office should have sent a story which he had seen in two Sydney newspapers, that representatives of Empire governments were expected to meet in London to discuss the dollar crisis. The Canberra office, after several requests, eventually sent the material that Cotton wanted. But the Canberra journalist responsible for the story protested that it should not have been used in the form in which it was broadcast. This man had telephoned Chifley's press secretary and was told that the only official meeting in London that was imminent was one of the International Monetary Fund, which would be attended by Dominion representatives including Beasley from Australia. The journalist had relayed this information to Sydney, adding that it was his belief that it was almost certain that these Dominion delegates would take the opportunity while in London to have their own discussions over the dollar position. This latter information, the journalist contended, was never meant for broadcast, but only for information. Even though it was correct, he claimed the ABC had no right to broadcast an opinion of this kind without official verification, which had not been forthcoming. It was
not "hard news of ABC type ... It is my belief that the ABC should not base its stories on 'almost certainty'".239 But it was the journalists's informed comment which Cotton and his staff wanted, and used. It added a new dimension to the forthcoming IMF meeting and its relevance to Australia.

Shortly afterwards, Canberra failed to send anything on sensational accusations made in the House by Abbott against Amour.240 Abbott claimed that, while boarding an aircraft bound for Australia from San Francisco, Amour had assaulted a fellow passenger and the captain, and was removed by a policeman. According to the information given to Abbott by a passenger on the flight, Amour was drunk at the time. The story was splashed on the front pages of the papers the following morning, but was not carried by ABC news.241 Cotton asked:

Am I to take it that the decision to use or omit such items should be left to the judgment of our Canberra staff? If so, is Canberra in a position to rebut the inevitable imputation that the ABC News Service is discriminating in favour of a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting?242

Dixon and his Canberra staff argued that it was entirely Canberra's responsibility to decide what should be covered and what should be rejected on the grounds of 'good taste'. It was Commission policy, they said, not to allow personal charges to be ventilated in its news bulletins, and had been ever since the Ward/Spender affair in 1942.243 In any case, Abbott had behaved poorly in sheltering behind Parliamentary privilege.

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241. See for example, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 September 1947.
243. See Chapter 1, pp. 89-90.
On the same day that the Abbott allegations were ignored by the Canberra office, they failed to send a full coverage of the Foreign Affairs debate in which they occurred. Cotton queried the lack of material from the Government side and so, a few days later, did Dr John Burton the Secretary of the External Affairs Department. He claimed that the ABC news had painted a false picture of what had occurred by virtually ignoring the contributions to the debate by the Defence Minister, J.J. Dedman, and Allen Fraser. Instead, it had shown more interest in "Small and unimportant incidents like the Hasluck affair [which] are highlighted for their scandal news value and genuine contributions to public understanding of the deep crisis in international affairs are ignored". Burton added:

A careful analysis of the recent ABC broadcasts gives us the impression that the policy of the Commission is to play up criticism and to pay less attention to presentation of facts, and this Department, one of whose functions is to bring wide understanding of Australian policy, protests most strongly against it.

It is very significant that the coverage sent from Canberra consisted almost entirely of attacks by Abbott and Menzies on the Soviet Union. In 27 lines, Fraser was given three, and Dedman did not get a mention. Undoubtedly Cotton was disturbed by this apparent partiality and evidence of anti-communist sympathies affecting news output. We have already referred to a similar incident again involving Abbott, in April 1947.

244. Burton to Moses, 26 September 1947, SP613, Box 44, 15/17/13.
245. Ibid.
246. See Appendix V for the text of the story.
247. See this chapter, pp. 257-58.
Cotton firmly defended the use of the story on the resignation of Paul Hasluck from the External Affairs Department, over a policy disagreement with Evatt, but had to admit that Burton was otherwise correct. He said: "As the AGM's files will show, I have made numerous protests, not only at what I consider to be inadequate coverage, but also at the seemingly total lack of appreciation of values shown by our Canberra staff". Burton was satisfied with Moses's reply expressing regret but urged that the ABC's news staff should visit the Department informally for discussions.

At the Commission meeting of October 1947, both Moses and Finlay supported a request from Cotton that the Canberra staff should work direct to him and carry out his instructions in matters relating to national news. The Commission agreed. This did not immediately end Cotton's problems with his Canberra staff. There were deep-rooted attitudes existing there which resisted change. But there could be no more arguing that Canberra's news judgments were just as valid as Cotton's. Canberra had to supply what Cotton asked for and to take his thinking into account in whatever story they handled.

It is perhaps a pointer to Cotton's influence that there were a number of complaints from Government ministers in the first two years of the independent service. They either resented the lack of prominence given to their speeches, or any venting of criticism of their Departments. They were more prevalent than in the last two years of the service before independence, and it seems likely therefore, that this mirrors the greater degree of impartiality under Cotton. There were protests from Evatt, Calwell, Courtice, Dedman and Chifley himself. There was also a new element of firmness in Commission replies in defence of its news service. Some factual errors were admitted, but the Commission backed

Cotton when he maintained that the criticism was unjustified. In particular there was resistance to the frequent pressures exerted by Evatt through Burton. Evatt was to be the most consistent critic of ABC news throughout his long political career. The genesis of this hostility seemed to arise out of the reporting of his activities overseas, particularly at the United Nations.\(^{249}\) He and others in the Labor Party were highly critical of agency reports and as the ABC at this time was entirely dependent on agencies for its overseas material, it incurred Evatt's anger. The Department tried to get the ABC to consult with it before writing some reports, but Cotton was most circumspect. He wrote to Moses:

> It is essential that we should have objective reports from such meetings as the General Assembly in New York and I would rather have our own present, though admittedly inadequate coverage, than have to rely entirely on official hand-outs which necessarily treat the subject from a unilateral viewpoint... Of course, we cannot rebuff the offer of co-operation, and, wherever practicable, we shall ask their advice. This will not mean that we must necessarily take it or fall into the position of being their mouthpiece, but it will at least show that we are ready to consult them.\(^{250}\)

The Department of External Affairs tried consistently to make the ABC news service lean more heavily on it for information, instead of relying on the agencies, but the Commission, though courteous, was not enthusiastic. In June 1949, for example, the Department offered a direct teletype service to the ABC newsroom, to provide various information, and also "texts of statements made which are received by the Department in cables, rather than have the ABC rely upon summarised agency reports".\(^{251}\)

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249. Evatt was a leading figure in the San Francisco Conference of 1945 which drew up the United Nations Charter. The UN from this point became the focus of his foreign policy. He was appointed Chairman of the UN Committee on Spain in 1946, Chairman of the Committee on Palestine 1948, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, 1947 and President of the General Assembly, 1948-49.

250. Cotton to Moses, 6 November 1946, SP286, Bundle 6.

251. Cameron to Boyer, 4 June 1949, SP341, Box 37, 11.1.
The Department suggested that the idea might enable the ABC to reduce its staff and reduce expenditure. Boyer accepted the offer, as long as it did not involve the ABC in any expense, but went on to explain that the ABC could not rely on the Department as the sole source of such news:

I must point out that the addition of a service of this nature could not result in any savings to our news service as it would provide only a supplementary source of primary news and of checking facilities. It could not for example, make any reduction in our requirements for news reporters and roundsmen at Canberra, or our general international service from overseas through the major international agencies.

This kind of individualistic thinking, while unremarkable by today's standards, broke new ground for the ABC's news service, which had had a close relationship with the Government up to 1946. We have noted above how Boyer, although keen to redress the balance between Government and Opposition, was not averse to the kind of reporting that emanated from Canberra or the easy acceptance of Government handouts. Cotton, backed by Moses, showed a healthier appreciation of the need to dig deeper and put the news in some perspective. In his Guidance No.12, written in February 1947, Cotton dwelt on the need for journalists to background themselves thoroughly in the subjects about which they were writing. In this way, a better informed and more valuable story resulted. He wrote:

we seem to have overlooked the question of whether our qualifications should go beyond a good record, a nose for news, and an ability to differentiate between tenses. Meanwhile the world has moved on and public intelligence has advanced at a far greater speed than has been realised. There is a growing and articulate minority which is demanding informed news on world events, politics, music, literature and science. As literacy increases, so does healthy scepticism. It is no longer good enough to present readers or listeners with slabs of news, the implications of which you do not know or the implications of which you have not studied.

This was a new approach for a service which had always restricted itself to essentials.

252. Boyer to Cameron, 7 June 1949, SP341, Box 37, 11.1.
Cotton was also a great believer in bringing significant international news into news bulletins. He felt that the onus on the ABC to ignore 'sensationalism' meant that it had the opportunity instead to report responsibly and authoritatively on major global issues such as the situation in India, the world food shortage, and decisions of the United Nations. He admitted that he placed more stress on international news than on domestic matters and told his staff: "I'll be glad when Indian and Indonesian, Chinese and Burmese political developments mean to us as much as, or more than, a Test Match". His success in promoting this policy can be gauged by the degree to which he eventually antagonised the Labor Party on this issue. Since the days of Curtin's Australia First policy, the party had been vigorously nationalistic, and in 1948, the Cabinet Subcommittee which had been considering the implications of the Fitzgerald Committee Report, asked Cameron to take up the matter with Boyer. Hanlon, according to Dixon, was at the Committee meeting which made the decision, and as both men had been critical of Cotton's internationalism, Hanlon may well have urged that such a step be taken. The Commission meeting of October 1948 mildly rebuked Cotton by resolving that Australian news should be given higher priority but it refused to give any unconditional direction to the News Department beyond this "as the priority given to any news item must depend on its importance and interest in relation to the other material available". Cotton's emphasis on world news helped to change and broaden the scope of ABC bulletins, just as the Commission's policy of accentuating regional news also did. Both policies helped swing the news alignment away from Canberra.

254. Ibid.

But it would be unwise to over-emphasise the impact of Cotton. He never did have complete charge or authority. He rectified certain imbalances and introduced new ideas, but the remorselessly factual style of reporting remained, as did the rigid divorcement from any ideas of news presentation which included voice material. This aspect will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5. Cotton also had some blind spots when his behaviour appeared to run counter to the beliefs be expounded. For example, he readily acquiesced in the use of Don Rodgers, the Press Secretary to Chifley, for the reporting of the Prime Minister's trip to Britain in July 1948. Rodgers was paid £50 for the coverage. He had been used in this way before, both with Chifley and with Curtin, but one might have expected that with his strong dislike of official handouts, Cotton would have demurred at the use of such a source. ABC files also contain a fascinating glimpse of the rigidity of ABC reporting, even under Cotton, and of his impatience at the thought of giving the more local, routine stories more than the most cursory treatment. In February 1947, a farmer named Poole of Neilrex, near Mendooran, in Central Western New South Wales, wrote a most lucid and well-informed letter to the ABC complaining that an item in the news referring to the forthcoming referendum on shopping hours was misleading. Voting in the referendum, in N.S.W. country districts, was to decide whether shops should close for half a day on Saturdays or Wednesdays. It was restricted, as Poole pointed out, to those whose place of residence was a shopping area, which effectively prevented country residents from having a say in a matter which they regarded as vitally concerning them. Poole claimed that the ABC news item which reported a heavy vote in favour of Saturday afternoon closing, failed to mention that many farmers who favoured Wednesday closing, had not been allowed to vote. He asked the Graziers' Association of N.S.W. to support him and a
similar letter was subsequently sent by P.A. Wright, the President of that Association. It was a rare occasion when both Dixon and Cotton saw eye to eye. Dixon wrote:

I doubt whether there is any substance in the complaint. From memory we dealt fully with the voting provision of the Act when it became law. Obviously we cannot go on repeating them.256

Cotton was even more emphatic in his reply to Poole:

I recognise [he wrote], and sympathise with, your feelings in the matter, but hope you will understand that the News Bulletins are a medium for facts as they arise, and not a forum for discussing the pros and cons of any argument.257

The Graziers Association had denounced the poll as undemocratic and 'cooked' and claimed that nearly all farmers, graziers and rural workers in the State opposed Saturday closing but were not entitled to express their view. The fact that the ABC news item confined itself to an official statement of the results, without mentioning the controversy surrounding the referendum, is an indication of the lack of elementary backgrounding at this time.

The ABC and the Consensus

We have seen that, on becoming Chairman, Boyer had certain beliefs which were in accordance with the consensus, that is, areas of mutual agreement on central issues of politics and power, and on society values. Although suspicious of demagogues, he believed in the wisdom of 'authority', and the fact that information emanating from 'authority' was reliable to the point where it need not be authenticated. He believed therefore in 'accredited witnesses', to use Hall's phrase, who are the spokesmen for consensual values.

256. Dixon to Cotton, 27 February, 1947, SP286, Box 1, S11. "News comments and enquiries".
257. Cotton to Poole, 3 March 1947, SP286, Box 1, S11.
Boyer also decried violence or conflict. His view of the ABC as a 'neutral forum' through which conflicting views could be expressed, calmly and objectively, was an attempt to use the institution as an aid to democratic practice. It was designed to avoid the 'agitation' and 'conflict' resulting from new, burning social and political issues. Hall has drawn attention to the phenomenon of the broadcasting institution reproducing the form of the liberal state. The ABC, under Boyer was an excellent example of reproduction "in symbolic form [of] the procedures, rules and practices of Parliamentary rules and debate". The ABC could maintain 'national unity' by reducing the possibility of militancy and conflict through controlled discussion of issues. With this went a strong belief in parliamentary democracy, which Boyer frequently applauded. The ABC was to assist in the maintenance of a 'healthy democracy'.

We have also remarked upon his attachment to family life and values, and the fear he had that outside influences, via radio, might break down this essential social unit. Alarming, disturbing, violent news was to occupy a very low place in the list of news values. The kindly and good in human nature was to be given precedence. For these reasons, Boyer adhered to "the core value of the political consensus [which] is the adherence to 'legitimate means for the pursuance of interests without resort to open conflict'".  


As well as an area of consensus, there was an area of toleration in which consensus and 'dis-sensus' overlap. This was not large but there is a sprinkling of examples in ABC files. These mostly relate to 'crusading' stories in which individuals have brushed with authority. They were in the main presented with sympathy, and often became the subject of official complaint. A story of apparent 'indifference' by airport customs officials in delaying the clearance of a seriously sick air passenger was one such case. Another was the complaint of a parent of a dead child in Darwin that the hospital was needlessly slow in treating her daughter.

Open conflict with 'authority' and the taking of arguments outside the parliamentary forum to the streets produced an area of dis-sensus in which the Commission and ABC News found difficulties of comprehension because they involved non-standard concepts. The events in Queensland in February and March 1948 were crucial to the ABC because for the first time Commission and News Department were faced with the reporting of a major national story in which one of the contending groups espoused 'confrontation'. The response of Boyer and the Commission was partly dictated by political pressure, and partly due to the fact that actions of the communist-led unionists conflicted with the beliefs which were fundamental to its thinking. Boyer's reaction of denying the communists broadcast time, by limiting ABC debate to conflicts within the parliamentary framework is very much in keeping with his own personal and the institutional point of view of maintaining 'national unity', and reducing the influence and impact of those advocating that results can be obtained through direct action.

260. Hall defines 'dis-sensus' as an area in which there are competing definitions about the terms in which a topic is to be treated, as distinct from 'consensus' in which there is mutual agreement. The area of 'toleration' includes some competing definitions.
Following from this, the Commission's changing views towards the Communist Party seem to be partly linked to that Party's decision to launch its campaign of strikes and demonstrations. We have seen that Boyer was amenable to letting the Communist Party broadcast in 1946, while it appeared to remain within the existing non-violent political tradition. When it moved outside this, it was denied air-time, and limited to infrequent references in news bulletins.

Yet, as we have seen, there was an element in Boyer which urged him to let the views of minorities be heard to counter the possibility of Government control. He wanted to demonstrate Commission 'independence' and his resistance to pressures to allow the ABC to be used by any authority within political consensus. His refusal to ban references to the Communist Party in news bulletins, and his refusal to allow the Hanlon broadcast mark the limits of Boyer's co-operation with the consensus. Beyond this point, the Commission's credibility would have begun to suffer.

Within the News Department itself we have noted the factionalism due to the conflict between Dixon and Cotton, and between the old authority-oriented attitudes and the new 'impartiality'. Within the Department there were some, like Dixon, who was strongly on the side of 'law and order'; men who would have self-censored material in accordance with this world-view. But there were others, presumably influenced by Cotton, who displayed striking sympathy with the strikers in their initial reports. They, and Cotton, had to bow to the wishes of the Commission and the consensus and thereafter report industrial matters with greater sobriety and caution. They conformed because they put their Department and their own positions at some risk.

261. See Appendix U.
The heavy emphasis from this point on elimination of reporting of strikers that was thought to be 'sympathetic', the end of any attempt to give them 'impartiality' of treatment, and much closer attention to 'official' comments meant that not only did the Commission come to support the political consensus at this time of acute industrial crisis, but right through to the end of the era of communist confrontation, played an important consensual role in helping to put down the communist challenge. ABC news by 1949 had succeeded in giving itself an obvious new look of 'objectivity' because of Boyer's 'impartiality' doctrine relating to Government and Opposition. It had a growing and appreciative audience. Its heavy slant towards 'legitimacy' as against the strikers' 'illegitimacy' must have had considerable influence because of the 'objective', 'neutral' language and form of ABC bulletins. There was no attempt at meaningful exposition of the dissident viewpoints.

By the end of 1949 therefore, the ABC had not only demonstrated its adherence to consensual values. It had proved itself of value to the State because of its part in sustaining and instilling those values in a time when they and the institutions of authority were under threat. Thus, in Hall's words, the ABC ensured "the conformity of broadcasting to the political system as a whole and thus to the fundamental structure of the state". 262

The sacrifice of Cotton, the public espousal of anti-communism, and the ban on Communist Party election broadcasts, all within weeks of each other, were all part of a package which signified a high degree of acceptance of the consensual creed of opposition to militancy, and support of the status quo.

The End of Dixon

Dixon had won a pyrrhic victory in his struggle with Cotton. He had marshalled his forces for the last time to prevent Cotton's re-engagement but in leaning so heavily and so blatantly, on his political friends, at a time when Labor's popularity was slipping, he had placed himself in a most precarious position. It was also obvious that his supporters could not or would not do anything to restore to him any degree of editorial influence and that he would have to reconcile himself to his new situation or struggle against mounting odds. Amour, Haylen, and Hanlon were prepared to use their influence to stop Cotton's appointment on the grounds that he had always constituted a threat to Labor because of his alleged dubious connections. But as the news service had now clearly established itself as an independent entity, secure from press influence and working on lines with which there was no major disagreement within the Labor movement as a whole, Dixon's position was no longer synonymous with the survival of the principle of independent news. Boyer and his news service had succeeded in winning the confidence of the Government. 263 Boyer's reappointment as Chairman for a further 3 years from 1 July can be seen as a vote of confidence in him by the Chifley Government. 264

263. Moses claims that Chifley as Prime Minister was never inclined to put pressure on the ABC over its news. When other Ministers urged him to complain about an item, he would do so rather reluctantly. He recalls: "Chifley would say ... 'Look, some of the lads are complaining that in your news you're doing so and so, and you're not giving them a fair go'. And I'd say 'Well, look, I'll have a look at that right away'. 'Look, you do what you think's fair. Don't bother to get in touch with me. I've told them I'd ring you', he said, 'I've got every confidence in you and you do what you think's fair ... I've told them I'd ring you and I've done it'. This was typical of Ben Chifley. He never once said 'Look, ... I wish you'd do so and so'". Interview with Sir Charles Moses, 8 February 1976.

264. The reappointment was announced on 31 May. Boyer said he regarded it as Cabinet endorsement of ABC policy. See Sydney Morning Herald, 1 June 1949.
But perhaps the most graphic indication of the Labor Government's acceptance of Boyer's good intentions was the lack of any outcry over the appointment of Hamilton. He, coming from a senior position on The Sun was just as likely to be a newspaper plant as was Cotton. It was known to Hanlon and Dixon that Moses had had talks with Eric Kennedy, by this time executive head of Associated Newspaper, publishers of The Sun, about Hamilton's suitability. Henderson recounts that Boyer also was involved in discussions. He says:

Boyer came to us and sought the services of a journalist who would be competent, knew the answers and would be loyal to the Commission ... I have the idea that Boyer might have sought the advice of Kennedy or Murdoch about Hamilton's appointment ... The Commission selected Hamilton and we released him.

Yet no campaign was mounted by Dixon and his supporters against Hamilton, as it had been against Cotton, despite this background. This acquiescence can best be explained by the fact that communism had by far supplanted the newspaper proprietors as a current threat to the Labor movement. We have noted that Hamilton's appointment took place against the background of the miners' strike. Hamilton's bona fides in this situation were impeccable, with his staunchly Roman Catholic background. It seems apparent that the enquiries made about Hamilton within the newspapers were mainly related to his ideological convictions and his attitude towards communism, and that they were recognised as such by Hanlon and Dixon, and approved of by them. Hamilton therefore was not seen as a saboteur directed by the newspaper proprietors, but rather as someone who would ensure that no leftist tendencies developed within the news service.

265. See Dixon, ABC, p.195.
266. Interview with R.A. Henderson, 10 February 1976.
Dixon therefore had no enemy to confront as he had with Cotton. In addition his long-time ally and protector, Hanlon, died suddenly on 13 September 1949. Dixon, from this point, had no way of knowing what was being discussed about news in Commission meetings, and no way of influencing those discussions. He had never had the same relationship with the other Labor supporters on the Commission as he had with Hanlon. Hanlon alone had seen his role as one of active support for and consultation with those who had been responsible for his nomination within the Labor Government. Dixon quotes Hanlon's widow as saying he had been bitterly disappointed with the lack of support he had received from other Labor members of the Commission.267

In December, the Labor Government was voted out of office and Dixon then found himself without friends in any position of power in Canberra. He recognised that he no longer had ministerial protection. He puts the position precisely in his book:

I am not suggesting for one moment that the Menzies-Fadden government had anything to do, directly, with my enforced retirement. What really happened was that the defeat of Labor left the Commission free to retire me at sixty, without any threat of ministerial interference. I doubt if it would have had the temerity to do this had Labor remained in power.268

There was no reason why the Menzies Government would have wanted to intervene to secure Dixon's dismissal. By this time, Dixon had been reduced to a figurehead and was being given less and less work to do. Early in 1950 he complained of this to Finlay and suggested that he should be employed in a more active capacity within the News Department, in some kind of subordinate role to Hamilton. He suggested the title

267. The other Labor members of the Commission during Hanlon's time were Vice-Chairman F.R. Daves, a former Labor Opposition leader in the South Australian House of Assembly, President of the S. Australian Branch of the ALP, and member of Labor's Federal Executive, and Mrs Ivy Kent from Western Australia, formerly a leader in the Labor Women's Movement in that State. See Appendix W for a full list of Commissioners 1932-61.

of Assistant Controller. These moves alarmed Moses and Hamilton, though Finlay seems to have been initially sympathetic. According to Dixon, Finlay urged Hamilton to reach some satisfactory compromise with him. Instead, Hamilton saw Dixon as a threat - a man who might attempt to undermine him as he had Cotton. Dixon recalls:

Hamilton told [Finlay] that my continued presence in the News Department would be a threat to his authority and that he could not agree to this. He knew of my background in the News Department and my relations with the staff. The Commission was not in the mood to sit back and await the ultimate consequences of Dixon's restlessness. Its March 1950 meeting declared his position to be redundant, and that there was no position of comparable status available within the News Department for him. The only alternative position offered was that of Controller of Broadcasts in External Territories, based at Port Moresby, on the same salary. This is ample evidence of the political nature of the decision to create the Federal News Executive position for Dixon. The Commission had to find, and justify, some position of equal status for him in the news area to satisfy the Labor government that he was not being victimised. There was never enough work on the administrative side to justify the post, which became even more of a sinecure with the appointment of Oakley as Assistant Editor-in-Chief to help Hamilton.

Dixon had made up his mind to retire even before the offer of the Port Moresby job was made to him. He saw Boyer in April to discuss his superannuation position, and it was then that the alternative job offer was made. He subsequently turned it down, on the grounds that his health would not stand the tropics. Dixon counter-proposed that he would retire if the Commission paid the Superannuation Board an amount equivalent to what he would have paid if he had worked to the age of 65, so that he could retire on full pension. The Commission, at its April

269. Interview with Frank Dixon, 13 January 1976.
meeting elected to do so but even this simple agreement could not be achieved without acrimony. The Commission decided to make its payments on the basis of 14 units of pension, whereas Dixon had, since 4 April, been paying 16 units. Dixon's request for payment for one month's long service leave additional to the leave to which he was strictly entitled, was also turned down.

This aroused the stubborn streak in Dixon and once again he went off to Canberra, this time to see Chifley, now Leader of the Opposition. Chifley promised to argue his case for the two extra superannuation units with the new Treasurer, Fadden. When Dixon told him of the possibility of his being retired on 14 units, Chifley told him: "there'll be a bloody row if they attempt to do that". We do not know exactly what transpired after this meeting, but Moses subsequently told him that he could have his 16 units on retirement if he paid an additional £300 to the Board. This decision did not appear to emanate from the Commission.

Dixon procrastinated into May. In that month the Commission considered another proposal from him. This time he argued that he should take a lower position somewhere in the ABC, but the Commission would have nothing of the idea, and said he would have to take the New Guinea post or go out under Section 17H(1) of the Broadcasting Act, which permits the Commission to compulsorily retire an officer at the age of 60. He was given two weeks in which to make up his mind.

270. Ibid.
At about this time, the AJA on Dixon's behalf, wrote to the new Postmaster-General Anthony. In Dixon's words, the Association:

asked the Postmaster-General to inquire into the circumstances of [his] being forced out of the service but the Minister said he had no right to interfere.271

He adds characteristically:

Surely a government has not only the right but the duty to intervene when a semi-government body like the Commission, responsible to Parliament, treats a loyal and capable officer ... like the Commission has treated [me].272

On 22 May, Dixon informed Moses that he had decided to accept the Commission's offer to make a lump sum payment to the Board on his behalf and would make the additional payment necessary to bring his pension up to 16 units. He thus left the ABC after fourteen stormy years.

Conclusion

In the first six months of the independent news service the ABC in Sydney received 32 letters of complaint and 5 of praise. In the whole of 1949, only 10 letters arrived, 8 of them critical and 2 expressing appreciation.273 As well as this barometer of increasing public satisfaction with its news, the Commission had the knowledge that it had at last been able to organise its News Department to its total satisfaction. The Government had, at the end of 1949, come to accept that the Commission had acted conscientiously and responsibly in the establishment of its news and that the policy it had laid down and

272. Ibid.
273. These figures are based on an analysis of the letters in SP286, Box 1, Sl1.
carried out was fair towards those parties and institutions which conformed to Australian constitutional and democratic norms. The Government had thus allowed Dixon to be eased aside because it was confident that the news structure and philosophy was now soundly established and was freed from the influence of the press. Cotton had had to be sacrificed by the Commission to make sure the Government allowed the Commission to run its News Department as it wished. But in a sense, Cotton was no longer needed. He had struggled for three years to implement the Commission's news policy, and to put the service on a professional and confidence inducing basis, against huge odds. Yet despite the powerful forces working against him, both in Canberra and within the ABC, Cotton had succeeded. He had attacked some of the root causes of the great problems facing ABC news in 1946, which had caused Boyer so much anguish when he took over the Chairmanship. As well as insisting on balance between Government and Opposition, he had taken Boyer's concern about the emphasis on Government to its logical conclusion by demanding an end to the handout orientation of ABC Canberra newsmen. He had found, revealed and weakened the strong vein of anti-communist bias running through ABC newsrooms. He had begun to ask for analysis of news events which went beyond the Boyer policy of 1946, and which might have led the news service upon more interpretative paths. But his most important contribution to the ABC was the way in which he fought Dixon and Hanlon on the Commission's behalf and thus enabled it to wrest back control of its news. Cotton must have been a rugged individual to withstand so much animosity.

Cotton was employed to implement the Boyer news policy of 1946, which was to be the blueprint of a new era for ABC news, in which the too-close ties with Government and press would be severed and a service developed which would epitomise the Commission's own search for an individual identity and for more 'independence'. It was to be a service
which would aid and strengthen the Commission's chances of survival, instead of weakening them by over-reliance on any one section of the political community.

The policy when finally formulated, was endorsed by all parties involved, including Dixon. All apparently believed in it. However the Commission was somewhat less ingenuous than it had been over its news policy on the newspaper agreements. It realised that there were complexities and difficulties ahead despite the apparent unanimity. It went as far as it could, given Dixon's political influence, to reduce his role in the implementation of the policy, by giving Cotton control of national news. It recognised by now, Dixon's capacity to frustrate programmes because of the outside resources at his disposal and the consequent independence of outlook. He had proved too powerful for the Commission between 1942 and 1946. Admittedly the same resources were at his beck and call - the AJA, Government Ministers, loyal staff - but he was no longer in complete control of news, nor was he opening opposed to the programme this time. The Commission therefore hoped for speedy implementation of its news policy, so that the uncomfortable Government spotlight on its news activities might be shifted and it could be allowed much more overall freedom of action.

Instead this was not to be. Although both Dixon and Cotton had accepted the news policy, they disagreed violently over its meaning and consequences. The result was conflict within the News Department which led to continued Government interest and enquiry, and allowed interference to continue from Dixon's political friends. What slight hope there might have been for arriving at an accommodation with Dixon on this question, and therefore increasing the possibility of the successful implementation of the policy, were dashed by the conflicts with him over the costing and staffing of the new service and the
degree of emphasis placed on regional news. In fact, the introduction of Cotton to interpret and apply the new policy caused Dixon and his friends to believe that the Commission, in league with the press, was out to prove the independent service was not viable because of the expense, and the difficulty of operation, made obvious by Cotton's 'errors'. This 'conspiracy' theory of Dixon, shared by Hanlon, hardened their attitudes on every news question.

Pressman and Wildavsky stress the misleading nature of any unanimous agreement on a programme because it can frequently conceal complexities involved in securing clearance at the various decision points. Dixon had agreed with a Commission policy designed to rid the news, as far as possible, from external influences. He had agreed with the programme based on anti-newspaper ethics and impartiality of political treatment to achieve this. But here his co-operation stopped because his perspectives and interpretation were different to that of the Commission and Cotton. For him, the policy was the same as that he had always followed. That is, the Government must be favoured because it made news. There might be a new slightly more rigid policy about balance in Boyer's directive but this did not change Dixon's overview of news. Nor did impartiality mean to him fair treatment for the left-wing. Pressman and Wildavsky list a number of reasons why participants in any programme may agree with the substantive ends of a proposal and still oppose it, or fail to facilitate it. Some of these obviously relate to Dixon and his attitude. First, there were differences of opinion on leadership and proper organisational roles. This was combined with procedural differences and with the fact that Dixon lacked the sense of urgency that the others had, because he saw nothing basically wrong with much of the older system of news-gathering. Any one of these attitudes possessed by a participant can cause delays which can endanger any programme. A combination of all three reduces the chances of implementation greatly.
Although the Commission had tried to place Dixon in a position where he would not be at a key decision point in the programme, this had not worked because of his insistence on his rights of overall supervision of output, given him in November 1945. His obstinacy on this point was unquestionably greater than the Commission thought it would be and made him much more of a major factor in the implementation of the programme than had been envisaged. Pressman and Wildavsky note that: "In situations of high controversy and mutual antagonism, the probability of these [clearance] actions being favourable or taken in reasonable time ... are quite small". The conflict between Dixon and Cotton over the right to interpret the Commission programme therefore made the chances of completely successful implementation minimal.

Yet Cotton, as we have noted, forced through a number of important changes which made the service more credible. He was able to do this because the influence of Dixon, Hanlon and Amour had declined in Canberra as the Labor Government recognised that the threat of press influence in ABC news was diminishing rapidly. Boyer's total commitment to complete self-sufficiency in news-gathering and the obvious efforts made to develop and improve the service, proved to be a more powerful persuasive factor than the cries from Dixon/Hanlon/Amour camp that the service was being deliberately run down at the behest of powerful newspaper interests, and coming under communist influence. Nevertheless, the ultimate success of Boyer's programme depended on Departmental reorganisation which would give one man the authority to impose the new standards uniformly throughout all bulletins in all States and without any conflict over interpretation. Given the divided control of the Department, Cotton could bring about reforms only up to a certain point.

Despite its failure to remove Dixon completely from editorial responsibility in 1945, because of Governmental inspired protection by Hanlon, the Commission still appeared to hope that it could achieve this result internally in the years following the setting up of the independent service. By the time of the Fitzgerald Committee Report, it was obvious that this could not be so. Its comments on the conflict and problems within the Department gave the Government the excuse it needed to reduce Commission 'independence' under the 1948 Act. The pinpointing of the problem of Departmental reorganisation meant that the onus was now on the Commission to solve this problem to the Government's satisfaction. This meant that from this time on, the Government became an importance clearance point for the Commission's news programme. Reorganisation could not only be achieved with Government approval. Despite the fact that Harris was heavily influenced by the Commission to favour Cotton in his report, the solution was not to be a Department under his full control. Dixon, Hanlon and Amour might not have been able to discredit Cotton as successfully as they had hoped, but by keeping up the campaign against him they had created enough doubts about his political reliability as to make his re-engagement impossible in the mood of anti-communism that accompanied the miners' strike of 1949.

Reorganisation could only take place to the Commission's satisfaction with Dixon's complete excision from the news policy area. The price of Government approval for the end of Dixon's influence and complete Commission control over its news resources was the rejection of Cotton. The conflict between Dixon and Cotton had prevented reorganisation and the final achievement of the Commission's news policy goal. Dixon's continuing influence had amounted to a veto of this key aspect of the Commission's programme. But this stalemate had now been ended by a compromise entered into by the Commission with the Government and the
politicians. The two antagonistic participants in the programme were both effectively removed at the same time, the Government cleared the reorganisation plan and the programme could thus be fully implemented under Hamilton. This appears to be an excellent example of the validity of Pressman and Wildavsky's maxim: "Vetoes are not permanent but conditional". They point out that a negative act does not necessarily mean the end of a programme. Accommodations can be made and bargains struck, although these will result in modifications of the programme. In this case, this amounted to the selection of a man, Hamilton, who was safe, but a relatively unknown quantity, in place of Cotton who had been highly regarded and trusted by the Commission and Moses.

Compromise and modification of the institutional ethos adopted by Boyer in 1945 also became necessary to build and maintain political confidence in the news service. Smith points out that a broadcasting institution has to evolve a philosophy which is geared to its political survival. It depends on both politicians and the audience for its survival. It cannot afford to upset either. It has to be in tune with the political feelings of its audience as well as the needs of politicians. Boyer's ideas of the Commission becoming an outlet for divergent social and political viewpoints could be a reality only until the heavy groundswell of popular opinion against communist controlled unions became apparent, and the Commission felt it had to demonstrate its consensual bona fides. Then he saw the Commission's survival could be endangered by presenting the viewpoint of the striking unionists in a favourable light or in any length. The resultant decision to treat the communists and the strikes in which they were involved with far more caution, was immediately reflected in the News Department which was

enjoined to tread more warily, dispassionately and with less colour than previously. With ABC microphones closed to communist speakers, the news became the sole outlet for all points of view in the industrial struggle with the attendant heavy responsibility to be purely, baldly 'factual'. News had to reflect the political environment in which the Commission operated. It had to represent the Commission's own order of priorities, and to change as those priorities were changed. Smith also draws attention to the "profound and sober influence" that periodic charter renewals have within the BBC. The enquiries at these times are coincident with efforts made internally to avoid controversy at all costs. The Fitzgerald Committee and Harris enquiries similarly brought about increasing degrees of prudence in the handling of news.

The three year period 1946-49 therefore saw an end to the extremes in news policy as practised by Dixon and his followers. It marked the end of direct and blatant political interference by the PSCB, Amour and the group around him. It marked the finish of the over-attachment to Government speeches and handouts as the primary source of news. News horizons were widened by the prominence given to news from overseas, interstate, and from country areas. The 'impartiality' doctrine had given it apparent 'objectivity'. These were some of the real gains resulting from the independent news service. But there was a price paid for this degree of freedom. The Commission and its news service had survived a most dangerous period but at the cost of making its news items soberly, factually 'correct', with the almost complete exclusion of background, comment or analysis. The listener could make up his mind on the basis of facts alone. Cotton had made some sporadic efforts to develop items beyond this, but these did not appear to survive the reaction against 'colour' that followed the

276. Smith, Shadow, p.59.
communist-led strikes. These characteristics were not new. They were a continuation of a tradition of dedicated adherence to simple 'fact' that had begun with the opening of the ABC's Canberra bureau and the adoption of the competitive 'roundsman' approach to reporting in order to beat newspaper restrictions. The reinforcing of this tradition between 1946 and 1949 meant that the Commission continued to turn its back on voice reporting techniques for news purposes, which were now widely used overseas to put hard news in some more understandable context.

In Nordenstreng's terminology this resulted in the Commission having bulletins of "raw news", much of which should ideally have had some background added in order to produce "intellectual activation" which can break down prejudices or produce more realistic stereotypes, by introducing previously ignored facts. The ABC's news was therefore still far removed from applying the informational news criteria which he and others now consider desirable. It was also, for reasons explained above, the product of institutional definitions and meanings, arrived at in order to ensure survival, which inclined it towards established democratic values and traditions, and their maintenance. As Hall says, this produces a situation in which unwitting bias operates towards these consensual values.

There was an interesting illustration of the continuing bias towards 'authority' in the first months of the independence service, when the Commission decided that it ought to investigate the applicability of Section 90(1) of the Broadcasting Act to the news service. This section stated:

The Commission ... shall cause to be announced the true name of every speaker who is, either in person or through the agency of a sound recording device, to deliver an address or make a statement relating to a political subject or current affairs for broadcasting from the station.
While recognising that this mainly applied to speakers used by the Talks Department, it had noted that there were some news items in which the source was not stated and expressed the belief that names should be given or items omitted. However, it called for a report on the practical implications of this and whether it would impose serious restrictions on the work of the news staff.

All State news editors and Canberra immediately drew attention to the adverse effects such a rule would have on the reporting of unattributable statements emanating from Government sources. From Tasmania came an indication of the extent of this official practice of releasing unsourced information to the press. The Tasmanian Manager wrote:

My Government Roundsman has frequently been given a news 'lead' by the Premier who has asked that his name not be connected with it ... If we had been obliged to quote the source we could not have used the item and would have been placed at a grave disadvantage with the press. I estimate that more than ten per cent of our news would be lost if the full text of sub-section 90(1) of the Broadcasting Act was applied.277

Queensland similarly provided evidence of the degree to which the service was dependent on unnamed official sources. Sholl wrote:

Quite frequently valuable news items are obtained by the ABC on condition that the source is not quoted. Two recent examples of national news sent from Brisbane were Queensland's part in Atomic Energy research, and the purchasing, on behalf of American interests, of Australian wool for Korea. Had the sources to be acknowledged those items would have been withheld from the ABC and given to the press. These are but two of hundreds of examples and if Section 90(1) were endorsed it would be a serious handicap to ABC news.278


278. Sholl to Dixon, 19 September 1947, SP286, Bundle 6.
Canberra, of course, was the office most affected by the Commission proposal and from there came the comment:

Almost daily we receive authoritative information from the Prime Minister, Ministers, leaders of the Opposition parties, departmental chiefs and even private members, which provides sound factual news copy, but, on which, the people concerned are unwilling to be quoted ... if we were compelled to give the names of informants our news coverage would be very adversely affected and we would miss out on a great number of stories of major national importance.279

Denning joined the others in asking that the position be allowed to remain flexible. He concluded:

the journalist who writes what might appear to be an anonymous paragraph always knows the origin of the item, and is always liable to be called on to declare confidentially to the Commission the author of it, so that in fact full responsibility is amply established.280

Although Moses supported his news staff and urged that no hard and fast rule be set, the meeting of the Commission in October 1947, decided differently. It resolved:

That no item must be included in the Commission's news service which quotes an opinion on a controversial matter attributed to an anonymous individual, as an expression of opinion has relevance and importance as news only because of the position or status of the person giving that opinion.281

However it decided to make an exception with Government Departments, resolving:

That Government Departments may be quoted in the Commission's news service through an official spokesman without mentioning the name or position of the person who supplied the information concerned.282

279. Commins to Dixon, 18 September 1947, SP286, Bundle 6.
281. Minute of Commission meeting, 7-9 October 1947.
282. Ibid.
Neither a subsequent opinion from the ABC's legal officer that Section 90(1) did not apply to News, nor demurring representations from Morrison, the ABC's news Editor in Adelaide, brought about any change in mind. The ruling stayed. Morrison's arguments were very pertinent. In a news item dealing with controversy on Commonwealth Bank credit policy, he had been forced to drop a statement by the Chairman of Associated Banks, the only private banking company based in Adelaide, because he did not want his name mentioned. As no other comment from a private bank could be obtained, their viewpoint could not be put. Morrison pointed out that because the Commonwealth Bank was a Governmental instrumentality, there was nothing to prevent the ABC from using an unsourced statement from it, but journalists were now prevented from using similar material from private banks. Six months later Morrison was rebuked by Moses for using an anonymous statement by a North Terrace specialist in a story on the free medicine scheme, also a controversial issue. The specialist had opposed the stand against the scheme taken by the British Medical Association, but his name could not be used for ethical reasons. Morrison explained that if the Commission ruling were rigidly kept to, the only statements on the issue would emanate from the BMA and the Federal Government. This would give a misleading impression of solidarity behind the BMA, whereas there were in fact many doctors who disagreed with the BMA and he felt they had a right to put their point of view.

This rigid rule about sourcing in controversial issues had several important effects. If favoured the institutions of Government as opposed to private organisations or individuals. Sigal draws attention to the importance of 'off the record' or unattributable backgrounding as a way in which officials control the channels for the release of information. There is no record or transcript of the information so released, officials choose those to whom the
information is given, and usually set the rules governing attribution. The official giving information in this way releases himself from public commitment, and passes responsibility onto the reporter. It is one way of enabling officials to use reporters for their own ends. The regular disclosure of information in this way, which was obviously widely practised at this time, reinforces the reporters' attachment to routine channels and to the beat system. Sigal also points out that such information is 'certified news' and helps solve some of the uncertainties among journalists about what news is. Unattributable information released on a confidential basis has an added tag of urgency and newsworthiness attached particularly if one journalist thinks he had been given the information ahead of another. Noteworthy in the comments from the ABC's news editors on this subject was the fact that this type of news has some special priority and that the ABC has an obligation to put it on air before the press.

Departmental sources were therefore able to use the ABC in this way but not anonymous sources elsewhere. This is clearly a situation in which there is a bias, of an unwitting kind, towards authority. The requirement for sourcing also meant that the possibility of interpretative reporting was made even more remote. A reporter could not henceforth give his own appraisal of any controversial news situation, unless it was based on anonymous official backgrounding. The reporter himself could not be a source. This was another curtailment of reporting enterprise in the interest of factuality and safety.