



(c) crown copyright

SECRET

C.P.(51) 187

COPY NO. 31

2ND JULY, 1951

CABINET

REPORT OF BROADCASTING COMMITTEE

Memorandum by the Home Secretary

The statement in paragraph 7 of C.P.(51) 183 that the proposal for independent Broadcasting Commissions for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland made by the Beveridge Committee "may appeal to Nationalist sentiment in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland" is, so far as Wales is concerned, very much of an understatement. The facts are that all three Welsh organisations who gave evidence before the Beveridge Committee (the New Wales Union, the Welsh National Party and the Welsh Parliamentary Party) were unanimously in favour of an independent Broadcasting Corporation for Wales - a proposition which had the support of the majority of the Welsh local authorities. Even the Beveridge Committee's proposal is therefore regarded in some quarters as inadequate, though it has been accepted by the New Wales Union and the Welsh National Party in a statement sent to the Prime Minister on 23rd May (a copy of which is annexed) as "the acceptable minimum". This statement ends with the following paragraph:-

"The time has come for Wales and her leaders to set their faces firmly against any less adequate proposals which would be a denial of the united declarations which have been published; and to stand together in this matter."

2. Resolutions supporting the Beveridge Committee's proposal have been received from six local authorities in North Wales, including one county council (Flintshire). It is certain, therefore, that the rejection of the Beveridge Committee's recommendations will be strongly opposed by some quarters in Wales including some not irreconcilably Nationalistic. The reasons given for the decision to reject the Committee's recommendations will, in consequence, be subjected to close examination. The paragraph in the White Paper in which these reasons are given (paragraph 19) has been considerably redrafted, but I doubt whether the reasons now given will convince Welsh sentiment. To begin with, the only practical difficulty which is mentioned is the fact that the responsibility of members of the Commissions' staffs would be divided, and interchange and promotion within the whole Corporation made more difficult. This is the sort of argument which is commonly used to block proposals for devolution and it is unlikely to carry much weight. As regards the other two objections mentioned in this paragraph, it seems to me that, looked at from the point of view of Wales, they are not really objections at all, but simply the natural consequence of allowing some measure of independence in Wales. It is obvious that this would affect the collective responsibility of the Governors for the activities of the Corporation as a whole, but this is precisely what Welsh sentiment desires. Similarly, the division of responsibility would be bound to be an obstacle to the development of coherent policies, because its whole object would be to enable a distinctive policy for Wales to be developed.

3. It appears from paragraph 7 of C.F. (51) 183 that it is feared that if an independent Commission were set up for Wales it would make "irresponsible financial and other proposals which the Corporation would have the odium of turning down". It is not clear what evidence there is for thinking that an independent Commission would not do its best to work harmoniously with the Corporation and it is difficult to see why the alternative scheme should work any better. According to paragraph 21 of the White Paper, "all major questions of policy and administration relating to their areas, including finance and capital development, will be settled in conjunction with the Broadcasting Councils". If there is a disagreement between the Corporation and one of the Councils it seems most unlikely that it will be possible to conceal it and the same sort of difficulty is therefore likely to arise.

4. I would also point out that opposition to the rejection of the Beveridge Committee's proposals is likely to come not only from the Nationalist elements in Wales and Scotland, but also from those who are opposed on general grounds to monopoly in the B.B.C. The proposal for independent Regional Commissions was the only recommendation in the Beveridge Committee's Report which weakened this monopoly.

J.C.E.

Home Office, S.W.1.,

2ND JULY, 1951.

ANNEX

THE FUTURE OF BROADCASTING IN WALESStatement by the New Wales Union and the
Welsh National Party

It is understood that the Government will shortly publish a White Paper outlining a policy for the control of Broadcasting in Britain from the beginning of 1952 onwards. Attention is therefore drawn to the views expressed by Wales in favour of an independent Broadcasting Corporation. This was supported by a majority of the Welsh County Councils (with no contrary resolution) and by more than fifty other Local Authorities.

The three Welsh organisations which submitted evidence to Lord Beveridge's Committee were unanimously in favour of an independent Broadcasting Corporation for Wales: and in the powerful memorandum which was submitted by the Welsh Parliamentary Party, the position is described in these words:

"We, the Members of Parliament of all the constituencies in Wales, representative of all the major political parties, wish to submit to you our case for an independent Broadcasting Corporation for Wales. This desire, we know, is shared by the overwhelming majority of the Welsh people. As proof of this we need only refer to the resolutions on this matter passed by a large majority of our Local Authorities, our Chapels and Churches, our educational institutions and other cultural bodies and organisations."

In its report Lord Beveridge's Committee recommends the appointment of a Commission (of five) for Wales, with powers "to initiate and frame a Home Service for its Region" (page 190) and to ensure that Wales "has its own distinctive voice on the ether" (page 161). This does not come up to the Welsh demand for an independent Corporation, but at the present time we suggest to Wales that this is the acceptable minimum.

The time has come for Wales and her leaders to set their faces firmly against any less adequate proposals, which would be a denial of the united declarations which have been published; and to stand together in this matter.

May, 1951.

G.R.

