



(c) crown copyright

(THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT)

SECRET.

COPY NO. 39

P.14(35).

C A B I N E T.

BROADCAST TELEVISION SERVICE.

Memorandum by the Postmaster General.

(1) In May last I appointed a Committee, under the chairmanship of Lord Selston, to consider the development of television, and to advise under what conditions any public television service should be provided in this country. The Committee have now reported; and their conclusions and recommendations, as summarised at the end of their Report, are shown below:-

(i) No low definition system of Television should be adopted for a regular public service.

(ii) High definition Television has reached such a standard of development as to justify the first steps being taken towards the early establishment of a public television service of this type.

(iii) In view of the close relationship between sound and television broadcasting, the Authority which is responsible for the former - at present the British Broadcasting Corporation - should also be entrusted with the latter.

(iv) The Postmaster General should forthwith appoint an Advisory Committee to plan and guide the initiation and early development of the television service.

(v) Technically, it is desirable that the ultra-short wave transmitting stations should be situated at elevated points and that the masts should be as high as practicable.

(vi)

(vi) It is probable that at least 50 per cent of the population could be served by 10 ultra-short wave transmitting stations in suitable locations.

(vii) It is desirable in the general interest that a comprehensive television Patent Pool should eventually be formed.

(viii) A start should be made by the establishment of a service in London with two television systems operating alternately from one transmitting station.

(ix) Baird Television Limited and Marconi-E.M.I. Television Company Limited should be given an opportunity to supply, subject to conditions, the necessary apparatus for the operation of their respective systems at the London station.

(x) In the light of the experience obtained with the first station, the Advisory Committee should proceed with the planning of additional stations - incorporating any improvements which come to light in the meantime - until a network of stations is gradually built up.

(xi) The aim should be to take advantage, as far as possible, of all improvements in the art of Television, and at the same time to work towards the ultimate attainment of a national standardised system of transmission.

(xii) The cost of providing and maintaining the London station up to the end of 1936 will, it is estimated, be £180,000.

(xiii) Revenue should not be raised by the sale of transmitter time for direct advertisements, but the permission given in the British Broadcasting Corporation's existing licence to accept certain types of "sponsored programmes" should be applied also to the television service.

(xiv)

(xiv) Revenue should not be raised by an increase in the 10/- fee for the general broadcast listener's licence.

(xv) There should not be any separate licence for television reception at the start of the service, but the question should be reviewed later in the light of experience.

(xvi) No retailer's licence should be imposed on the sale of each television set, but arrangements should be made with the trade for the furnishing of periodical returns of the total number of such sets sold in each town or district.

(xvii) The cost of the television service - during the first experimental period at least - should be borne by the revenue from the existing 10/- licence fee.

(2) With regard to finance, the Committee take the view that, as the B.B.C's Charter will expire on the 31st December, 1936, the financing of the television service beyond that date will be bound up with the general question of the Corporation's finance, which they assume will come under review before the expiration of the Charter. They have confined themselves, therefore, to consideration of the cost of the service for a period of 18 months, ending on the 31st December, 1936. This cost they estimate will amount to about £180,000; and after reaching the conclusion that the amount should be borne by the revenue from the existing 10/- licence fee, they add -

"The determination of the allocation of this contribution as between the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Treasury naturally presents a wide field of controversy which we should have had to survey at length were we attempting to lay down a permanent basis. Since, however, as explained above, we are dealing only with a relatively limited sum for a very limited period, we suggest that the best course would be for a reasonable share of the amount to be borne by each of the two parties - the Corporation and the Treasury - and we think that the matter should

be considered and determined in this light by the Treasury after consultation with the Postmaster General and the Corporation."

(3) The Committee envisage the possibility, at a later stage, of the distribution of television programmes from a central station to a number of stations in different parts of the country. This would necessitate the provision of a network either of cables of special type, or of special wireless relay links. As such connections would be analogous to the land-lines leased to the British Broadcasting Corporation by the Post Office between the present broadcasting stations, I think it desirable that they should be retained under State control and I propose that any such network should be in the ownership of the Post Office.

(4) I consider that the Television Committee's recommendations are sound; and if no objection is seen, I propose to adopt them, and to issue a licence to the British Broadcasting Corporation to conduct a television service, as proposed, during the remaining period of their Charter. Provision will be made in the licence to ensure that effect shall be given to decisions on essential points taken by the Postmaster General, after considering the advice of the Advisory Committee.

(5) The Television Committee have stressed the importance of establishing a public service at the earliest possible date. Television has made about as much progress in the United States and Germany as in this country, and whichever of these three countries is the first to establish a successful public service will probably have the best chance of securing business for its manufacturers in the development of television services in other countries,

(6) The Report is being printed; and I should like to present it to Parliament as soon as possible, and at the same

time

time to inform the House that the Committee's recommendations, as summarised in their Report, are approved by the Government, and that steps will be taken to give effect to them without delay.

(7) I propose to proceed at once with the appointment of an Advisory Committee on the lines suggested in the Report and to include, if possible, a definite announcement on this subject in my statement to the House.

K.W.

24 January, 1935.