PROGRAMMES FOR IMMIGRANTS

Note of a meeting held on Tuesday, 13 July 1965, in the Council Chamber, Broadcasting House

Present:
Mr. A.G. Bennett (Blue Star House, MacDonald Road, Highbath, N.19.)
Mr. S.P. Bourne (Department of Economic Affairs)
Miss A.B. Burton (Welfare Officer, Reading Borough Council)
Mr. E.D. Butterworth (Lecturer, Department of Extra-Mural Studies, Leeds University)
Mr. R.D. Chapman (Head of Department of English for Immigrants, Birmingham)
Mr. R. St. C. Charles (Office of the High Commissioner for Trinidad and Tobago)
Sir Learie Constantine (Member of BBC General Advisory Council)
Mrs. P. Crabb (Welfare Secretary, National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child and member of the Immigrants Advisory Committee, London Council of Social Service)
Mrs. M. Dines (Chairman, Wood Green Commonwealth Citizens' Consultative Committee)
Mr. G.A. Evans (Information Officer, Public Relations Bureau, Hackney Borough Council)
Mr. J.E. Fraser (Formerly West Indies Commission)
Miss J. Harrison (Welfare Officer, Westminster City Council)
Mr. E. Irons (City of Nottingham Education Committee)
Mrs. P. Jeffrey (Kensington Citizens Advice Bureau)
Mr. W. Knight (Managing Editor Designate of Concord)
Mr. G.W.R. Lines (Director of Education, Wolverhampton Borough Council)
Mr. P. Mason (Institute of Race Relations)
Mr. C.E. Maynard (Deputy Head of Welfare Department, Office of the Commissioner of Eastern Caribbean Governments)
Mr. R.E.K. Philips (Chief Welfare Officer, Office of the High Commissioner for Jamaica)
Mr. J.F.C. Springfield (British Council, Student Welfare Department)
Mrs. D.P. Thirlwell (Adviser, Paddington Overseas Students and Workers Committee)
Mr. A.R. Truman (Inner London Education Authority)
Mrs. M. Winchester (National Council for Commonwealth Immigrants)
Miss D.M. Wood (Secretary, Nottingham Commonwealth Citizens' Consultative Committee)

For the BBC: Sir Hugh Greene (Director General)
Mr. O.J. Whitley (Chief Assistant to Director General)
Mr. C.J. Curran (The Secretary)
Mr. H.G. Campey (Head of Publicity)
Mr. D. Stephenson (Head of Overseas and Foreign Relations)
Mr. F.G. Gillard (Director of Sound Broadcasting)
Mr. R. D'A Marriott (Assistant Director of Sound Broadcasting)
Mr. A.P. Monson (Chief Engineer, Sound Broadcasting)
Mr. C.B. Mansell (Chief of Home Service and Music Programme)
Mr. J.A. Camacho (Head of Talks and Current Affairs (Sound))
Mr. P.M. Beech (Controller, Midland Region)
Mr. R. Stead (Controller, North Region)
Mr. D.F. Gretton (Assistant Head of Midland Regional Programmes)
Mr. E.S. Postgate (Controller, Educational Broadcasting)
Mr. D.M. Hodson (Controller, Overseas Services)
Mr. G. Steedman (Head of Overseas Regional Services)
Mr. D.C. Scoue (General Manager, Television Enterprises)
Mr. G. De Strother (Head of Productions, Television Enterprises)
Mr. D.B. Mann (Secretariat)

1. Preliminaries and Procedure

The Director General welcomed the guests to the conference and outlined the procedure for the meeting.

2. Introduction by the Chairman

The Director General said the BBC, as a public service broadcasting authority, felt it had a duty to assist immigrants in whatever way it could. On 6 July a similar conference had been held with leaders of the Indian and Pakistani communities. The BBC recognised that their problems were, in many ways, different from those of West Indians; the main purpose of the present conference, therefore, was to provide an opportunity for the BBC to learn from those present what the West Indian problems were and how the BBC could help.

The Director General said there were two sides to the BBC's problem. One was to decide how the BBC should make West Indians feel at home in the United Kingdom, and the other was to educate public opinion, both in general and in the particular communities in which West Indians lived. With regard to the second part of the problem, it was unfortunate that there was no system of local broadcasting, because this could prove an excellent way of reaching the communities, and discussing their day to day problems. As it was, the BBC had to depend at present on its existing regional and national services in radio and television, not forgetting, however, the External Services whose Caribbean service made a useful contribution. For those who were interested, there was available a booklet, "Going to Britain", which was based on a series of talks given in the Caribbean Service to prepare would-be immigrants for the life they would meet.

Of necessity, the BBC could do only a limited amount on its own, and it would, therefore, be helpful to know how its efforts could be integrated with the
activities of the central government, the local authorities and other agencies. The Director General hoped that the listening and viewing habits of West Indians and their preferences for radio or television, would be among the subjects which would occur in the ensuing discussion.

### The Role of the BBC: Present Output and Past Programmes

Mr. R.E.K. Philips said one of the principal roles for broadcasting must be to help to build the right kind of relationships in society. In this respect, education of the British public to accept West Indians as citizens might be more important than education by radio or television in the narrow sense for West Indians themselves. One example of the way not to do this had been the programme "A Little Bit of Madness", which had been the subject of an official complaint to the BBC. It had done much harm and had helped to spread the idea that every black man in the street was uncivilised and of lower morals and lower standards than other races. The Director General said the programme had been a brilliant documentary, had been made in association with the Jamaican Broadcasting Corporation, and had, presumably, been an accurate picture of a certain aspect of life in Jamaica. It had pretended to be no more than this, and any unfortunate side effects could have arisen only through misunderstanding of its aim. The really important point, however, was that, as a single programme, it did not represent BBC policy in any way. Nevertheless, it was most valuable to know of the effect which it had had. Mrs. P. Jeffrey said "A Little Bit of Madness" had interested her, as a person coming from another part of the West Indies, very much. She felt, however, that the people in Britain were very probably not sufficiently informed to be in a position to understand the programme. If the BBC were to show such programmes - and she thought they should be shown - it should first build up the kind of knowledge required to understand them.

Mrs. D.P. Thirlwell said the BBC's treatment of news tended, on occasion, to stress areas of conflict. The aim should be to damp down such issues instead of raising them up. Because of the question of colour, things were mentioned which should not be mentioned, for example, Colin Jordan’s wedding. Similarly, when a child in Smethwick caught typhoid it was unnecessary to say that the child was West Indian. Mr. Philips said that both the Press and Television had been guilty of creating excitement through sensational reporting, although this had not been done deliberately. For example, an item in "Gallary" on the Ku Klux Klan had been followed by crosses being lit in Leamington Spa. It was all too easy to excite the lunatic fringe, and to excuse such actions as the work of a lunatic fringe; what was needed was more reports drawing attention to the fact that there was another side to the coin. The Director General said that there was, on the other hand, danger in suppressing unpleasant things. Mr. E.D. Butterworth said it would be a mistake to have programmes showing only educated West Indians doing socially acceptable things. But Mrs. Thirlwell's point about publicising conflict situations had been a valid one. The Press, when dealing with race relations, gave undue prominence to conflict:
the BBC should help to rectify this by emphasising occasions when there was cooperation between groups, and by emphasising situations when people were facing common problems, for example, housing problems in the run-down areas in British cities. On the question of prejudice, it was wrong to assume that if people were presented with the facts, they would automatically make the right judgments from them. Prejudice fed on the most unlikely material, and there was a need both for education of the leaders of the community, the intellectuals, in the reasons for prejudice and the British attitude to race, and, in the wider sphere, for the initial conditioning of the public to make them aware of the historical basis of differences, and of the evidence, recently, for example, put out by U.N.E.S.C.O., about the unimportance of biological differences. The BBC should be concerned not just with affecting public opinion at the present, but with affecting potential public opinion in the future.

Miss D.M. Wood said it was often difficult to get publicity for events illustrating positive progress towards integration. She quoted an example of an event in Nottingham which had not been reported on the BBC. The Director General said that it was often impossible to include in national or regional news bulletins, events which would have received notice in a local broadcast. This underlined the importance of local broadcasting in this context.

4. Suggestions for Developing the BBC’s Role

Mr. J.S. Fraser said the primary concern of those present should be to see what could be done to improve relationships between the English people and West Indians. It would be necessary first to realise, however, that there were differences which the mass of people were not, in his view, capable of accepting. The BBC should have a message, and a meaning to what it did if West Indians were to be won over. It should avoid excessive condemnation of what West Indians did in the United Kingdom, and should not be condescending. The guiding aim should always be to put the other side of the picture when dealing with subjects concerning West Indian immigrants.

Mrs. P. Jeffrey said she would welcome, in particular, more documentaries to give the other side of the West Indian situation. Programmes giving the historical background of the link between Britain and the West Indies would be very useful.

Mrs. P. Crabbe said it would help greatly if West Indians or Africans could be used more in programmes simply as people in their own right and in their own jobs. It was important to get away from the idea of thinking of people who appeared in programmes only as entertainers. The Director General said he entirely accepted this point. A West Indian announcer, Mr. Dwight Whylie, had recently been appointed and another West Indian, Mr. Eric Abraham, would shortly join "Panorama". The policy, however, with which he hoped those present would agree, was to make all appointments entirely on merit. Mrs. Crabbe said she agreed entirely with this policy. Mrs. Thirlwell regretted that the BBC had
publicly announced that it had appointed a West Indian announcer: it should have been unnecessary to draw attention to the appointment, which should have been regarded as a perfectly natural event. The Director General explained that it had been an entirely natural event to call a Press conference to announce the appointment of two announcers, because it was the BBC's policy to give the names of announcers in radio as in television. The Press conference would have been held had both the successful candidates been English.

Mr. P. Mason said that, in his personal experience, it could be dangerous to put over a message, as Mr. Philips had described, too strongly. This should therefore be done as naturally as possible in the manner suggested by Mrs. Crabbe. He thought there would also be great danger with an historical programme in raising difficult issues, such as slavery. Mrs. Jeffrey thought such matters could be presented without trouble, especially if treated honestly and factually and, if necessary, in a series rather than in a single programme. Miss D.M. Wood said she was more interested in finding out more about what was happening in the West Indies, especially with regard to developments in education and commerce. Such information would be helpful to English people and of interest as news to West Indians. She hoped something of this sort could be shown on television. Mr. W. Knight said he would like some documentaries to show how culture, music and the arts had developed in the West Indies throughout the years. People tended to associate the West Indies with Jamaica and Trinidad, and knew very little about the other islands. Miss A.E. Burton said it would be a good idea to have programmes about news and the background of the West Indies and other Commonwealth countries. Mrs. Dimes said it might be wrong to show the West Indies in a too favourable light, for this might bring forth the retort from English people that "If this is where they come from, that is where they belong". One should also guard against showing anything which perpetuated the difference between English people and West Indians. Mr. G.A. Evans said he did not agree that it would be dangerous to show West Indians in a too favourable light. One had to remember first the long-standing feeling of racial prejudice against West Indians as 'colonials'. It would be a good thing to show West Indians in their natural setting, as labourers, peasants or Civil Servants, showing the variety of living standards, and different ways of life in a manner that would interest viewers in Britain.

Sir Learie Constantine said that, in the past, pictures of the Colonies had shown only the huts and shanties. There had never been pictures of the nice buildings in which the doctors and the lawyers lived. It was important now, therefore, to project the successful man holding his place in the Western circle, but, equally, it was important for the West Indian to make his own contribution in a way that would help to project the picture of a new society. He himself, for example, visited many schools in Britain to talk to children, and he had appeared on television in "This is Your Life". The BBC had a tremendous job to do, and as a member of the General Advisory Council, he hoped to make his
contribution. But many others should do a little more in areas outside their own, because this was the way to educate English people. With regard to the treatment of West Indian history, he saw no purpose in hiding the facts of slavery, for any discredit would fall on those who had made people slaves, and not on those who had been enslaved.

Mr. Bennett said there was frequently disagreement and animosity between Africans and West Indians and between West Indians from different islands. The BBC might be able to help in bringing them together in discussion. Sir Learie Constantine disagreed that this was a serious problem, and Mr. Phillips thought that it was unimportant compared with the main task of helping West Indians find their feet in society.

Mrs. Dimaq asked whether consideration had been given by the BBC Regions to doing programmes, on either radio or television, about multi-racial projects undertaken by people in areas where there were integration committees, as, for example, Sparkbrook in Birmingham. Such projects might be an opportunity to bring out local material with the emphasis not on the fact that some of the people concerned were West Indians, but on the interest of the projects themselves. Mr. Butterworth said it would be wrong to assume a national pattern for immigrants' problems. The position, in terms of prejudice, changed as between different areas. Mr. P.M. Beech said this was an idea which the BBC had in mind. There had recently been a very good radio programme, called "Generation of Strangers", which had been concerned with the lack of differentiation among white and coloured children in schools. Documentary films had been done on various aspects of the life of coloured people, but not on the Sparkbrook Association.

Mr. Butterworth said it was possible that not enough publicity was being given to the positive contributions that were being made. He did not, however, think that there could be much lasting effect from getting people together to resolve differences and understand one another. Nor could the BBC do a great deal to change public opinion; the chief difficulty arose from the situation in which people were placed and the attitudes they brought with them. The BBC, however, might do something to explain the strains and stresses of moving from one country to another; the expectations people brought with them were invariably greater than their actual achievements in the country they entered. This was true of all migrants. It might be possible to have programmes which stressed the contribution which minorities - the Jews, the Irish, the Polish - had made to the life of the United Kingdom. It was worth noting from the Report of the Commission on Immigration of 60 years ago, that people then were saying the same things about the Jewish migrants as they were now saying about recent immigrants. One other popular misconception which might be tackled was the idea that mixed marriages were biologically unsound: the views of a biologist and a geneticist might be sought. Similarly, the common assumptions that West Indians took jobs from other people, and that the housing situation was made worse by immigrants, could be demonstrated to be false. Such subjects could be dealt with in education programmes or in a tough kind of documentary like "Tonight" or "Panorama". Mr. Mason said
he agreed with much of what Mr. Butterworth had said, but doubted that a discussion by biologists about hybridisation would be very effective. It would be better to show examples of people who were the results of cross marriages.

Mr. Fraser said he would like to see integration in the BBC's services. One way to do this would be to emphasise, wherever possible, the contribution, economically and otherwise, that West Indians were making to the country. Regrettably people in the United Kingdom were hardening in their attitudes towards accepting coloured people as citizens in the true sense. On the subject of integration in programmes, Mrs. Dimes said she would like to see more use made of West Indian commentators, whose rich voices could be most effective. The BBC should, however, avoid propaganda, and keep to simple programmes as other speakers had suggested: any suggestion of propaganda would result in opposition to watching the programmes.

Mrs. Thirlwell said she did not favour introducing immigrants' problems as the main subject of broadcast discussions: it would be much better to have general programmes about, say, the housing situation, with the West Indian question treated in context. Mr. Butterworth agreed that there were dangers in the ordinary documentary programme about immigrants, which tended to be one in which a little serious comment was presented with a bit of local culture, steel bands, singing and dancing, all of which ministered to the stereotypes which people expected. But he did not believe that the attitudes of parents and adults were necessarily inflexible. The difficulty was to put the facts to the mass of the population in a popular kind of way.

5. Education and Adult Education

Mr. G.W.R. Lines said that because adult attitudes were hard to change, it would be better for the BBC to concentrate on the children: one could see in any school that under the age of 11 colour was immaterial. In fact a documentary about children playing in school could be most revealing, and might well draw a sympathetic response from an adult audience.

Mrs. Dimes said that, both in school and in schools broadcasts it was necessary first to get rid of the idea that the children born in the United Kingdom were immigrants. It was regrettable in this respect that school books always featured white children, or that "Liston With Mother" never had West Indian voices. In children's programmes about other lands, it was important to take the capital O and capital L out of the title and avoid the sort of condescension that was often heard.

Mr. A.G. Bennett said he did not accept the theory that if one taught a child about race relations, it would make a difference later in his life. It was his experience that children accepted, as they grew up, the prejudices extant in the community. But on the other hand, he did not agree with those who assumed that adults could not be educated or changed.
Miss L. Harrison said that the problem of the future would be the acceptance of 'coloured English' by the community. This meant that emphasis ought to be placed on the children who were coloured, but who spoke like other English children. More child actors in children's programmes might help to achieve this.

Turning to the sphere of adult education, Mrs. Crabbe said her work with the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child suggested two ways in which the BBC might help. First, the West Indian unmarried mothers often did not know about the Council because they did not read the women's magazines, through which most of the Council's mothers learnt of its work; and second, the public, and even social workers themselves, often did not realize that West Indian mothers faced exactly the same problems as English mothers. An educational programme, emphasising the common problems in very many areas of social work, would be helpful. Replying to the Director General, Mrs. Crabbe said she knew "Woman's Hour", which treated this sort of problem, was a great favourite, although social workers were unlikely to be able to listen to it. "Listening Post" and "This Time of Day" had also discussed such subjects. For social workers, a programme would have to be placed in the early morning or the evening.

Mr. R.S. Postgate said the BBC had been considering what could be done for immigrants who did not speak English well, both adults and children, but this was not really relevant to the needs of West Indians. He had, however, been thinking also in terms of a television series to deal with human situations such as shopping, going to the town hall, or dealing with housing matters. The intention was to use both immigrants and British people, so that the possibilities of collaboration in work could be stressed, rather than the difficulties. Televison, rather than Radio, would seem to be the better medium. Mr. Fraser suggested that although radio was used extensively by West Indians, television as a medium was perhaps more powerful for both sides. To his knowledge, there was no organised group activity by West Indians meeting to view programmes, other than possibly by students.

Mr. Postgate said that in broadcasting for schools, the BBC had kept away from doing programmes which would, by emphasis, isolate any particular group of people from others. Programmes about other lands, for example, did not discuss other peoples as strange human phenomena, but tried to reveal the different ways of life, often, on television, by specially shot film. One good example was a programme called "Singapore Farmer". But this was essentially a lesson in geography, and there was no social motive.

Mr. Postgate agreed that the BBC might be able to do more in the way of introducing coloured children naturally into its programmes, particularly perhaps in the 'choice of employment' programmes. Quite a number of coloured children had, however, been used already. Mr. Phillips said he would welcome programmes dealing with practical community problems, but these would have to be problems common to immigrants and non-immigrants alike. He envisaged programmes dealing with such subjects as the town hall, the Citizens' Advice Bureau or the library.
Mrs. Thirlwell said she had recently heard a talk to schools about Jamaica, in which Mrs. Crabbe spoke, and this had been excellent.

Mr. A.R. Truman said there seemed to be some contradiction in what people wanted, so far as educational programmes were concerned. On the one hand, people wanted to help English children to understand something about West Indian backgrounds, and on the other hand, some, including himself, wanted to think of coloured children as English children and to cease to identify them with the West Indian background. He hoped all educational broadcasting would be directed to this end. Mr. Postgate said the educational provision that the BBC made was, in fact, provision for all children without consideration for their origins. When overseas countries were discussed, it was in a geographical context. Concerning social work, BBC-2 would carry in the autumn a new series covering all the range of social work. The series would be supported by a correspondence course, and various group viewing arrangements.

The Problem of Integration

The Director General said it appeared, from the discussion, that West Indians had a problem of integration, many of them wishing to settle in Britain and become British, unlike the majority of Indians and Pakistanis who intended to go home eventually to their own countries. Mr. Bennett said it often did not please West Indian parents when their children lost contact with the home country. Parents at least wished to continue to be identified with their own country. The term "Black Englishmen" was still used, and although in one respect this was desirable, in another it signified that a man had gone too far in adopting English ways. A West Indian, successful in England, could find himself cut off from his own community, and the victim of another type of prejudice. Sir Learie Constantine said he personally welcomed the tendency to regard some West Indians as black Englishmen. This was a sign of successful integration. He regretted the pressures, frequently resulting from housing difficulties, which prevented West Indians from moving in wider circles and achieving integration. One thing he especially regretted was the sight of white people in films blackening their faces to take parts which should be taken by coloured people. This tied up with what he had said about the importance of West Indians looking for opportunities outside their own immediate circle. Mr. Fraser said that although he agreed in principle with Sir Learie, he had been astounded, when touring schools, to find how the attitudes of young people and children were hardening. In the North, all was well under the age group of 11 in the junior schools. In the higher age group resistance was hardening, and in the Midlands it had already hardened. In London and the South, children showed very little interest in coloured people or the way they lived. This reflected the attitude of the parents. Sir Learie Constantine agreed that the problem really started when children left school, because of adult influence. Prejudice would have to be broken down in the adult world, not in schools. His aim in speaking to schools was to help the child to stand up
against a prejudiced parent. He was sure that in this work the BBC could make a contribution. Mr. R.D. Chapman said his own experience led to a similar conclusion.

There were two sides to the coin. There was the obvious need to educate the English towards integration: from his experience in Birmingham, however, he believed there was a need to educate many of the West Indian people in certain communities with some idea of their responsibilities to the larger community in which they lived. This was vital because in areas where there were poor conditions, and, in many cases, bad behaviour due to lack of understanding, prejudice was the result. Two-way education was needed. Mr. A. Irons said he agreed with both speakers. Some progress had been made in Nottingham towards getting immigrants to identify themselves with what was taking place in the larger community, but frequently little pressure groups sprang up to deter people from trying to make such kind of progress.

It would be a great step forward if some of the BBC's programmes could emphasise that West Indians had to decide for themselves what role they were prepared to play in the community. This might be done by showing panels discussing the opportunities for progress and the progress achieved in the community concerned. These things could be done in a practical way—for example, they had had in Nottingham a highly successful experiment of introducing West Indian food to local people. It was not a one-way problem: it concerned both host and immigrant communities. Mr. Evans said he agreed to a great extent with what had been said. One puzzling thing, however, was the apparent trend, in the past three years, of children aged between six and nine to take on the prejudices of their parents. The BBC could make a contribution by avoiding nursery rhymes such as "Ten Little Niggers" in children's programmes, and by directing programmes at parents with the hope of encouraging them to correct the attitude of their children. Mrs. Dimes said similar arguments could be applied to religious broadcasts. Christian imagery was based on the idea that white was pure and evil things dark. She hoped religious programmes would contain more ethical material less closely related to these particular concepts. Mr. Mason thought it would be extremely difficult to change language in this way, although the point, which was important, should be brought to people's notice. Mr. Philips felt that it was possible to be over-sensitive: more harm was done by the things that Sir Learie Constantine had identified earlier.

7.

Conclusion

The Director General said Mr. Fraser had referred to "the integration of the BBC's programmes". In a certain sense, this phrase summed up the discussion. The suggestion was that the BBC should not be thinking in terms of special programmes addressed to West Indians, whether immigrants or people born and long settled in the United Kingdom, but that for both children and adults, the BBC should be thinking of programmes which took account of the fact that white and coloured people were living in a mixed community, and would be listening and watching those programmes together. It was on this basic concept that the BBC would have to build. Mrs. Crabbe
said this approach by the BBC would be most valuable. She and others realized, however, that the mass media alone could not overcome all the problems. Mr. Lines agreed with the Chairman's summary of the discussion. It had become clear, as a result of this, that it would be wrong to assume that the BBC could do a tremendous lot. What was important, however, was how those responsible thought and felt, rather than what they did. Mr. C.E. Maynard said one practical step might be an extension of the Home Service programme "Can I Help You?", preferably placed at a time when the majority could listen. Mr. E.C. Gillard said it was always difficult to find a placing that would please everybody. The present programme was broadcast on Sunday, when most people should be able to turn to it. The programme was a kind of advice bureau of the air, and it had occurred to him in the course of the discussion that this aspect of radio might be expanded a little. He was grateful for a constructive suggestion and would see in what ways it could be followed up. The Director General thanked those who had attended. The discussion had given the BBC the basic idea he had mentioned, and a lot of individual ideas to follow up. As Mr. Lines had said, the occasion would have influenced the BBC's thinking, and this was perhaps one of the most important things of all.

The meeting was adjourned for luncheon at 1.10 p.m.