

WR 306/11
31 AUG 1979

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Mr McQuillan (IPD)

REVIEW OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURE: BBC EXTERNAL SERVICES

1. You asked various Departments to comment on your draft submission on this subject. Apart from Item 5 (Burmese), all the 12 services listed as most vulnerable relate to countries and/or languages handled by Departments in my area.
2. I note the view expressed by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State that so far as possible the World Service and services to Communist countries should be preserved and audibility maintained.
3. I have a lot of sympathy with Mr Gladstone's minute of 7 August. These are essentially the arguments we have heard so often when the BBC's vernacular services were threatened in recent years, and I heard them all over again yesterday from Mr Austin Kark of Bush House. But I have to dissent from Mr Gladstone's suggestions both as regards German and Finnish. In my 7 years in Bonn I never came across anyone who listened to the BBC in German, and in the GDR the principal Western information medium is surely West German Television, receivable by something like three quarters of the East German population. Nor is FRG Television all propaganda: half the time it is attacking the government in Bonn. Thus I would not put up a strong plea for the German service, even though its disappearance would run counter to the Prime Minister's and Secretary of State's directive on sparing the services to Communist countries. As to Finland, I would take some convincing that this service has an influential audience in Finland. Experience has made me suspicious of the BBC's own figures.
4. Mr Daunt has written a minute (attached) about the South European services. He suggests that further consideration should be given to preserving Turkish and Portuguese for Portugal and Portuguese Africa. If pleas for mercy can be entertained at this stage, I would support Mr Daunt.
5. But I also agree with Mr Daunt that a global view has to be taken. Is it really sensible to drop all BBC broadcasts, in Spanish as well as Portuguese, to South America? Are the Thai and Vietnamese services really more important to British interests than some of those listed in the first dozen? These and similar questions are difficult to comment on when one only knows half the picture.

JL

8 August 1979

J L Bullard

Copies: PS/PUS
 Mr Gladstone ✓
 Mr Daunt
 EESD