CONSUMPTION AVENUE

All of this and more came under Cecil Graves' bailiwick as co-Director General. Of the two of them, his responsibilities made him more like a modern-day BBC chieftain, ordering the programming, setting the tone and overseeing the content, while his fellow DG maintained the structure in which he did so. Foot in particular saw it as a relationship between an editor-in-chief (in Graves) and an administrator in himself. It was a decent idea. Its flaw was how heavily it relied on people - specific people. One of whom was a sufferer of chronic tuberculosis.

Foot and Graves actually got on rather well. The yawning gap between the broadcasting experience of each must have helped: Foot the outsider from the Gas Board was happy to defer to Graves the BBC lifer on output, since he knew he had no grounds to argue (except in the unlikely event of a coal-powered radio programme). They both attended a recording of the controversial "Music Hall" show - in which the country's most available variety stars would trot out their acts for an hour - to check out its content for evidence of the "vulgarity of the modern comic" that the newspapers were needling them about. Not only did they pass the content, they both reportedly laughed like drains.

Sadly, Graves' prison-camp souvenir continued unabated, and the stresses of his role hardly soothed his troubled lungs. His absences from work became longer and more frequent, until his actual presence at Broadcasting House was apt to cause genuine shock. Eventually his tuberculosis became the bacterial equivalent of a sale at DFS - the gap in between severe instances having shrunk to the point of near-invisibility. By June 1943, eighteen months into the ostensible joint reign, Robert Foot had effectively been sole Director-General for the vast majority of that time, including almost all of 1943 itself.

Graves finally had to make a hard decision between his beloved BBC and breathing. He reluctantly chose the latter, finally giving in to the inevitable and retiring from the Corporation entirely in September 1943. It was a source of constant regret (to himself at least) that he hadn't got the job in 1938 after Reith's departure when he had a greater lung capacity. He had been Reith's choice for the role (after Charles Carpendale proved to be far too old and proved it by retiring) - which might have been the very reason the Governors overlooked him in favour of a complete outsider in F. W. Ogilvie. As we've seen, that didn't really work out, and by the time the Corporation had got through that mistake it was too late for Graves.

This is not to suggest that everything would have been great if Graves had taken over in 1938 instead of (half) in 1942. The Second World War would still have happened - the influence of the

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BBC, Cecil Graves, or indeed Ogilvie was not that great - and it would have proved a major headache for whoever was in charge. In practice, Graves as Director General in 1938 would probably not have lasted much longer than Ogilvie had, if only because of his lungs.

He wouldn't even necessarily have done that much better; he had the broadcasting experience to understand the role from the start instead of needing to learn as he went, but he was also highly Reithian in his outlook - deploring popular music in particular almost to the same extent, with a particular venom for crooning (which he called "this particularly odious form of singing" and had outright banned when Controller of Programmes under Reith) and a particular loathing for Vera Lynn which seethed away unrelieved as she grew into a star of unprecedented magnitude over the course of the war. Such sentiments were almost calculated to put off the Governors in 1938, looking to make as clean a break from John Reith as possible.

Foot was left in sole charge, hurled in at the deep end of the Broadcasting Industry, and at a crucial point in history, with the War starting to turn. He had outdone even the Peter Principle in rising beyond his own incompetence into a position he barely even understood. The course of action was obvious: run.

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