REMAKE/REMODEL

The keyword for Foot's reform was to be "decentralisation". Instead of a sprawling mass of veins and arteries spreading out from a central heart, with everything and everyone subordinate to and reporting back to the Director (or in this case Directors) General, causing constant logjams as multiple iterations of the same basic process or information tried to make their way to the top simultaneously, the Corporation would be divided up much more neatly into self-running and self-regulating Divisions.

The other side of decentralisation was regionalism. The regions, as a concept, was given its own division consisting of six departments: one each for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and three for various subdivisions of England. Except London and its environs, which had its own four-department "Area Office" amounting to a separate division altogether, because London is special. This made perfect sense at the time, and was at least more rational than the gordian knot of corporate structure it replaced. Besides, the intention as far as Foot was concerned was to give the other regions some sort of a boost towards, if not exactly meeting, London's exalted heights, so as to prevent the Corporation from "becoming a top heavy and remote organisation looking at its policy and its performance with what I might call the eyes of the Londoner."††

At the start of the war, the regions had understandably fallen in importance, partly because of the sharp reduction in physical wavelengths. Now, the tide of the war was slowly but surely turning with the entry of the United States, and it was now reasonable to look to a possible post-war broadcasting landscape and consider how that might look, what it might need, and what part the BBC could play in it - or more accurately how it could continue to play its assumed role, which was of course the main lead. With the airwaves presumably
freed up once again in peacetime, the regions would naturally return to some level of prominence, and Foot's plans anticipated that, in a sort of general sense influenced by his not knowing the first thing about broadcasting itself, but knowing how to organise a sprawling Corporation.

The most important and long-lasting effect of the "decentralising" reforms was the creation of the News Division. Beforehand, there were four separate news services within the BBC, all managed independently and constantly bumping into one another despite sharing a single co-ordinator. Now, Home News, Empire News and News Talks were all merged together, although European News was to remain separate for war-related reasons. The old co-ordinator, A. P. Ryan, would be transformed into a much more powerful and hands-on controller. This was the start of the BBC's maturation as a news provider in its own right, partially forced on them by the war. It would continue under Foot and Graves' successor (at least for a time).

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The problem with Home and Empire being separate departments was that Home News had to double-check every line, dot, comma and whimsical kerning decision with just about everyone you could think of: the appropriate branch of the armed forces, the Foreign Office, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Information and some chap called Bernard, and if any of them disapproved, it was back to the office for painstaking redaction. The Empire News service, on the other hand, only had to do this on the odd occasion at the editor's discretion. Foot's new system, largely suggested and supported by Ryan, brought both departments together under a single common policy.

The Government also agreed to bring News policy into the sole remit of the Ministry of Information rather than forcing the Corporation to go cap in hand to every single relevant or semi-relevant Government department, one after the other, plus whichever branch of the three fighting services is involved in the story (and more often than not it was all of them). The new structure and greater freedom was a great relief to Ryan and to that sector of the BBC in general. It did, however, have one drawback: it helped foster old resentments between the Corporation and the Press, who now saw the BBC as receiving preferential treatment, and not for the first time.

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