MOVING ANXIETY (II)

Ogilvie, however, stuck to his guns, vowing to push ahead with the project despite the protests of people like Graves and Overseas Service Director J.B. Clark telling him that the three rebels were also experts who knew their subject like no-one else and whose opinions carried genuine weight. "*Decisions are not open for reconsideration, without fresh evidence, simply because they are disliked by the particular parties concerned."*†† the Director General explained. When Ogilvie visited Wood Norton to explain the situation to the workforce there, he made sure Whitley and Marriott were excluded from the meeting. This did not help defuse the situation.

Inevitably it eventually reached the Board of Governors. One of the freshest was the Honorable Harold Nicolson, formerly official Censor in the Ministry of Information before being moved to the backbenches (on the grounds that Labour wanted greater representation in the Coalition) and given a Governorship as a consolation prize. Nicolson sided with the rebels, stressing how important the Monitoring Service was, particularly during wartime - so much so that the Government might well accuse the BBC of obstructing the war effort, should anything go wrong. Partly due to this argument, the resulting conclusion of the Board's deliberations was carefully non-committal - running to some mumbling about hierarchy and proper procedure - but in no way could be interpreted as supporting Ogilvie's authoritarian stance on discipline.

The Director-General's gambit had backfired. He had tried to emulate his predecessor's two-fisted approach to management, but discovered to his cost that it only works if you really are as tough as blackened teak. Reith was a genuine hardman. No-one would have rebelled against him. Ogilvie tried to play the part, but didn't have the natural authority. Over the course of the winter of 1941 through to 1942, all three rebels resigned from the BBC and signed up in the armed forces. Shankland was ultimately killed in action, but Whitley and Marriott would return to their careers at the Corporation in peacetime. As for Ogilvie, he resigned in exhaustion on the same day as Marriott, his position having become, one way or another, untenable. The governors were at pains to clarify that he had, indeed, resigned rather than been sacked, but had he not jumped they would have had to push him, as evidenced by a diary entry of Harold Nicolson's describing a meeting two days before Ogilvie's resignation at which it was decided to "retire" him in favour of a diarchy of Cecil Graves and Robert Foot. To his diary, Nicolson confessed his moral dilemma:

"*I am sure that this is right, as Ogilvie is too noble a character for rough war-work. Yet I mind deeply in a way. This clever, high-minded man being pushed aside. I hate it. But I agree."****

Nicolson might have assuaged his guilt by reflecting that Ogilvie was never really comfortable in

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the job and was probably, if privately, at least partly glad to be shot of it and returned to academia, though not immediately. He was given a knighthood shortly after his departure as a sort of unofficial compensation, and soon accepted an invitation to join the British Council and spearhead its new white propaganda project to promote British culture overseas. Following that, he joined Jesus College, Oxford, where he was much happier. Over a the next five years as Principal he pulled it back to respectability from a position something of a backwater (at least by Oxbridge standards). He remained in this office until his death in 1949 at the age of 56, spending much of his spare time criticising the direction the Corporation had taken in the meantime. Not that many people paid particular attention to his opinions on broadcasting.

Over a near century of history, there's inevitably no shortage of forgotten men or women in the BBC, and Ogilvie is one of the most high-profile. He took on a job he was ill-suited for at one of the most turbulent times in its and the world's entire history, and was inevitably doomed from the start. Even the BBC Chairman who appointed him would later reflect that he had every ability necessary for the role "except that of being able to manage a large organization, the one quality which was indispensable"♯. He is one of the only 20th Century DGs prior not to have an official portrait commissioned to hang in broadcasting house. The other two were his successors.

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