CANCELLED TELEVISION PLAY

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§2.45 p.m.

§VISCOUNT HAILSHAM rose to call attention to the action of the Chairman of the Governors of the British Broad-casting Corporation in instructing the Director-General not to proceed with the repetition of the broadcast of the television play Party Manners; and to move for Papers. The noble Viscount said: My Lords, if I may say so with proper deference, your Lordships' House is renowned for the high standard of its debates and for the wide range of in-formation available to its members, and not least of all for the just dignity and restraint with which matters of controversy are invariably handled. These circumstances and traditions inevitably fill one who has the honour to address your Lordships for the first time with a feeling of diffidence and awe, and to make him, if he is wise, determined rather to place himself upon the indulgence of the House than to rely upon his own merits. I crave that indulgence on this occasion of my first speech, not least because I have thought it right to do so upon a Motion of my own moving, a circumstance which I trust will not be thought presumptuous on my part, since the question which I have ventured to bring to your Lordships' attention is, I believe, one of importance and interest and one upon which I certainly have some depth of feeling. I am strengthened in my confidence in addressing the House by the circumstance that I see ranged on these Benches noble 156Lords who knew my father, and upon them I know that I can count to put the Second Commandment in reverse and to supply the defects of the son with the merits of his sire.

§My Lords, I thought it right, and I think it right now, to tell your Lordships that I have given notice to the noble Lord who is Chairman of the Board of Governors of the British Broadcasting Corporation before this Motion was put on the Paper, since I must say I had hoped that he might have found this occasion convenient to afford both to your Lordships' House and to the public a somewhat fuller and more detailed explanation of the matters to which I am about to refer than has so far been forth-coming. I cannot but think that the forum which is afforded by your Lordships' House for matters of this kind, where things can

be discussed in the calm light of reason, and without the attempt of exercise of political power, is a convenient one, and one which might well solve the difficulties which are undoubtedly present in the public discussion in Parliament of the affairs of these great corporations.

§The circumstances of the incident to which I am referring are fortunately short. Somewhere about the beginning of the year a playwright, Mr. Val Gielgud, employed, I think, on a permanent basis by the British Broadcasting Corporation, composed a play or comedy entitled Party Manners. With your Lordships' permission, I do not intend to canvass the merits of this piece of work as a play or on aesthetic grounds. No one has attempted to justify what was subsequently done on the ground that it was a bad play, and, indeed, if such were the justification, one can only say that listening would become an even more speculative and exciting occupation than it is, and unaccountable gaps would constantly be appearing in the programme of the British Broadcasting Corporation. On the contrary, for the purpose of what I am about to say, I am content to assume that the merits of the play were accurately described by the magazine Tribune, a paper which does not happen to hold the same political views as myself, and the periodical the New Statesman, which, equally, is a paper not of Conservative opinion.

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§When it was first presented on the living stage, Tribune reviewed the play as follows: Mr. Gielgud's comedy at the Empire is an entertaining political trifle from the Right Wing, scrupulously fair, carefully written, impartially anti-Labour"—

§whatever that may mean. Mr. Gielgud's, political reasoning is often naive but he knows his contemporary world, and some of his good-humoured criticisms are well placed.

§For the reviewer of Tribune, who is commonly more atrabilious, I think that may be considered to be a favourable notice of a Right Wing play, if it was a Right Wing play. The New Statesman was equally friendly, with the comment: Not Wycherley or Wilde, but very passable good fun.

§I think no one could have supposed, on reading reviews of that kind, that lurking behind the "entertaining political trifle," lurking behind the "very passable good fun," was a secret, covert attack upon our democratic beliefs. Nobody, as a matter of fact, did have that idea, because the British Broadcasting Corporation broad-cast the play earlier in the year without any complaint at all. I say "without any complaint at all," but perhaps that requires a small qualification: two anonymous writers wrote to Mr. Gielgud to say that they objected to the play's anti-Labour bias, and one complained that it referred in favourable terms to strong drink. Apart from that not a ripple was made upon the surface of public opinion.

§It was then thought suitable for television, and was in fact televised on October 1. On October 2, for the first time, a serious public political attack was made on the play. That attack, which I could quote in extenso but which I forbear to do unless requested, was based upon the complaint not that the play was an attack on our democratic institutions but that it was an attack upon the Labour Party, and it appeared in the feature column of the Daily Herald, having been written, I understand, by no less a person than the Editor of that journal. The attack concluded with these words: According to the Radio Times, Party Manners is to be repeated on Thursday. It should not be.

§My Lords, it was not. On October 3, the day following the attack in the Daily 158Herald,the Chairman of the Corporation, a noble Lord who is a member of this House, overriding what must be presumed to be the decision of the Director-General and, so far as one can ascertain, without consulting his colleagues as a body, thought fit to give instructions that the repeat performance was not to be given.

§I must say, in passing, without taking too tragic a view of the matter, that if the noble Lord the Chairman of the Board of Governors had desired to illustrate the theme of the play, instead of to contradict it, he could have hardly done so more aptly. If Mr. Val Gielgud were now to rewrite the play in such terms as to portray a member of the Labour Party, newly converted to the creed, appointed to a public board, not now an atomic board but the British Broadcasting Corporation, who suppresses a document, not now a report on atomic energy but a popular

comedy, not on the ground that it is intrinsically immoral or obscene but in the face of a violent attack, not now from the Cabinet (as in the existing version of the play) but from the official organ of the Labour Party, and on the ground that it might bring his Party into ridicule, I can only say that the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, would have only himself to blame. If he was really seeking to disprove the innuendo—if there was any, which I hardly think—he was going about his business in rather a curious manner. But there was the fact. We now know a little more about it.

§In the court of Haroun el Raschid, the Caliph of Baghdad, there was once a court poet or jester called Abu Nuas, who established his reputation by responding successfully to the Sultan who asked him to produce the example of a crime which was equalled and surpassed in its iniquity by the explanation subsequently given. The original incident was, I think, ridiculous, but sufficiently a trifle not to have attracted your Lordships' attention. Subsequently the noble Lord, the Chair-man of the Board of Governors of the B.B.C., put forward an explanation which renders it rather more serious as an event. If he had simply said not "Non semper arcum tendit Apollo," but "I made a mistake," no one would have thought much the worse of it; but he sought to justify what he had done, and he159left us to suppose that he would do it again.

§The explanation which he gave is sufficiently remarkable for me to quote it in extenso, since it is quite short. This explanation, which was broadcast, I think, on all programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation, and was extensively published in the Press on the morning of October 12, more than a week after the event, was as follows: In view of the public concern which has arisen as to the reasons for not repeating the television play Party Manners, I feel it desirable to make a personal statement. The Governors of the B.B.C. are appointed as a cross-section of the British public, and to them is entrusted by Parliament full responsibility to determine what shall and what shall not be broadcast. It is the prime duty of the Governors to ensure that the B.B.C. shall be impartial in all matters of political controversy. But this does not mean that it should be impartial on subjects about which the great mass of opinion in this country is agreed. Foremost among such subjects is the need to uphold

democracy. On Saturday, September 30, I read the script of the sound broadcast of Party Manners because a colleague had drawn my attention to the fact that the play was to be televised. I was much disturbed. Although admittedly a comedy, part of the play turned upon the apparent willingness of a British Cabinet, in order to win a General Election, to imperil national security by releasing the secret of the atomic bomb. I felt such a play capable of being misunderstood, and it seemed to me that if that came about it could not be in the public interest. After a week-end of misgiving and discussion I gave instructions that the play should not be repeated. From beginning to end neither I nor any other Governor, nor anyone on the staff of the B.B.C., has received any representations or pressure, direct or indirect from any member of the Government, or indeed from any-one outside the Corporation.

§Your Lordships will no doubt receive the last assurance with pleasure, but it is perhaps not quite good enough to be told that pressure was brought by a single unnamed colleague—and so far we have not been told who that colleague was— when one realises, as one does, that the instructions were given on the day following a public attack in the official organ of the Labour Party. I do not know whether or not the noble Lord had read the attack in the Daily Herald. If he had sent for the script, it was somebody's duty to bring the attack in the Daily Herald to his notice. If they did not 160they were seriously lacking in the obvious duty of any public relations organisation.

§As a late Member of Your Lordships' House once said, it is important not merely that justice should be done but that justice should be seen to be done. Here we have a person in almost a quasi-judicial position, a trustee for the public, whose duty of impartiality he proclaims in his explanation, apparently being seen to give way to a Party attack in the news-paper of the Party of which he is a member. I should have hoped that he would think it right on this occasion to explain whether he did or did not see this attack, and if he did not how he came to miss it. But that is only the fringe of the matter. No one doubts the constitutional position of the Board of Governors of the B.B.C. The fact that they possess legal power does not render them immune from criticism in the exercise of it. One must say, with a certain measure of surprise, that the fact that power is given to the

Board of Governors does not necessarily mean that the Chairman of the Board of Governors is entitled to exercise that power without previously consulting his colleagues. One, of course, must admit that occasions of great urgency may arise upon which the chairman of a governing body is bound, and is entitled, to act with-out consulting his colleagues. But surely he should not do so in controversial matters unless he is very sure of his ground or unless the urgency is very great —not, certainly, in such a matter as the repeat performance of a play which has appeared in public on the stage, which has once been broadcast and has been televised already.

§Surely, too, when he has felt it his duty so to act, his very first business is to go to his colleagues and to say: "I have so acted. I know it is controversial. Will you please endorse by ratification what I have done." Did that happen? I think we are entitled to know what was the attitude of the Board of Governors and not simply of the Chairman of the Board in relation to this matter. What is the meaning of the explanation put out by the noble Lord in the face of the silence of the body constitutionally entrusted by Parliament? Why are we to be denied, apparently, an opportunity of hearing the noble Lord at any rate expound the views of his colleagues? What is the meaning of this self-styled upholder of democracy 161proclaiming: "L'état c'est moi"—"the Board of Governors, that is me," a principle which has had its distinguished adherents in the past but hardly among the upholders of democracy.

§There is a functionary in the B.B.C. known as the Director-General. I am glad 10 see that the noble Lord, Lord Reith, is in his place. Perhaps he will enlighten the House still further as to this functionary. We know that Lord Reith has the universal confidence of both sides of the House. Perhaps he will tell us how he would have reacted if he had been overridden, not by the Board of Governors but by the Chairman of the Board of Governors, without consulting his colleagues, about a matter singularly within the noble Lord's own province. Would he have taken it lying down? Would he have borne the insult patiently? I have heard it remarked that Sir William Haley tendered his resignation. I wonder whether he did. and whether we shall be told whether he did or not. At any rate, I think we have the right to know why it is that the noble Lord, Lord Simon of

Wythenshawe, thought it proper to act as he did without consulting his colleagues, and publicly to override the decision of his Director-General.

§Then we come to the substance of this explanation—if it be an explanation. Up-holding democracy! What is this up-holding of democracy? Your Lordships will, I am sure, be anxious that the stage and all our institutions should uphold the institution of holy matrimony. But are we for that reason to ban every question-able joke in every bedroom comedy on the stage? We are all, I know, anxious to uphold sobriety. But must we then exile Sir John Falstaff for ever from the boards? We all wish to maintain the administration of justice. But the satire on Justice Shallow might well be included in the index expurgatorius of the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, as a bitter satire on the great unpaid judiciary of this country, a satire which has lost none of its sting since that poaching escapade some four centuries ago. What is this argument in favour of suppression based on the alleged necessity to uphold democracy other than the argument in favour of totalitarianism wherever it is found?

§We are mourning to-day the loss of a 162great writer, the late Mr. George Bernard Shaw. I suggest that a more fitting tribute could scarcely be paid to his memory than that some of his plays should be broadcast and televised. They might get by the Director-General of the B.B.C, but would they circumvent the censorship of the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe? What about The Apple Cart? That play, as I understand it, contains not a lighthearted attack but a deliberate and well-thought-out attack, buttressed by a most magnificent preface, upon the whole Constitution of our country, bringing a suppositious British monarch on the stage and making him indulge, I believe, in slap and tickle with a female Chancellor of the Exchequer. I am afraid we must say goodbye to Mr. George Bernard Shaw on the wireless, together with Shakespeare and Sir John Falstaff. Then why not a little light musical comedy? Being a person of low tastes, I rather enjoy Gilbert and Sullivan. But what are we to say about Iolanthe —or, rather, what would Lord Simon of Wythenshawe say about Iolanthe? I for-bear to say in this sacred place what is done in that play with your Lordships' House. At any rate, it will be remembered that the chorus was composed of supposed members of your Lordships' House, coroneted and

invested with all the regalia of chivalry, dancing about the stage. There was also a very rude song about the House of Peers, sung by a suppositious peer named Mount Ararat. Throughout the Victorian era, your Lord-ships' House, whatever else might be said, certainly did "nothing in particular" about Gilbert and Sullivan except to sit in the stalls and applaud very loudly.

§How did another place fare in Iolanthe? There was a certain Private Willis, who sang a song outside Big Ben, if I am not mistaken, and the song contained the lines: When in that House M.P's. divide If they've a brain and cerebellum, too. They've got to leave that brain outside And vote just as their leaders tell 'em to. Of course, we have progressed far be-yond that now. For government by the majority we have substituted government by ambulance. The question is not who has the majority of seats, or whose arguments are considered to prevail, but who can be squeezed though the Division Lobbies on a stretcher. I do not know whether that would be a matter which 163Lord Simon of Wythenshawe would de-scribe as upholding democracy. What about the great officials of State? The Prime Minister in that play was one Strephon, who, apart from a most un-desirable affair with a shepherdess, actually doubled his part as first Minister of State with that of Leader of the Opposition.

§I scarcely like to remind your Lordships of what was said about the Lord Chancellor. He openly proclaimed his desire to marry his Wards of Court, thereby committing himself for open contempt of his own authority. If we get into deep waters in which we have to treat all that happens in lighthearted comedy with portentous solemnity, there is absolutely no end to the folly which great officials may commit.

§I have treated this matter light-heartedly, not because I desire any flippancy or spirit of levity to creep into your Lordships' debates, but because I was anxious to avoid the very fault into which the noble Lord himself fell: that of treating tragically what, after all, is fundamentally only a comedy of manners. There is only one way of upholding democracy—if that be, as I believe, the aim of the noble Lord—and that is by being democratic. You do not do that by going behind your colleagues' backs. You do not do that by yielding to newspaper pressure. You do not do it by overriding your trusted subordinates. Above all, you do not do it

by a humourless sensitivity to criticism. If I may venture a definition, democracy means something a little more than a legal framework, perhaps a little more than the rule of the majority. It consists just as much in respect for the rights and opinions of others, even though they be a minority, as it does in this legal framework. It consists, above all things, in a sense of humour, something which is quite removed from levity, facetiousness or frivolity; it is the ability to smile when less civilised people reach for their six-shooters, and involves a sense of criticism which enables persons in great places to see when they are beginning to become ridiculous.

§If I may venture one last remark of perhaps a more controversial kind, I would say, with respect, that of late years this somewhat humourless sensitivity to criticism is a trait not altogether un-characteristic of the great political move- 164ment to which the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, has recently pro-claimed himself a convert. If I may say so with humility, it is a trait of which they would be well to rid themselves, because it is a trait which is not calculated either to enhance their own dignity or embellish the traditions and public life of a free people.

§3.13 p.m.

§LORD VANSITTART

My Lords, I am venturing to-day to exercise my non-Party manners, because a new disease is visibly creeping over the world. It is the danger of the charge of insufficient respect for the Party in power. That is the new lèse-majesté, and we can see it at its worst all over Eastern Europe. We certainly do not want even the smallest beginnings of it here. I went to see this play, and when I came away I said, in the phrase already used by the noble Viscount who opened this debate, "This is very passable good fun." Then, some-what to my surprise, I found I had used exactly the words employed by the New Statesman! I put that on record because it is the first time the New Statesman ever agreed with me about anything, and I should be the last to wish to add to the editor's embarrassment.

The noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, and an unknown colleague, appeared to think that this play might be subversive of

democracy. That seems to me really a great effect from so small a cause, because this neither is nor pretends to be a great political comedy. Indeed, so far as I know, after some acquaintance with the theatre, no great political comedy has ever been written in this country, or even in France; and there, for the last century, men have followed the example of Figaro and hastened to laugh at their politics for fear of being obliged to cry. In the last century Queen Victoria said: We are not amused. The progressive years rolled by and last month Marshal Tito said: We allow no jokes at our expense. He was particularly severe on a harmless satirist called Copic, although he graciously added that he would not arrest him for the present. And I understand that Mr. Gielgud is still at liberty.

Just about the same time the Daily Herald said much about the same thing in its own way, and was closely followed 165by the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe. Of course, that is only the long arm of coincidence, but the long arm does seem to be getting a bit thick. Thereafter the noble Lord, by his own account, subjected himself to some heart-searchings, which were surely unnecessary, because the play is avowedly founded on the unfounded. For example, one of the principal characters is a Peer who has turned cook-butler, and who, incidentally, steals the show with a talented caricature of the impossible. But in the Welfare State there are many Peers but few butlers. Only last week the noble Viscount, Lord Samuel, to whom I should like to give belated birthday greetings, said that 500 peers have been created in the course of this century. I can account for over four, but nothing like six or eight new butlers are created every year. Of course the absurd combination of peer-cook-butler is a manifest biological fantasy. The noble Lord, Lord Simon, then took action against which one sentence in the play should have warned him. It runs as follows: The one consistent belief held by the English is that all politicians are funny. Note that the play says "all" politicians —there is no discrimination about that. There is even a grain of truth in it, which I think I could demonstrate if I ever wrote a biography. If it comes to that, the public and politicians have equally thought that we public servants are some-times funny. We public servants have been subjected to a continual stream of satire. It would perhaps be true to say that half the people in this country think there are twice too many public servants, and I should not be altogether disposed to

quarrel with them over that. But nobody in his senses has ever thought of protecting public servants against satire. I wonder whether the noble Lord has not confused fun and satire.

Recently, I have been re-reading some of the works of Swift, and except for the immortal Gulliver, I do not find them quite so good as I found them at one time. But there are still many treasures in them, and in re-reading Swift I re-discovered the following: Satire is a sort of glass wherein the be-holders do generally discover the likeness of everybody but their own. I will add to that a little, and say that when they do discover their own like-ness, it is not satire but libel. And going 166a little further, we have this ominous school which says that ''When I make fun of you, it is satire; but when you make fun of me, it is impertinence—nay, more, it is subversive of democracy." I think probably David Low may have been wrong in thinking that there were Blimps only on the Right. The noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, and his unnamed colleague have thought that political fun may be capable of being misunderstood— those are his words. But no such solicitude has ever been extended to Peers. In the whole of this half century I can hardly recollect a single stage Peer who has not been made fun of. But do we mind? Why, no, we do not give "a tinker's cuss," if I may borrow that object for a minute. We are quite unswayed by it, I hope. Are we alive after all this satire?—as Dr. Johnson once asked. Very much alive. Having seen something of the world, I think this is the best Second Chamber in it. If Feers are so funny, what could be funnier than some of the speeches on foreign affairs in the House of Commons? That brings me to my second quotation from the play, which is: Why can't you all stop taking yourselves so damned seriously? Now I must be a little more serious for the moment, in order to drive home my point, which is an important one—namely, that if broadcasts are to be banned because they are capable of being misunderstood, then the ban must be applied on national lines and not on Party lines. I am going to offer to your Lordships some comments and some evidence in that respect. On May 2 I made a speech in this House, when the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, was present, and I reproached him with a broadcast which terminated with the reluctant conclusion that Communism might be the best thing for India. I protested against that, and pointed out that it made no sense that we should send the Foreign Secretary to Colombo to

combine measures against Communism if utterances were to proceed from the B.B.C. which apparently had the opposite effect. I said of that in this House at the time that I sincerely hoped the noble Lord would express some regret. But, on the contrary, he went away and repeated the whole performance, including that offending passage. I then wrote the noble Lord a letter of protest pointing out that this was against the national interest, 167and he replied to me that he had not felt able to eliminate the offending passage —and these are his own words— "lest it should savour of internal censorship in the B.B.C." What else have we got now? Look how we stand. If I, an independent, protest against something which I deem to be opposed to the national interest, I get nothing but a rebuff. But if the Daily Herald do it, they obtain suppression of the whole play. Is that fair or impartial?

Let me take another matter, to which I also referred in the debate on May 2. I pointed out that a professor Hyman Levy had put out a broadcast in which he preached the inevitabilty of class war. Surely that is capable of being misunderstood, and is most undesirable in our pre-sent circumstances, beset as we are with so many external perils. But there was the professor on the air again only the night before last, with his dreary stuff. If I were to take the inevitability of civil bloodshed with the same equanimity as the professor does, and if I were to return to the stage with a comedy in which the lead would be played by the Secretary of State for Class War, the noble Lord would ban me. But the Professor goes on all right. Is that fair? I do not think it is.

Take another example, of a recent broadcast by Mr. Pritt. I shall be as brief as I can about it, but I think it was an outrage. He was put on the air to deny and deride the sufferings in central and Eastern Europe. It was enough to take the heart out of those poor people. It was an outrage, as I say, to decency and humanity; and nobody but a callous heart could have done that. And it was foolish to allow it, because one day, just as much as these people need us now, we may need them. I will not enlarge on that, because it is a more fitting subject for a foreign affairs debate. However, I may have something to say about that angle on a future occasion. Mr. Pritt was allowed to do that because he demanded —I do not like the word "demanded," but he did—the right to reply to a broad-cast in which an accquaintance of mine

had taken part—a perfectly honest man who, by some miracle, had survived the application of over one hundred of these "softenings-up."Mr. Pritt's answer was virtually to call him a liar. If I had then demanded the right to give Mr. Pritt the public caning he deserved for that per-168formance, I should not have been allowed to. But Mr. Pritt got his chance. Is that impartial? Are not all those things cap-able of being misunderstood? Of course they are; and they were greatly misunderstood.

Let me pass on to another series. For a long time, under the noble Lord's direction, there was a series of broadcasts called "The Soviet Idea." The series consisted of discussions conducted mainly by Communists, or Communist sympathisers. They were largely Communist propaganda. They were capable of being misunderstood, and were misunderstood, and there were many protests. But the B.B.C. obstinately continued them. Is that right? "The Soviet Idea" was succeeded by an-other series called "The Soviet View." and this has gone on, in spite of many protests. It consists of Soviet propaganda and it is now stated to be such; but it is not riddled and eviscerated, as it should be, if it is given at all. There is every possible disadvantage, and no conceivable advantage, in giving it. Yet, although it is not only capable of being misunderstood, but is misunderstood, on and on it goes.

I will mention only one other thing as an illustration of my point—namely, the protests in the last two days from the Free Church of Scotland about the atheistic broadcasts emanating from the B.B.C. I am bound to say that I have sympathy with the Church. I myself have heard some of these broadcasts. In particular, I recall one by a young man rejoicing in the singularly inappropriate name of Dr. Comfort, who seemed bent upon depriving men of such consolation as they could derive from their faith. I do not understand why these things are done. What part of the business of the B.B.C. is that? Is not the world growing hard enough and desperate enough fast enough? But the answer to criticisms—I have had it myself—is that broadcasts of this sort do no harm because they are absorbed only by highly intelligent people. That seems to me to be a most unsafe assumption. As a matter of fact, if it comes to that, about half of the most foolish people I have met in my life have been highbrows. Why make them more foolish still?

I have said enough to show that, although this matter is in itself a trivial 169one, it has deep and undesirable implications. Its cause is an over-sensitive self-righteousness. Why should the noble Lord assume that he and his friends, or anybody else's friends, must always appear so visibly virtuous as to be immune from a laughing "dig in the ribs "? That state of mind was well reflected in a refrain I heard over fifty years ago—and since the noble Viscount who opened this debate has referred to musical comedy, I have no hesitation in quoting it. It comes from as far back as the The Belle of New York, and perhaps some of your Lord-ships remember it. It runs as follows: Our virtues continue to strike us As qualities magnificent to see; Though, of course, you can never be like us. Be as like us as you are able to be.If your Lordships hold that notion up to the light for another facet you will see that in a way it reflects the idea of the Minister of Health, that because a Press may be dissident it must be prostituted. I have had any amount of abuse and criticism from the Press, but it would never occur to me to complain about it. And, if it comes to that, I have had packets of abuse from the Tribune, some of it going beyond what I should have thought to be the decencies of English journalism. But I would never for a moment suggest that the Tribune is prostituted. I would rather meet the editors with the reply of Oscar Wilde: Ah! don't say you agree with me. When people agree with me I always feel I must be wrong. I feel that that is a much more fitting attitude.

Finally, if we are allowing all this sedition at Sheffield, and if we preen ourselves on our tolerance for so doing, surely we can be more tolerant of a little fun, even of a little mockery, and even of deep disagreement among ourselves. It is in that spirit that I have spoken to-day. If this episode serves to that end, then in the long run it may have done more good than harm. But if we are going to have any more of this nonsense about democracy being subverted by squibs, the prostituted Press and all the rest of it, then we shall have to get together to defend our liberties a good deal more vigorously still.

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§3.31 p.m.

LORD STRABOLGI

My Lords, I am also glad to congratulate the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, on a very interesting and able maiden speech, full of wit and pretty well to the point. I am sure that your Lordships will agree with me when I say that he is a great asset to this House, and I hope we shall be hearing him again. I lad some sympathy with the noble Viscount when he found himself compelled by the laws of heredity to leave the House of Commons and come to your Lordships' House. I suffered in the same way myself. But let me inform him that as time goes on he will find that there are some compensations in this House—he will no doubt find that at the time of the General Election. He will also find that one of the advantages of the House of Lords is that any member can put down any Motion, on any subject, for any day when the House is sitting, and he can get a place and a hearing for it. I am not sure that he would have been able to find an occasion in the other place to make the speech we so enjoyed this afternoon. Certainly it would have been necessary to put down a specific Motion, and a Private Member would not have had a chance to bring one forward. Here any-noble Lord has the chance, and perhaps we are one of the last strongholds of the democracy which I presume he wants to uphold.

Now with regard to one matter which caused the noble Viscount pain, I can give him some comfort. He was afraid that my noble friend Lord Simon of Wythenshawe would not be able to speak in this debate. I understand that my noble friend has been given permission to speak—yes, permission. I am coming to that in a moment, and if the noble Viscount, Lord Swinion, will permit me, I think he will find that I have something to say about that. My noble friend has been given permission to speak and is going to speak. I am sure that your Lordships will give him a most attentive hearing, and I am glad that he is here in person in this debate and able to take part in it. I said, "given permission to speak," because this gives me an opportunity of raising a matter to which I have referred before in your Lordships' House, and which I have discussed with my noble friend the Leader of the House and my other colleagues here. It is this: 171that I think the rule that heads and chair-men and titular chiefs of public corporations should not be allowed to take part in debates on their own subject in this House is—I will not say absurd, but in-applicable. In this particular case it really would have been curious if my noble friend Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, while able

to give interviews to the Press, while able to broadcast even, had not been allowed to defend himself— and he has been attacked— and to put in your Lordships' House the point of view that he holds.

I am very glad that this precedent—if I may so call it—has been created, and I hope that it will apply to other heads of corporations. If they are members of your Lordships' House, and if they are heads of corporations, it is surely to everyone's advantage that we should hear their intimate and specialised knowledge. Therefore, when we come to discuss broadcasting policy as a whole—when my noble friend Lord Vansittart will be much more in order than he was this afternoon; he rather strayed to broadcasting policy as a whole—when, as a result of the publication of the Report of the Beveridge Committee now sitting, we discuss broad policy, I hope that we shall have the benefit of the views not only of my noble friend Lord Simon but also of my noble friend Lord Reith. I hope the fact that Lord Reith has taken over a very important post as head of another corporation, as announced in to-day's papers, will not silence him on matters of which he has intimate knowledge and upon which your Lordships' House would like to hear him.

With regard to the main attack of the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, I am now going to break a lance on behalf of my noble friend Lord Simon of Wythenshawe. I think he was dead right in what he did. I think he was completely right and completely justified, and I shall explain, as briefly as I can, why. My only regret is that his attention was not drawn to this ridiculous and pernicious play earlier. The noble Viscount sought to draw a parallel between this play Party Manners, and The Apple Cart, that great masterpiece of that giant amongst play-wrights, Bernard Shaw. I hope he was not drawing any comparison. I have seen The Apple Cart many times and, 172indeed, as often as I could. I have also read it many times, and it is a marvellous example of Shaw's undoubted genius. But note the difference. The Apple Cart made fun, or satire if you like, of individuals. If I may remind the noble Viscount, it was not the Lady Chancellor of the Exchequer, but the First Lady of the Admiralty—

§VISCOUNT HAILSHAM

I accept the correction.

LORD STRABOLGI

—who used her charm on the King. The tilts, the holding up to ridicule and amusement, were at the individual and the character of the individual, and not at the institution. It was not an attack upon the institution of monarchy, nor on the institution of constitutional monarch; and it was not an attack upon the Parliamentary system as such—I am speaking now of The Apple Cart, and I defy anyone who knows the play and has had the great pleasure of seeing or reading it, to disagree with me. It makes fun of the individual and the character of the individual. That was the genius of Shaw. It did not make ridiculous any of the institutions I have mentioned.

Now what does this play Party Manners do? I did not hear it broadcast, I am glad to say, but when the controversy arose I was lucky enough to find it reproduced in the Evening Standard, and I was therefore able to read it. I did not get the whole script, but I understand that a substantial part of the play was reproduced. It is a violent attack, if you like by ridicule and satire, on the institution of democracy, and not on the individual. It is not on the personalities, as in the Shaw plays—because The Apple Cart is not the only play in which Shaw touches upon politics—but on the very essence and theory of democracy itself, and Parliamentary democracy in particular. That being the case, I am astonished that my noble friend Lord Vansittart, who is such an upholder of democracy, and who is so justly alarmed at attempts to undermine it all over the world, took the line he did.

§LORD VANSITTART

May I ask the noble Lord whether, as well as reading it, he has seen the play?

LORD STRABOLGI

No.

§LORD VANSITTART

I have seen it and not read it, and I think the noble 173Lord might have obtained a different impression if he had actually seen the play being performed. It is extremely light-hearted.

LORD STRABOLGI

I am aware of the noble Lord's great knowledge of the arts and the theatre, and there may be some-thing in what he says. I did say that I was glad I had not heard it: I have certainly not seen it and have no intention of seeing it. I have read the play itself and it is a direct and violent—if I may use that word—attack on the whole conception of Parliamentary democracy. The noble Lord, Lord Vansittart, has seen the play and formed a different impression but that is certainly the impression which I formed. If I formed that impression from the beginning—and, after all. I have been a Member of the other House, and, therefore, I suppose I am one of the common low denominators of the public—other people will surely form the same impression. That being the case, I think my noble friend Lord Simon of Wythenshawe was well justified in saying that this was not a suitable play to be broadcast at this time. I only regret that action was not taken earlier, that it was ever broadcast or televised the first time.

Furthermore, I can see very little merit in the play, quite apart from this objectionable and poisonous feature of it. I do not think it is witty—this is, of course, a matter of opinion. To be quite frank, I thought it infernally dull. Certainly it had no artistic merits to cause any swaying of the balance in its favour, when my noble friend had to take a rather closely reasoned decision. Unfortunately, action was not taken earlier, and the play has had a terrific advertisement. That was only to be expected. If the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, and I could have got together with the playwright, and if we were unscrupulous people, as all politicians in the play are made out to be, we could have made a very lucrative bar-gain amongst us.

§VISCOUNT HAILSHAM

I think the noble Lord will realise that we should have had to have the complicity also of the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythen-shawe, because he is the one who has really given the play a boost.

LORD STRABOLGI

Yes. As I say, the play has had a tremendous advertisement. I think that when people see it they will come to the same conclusion that I have. I think that my noble friend was entirely justified, and I am certain that the case he will make out will add still greater weight to that opinion.

§3.42 p.m.

§LORD BRABAZON OF TARA

My, Lords, your Lordships know perfectly well that I stand hero only as a matter of convenience and in no way representing the official views of the Opposition. I should like to start by saying what a pleasure it was to hear the speech of the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, to-day. He has a great reputation and I was just a little nervous at one moment lest he should take the whole of this subject too seriously. However, he never fell into that trap, and we have listened to a most delightful speech. I hope we shall hear from him often in the future.

Some time ago, I put down a Motion on television and the B.B.C. Here to-day we have had another debate, or at any rate the start of one, of great interest. I must say I am surprised that the noble Lord, Lord Beveridge, who is about to produce an enormous tome on how to re-organise the whole of the B.B.C. and the television service in this country should not have come and listened to the wise words which fall from noble Lords on both sides of the House. The Report will be very lacking in something if the man responsible for that particular document does not come to listen here.

I may say I am one of the few people who happened to see the broadcast of this play. As your Lordships know, broad-casts on a Sunday evening start at the most inconvenient hour of half-past-eight, just when we are tackling our weekly ration. I happened to turn on the television. I often turn on the television, and it is turned off very quickly by my wife—that is one of those domestic things which I am sure happen in many households. But this time I insisted that it should go on, and for one reason: it was that I noticed that a prominent Labour man's son had turned

Conservative. That was right up my street, be-cause I support the theory very strongly that there is an inversion of opinion in young people if you over-drive propaganda. I say to my friends on these 175Benches that, if they try to push their children into the same views that they themselves hold, in a few years, when they have passed by, this House will be over-flowing with Socialists—a very grim thought! The Jesuits say: "Give me the child till he is seven years old, and you can have him for the rest of his life." That may be all right in Latin countries, but I believe that in this country when a man gets round about twenty years of age he wants to think for himself. He is going to form his opinion on his own judgment, and he will be very prejudiced if he is, so to speak, dictated at and assailed with propaganda by his superiors. Here I give a very useful hint to the noble Lord, Lord Woolton: if he can possibly get intellectual Socialists (although the term is a contradiction) to be dons at the universities, every single undergraduate will be a Tory. Of course, the same is true of the noble Lords opposite. If they could get dons rather like the noble Viscount, Lord Swinton, they would produce not only Socialists but also, probably, Communists.

I cannot help saying that I enjoyed this play very much. I came away from it, having had a good laugh, with no impression that it was a serious attack upon the Labour Party. After all, there was a scoundrel in the play and he was a member of the Labour Party; but there was a very good "cove," a patriotic, decent citizen who gave up the whole of his life because he thought he was doing right, and he was a Labour man as well. You cannot attach blame to the Labour Party just because they have one man who is not perfect. There is a tradition, I know, that you should not hit a man when he is down. I have never been persuaded that the Labour Party was so down as all that. I think they can still stand up to a little knocking about. I deplore the fact that we are getting over-sensitive. After all. what is public life? Why are we, who have been in another place and in public life, really much more companion-able than other people, who are small frogs in a little pond? It is because we have been attacked and abused and have done the very same thing ourselves. We are used to taking knocks and thus we become much more reasonable human-beings. I do not think that the banning of this play did any good at all to the Labour Party. What it has done is to 176boost the play and make the whole thing rather ridiculous. On the whole, I

regard the Chairman of the Governors rather as I look upon the members of the Front Bench opposite—I like them. I think they are splendid fellows. I would not mind going round the world with them: which is the highest compliment they could have. But I say of them, as was said by the great Bishop Creighton—I put it in the plural: They are as good as gold and fit for Heaven—but of no earthly use.

§3.49 p.m.

§LORD CALVERLEY

My Lords, may I intervene in this debate for two reasons? The first reason is that I wish to be permitted to congratulate a very old friend of mine, the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, with whom I agree on almost everything except politics. That is the first reason why I test your Lordships' patience. The second reason is that I wish to speak as a very ordinary listener of the B.B.C. I listen to almost every-thing, and on June 12, I think it was, I saw in my newspaper (not the Radio Times) that something was to be broad-cast about Party manners. I at once switched on because I really thought I was going to be able to improve my own party manners, so that I could associate with your Lordships in a much better way than I do at present. I found I had been led up the garden, and was listening to a play called Party Manners. I was amused at it. Speaking from memory, I think there was a reference in it to the effect that every politician has his price.

§VISCOUNT SWINTON

That was not very original.

§LORD CALVERLEY

I quite agree; but if it is not original, it is also untrue of the Party politicians I have mixed with. The more I listened to this play on the Home Service programme, the more pronounced was my conclusion that it was for the proletariat, not for Lord Vansittart. I simply had a good laugh and I took the advice offered, I believe by the noble Earl who figures in the play, the mythical Lord Eltham—I wish to emphasise "Eltham." He was an old Etonian who, so far as I remember, took occupation as a butler, thereby showing the great virtues of Eton, in that a man can adapt

himself and become a useful member of society in whatsoever position 177he is placed. In good English, the Earl of Eltham said something like this: "I wish you could learn to laugh at your-self. Do not take yourself too seriously." Sometimes I think we do tend to take ourselves too seriously, and are all the worse for it.

But may I now return to the subject of the debate? The play was broad-cast on June 12. It was subsequently put on for the 250,000 people who have television licences, and for whom the proletariat pay £1,700,000 to meet the deficit on television—which shows that the proletariat are "suckers." The editor of the Daily Herald evidently saw it on television, and then did his duty. After all, he is the Horatio holding the editorial bridge against a horde of editors from every other Party, especially the Daily Worker, the Daily Express and other newspapers that I will not mention. Being on our side, the editor of the?Daily Herald thought he had a duty to perform, and having the feeling that he was a super Mrs. Caudle he ventured to write a leader. That was democracy: he had a right to do it. If the Executive of the Labour Party or a member of the present Cabinet had asked him to do it. that would have been undue interference with the editor of the Daily Herald. But I am certain that that editor did what he did from a sense of public duty, as he had a right to do. However, the sequel was that after the first television programme this play was banned, and was therefore boosted in every other news-paper; and the result will be to bring in some royalties to the writer of this third-rate play.

Now the play was withdrawn. By whom? I think that was a mistake. The Director-General of the Corporation is a Yorkshireman and was born in part of the parish where I live, and if the Governors of the B.B.C. have interfered with him I should say it was his duty to ask for his cards. It would then have been the. duty of whoever could overrule that request to say, "We refuse to give you your cards." My own personal opinion is that it was an interference, even it the play was only to be televised, and I trust that we shall have from the Lord Chancellor, when he comes to reply, an explanation of this interference.

I want to conclude by stating that I 178could not understand the speech of Lord Vansittart, except that he appears to want censors galore to censor everything that he himself does not like. We

people of the Left who listen to the B.B.C. are used to being spoken of in uncomplimentary terms; but, as Lord Brabazon of Tara has said, it is all for our good, and that is why the Labour Party makes progress.

§LORD VANSITTART

Of course I never said anything of that sort at all. If bans are to be applied they must be applied on national lines and not on Party lines.

§LORD CALVERLEY

But national lines are Vansittart lines

§LORD VANSITTART

I am very flattered to hear that remark. It has never been made before. The noble Lord identifies the nation with me.

§LORD CALVERLEY

Well, I wish Lord Vansittart no harm in ploughing his lonely furrow. I hope that the B.B.C., the Director-General, or anybody else who has anything to do with the matter, will do the right thing, and will allow perfect liberty to people to go on abusing or praising us. There is something remiss in the administration of the B.B.C. I do not know the Governors—I know only the names of one or two of them. It takes them from June to September to find out that this is a naughty play in the sense that it is poking fun at certain people of a certain Party. What are these Governors doing? There should be an allocation of duty. The Chairman should be compelled to listen to the Children's Hour, and the other Governors should take their turn in listening to the fifth-rate comedians that we have to listen to. The duty should be allocated. I do not want the Chairman of the Governors to have a nervous breakdown; I want him to have a change-over, so that he may listen in to the Third Programme. It would appear that the Governors of the B.B.C. were asleep from June 12 until September, and then suddenly discovered that there was something very funny and very foolish being broadcast.

I want to congratulate my friend on his forbearance in this debate. I believe he has done good in allowing us to ventilate something, because we all have a grouse with the B.B.C. I could improve it if only I could get the jot, but there are no jobs for boys like me. Therefore let the 179B.B.C. give us real comedy. Let us have some new jokes and let us have some better football broadcasts. But, for good-ness sake, do not give a man an advertisement—the finest advertisement he could possibly have—without charging him even a penny. There the B.B.C. have been "led up the garden." If any cards are going to be given and any sacking is going to be done, I hope it will be in relation not to that good Yorkshireman from Bramley, Sir William Haley, but to some of the Governors of the B.B.C.

§4.2 p.m.

LORD NOEL-BUXTON

I should like to congratulate the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, on his brilliant and interesting speech, which I think will serve a very useful purpose, and I congratulate him on raising this particular subject. I hope we shall hear him often in this House. I am hesitant to speak in this debate, because it has been conducted on such a high level. My first excuse for addressing your Lordships at all on this subject is that I myself spent two years on the staff of the B.B.C, and I do regard this as a very important issue. I do not agree, in the first place, that the play itself is un-important. I saw it last night; I have never seen it on television, because television has not reached me yet, and personally I do not wish television to reach me: I think sound radio is a more imaginative medium, but that is neither here nor there.

It is interesting that the smallest audience which a broadcast could reach should have attracted so very much attention. Personally, I think the play is of interest. It is serious and hard-hitting, funny and serious, all at the same time; and I think it is to be welcomed as such. It seems to me to be important, looking to the future, to see that such mistakes as have been made should not be made again. Where it seems to me to have been a mistake is that it appears in isolation. Why cannot we have a lot of this hard-hitting drama—and drama is a weapon— on the other side too? Let somebody else have the chance to write as good a

play. Val Gielgud understands the times, and I think that the play was brilliantly acted and that we should have more like it. I can well understand how it could cause offence, but it is ridiculous that it should 180have given rise to that anxious week end of Lord Simon's.

Surely what is needed is that the whole policy consideration side of the B.B.C. should be considerably overhauled; as other noble Lords have said, this matter should have come to the attention of the B.B.C. very much earlier. As your Lord-ships know, and as has already been said, to-day, the play was sent out on sound radio in, I believe, June, and attracted very little attention. There is, of course, the question of the dearth of good plays, and I think that if, in terms of sound broadcasting, the B.B.C have to fill fifty-two weeks of the year, it was a good competitor. The point I want to make is that, seeing that the play had gone out on sound radio, and once on television, it was a wrongful interference with the B.B.C.'s own professional business that it should be stopped on the Thursday. I do not think it has anything very much to do with the Daily Herald or the newspapers. I am quite sure that Lord Simon of Wythen-shawe considered this matter very seriously, and I can understand it, but I feel that at that stage it placed Sir William Haley in a difficult position, and was therefore a bad thing.

For the future, I think the sort of thing we want to know is: who considers a play like Mr. Val Gielgud's television play from the policy point of view, apart from Mr. Gielgud himself—I believe he is in charge of television drama. If he had any doubts in his mind as to whether this was a good play, to be sent out without any balancing play making an attack on Conservatism, he should, I think, have brought it forward to be discussed, and the matter should have been raised with the Director-General and brought out into the open. I think we have treated this matter a little too much in terms of personalities and a little too much retrospectively. My Lords, radio is an acute, narrow focus, and this issue arises more acutely when there is only one authority responsible for broadcasting. For that reason I think that this whole episode should act as a very healthy lesson in discussing and considering for the future how not to cause too much offence. I think it is important that we should have that sort of play on television. It is interesting and it is lively. As I have said,

I personally enjoyed it. I think that Mr. Val Gielgud really deserves that such 181a play should get a little extra advertisement, though. I admit, in rather an un-fortunate circumstance.

It is not, in my view, a question to be dismissed by saying: "Why should we take ourselves so seriously? It is just a little bit of fun." Humour is often one of the most serious things in life, and it certainly is very funny, as is the under-lying seriousness. I cannot quote it accurately, but I seem to recall a sentence in one of Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays, to the effect that life no more ceases to be serious when people laugh than it ceases to be funny when people cry. And I believe there is in our lives this interesting mingling between the humorous and the serious. I can therefore well understand the trouble that this play has caused, and I repeat that to me it is particularly interesting that the trouble should have blown up over the smallest audience on the air.

§LORD CALVERLEY

They have a better sense of humour.

LORD NOEL-BUXTON

When I was in the B.B.C. I was never involved as a producer in any programme heard in this country. I was responsible, partly, for a North-American audience and the task was both more difficult and more easy be-cause we had more scope; we did not have to balance up immediate audiences in our own country, but we had less response. Sometimes, indeed, we should have been glad of more, not less, response. I have no doubt that Lord Simon of Wythenshawe's action was a personal action, and was not decided upon between him and the other Governors, although that is not clear in my mind. I think it was to be considered a personal action, but it was not the sort of personal action that was right. Possibly Lord Simon of Wythenshawe underestimated the importance of the decision he made. My Lords, that is all I wish to say, except to emphasise what a very difficult situation any-body concerned in any way with radio as such—with its acute and narrow focus —is in.

§4.10 p.m.

§THE LORD CHANCELLOR

My Lords, I have thoroughly enjoyed this debate. I enjoyed very much the speech of Lord Hailsham, which I thought was illumined with real wit. I enjoyed very much, too, the speech of Lord Brabazon 182of Tara, with which I entirely agree. So far as Lord Hailsham was concerned, I could not help thinking that he was enjoying himself as much as we all were; and there was no need for him to pray in aid his father's memory, so dear to us all in this House as it is, because his own performance was so outstanding. We shall hear him very often, I hope. He will certainly enliven our debates: we shall gel: more cut-and-thrust—a thing which debates in our House sometimes lack. Whatever the House of Commons have lost—and they have lost a great deal —we, at any rate, are great gainers.

There is underlying this matter one important and fundamental point, and if I make a very dull speech in contrast to those that have been made, your Lord-ships will forgive me, for I must stress that point. It is the question of the proper relationship between the B.B.C., the Government, and Parliament, on matters of day-to-day management, particularly, programmes. Lord Hailsham thought that this was the right forum in which to discuss these matters. I venture to say that I differ from him upon that. I think that ever since the B.B.C. has been established there is one thing which no one has questioned, and that is the undesirability of Government or Parliament interference with B.B.C. programmes. I hope that nothing we do or say here will in any way compromise the complete independence of the Governors of the B.B.C. in that respect. If I may remind your Lordships, that was the view of the Craw-ford Committee and it was endorsed by the Ullswater Committee. Incidentally, Mr. Clement Davies was a member of the latter Committee.

So far as the present Government are concerned, we prepared a White Paper in July, 1946, in which we set out broad-casting policy. It was discussed and approved by the House of Commons, and no one questioned the wisdom of the policy which we there enunciated—that the Corporation should be absolutely free and uncontrolled to do and to put on whatever they thought best. I hope, there-fore, that the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, will forgive me if I show very considerable discretion in following him

with regard to some of the matters which he has raised. If we ever reach the position where the Government accept any183responsibility for accounting to Parliament on the Corporation's decisions on matters of programming, we shall have gone a long way in the direction of Ministerial control of broadcasting. It would be most undesirable that, before the Corporation made up their minds in a particular case, they should have to ask themselves whether what they were doing would commend itself to the Minister who would have to speak for them in Parliament. It would not be long before they were driven to consult Ministers before-hand. It is also undesirable that, like Government Departments, they should always have to be considering whether a particular decision is or is not likely to be criticised in Parliament. Could any-thing be more fatal to the enterprise and initiative which the Crawford Committee were so rightly anxious to encourage?

Therefore, on the merits of the Party Manners incident, the Government have no collective view. Ministers, like other people, are entitled to their own opinions, and it is possible that, like other people, they may differ substantially from each other—I do not know. But that is nobody's business except their own. If I cannot state a Government view, it is because, for the reasons we have given, I do not think that there should be any such thing as a Government view upon this. On the facts, and in the circum-stances, there is nothing that I can add to those facts which have already been made public. Of course, I accept fully the account of what has happened which has already been given to the public by Lord Simon of Wythenshawe. So that there may be no misunderstanding on an aspect of the matter, which, however, does affect the Government, I should like to repeat that, as the Postmaster-General said in his letter to Mr. Clement Davies, which was published in the Press—and no one has suggested the contrary—there was no pressure upon Lord Simon of Wythenshawe from any Governmental quarter whatever before he took his decision to cancel the second television broad-cast of Party Manners.

I hope that the wide public interest which has been shown in this incident, and the strong and varied views which have been so happily expressed, are not sufficient reasons for departing from the principles of great importance which were 184laid down by

the Crawford and Ullswater Committees and endorsed by Parliament before the present Charter came into operation in 1947. I must add this. As the House knows, the future organisation of British broadcasting services has been the subject of a thorough inquiry by Lord Beveridge and his Committee. It may be that that Committee are in the best position to judge the performance of the Corporation, as exemplified not by particular incidents but by its record over the years, and I would suggest that any changes in the position should plainly await the Report of that Committee.

I want to add, before I come to express some views of my own, one further point about the position of Lord Simon of Wythenshawe. He is present, and, as a Peer of Parliament, he is, of course, en-titled to take any part in the debate that he may feel inclined to take. There is no question of his being allowed or not being allowed to do so. He is a Peer of Parliament and he must use his own discretion. But I do think that the chair-men of these public corporations are placed in a very difficult position, so difficult that it merits the consideration of all Parties. So far as there is responsibility to Parliament for what is or what is not produced by the B.B.C., it must plainly be exercised by a Minister. It is an accident that the Chairman of the Governors of the B.B.C. is at present a Peer, and it would be anomalous that, because of that accident, the House of Lords could exercise direct control over the B.B.C., through its Chairman, while the House of Commons could not do so. If it is right that the B.B.C. should be directly account-able to Parliament, some Minister should assume responsibility. Consequently, with regard to any speech which the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe may think of making—and I think that this is plainly a matter on which he and the House will receive, and will be grateful to receive, guidance from the noble Viscount the Leader of the House—I feel that he is in the very awkward position that he may, by accounting to this House, set up a principle of direct accountability to Parliament where that is plainly not the proper principle at all.

So much for that. Having said all those things, having said that there is no Governmental view, may I trespass upon your Lordships' time for a few moments, 185speaking entirely for myself and representing no one but myself, to express a few conclusions to which I have come upon the whole matter? First of

all, I am inclined to think we can take this matter too seriously. I will not say it is a storm in a teacup, but it is rather like one. If the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, made a mistake in this respect on this occasion, your Lordships may be quite certain that the noble Lord will never make the same mistake again, and no doubt, therefore, something has been gained by ventilating the whole matter. As I was asked to speak on this question I thought I ought to read the play.

§LORD CALVERLEY

Hard lines!

§THE LORD CHANCELLOR

It was hard lines. I was reminded of what George III said to Fanny Burney about Shakespeare: "Sad stuff, but one mustn't say so." I thought the play very sad stuff. I hope I am not deficient in a sense of humour; I do not think I am. I entirely agree with the noble Lord, Lord Brabazon of Tara, that it does us all good to be "ragged," and I am not a person who minds criticism. I have had a great deal in my time and I expect a good deal more. My criticism of the play was that it was dull. It was not only dull but I thought it offensive. It may be that I should have gained a different impression if I had seen it played, but, reading it through, and with some care, I came to the conclusion that it was very dull, and offensive—not offensive just because it was an attack on the Labour Party; I should have thought it just as offensive if it were an attack upon any other Party; but be-cause I think the high standard of public life in this country is very much to be praised and I do not like any attempts to decry it, either by an attack on the Labour Party or on any other Party—unless, of course, there is a lot of wit and humour about it; that makes up for everything. Iolanthe, Falstaff, Bernard Shaw—for goodness sake let us have them all! But if there is no humour in a play (though this is purely a matter of personal impression), then the play is really worthless.

Speaking for myself, I think the first mistake was ever to have had this play on at all. I think the unfortunate listeners to the B.B.C. and viewers of television were not given their money's worth. 186That was my impression. Whatever else the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, has cone, he had no

responsibility at that stage because, so far as we know, at that stage he knew nothing about it and had heard nothing about it. The noble Lord did come in at the point when the matter having, as he says in his letter, been brought to his notice by a colleague on the B.B.C., he had to decide whether or not to have steps taken to cancel it. If I had been by his side at that time and the noble Lord had done me the great honour of asking my advice, I could have told him of some of the lessons I learned from the old days when I was Attorney-General. I could have told him what happens when the Home Secretary bans a book. I remember once motoring in France when I became ill. Not being very good at French, I sent my chauffeur to get all the English books he could obtain from neighbouring towns. In all the neighbouring towns there were only two books to be obtained and he brought me a copy of each. They were The Well of Loneliness and Lady Chatterley's Lover. If those two books had not been banned, we should never have heard any more about them. Again, I remember when I was Attorney-General starting proceedings about an exhibition of pictures, many of which were, by common consent, destroyed. The remaining works of the artist which were not destroyed went up enormously in value. If he had sought my advice, I should have told the noble Lord that if he were to take this course he would give what I personally regarded as a wretched play a tremendous boost. However, those who now go and see it will have to stand the consequences.

The second mistake the noble Lord made, if he will forgive my saying so, was to act in this matter without calling a meeting of his Board of Governors. I think if he had been more experienced he would not have made that mistake, because if you are going to make an awkward decision you want to surround yourself with a cushion of others to share the responsibility: you want to make it a collective decision of the Board of Governors. But it is so easy to be wise after the event. Any fool can be that. I have not a shadow of doubt that at the time the noble Lord did not realise that this was going to assume the tremendous proportions it has since assumed. He thought it was a rotten 187play and offensive at that, and that he should stop it. He did so without consultation with his colleagues, and there he made a mistake.

There is one other consideration which applies to the noble Lord and to the Board which does not apply to censor-ship as a

whole—and I am entirely against censorship. To my mind the B.B.C. must at all costs maintain their reputation for impartiality. The noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, has already quoted the old adage that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. So with the B.B.C.: it must not only be impartial but must be seen to be impartial. I think that is the fundamental question, and it raises a very real difficulty. If, for instance, plays of this sort attacking the Labour Party were frequently put on, obviously many people would think that partiality was being shown. As it is, a large number of people attack the B.B.C. on the ground that they are leaning to the Right. And probably an equal number of people attack them on the ground that they are leaning to the Left. On the whole, I think they manage to hold the scales fairly evenly. But the Governors of the B.B.C., the Chairman of the Board, and the Board themselves, in considering what to do in these matters, must always have regard to that essential prerequisite of establishing and maintaining conditions of strict impartiality. There I have done. I think this debate is all to the good. A mistake was perhaps made in the respect I have indicated, speaking in the light of after events, or it may not be so. There is nothing in the least sinister about it and we are grateful to the noble Viscount for the tone and temper in which he opened the debate, which I think will have had a useful purpose in bringing all these matters to the light of day.

§4.27 p.m.

§THE LORD PRIVY SEAL (VISCOUNT ADDISON)

My Lords, I venture to intervene before the debate concludes to present certain considerations to the House which arise out of this debate. Before I do so, I should like to congratulate the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham, on his maiden speech. I hope we shall hear many more. We are greatly indebted to him for the sparkling wit and humour which pervaded his speech and 188for its good temper. My Lords, along with my noble and learned friend who sits on the Woolsack, I accept full responsibility for the fact that up to this moment the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, has not intervened in the debate. I would ask the House to think over the position for a minute or two. As the noble and learned Viscount on the Woolsack has explained in his reference to the practice regarding the courts, which is generally accepted by all

Parties, it is of great importance that the administration of these public boards, the B.B.C. and others, should be independent and free, and not subject to day-to-day Parliamentary discussion and examination. Otherwise, whoever appoints them, we shall never get the right kind of people to serve on the boards, and that would be damaging to the integrity of the schemes. Of course, the B.B.C. are in a different position from some of the other boards: they are financially subject to Parliament, in that we make them grants, unlike other Boards, such as those concerned with transport and electricity. It so happens that in some cases some member—it may be the Chairman or some other member of the Board—is also a member of this House. Members of these Boards are not allowed by the Constitution to be Members of the House of Commons. For this reason, amongst others, the House naturally attaches importance to Ministerial responsibility. The Minister, whoever he may be, is responsible for the directions to these Boards, and you do not haul the Chairman of the Board, or individual members, before Parliament to give an account of their day-to-day administrative work.

§VISCOUNT SWINTON

I should like to say one thing to the noble Viscount, because it is important. The noble Viscount is distinguishing between the responsibility of the Board as a whole for the policy of the Board and the responsibility of the Minister to Parliament. Without canvassing that, are we not here considering something slightly different— namely, the personal action of a Chair-man of a Board, which was, as I under-stand it, not the action or policy of the Board at all?

§VISCOUNT SIMON

Perhaps I may be allowed to intervene on a different point. I quite understand the practical argu-ment, but surely the reason why a man 189who is a Member of the House of Commons cannot be appointed to one of these offices is that it is a new office of profit, and by our Statute Law the holding of such office is not compatible with holding the position of a Member of Parliament. That has nothing to do with the responsibility of Ministers.

§VISCOUNT ADDISON

Both those statements are quite correct. But, in reference to the latter made by the noble and learned Viscount, Lord Simon, it is generally agreed that it is also because of the considerations I have been indicating that it is desirable that members of these Boards should not be Members of the House of Commons. While it is true that the point in question is an administrative act of an individual— namely, the Chairman—this does not in any way detract from the fact that it is an administrative act of the day-to-day working of that particular corporation.

What I am putting before the House (and I shall be very glad to have conversations with noble Lords opposite on the matter) is that we must be most care-ful—and, frankly, this is why I have stood in the way of Lord Simon of Wythen-shawe's speaking—that we do not seek detailed interference with the responsible work of these different Boards and take advantage (if I may venture to put it so) of the fact that a particular member of a Board is a member of this House. That is merely an accident which may or may not be important. But, however that may be, what I am anxious to safeguard is the general positon I have mentioned which I am sure is of first-class importance. Therefore, in my view, it was not proper that the noble Lord should himself answer in so far as relates to the detailed administrative work of his Board. If, however, he has any personal statement to make on his own account, that is another matter. The present case is only a small illustration of what may happen. We have coming before us a Transport Bill produced by the noble Lord, Lord Teynham, and there are three or four noble Lords in that organisation who will possibly come here and listen. It may well seem hard that we should be deprived of what may be regarded as the benefit of their advice on the subject of the Bill. At the same time, it would be entirely wrong that they should be. as it were, heckled about the administrative 190work of their Board The man to be criticised is the Minister, who constitutionally is responsible to Parliament —the Minister who appoints the Board, gives them directions, and so on. That is the important principle that I wish care-fully to preserve. I express no opinion about this particular episode, which seems to be a rather trivial and contemptible affair. But I do attach great importance to our safeguarding the independence of these Boards, and so in that way assuring that the right kind of people serve on them by maintaining the principle that the working of these Boards is the

responsibility of the Government through a particular Minister to Parliament.

§4.33 p.m.

§THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY

My Lords, the point which the noble Viscount has raised is an important one, and I hope that it will be given a great deal more consideration. He sail that it would be very hard if we were unable to take advantage of the presence in your Lord-ships' House of numbers of people who know a great deal about certain subjects and who were yet debarred from speaking because they were members of a Board. I do not think that is the point. They have been appointed as Peers of Parliament, and they have a constitutional responsibility as Peers. They may have two responsibilities: they may have responsibility as a Peer and, equally, responsibility as a member of a Board. But I do not think the fact that they have accepted membership of a board of a public corporation does away with their obligations and their constitutional responsibility as a Peer.

§VISCOUNT ADDISON

I accept that.

§THE MARQUESS OF SALISBURY

Therefore, though the noble Viscount may be right with regard to other Boards —not the B.B.C.—in saying that it would be dangerous if the principle were accepted that they were to be regarded as representing their Board in Parliament, I do not think they should, in any event, be debarred from intervening in a debate—not to be questioned and harried, but to give the benefit of their experience, as is right, in Parliament. The question of the B.B.C., as the noble Viscount the Leader of the House and the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythen-shawe, will recognise, is slightly different. 191It is a much more individual body, and differs from other Boards which are a Ministerial responsibility. It may well be that in a case like that, there is a stronger argument for some statement being made in Parliament by the Chair-man of the Board. I do not propose to dogmatise about that. What I do feel is important is that this point about the division of

constitutional responsibility should be threshed out, and a decision reached. If the noble Viscount would like to talk to me—I have no doubt the noble Viscount, Lord Samuel, would say the same thing—it would be most valuable.

§VISCOUNT ADDISON

I should welcome conversations. The noble Marquess and I have discussed this subject before. What I am trying to safeguard is not the right of a Peer to exercise his rights as a Peer, but the day-to-day administration of these Boards from Parliamentary interference.

LORD STRABOLGI

I should like to put this point to my noble friend for his consideration. Would it not be possible to differentiate on suitable occasions between the question of broad policy and what has been called the day-to-day ad-ministration? The fact that a Chairman of one of these Boards is a member of your Lordships' House should entitle him to speak on broad policy questions, apart from the day-to-day administration of the concern.

§4.38 p.m.

§LORD SIMON OF WYTHENSHAWE

My Lords, I willingly accept the advice of the noble Viscount the Leader of the House and the Lord Chancellor, and I shall avoid dealing with any matters of day-to-day management or administration. However, I think I have their per-mission to say a few words in personal explanation about my action in this matter. I will do my best to keep those two separate, and I hope that I shall succeed. I should particularly like to thank both the Lord Chancellor and the Leader of the House for what they have said about the independence of the B.B.C. All the Governors are completely convinced that the prestige and success of the B.B.C. has been built up on its independence, under the present system as laid 192down twenty-five years ago by the Craw-ford Report, as explained by the Lord Chancellor. I was very glad indeed to hear that so forcibly and clearly put.

I imagine that it will be in order for me to join in the general chorus of congratulation to the noble Viscount, Lord Hailsham. I thought that he put his case with the greatest possible skill, good tem-per and wit—in fact, before he had finished I came to be very much surprised at the actions I had taken. There is only one thing in his speech to which I must strongly object. He referred to a rumour that the Director-General had threatened to resign over this matter. I do not know where that rumour came from. It is totally and completely untrue and, if I may say so. I think it is a little unfortunate that it has been put abroad. During my three and a half years of Chairman ship I have had the most intimate daily relations with the Director-General. Our relations are perfectly well understood. They are like the relations between Minister and Permanent Secretary. He advises the Governors, and we take the decisions. The Director-General then very loyally abides by our decisions. I may say that the decisions in nearly all cases are in accordance with his advice. I am glad to see my noble friend Lord Reith here, and I should like to say that it is impossible to overstate what the B.B.C. owes, during the last twenty-seven years, first to its founder, Lord Reith, and, secondly, to the present Director-General, Sir William Haley.

The Governors have definitely dele-gated to the Chairman the right to act on matters of urgency in between board meetings. I do not think any of them dispute that I had a perfect right to act constitutionally in this particular matter. I did take that decision, and I alone was responsible for it. I had not consulted most of the other Governors. I had, as has been said, no outside pressure put upon me—certainly no pressure of any sort from the Government. The Director-General and the staff had no responsibility for the decision and, I say again, it was entirely my own decision.

I do not think I need refer to the question of the quality of the play. Your Lordships' House has shown that there are differences of opinion. It can be taken light-heartedly, as the noble Viscount took it and as others have taken it, or it can be taken seriously, as I took it193myself. I may be lacking a sense of humour, along with all my colleagues on these Benches, but I am not quite sure that I am prepared to accept the noble Viscount's view on that matter. I certainly took it seriously. I have been widely accused of having banned the play. The word "banned" is a word with a very emotional context, implying a dictator taking an arbitrary

decision. I think I might explain the way I viewed the matter. Every year the B.B.C. put on about a thousand plays on sound and about a hundred on Television, and there is an elaborate organisation of selection. There are six groups of persons who take part in the process of selection and rejection. The Governors are the seventh and final court of appeal. It is an editorial process, just like an editor rejecting contributions. I regarded myself as Taking part in that editorial process, like the editor of a. paper. Rightly or wrongly, I took that view. Very few people agreed with it—at least, the Press did not—and looking back on it now, I must say that I did not foresee the hurricane which arose. I think it is clear that I made a serious under-estimate—I made a mistake — in taking that action, in view of what happened afterwards.

For the same reason, I think I made a second mistake, as the Lord Chancellor suggested. The whole matter was urgent, because if the play was not be repeated it had to be stopped immediately. It would have been difficult to get the script round to the other Governors—there was not time. I did not regard it as a matter of very great seriousness and, therefore, I did not consult the other Governors. If it had occurred to me for one moment that it would be suggested that I had read the Daly Herald article and that I, as a member of the Labour Party, had been influenced by that, and that therefore I was bringing Party politics into the B.B.C., it would have been utterly inconceivable for me to act without consulting the other Governors. I may say that I regret that the other Governors who are members of your Lordships' House, Lord Clydesmuir and Lord Tedder, are not here. I should very much have liked them to be here. I should just like to add that we have Liberal, Conservative and Labour Governors, and during the three and a half years I have been Chair-man we have never had any difference on Party matters. We have tried hard 194to preserve impartiality and a balance of political controversy, and I hope your Lordships will agree that, on the whole, we have succeeded fairly well. We do get abuse from the extreme Flight and from the extreme Left, but on the whole I think the general feeling is that we manage reasonably well, and we are all desperately anxious to maintain it. Nothing would induce me to do consciously anything which I thought would weaken that issue.

That is all I think I can say, under the guidance of the Leader of the House— in fact, he seems to think that I have said too much already. I am very glad indeed that the Lord Chancellor, the noble Viscount the Leader of the House and the noble Marquess the Leader of the Opposition, have stressed so strongly the importance of the independence of the B.B.C. All the Governors are interested in this question, and I very much hope those discussions will go on. If there is any danger that anything I have done will affect the independence of the B.B.C. or its power of public ser-vice, there is nothing that I could possibly regret more deeply.

§4.47 p.m.

§VISCOUNT HAILSHAM

My Lords, I think it would be the general wish of this House, having regard to the statement that we have just: heard, that we should not press this matter any farther. But before I ask leave to withdraw the Motion, I feel that it would be churlish of me if I did not thank the many noble Lords who have given such a generous welcome to what is necessarily a difficult first appearance. Perhaps I may be forgiven if I say to the noble and learned Viscount the Lord Chancellor that I hope nothing I said led him to believe that I wished to impose any Governmental responsibility in respect of matters concerned with the British Broadcasting Corporation, or any other Corporation. I think that much is clear.

It is also clear, I think, that the independence of these Corporations in the matters of their day-to-lay management is a matter of great public importance. But if I may say so, I do not consider we have quite reached finality in the technique of Parliamentary discussion of their affairs. Great difficulties arise in both Houses of Parliament with regard to that matter, and I myself take a slightly more forward 195view than either of the spokesmen for the Government. I would say this with respect: there is a distinction between accountability in the lower House and accountability in your Lordships' House. There is also a distinction between accountability and the use of the House as a forum for discussion. Indeed, a forum for discussion can be afforded by your Lordships' House and can be very valuable. We do not want to set precedents; we want to feel our way forward. I hope your Lordships will feel that the debate to-day has done a

good deal of good. For instance, it afforded the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, an opportunity of making a statement that will certainly win him a very great deal of approval which he had not previously won. In many ways, debates of this kind can be used in order to form and mould public opinion, without in any way involving or infringing the principle of the independence of these Corporations. That having been said, and having noted the speech of the noble Lord, Lord Simon of Wythenshawe, and having thanked your Lordships for the very generous way in which my first appearance has been greeted, may I, with your Lordships' leave, ask the permission of the House to withdraw my Motion?

§Motion for Papers, by leave, withdrawn.