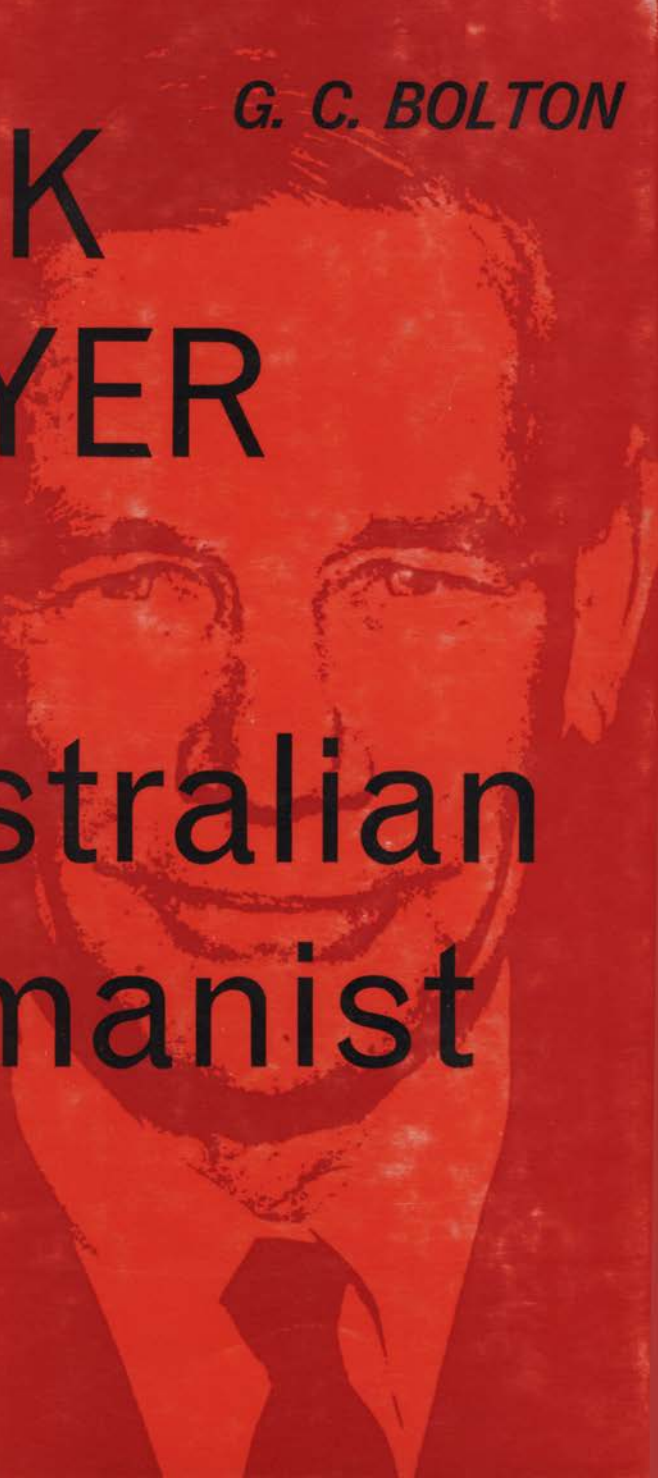


*G. C. BOLTON*

# DICK BOYER

An  
Australian  
Humanist



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Sir Richard Boyer, K.B.E., Dick Boyer to all who knew him, was a man of many careers. First Methodist minister stationed in Canberra, pioneer of a western Queensland sheep-run, humanist and internationalist, and finally chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission during the critical years between 1945 and his death in 1961, Boyer attempted to put into practice the classic principles of liberalism in the pragmatic realities of Australian public life. This biography attempts to show how Boyer's liberalism survived in the face of government and public pressures. Throughout his years with the A.B.C., Boyer fought against constant interference from politicians and others who wished to influence the A.B.C.'s policy. He died fighting his last battle for this freedom.

Though primarily a portrait of a man, this book is also an account of the A.B.C. and of the struggles and clashes of personality inevitably involved in the life of such an organization. Boyer's years as chairman covered the critical period of the introduction of television to Australia, an event which had a profound effect on Australian society.

*Jacket design by Robin Wallace-Crabbe*

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DICK BOYER

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*A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920* The Australian National University, in association with Jacaranda Press, 1963

*Richard Daintree: A Photographic Memoir* The Australian National University, in association with Jacaranda Press, 1965

*The Passing of the Irish Act of Union* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966



*Sir Richard Boyer*

DICK BOYER

An Australian Humanist

G. C. Bolton

*Professor of Modern History  
University of Western Australia*

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## Introduction

Author's introductions are usually too ponderous, but a few points need to be made. This is not a commissioned biography. It was undertaken because I was interested in Sir Richard Boyer as a man, as a liberal, and as a figure who had a good deal to do with mass media in Australia in recent years. His family have been entirely generous and helpful in comment, advice, and in placing Sir Richard's papers unreservedly at my disposal. But they have not sought at all to influence the content of this biography, and are in no way responsible for the portrait which emerges from these pages. Only a practising historian can gauge how grateful I must be to Lady Boyer and Mr Richard Boyer and other members of their family, as much for their restraint as for their ungrudging co-operation. I also owe much to Professor John Legge and Mr Harry Gelber, of the Department of History, Monash University, who read and criticized this manuscript, and to Mrs Jean Thompson and Mrs Joyce Hodgson who typed successive drafts; and more to my wife's unstinted encouragement and help.

Except where otherwise indicated, all material cited in this book comes from the Boyer papers. These include Sir Richard's personal files as chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and I have worked on the assumption that these contain most of the material about this aspect of his career relevant for his biographer.

I have deliberately refrained from approaching one obvious source of material. I have not used any records or files of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, nor have I interviewed personnel currently employed by the Commission. (Among friends of Sir Richard Boyer interviewed

were several people who had been his colleagues on the Commission, but they are not responsible for the material or opinions expressed in this book.) When the history of the Australian Broadcasting Commission comes to be written by a competent historian, he must of course have full and unrestricted access to all written and verbal sources. This book does not set out to be a history of the A.B.C., and in any case it is uncertain whether, under the provisions of the 1960 Crimes Act, any historian could, with legal propriety, approach officers of the Australian Broadcasting Commission for information relating to their duties. As Sir Walter Raleigh wrote, in a passage which I read among Boyer's papers on his station homestead at Durella: 'Whosoever in writing a modern history shall follow truth too near the heels, it may haply strike out his teeth.'

G.C.B.

Perth  
June 1966

## RICHARD JAMES FILDES BOYER

- 1891 Born, Taree, N.S.W.
- 1913 Probationer Methodist minister, Canberra
- 1914 Master of Arts, University of Sydney
- 1915 Y.M.C.A. officer. On active service, Gallipoli
- 1916 Lieutenant, 1st A.I.F.
- 1917 Wounded at Passchendaele
- 1918 Return to Australia
- 1920 Acquires Durella, a pastoral lease in Queensland
- 1920 Marriage to Elenor Underwood
- 1935 First European tour
- 1939 Second European tour; visit to United States
- 1940 Member, Australian Broadcasting Commission
- 1941-4 President, United Graziers' Association of Queensland
- 1942 and
- 1945 Delegate to conferences, Institute of Pacific Relations
- 1945 Chairman, Australian Broadcasting Commission
- 1956 Knight of the Order of the British Empire
- 1957-9 Chairman, Prime Minister's Committee of Inquiry into  
Recruitment to the Commonwealth Public Service
- 1961 Died, Sydney, N.S.W.



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## 1 Probationer

Dick Boyer, who defined his beliefs as 'the faith of an Australian liberal', was born in 1891, a year of crisis for Australian liberalism. Since the middle of the nineteenth century reformers and optimists had been able to point to a continuous spread of liberal reforms and institutions. The discovery of gold in 1851 had shattered pastoral dominance without ruining pastoral profit. It provided a stimulus for the growth of other industries and drew a tide of immigration which helped the sevenfold increase in Australia's population between 1851 and 1891. Against this background of steady prosperity and growth, the notions of democracy and equality gained ground easily, with just enough conservative opposition to arouse pride in achievement. By the centenary of settlement in 1888 Australians happily contrasted their present and future with the lot of the Old World. Where else had manhood suffrage, voting by ballot, and payment of members been adopted so readily and so widely? Where (except perhaps in North America) were cheap land and cheap mining rights so easily available to the poor man in search of betterment? Where else were such a climate and such opportunities awaiting the young when they completed their free, compulsory, and secular education?

Pride in liberal achievement flowed over into pride of nationhood. Not only the republicans of the *Sydney Bulletin*, but eminent and titled politicians such as Parkes and McIlwraith asserted Australian nationalism against the chafing restraints of the Mother Country. The notion of Federation was stirring. Many hoped that a united, liberal Australia would out-progress the United States. Beneath this

## 2 *Dick Boyer*

optimism Australian attitudes revealed a disquieting intolerance of minorities who failed to conform. This showed itself in a number of ways: in hostility towards aliens, in an occasional weakness for shoddy demagogues of the John Norton type, in that exaggerated distrust of superiority which prompted Henry Lawson to urge that the rich and educated should be educated down. Still it could be hoped that Australia, while retaining the hopeful liberalism of a new country, would outgrow these traits of immaturity. Certainly few other countries took liberal assumptions so much for granted.

The coming of the nineties brought hard times for the liberal ideal. It had depended too much on a harmony of interests resulting from the prosperity which came from continuing overseas investment. This in turn had relied increasingly on an overestimate among investors of Australia's resources and growth prospects. The 'breaking of the boom' did not finally engulf the financial world until 1893, but its first effects were felt some years earlier, particularly among the primary industries that were so dependent on the vagaries of seasons and markets. Despite earlier optimism, Australia was often inhospitable to the smallholder and none too easy a source of profit for the big man. During the eighties the landless outback workers had banded into unions. In good seasons they could wrest better wages and conditions from the pastoralists, but by 1891 many squatters were at the end of their credit. A clash loomed. Meanwhile the habit of forming trade unions made headway in other industries, and in the spring of 1890 the great maritime strike marked the first major struggle between capital and labour.

1891 confirmed the rift between employers and middle class on the one hand and trade unionists on the other. It was the year of the great Queensland shearers' strike, when the old Southern Cross flag of Eureka flew over the Barcaldine strike camp, when pastoralists woke from sleep to hear their woolsheds going up in flames, and clerks and shop assistants in their volunteer uniforms were brought up from the cities to garrison the dusty western townships. The

end of the strike was followed by the spectacle of Queensland judges, actively supported by the intellectual and radical Premier, Sir Samuel Griffith, bending the law to its utmost in order to convict the ringleaders who had defied the conventions of order and property. Other Australian politicians usually noted for liberal views, among them Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin, earned the distrust of the labour movement for their apparently one-sided firmness in suppressing strike action. Labor had already begun to respond by putting up its own candidates for parliament. The thirty-six somewhat surprised young men who found themselves holding the balance of power in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly were the forerunners of a Labor Party whose success would within twenty years force a coalition of all its opponents. The flexible scramble of factions in the old colonial parliaments was to be replaced by an increasingly disciplined party system, eventually polarizing each group into radicals and conservatives, friends of labour against friends of property, the 'party of initiative' against the 'party of resistance'.<sup>1</sup> While the cause of Federation still had to be fought and won, men of goodwill among all parties could agree on setting up a Commonwealth Government to look after problems of social welfare which had proved too big for individual states; but once Australians were enjoying the benefits of old age pensions, arbitration courts, and their own army and navy, the concept of liberalism would become sectional and limited. To most conservatives, liberalism meant preserving the rule of law; to most Labor politicians, providing a fair share of material benefits to all; to few men on either side did liberalism involve safeguarding the rights of the individual, including the holder of unpopular opinions. One further disturbing feature of the experience of 1891 was the difficulty of obtaining honest information in a crisis when nearly all the Press was one-sided and hotly partisan. How could liberalism flourish when mass media were passing into fewer and fewer hands? These were

<sup>1</sup> I am aware that this categorization of Labor and non-Labor politics in Australia is unfashionable in some quarters, but it strikes me as broadly appropriate for the period between 1910 and 1945.

#### 4 *Dick Boyer*

questions in 1891 to threaten the complacency of Australian liberals.

In this year 1891 Taree was one of the quietest corners of New South Wales. Situated on the coast road about two hundred and fifty miles north of Sydney, this small trading centre boasted no more than seven hundred and fifty inhabitants, and had reached the status of a municipality only a few years previously. Taree was nevertheless important enough to warrant the services of a full-time Methodist minister, and since 1889 the post had been held by a hard-working North Countryman not many years out from England: the Reverend Frederick Cartwright Boyer. Born in 1853, he was the son of Edward Boyer, who in the middle of the nineteenth century settled at Bowden, near Manchester, to found an ample mid-Victorian family. One tradition has it that the Boyers originated in Hungary; another suggests an ancestry of Huguenots driven out of France after 1685 by the repressive edicts of Louis XIV; but as long as anyone could remember their qualities were traditional North of England. Nonconformist, middle-class, self-reliant, attached to the down-to-earth liberalism of Cobden and Bright, they were not impressed by pretensions of rank or display, and were very much alive to the importance of education as the means by which a man should develop himself to play a fit part in his community. Some of this Manchester background was transmitted by Frederick Boyer to his Australian sons.

Frederick, after education at Wesley College, Sheffield, and Manchester Grammar School, was intended by his father for chartered accountancy, and a suitable firm was found for him. The commercial side of the family tradition appealed to him less than its strong Wesleyanism, and eventually Frederick left accountancy to study at Didsbury Theological College. By 1882 he was qualified as a probationary minister, and served a year at Grantham in Lincolnshire. He had also found a future wife. Her name was Marianne Pearson, and she was the organist at a Methodist church. In many ways she was well suited to Frederick, for he was at once more solemn and more emotional than she; she contributed

a placidity and a keen sense of humour that would mellow to a considerable extent Frederick's propensity for seeing the world in black and white, without intermediary colours. Before they married, however, he wanted to begin his life's work, which he saw as serving his church in the mission field. Japan was his first choice, but the American Methodists were already sufficiently active there. Then he received a call to Australia. Hard pressed for clergy, like every other pioneering church, the Methodists of New South Wales made a drive for young ministers in England, and Frederick Boyer was one of eleven to come out in one ship. Immediately on arrival in 1883 he was packed off to preach the Word to the coal-miners of West Maitland. From this arduous apprenticeship he was picked in 1884 by Dr W. G. Taylor as a colleague to start the Sydney Central Methodist Mission. Next year he married and began in earnest the nomadic life of a Protestant country parson. Here he had first-hand experience of the rough edge of Australian sectarianism. In 1886 there arrived in Lismore a woman named Edith O'Gorman, who advertised herself as 'an escaped nun' and hired a hall to give a series of lectures on the alleged malpractices of the Catholic church. The Roman Catholics tried to stop the lectures, and aroused the ire of the staunch Orangemen among the surrounding farmers, who rode in from as far away as Kyogle. Wild scenes followed, so that the mayor had to swear in special constables, and before the lectures were abandoned fifty of the district's citizens were summoned to appear at the next Grafton Assize Court on charges of 'behaving in a riotous manner' and 'committing an affray'.<sup>2</sup> Frederick Boyer, although the staunchest of Protestants, took so prominent a part in pacifying the riot that his son found, thirty years later, that he was still remembered affectionately by the Lismore Irish.

Three years in each circuit, the Boyers shifted from Lismore back to suburban Willoughby, then successively

<sup>2</sup> This deplorable affair is described in the *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 28 Oct. 1886, and in M. Daley, *Men and a River* (to be published by Melbourne University Press, 1966).

## 6 *Dick Boyer*

to Taree, Armidale, Spring Hill, Leichhardt, Bowral, Orange, and Rockdale. Their only break was a visit to England in 1905, until in 1912 his own ill-health and that of his wife compelled Frederick Boyer's retirement to Bexley as a supernumerary. Methodist Conference placed on record a long tribute to him, including one phrase which might later have been applied to his son: 'He has retained the aptitudes of the capable man of affairs and the instincts of the student.'<sup>3</sup> A good man, centring his strong emotions on work, home, and family, Frederick Boyer was seemingly without complexities. 'That gentleman looks a dogmatic man', remarked the purser on the ship which brought him to Australia. Intensely Protestant—significantly, his one publication was entitled 'The Romanisation of the Church of England'—he was likewise a sworn foe of alcohol and gambling; but it would be unjust to picture him as one of those black-coated wowsers caricatured in Norman Lindsay's novels. His forthright principles were tempered by natural kindheartedness and, above all, by the good-humoured influence of his lively and intelligent wife. Together they provided a stable, affectionate upbringing for their three sons: Mowbray, born in 1886, Gilbert, born in 1889, and Richard, born at Taree on 24 August 1891.

This family grew up in the secure and optimistic Australia of the years before World War I. The six colonies recovered from the depression, federated, assumed the airs of a nation. Schoolchildren learnt the new song 'Advance Australia Fair', but their teachers also told them that Australia owed a loyalty to the British Empire, and most of the children believed it implicitly—unless their parents were Irish. Deeds that won the Empire, however, paled into insignificance for most schoolboys beside the stirring feats of Victor Trumper, Dally Messenger, and Norman Brookes. Apart from the achievements of those heroes the outside world was a long way off from the sunlit country towns of New South Wales. The local newspaper, owned by a versatile editor-printer, was still a main source of news, supplemented by the city weeklies and mails which leisurely steam-trains brought for

<sup>3</sup> *The Methodist*, 28 July 1917.



whiskered farmers in their buggies to collect. Amusements were still largely home-made. Films were a striking novelty, motor cars more so, and wireless best known as the means by which the fugitive murderer Crippen had been brought to justice at sea, although there were occasional reports of experiments conducted in Sydney by a young man named Ernest Fisk. In these years without the benefits of radio and television, amusements in country towns tended to centre around amateur sport, picnics, brass bands, debating societies in the School of Arts, Saturday night dances to the school piano. Sunday divided a community into those who sought their entertainment at the publicans' back doors and those no less typical Australians who, dutifully overclad, went to church.

In this sort of background the young Boyers grew up happily and uneventfully. They were healthy, active, and had a sufficient capacity for mischief. Apparently Dick Boyer did not particularly distinguish himself at his schooling. A good country lad, fond of dogs and horses, he was always ready to leave his books for an afternoon's rabbiting. His main talent was music, for which he seemed to have an inborn gift. If he inherited his talent from his father, who was a pipe-organist of some note among his friends, it was Dick's mother who got him to persevere with the piano until it became a social talent which enlivened many gatherings. Throughout his life, he was always able to give himself relaxation and others entertainment at the piano; for instance, only a year or two before his death, when the Australian Broadcasting Commission had met at Launceston and the commissioners with various local worthies were spending the evening at Dame Enid Lyons's home, he had the whole party of dignitaries standing around the piano vigorously singing Moody and Sankey hymns and having the time of their lives. So far as his schooling went, Dick Boyer was probably stimulated by his parents' trip to England in 1905 when he and his brother Gilbert were put to school at Earnseat, in the Lake District. In those far-off times English schoolboys were still credulous enough to believe that the newcomers from Australia would be

## 8 *Dick Boyer*

black, and the two Boyers found plenty of opportunity for leg-pulling; but the school was evidently a good one, and from that time Dick Boyer did well at his education. He went first to Wollaroi College, Orange, and later to Newington, where he took his earliest interest in public affairs. There was at the time considerable controversy about whether Australia should contribute a destroyer to the Royal Navy, and the young Boyer, fired with imperial patriotism, wrote to the *Sydney Morning Herald*: 'Let us put our hands in our pockets and in our munificence of public spirit give not one ship but a fleet of ships.'<sup>4</sup> The *Herald*, not suspecting the writer's youth and inexperience, printed the letter; greatly, one imagines, to the pleasure of Boyer's father, who was a staunch British Empire man.

Frederick Boyer, who at one stage had almost thought of finishing Dick's schooling because of poor progress, was now increasingly satisfied with his youngest son, and perhaps closer to him than he had been. Since the eldest son, Mowbray, had chosen to become a mining engineer, and the second son, Gilbert, was an orchardist near Orange, it pleased both parents immensely when Dick decided to study for the Methodist ministry. Accordingly in 1909 Richard Boyer matriculated into the University of Sydney, where he read for a degree in arts, majoring in history and English. It was a leisurely, uncrowded era in the University's history, and as well as absorbing the wisdom of such scholars as the philosopher Francis Anderson and the historian Arnold Wood, the young man had plenty of time for boxing, athletics, and football. He was making friends with the same pleasant readiness that was to characterize him all through life. One close University friend was Julian Ralph Blanchard, who subsequently became Moderator-General of the Presbyterian Church of Australia; another was J. P. Abbott, later a Country Party Commonwealth cabinet minister. H. V. Evatt, a brilliant young contemporary, was

<sup>4</sup> I owe this anecdote to Mr Walter Cottrell, president of the Bowen Historical Society, Bowen, Queensland. For much of the material in the preceding paragraphs I am indebted to Sir Richard Boyer's brothers, Mr Mowbray Boyer and Mr Gilbert Boyer, and his son, Mr Richard Boyer.

apparently no more than an acquaintance, but, despite the later divergence of their careers, they absorbed a considerable stock of ideas in common while at University. There were also a good many pretty girls whose society the young Boyer enjoyed, but none of whom he took very seriously. For the rest, he was a high-spirited undergraduate, prominent in Commemoration Day processions—there are reports of his involvement in a memorable float lampooning the suffragette movement—and not always able to resist a practical joke. On one occasion, visiting an old friend of his father's who was minister at Katoomba and who had not seen him for years, he dressed as a down-and-out swagman, knocked on the back door of the manse, and requested his Reverence to give him a job and a handout. He was refused both, and lectured for his idleness and insobriety; so that when he returned half an hour later, tidily dressed and announcing himself as his father's son, the old minister was profuse with apologies for his lack of hospitality.

Meanwhile, he was a good student and his work was maturing steadily. By 1913 he had his Bachelor of Arts degree with a highly satisfactory set of results, and his professors were beginning to hint at the possibility of a Rhodes scholarship. The idea of Oxford attracted him, and with his father's enthusiastic backing he began to sketch plans for two years at Mansfield College, a notable centre of Protestant theology. Eventually, however, Boyer decided first to qualify himself for the Methodist ministry and to gain a little active experience of parish work before trying to go overseas for further study. Not wishing to lose touch with the University, he undertook to read for a master's degree in history. This involved studying for an advanced examination in the history of the Middle Ages and the period of the Renaissance and Reformation, and writing a thesis on some aspect of this period. The usual practice nowadays is to direct an M.A. student to do a piece of intensive research on a fairly limited scale, using original sources and documents, in order to acquire the skills of the historian. The University of Sydney, when Arnold Wood was professor of history, had no compunction about approving broader

themes, and Boyer was set to composing a dissertation on 'Erasmus: Apostle of the Modern Spirit'. Meanwhile he had satisfied the initial requirements for the Methodist ministry, and by the end of 1913 could sign himself, at the age of twenty-two, the Reverend Richard James Fildes Boyer.

Early in 1913 the Methodist church appointed him to his first charge: Canberra. The nation's capital was not yet big enough to need a more senior pastor. In 1914 Canberra was a scattered circuit. From the Royal Military College at the old Campbell homestead, Duntroon, it stretched fifteen miles to the construction camps of the Cotter Dam, as well as including the scattered homesteads out on the Upper Murrumbidgee. From his letters to his parents Dick Boyer's impressions of the country emerged as he travelled his circuit, sometimes by motor-bike, more reliably on an old mare, Bess. Untouched by the imagination of the architect and the suburban practicalities of the civil servant, the main Canberra valley was a windswept limestone plain, almost treeless but for a line of willows along the Molonglo. Bitterly cold in winter, bare and dust-blown in summer (describing a three-day 'tornado' early in March, with dust and sand like a snowstorm, Boyer remarked: 'Riding Bess I could not see her ears at times'), Canberra was redeemed from desolation mainly by the shifting light on the surrounding hills.

The young Wesleyan was energetic, earnest, anxious to test his values in experience of the world. There were disappointments. The navvies at the Cotter Dam allowed him exactly ten minutes from their precious Sunday morning's two-up to preach to them; if he exceeded the time-limit by a second, out came the kip and everyone stopped listening. This bothered him far less than a running feud with the neighbouring (and senior) Methodist minister at Queanbeyan over the boundaries of their circuits. Boyer gloomed over the squabble: 'any glamor there may be in the ministry from the distance all goes at close quarters', he wrote to his father. At the same time he found he enjoyed preaching. He was even, in his first enthusiasm, prepared to take open-air services outside Sydney Town Hall. At first he tried conscientiously to model himself on his father's

downright manner: 'I'm getting more punch in my preaching now', he reported in November 1914, 'getting a regular Calvinist. Soft soap is no good'. But this capacity for forthright self-expression was tempered by intellectual beliefs less simple and unquestioning than his father's. When he preached before Synod as a probationer in December, his examiners awarded him a mark of no more than 65 per cent —because although his manner was good and his philosophy faultless, his views on repentance seemed not quite orthodox. This squared with Boyer's own view of his capacity. He was finding himself as a public speaker, able to deliver a strong, pragmatic line of argument; but he was worried by his inability to put over the sort of robust, simple statement of untroubled faith that marked his father's generation. The old minister, retired now through ill-health, wrote to his son with an utter confidence in God's providence which could come only from an unquestioning belief that he was a humble instrument of God's will. He was looking to his son to achieve greater things in the same cause; and it was hard for Dick to own that intellectual training, which meant so much to both father and son, should have tempered the force of his convictions.

Soul-searching and introspection did not trouble him to excess. Much of the time he was happily engrossed in exploring the Monaro tablelands, canoeing down the Murrumbidgee, urging his cantankerous motor-bike along the bush tracks, practising boxing with the Cotter navvies, making friends with the Duntroon officer cadets. He was also hard at work in the evenings on his thesis on Erasmus, feeling as many students have felt that the initial enthusiasm of writing spent itself long before the last word was written. Despite his fears that the later stages of the thesis showed the mechanical effects of hard slogging, it was a creditable piece of work, earning him his Master of Arts degree with first-class honours. While no new or profound insights into the subject were to be expected, it showed extensive reading of available sources, including the complete Latin works of Erasmus and sixteen secondary references, among them material from the *Révue Historique*. (One wonders how

many M.A. students today are equipped to use Latin and French sources.) Writing the thesis was probably of most value for Boyer in helping to formulate his notions of liberalism. He was already convinced of some of his basic beliefs about liberalism: that there were ethical standards of behaviour for politics and society, and that since men's interests and needs differed too widely to be satisfied by any single code of dogma, the surest guide to these ethical standards was conscience acting by the light of reason rather than the traditions of authority. These views reflected Boyer's Protestant background, as did his faith in education as the means of developing a sound judgment in private and public conduct; already apparent in his M.A. thesis, they remained with him throughout his life.

In judging the practicability of liberalism, Erasmus, the humanist scholar who found himself under fire from both sides at the outset of the Reformation, is still very much a test case. Some historians regard him as a timid vacillator who lacked the courage of his intellectual convictions when forced to a choice between traditional authority and unorthodoxy; others see him as a dedicated humanist trying to keep alight the frail flame of objective truth among the high winds of controversy. Boyer followed the nineteenth-century Protestant historian Froude in viewing Erasmus as a 'modern' out of sympathy with the aggressive movements of his time. In this view Erasmus is important not only as the scholar who insisted on going back to the original texts to find what the Fathers of the Church meant, but also as a moralist, tempering a Renaissance ideal whose classical inspiration sometimes bordered on paganism with a 'Northern European' sense of duty to the individual conscience of the sort which later inspired the leaders of the Reformation. Insisting that traditional authority must be accountable to the questionings of reason and scholarship, Erasmus was thus even more than Luther on the side of religious individualism, but shrank from extending that individualism beyond the educated few. He was a 'judicious evolutionist doling out truth to the multitude as it is able to hear it, gradually weaning the affections from the untrue

to the true, trusting to time's all-healing touch to prevent disorder.<sup>5</sup> But could this scholarly gradualism compete with the compelling zeal of a Luther, 'clean, honest, picturesque'? People prefer a good fight, wrote Boyer,

men will follow a hero where they will not follow a policy . . . Luther stands for the belief that error is always intolerable and Truth, when ascertained to be such, is the inalienable right of every person, whether he is sufficiently balanced to stand it or no.

Luther saw truth as absolute, necessary, authoritative; Erasmus as evolutionary, relative, self-supporting. Despising dogmatism, Erasmus nevertheless accepted the authority of the Catholic church rather than break down the world of religion and learning into an anarchy where every man followed his own ill-nourished light.

The issues raised in Boyer's thesis were not just an academic exercise into long-dead theology. He was working out their implications for himself as a young Australian whose education gave him some responsibility for serving his community. What liberalism meant for a young Sydney graduate in Boyer's time can be seen in a prize essay written by H. V. Evatt in 1915.<sup>6</sup> Evatt was then a very young man who had not thrown in his lot with the labour movement, and his views reflected the liberalism of Arnold Wood, who also taught Boyer history. Evatt traced the course of Australian history to show how often petty tyranny and restrictions on individual freedom had been overcome. Very much an advocate of 'socialism without doctrines', Evatt saw a consensus of liberal attitudes in all political parties, and gently chided the Labor Party for a zeal too doctrinaire. To Evatt, liberalism in Australia was marked by a departure from *laissez-faire* and by the conscious use of the State as a means of securing social justice and thus enabling all citizens to lead the good life. This meant providing for their physical well-being, guaranteeing equality of opportunity,

<sup>5</sup> This and other quotations are taken from a draft of the thesis among the Boyer MSS.

<sup>6</sup> H. V. Evatt, *Liberalism in Australia: An Historical Sketch of Australian Politics down to the year 1915* (Sydney, 1918).

and fostering a vigorously self-protective nationalism. All these attitudes, based not too distantly on a Protestant background, were equally influential with Boyer. Although his views and Evatt's diverged in later years, both took from Sydney University at this stage not merely a well-developed concept of liberalism, but a feeling that it was the responsibility of educated men to speak out in public life so that these ideals were put into practice.

Yet the years before World War I in Australia saw in some respects a weakening of the liberal temper apparent among the founders of Federation. It was a period when old feuds were kindling between Protestants and Catholics, when youths who disliked compulsory national service underwent a good deal of officially-sanctioned bullying, when the front benches of the Commonwealth House of Representatives forsook reasoned argument for the Billingsgate of John Norton's school. The era of Alfred Deakin was waning; it was soon to be the time of the tough, intransigent men, Hughes, Bruce, Mannix, Theodore. A good many Australians, like the Lutherans whom Boyer described, preferred frankness and wholeheartedness, no matter in what cause, to academic correctness and respect for the facts. Must educated Australians, like Erasmus, stand aloof from violent controversy, or could they intervene effectively in public affairs, to raise the level of informed thought and leaven popular prejudices?

Unfortunately history goes to show us [wrote Boyer] that, especially in the religious sphere, the man of the widest vision and greatest knowledge has done little toward the eradication of evil, which he has generally left to an uncultured enthusiast. A width of vision generally means diffusion of sympathy.

At one level, of course, Boyer was reflecting the possible tension between the fundamentalist fervour which had made his father so effective a minister and the refinements and reservations which arose from his own university training. At another level he was trying to argue towards a view of man and society which could reconcile Protestantism and Enlightenment. Social progress depended on culture and



education: 'such peace as the future may have in store will depend upon individual popular enlightenment'. These were convictions which would powerfully influence the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission forty years later.

Meanwhile, however, the future of liberalism waited on more pressing events. For it was 1914, and the British Empire and its allies were at war with Germany.

## 2 War Service

To Dick Boyer, as to many other young men in 1914, the issues at stake in the early phases of the war were simple. The cause of the Allies deserved the highest loyalty from Christian principle as much as from patriotism. It was intolerable for any able-bodied young man not to serve. He thought of asking for a year's leave to go to the front, but could not leave Canberra until early in 1915 when another minister was available; meanwhile, he agonized at length about how best to serve. His own tastes were for action, but perhaps it was his Christian duty to stick closer to his training as a probationer minister. Christian influences certainly seemed to be needed in the A.I.F., however, to judge from reports stating that five hundred volunteers for the 1st Division had been sent home for drunkenness, immorality, and other forms of misbehaviour. Boyer was young enough and serious-minded enough to imagine that this situation might be changed by a stronger leavening of religiously-minded recruits, and in considering a suggestion that he might become a signals officer he weighed it as an opportunity for good work spiritually. Finding that he could not get a commission in the Signals in time to leave with the Third Contingent, he went up to Brisbane and secured an interview with the acting-premier, W. H. Barnes, a stalwart Methodist and local president of the Y.M.C.A. As a result in March 1915 the Reverend Richard Boyer became Y.M.C.A. Camp Secretary with the 25th and 26th Battalions at Alderley camp near Brisbane, with promise of the status of chaplain and an annual stipend of £150.

Alderley was not easy at first. He was a newcomer replacing an extremely popular colleague. 'The officers

regard you as an outsider,' he wrote to his father, 'while the men look upon you merely as a caretaker.'<sup>1</sup> His nearest colleague, with whom he shared a tent, was 'the Anglican padre, who has hide enough for six. He wants, if you please, to send a lay-reader to take the evening service in my tent and supersede me!'<sup>2</sup> Also Y.M.C.A. organization moved too slowly for him. After three weeks of idleness he was able to start work, but he was left without effective and specific rank, and with no definite promise of proceeding with his battalion to the front. Even before the Third Contingent sailed in May 1915, Boyer was studying German with a view to getting on Divisional Headquarters Staff if the Y.M.C.A. job proved too limiting. But at the time of his departure, he was still anxious to make good with his Y.M.C.A. responsibilities, and his hopes were mainly centred on doubling the position with service as Protestant chaplain.

Egypt altered him. Somehow during July and August, as the Queensland reinforcements went into final training for Gallipoli, it became harder to reconcile himself to the essentially civilian duties of a Y.M.C.A. functionary. It was useful, it was necessary that somebody should look after the men's leisure hours, take occasional church parades, and wage a fight against drunkenness and immorality; but could these duties compare with front-line service? He had plenty of time to think about this, for Egypt soon became boring except when the opportunity arose for sightseeing. One of Boyer's few surviving diaries describes a trip with two friends at that time. A zestful narrative, it is worth quoting in part if only to show how little Boyer's doubts about his vocation interfered with his ability to enjoy new experiences and to bluff his way through difficulties as readily as the next young Australian. After riding their hired donkeys through the cotton-fields and squalid villages to visit the monuments of Sakkara, Boyer and his two companions returned at night to the flooded Nile:

. . . and woke up the village on the Nile bank to get a crew for a felucca. Finally we dug up the sheik and then

<sup>1</sup> Boyer to Rev. F. C. Boyer, 27 Apr. 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2 Apr. 1915.

found that we had no change to pay for the craft. Promises to get change on the other side were of no avail until I produced a very business-like Colt automatic, which speedily turned the tide of events in our favour. Now came the gem of the day's experiences. The breeze had dropped considerably and there remained now barely sufficient to enable the clumsy felucca to make way against the flood waters. So we lazily worked upstream in the moonlight. As soon as we were fairly in the stream, one of the felucca's crew took off his outer shirt, laid it on the floor of the craft, and turning East lifted his face to the moonlight and began his devotions, and out of respect we all kept perfectly quiet until even an owl perched itself on the end of the long jib which supports the huge triangular sail. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Sharing these experiences with friends who would all shortly be in action, Boyer at last made up his mind to quit the service of the Y.M.C.A. and go to Gallipoli with the reinforcements in August 1915. How he managed it is not easy to piece together. One story was that he managed through the help of his orderly to stow away on one of the transports, using the papers and kit of a private who had recently died. But according to an old Queensland friend, Walter Cottrell, so many men stowed away on the Gallipoli transports that the authorities simply assembled them all and made them privates on the spot, and this sounds likely. Once there, there was no sending him back. He was at first put on mail duty, and spent some time ferrying between the transports and the shore. Exposure to constant shelling in no way dulled his taste for front-line duty, and he was profoundly disappointed when after a short spell in the lines he went down with dysentery and had to be shipped out. This taste of action decided him. The Y.M.C.A. lost an officer, and the A.I.F. gained a private.

Private Boyer was sent back to Australia in January 1916, and spent the next year in training, at first at the light duty camp at George's Heights, Middle Harbour, and later at the 3rd Battalion Depot. In November he was sent to Duntroon

\* Diary, undated (Aug. 1915).

for officer training, where he renewed many Canberra friendships. He was transferred as second lieutenant to the 1st Battalion in January 1917, joining reinforcements who were to embark three weeks later for service in France. He was a wholeheartedly enthusiastic soldier, no longer troubled by a conflict of duties. Front-line experience had increased the intellectual doubts which stood between him and the unquestioning church loyalty felt by men like his father whom he admired but could not imitate. By now he was coming to think that the ministry was not for him. Without losing his Christian convictions, he tended to give patriotism the devotion which he could no longer completely give the Methodist church. He became a public speaker for patriotic causes: addressing big open-air rallies in favour of the New South Wales referendum for closing hotels at 6 o'clock as a measure of wartime self-sacrifice, sombrely assessing the death of Lord Kitchener ('. . . it just means that the Empire will have to buck up and try to compensate for such irreparable loss . . .'), advocating a 'Yes' vote in favour of conscription. If he did not return to the ministry after the war, he reflected, his parents would be compensated by the recent ordination of his brother Mowbray. In fact, however, as Boyer moved away from the uncomplicated outlook of his family circle, the deaths of his parents snapped the most powerful emotional links which might have influenced him. First his mother died of cancer in August 1916; by the time he sailed the next February, his father was visibly failing, and died of a heart attack in July 1917. In Boyer's personal life, however, these years 1916 and 1917 saw not only the breaking up of what had been a singularly happy family circle, but also his meeting with his future wife. The circumstances were rather undignified. Immediately after his return to Australia, Boyer had succumbed to a mild attack of mumps, for which he was admitted to the Coast Hospital (now Prince Henry). Never a particularly docile patient, he was soon trying to persuade his nurses to allow him out of quarantine, and so came under the notice of the nursing sister in charge of the hospital. Elenor Underwood was a young woman well able to cope with the blarneying

of refractory patients, but she was also very attractive in looks and personality, and after his discharge from hospital Dick Boyer made it his business to keep in touch with her. When he left Australia for the second time, it was to her that he wrote most regularly.

The voyage to England took two months, with most of the usual episodes of troopship life. At Melbourne the servicemen were welcomed too lavishly: 'Just had a lively hour jailing a crowd of drugged and sodden men', he wrote, 'The row from our birdcage is Tartarus stuff. I'll have to crime the lot tomorrow. A strange life for a minister . . .', but he was accepting it much more philosophically than the earnest young clergyman at Canberra who deplored the drunkenness and immorality rife among the 1st Division. From Perth ('they are a fine patriotic lot here') the ship had a cold voyage to Durban, where the local authorities prudently closed all the hotels but allowed the Australians free travel on all trains and trams. It was April before they neared Plymouth and the reminders of war. 'Today we have passed plenty of wreckage, an upturned lifeboat, and a dead body or so in lifebelts.' Closer appraisal of the realities of war altered him from the somewhat conventionally idealistic patriotism of his Australian training to a more mature outlook. The change in his attitude was probably fairly typical of the more thoughtful and articulate young servicemen of his time. Soberly accepting the probability that he would not return from France—all the previous draft of subalterns were dead within six months—Boyer still wrote during three months of hard drilling in England with a light touch, quite without self-pity and with a heightened awareness of the physical world around him. At the same time—and it would be interesting to know how characteristic this was of young Australian officers serving abroad—his letters show increasingly a biting intolerance for those who were not serving, and particularly for the politicians who had successfully urged Australia to vote 'No' for conscription.

Our own fellows seem to do a constant round of camp to front, front to hospital, back to front when they can walk,



*Richard Boyer, B.A.*



*2nd Lieutenant Richard Boyer, A.I.F., in 1917*

and so on till it stops somehow. We haven't got one man as reinforcement for every three casualties, thanks to our 'manly and patriotic' blighters in Australia.

Later, as he voted 'Yes' in the second conscription referendum in December 1917 (which was defeated by a larger majority than in 1916) he wrote: 'I don't know how we shall exist as a people if it doesn't get thro' this time. I think I'll live in America for the rest of my life.' There were some grounds for this intensity; shortly before preaching in a Manchester Wesleyan chapel against pacifism, he was told by relatives that a Canadian cousin wounded at the Western Front had been taken prisoner by Germans and crucified against a barn door. (Later research cannot substantiate the story; but this particular atrocity, usually said to involve a wounded Canadian, gained very wide credence in Britain during the war, and it was in no way gullible of Boyer to believe it.)

The verifiable news from the Western Front was dismal enough. At Bullecourt, an action which 'more than any other battle, shook the confidence of Australian soldiers in the capacity of the British command',<sup>4</sup> the Australian 1st Battalion had suffered over 300 casualties. They were spelled for three months behind the lines, and in July the reinforcements came over to France to join them. Boyer was among them, and his first impressions were all of contrast. He could hardly credit how a blatantly thriving underworld could co-exist in Paris with an atmosphere of wartime emergency, with maimed soldiers everywhere, every second woman in widow's weeds, and British Tommies running the trams and trains:

. . . Yet I love France and the French. They are the most polite considerate and engaging people you can imagine, and I want to come back 'après la guerre' to these glorious beech and oak forests and trout streams . . . Sometimes the national impulsiveness is a bit embarrassing as when the other day a charming 'demoiselle' whose arm I bumped and to whom I apologised in my most elegant

<sup>4</sup> C. E. W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, vol. IV, p. 544.



French was so delighted at the apology that she embraced me on the spot and gave me her forgiveness with a noisy kiss on the nose to the terrific cheers of all the officers and soldiers in the street. The Battalion has been trying to learn how to apologise ever since.<sup>5</sup>

Approaching the front he noted how the distant thud of guns and the old wire entanglements were all that intruded an alien note on the countryside of northern France, where sturdy women and old men harvested among 'fields yellowing with ripe wheat or ablaze with red clover, while through it all are millions of scarlet poppies and daisies'. 'Some parts of a soldier's life are glorious,' he wrote, as his unit marched

. . . through wonderful avenues of beech or poplar with leaves and moss underfoot, ahead of you a moving stream of our boys in battle order, with their steel helmets hung on their rifles and a band at the head blaring out the news that 'Australia will be there', then the scene changes, as you get nearer the line the band disappears, the trees are shattered and the real life of slaughter and being slaughtered begins. I wouldn't be out of it for all the cigarettes in Cairo . . . With all its squabbles and mutinies the A.I.F. on active service here is a big brotherhood; it's a privilege to belong to it.<sup>6</sup>

From Paris the new reinforcements were shifted to a fairly inactive sector of the front for six weeks' initiation under fire. It was one of the wettest summers of the century, and more than shrapnel or gas-shells the troops' main enemy seemed to be the appalling mud of the Flanders countryside.

At last in September the weather eased. The veterans of the 1st Division were moved up from behind the lines to join the reinforcements, and in the second week of September an attack was mounted against the high ground east of Ypres. The objective was an advance of ten miles or so to a village called Passchendaele, with the combined aim of seizing a strategic advantage which would compel the Germans to withdraw their coastal forces, strengthening the Allied control of the English Channel, and at the same time inflicting

<sup>5</sup> Boyer to Elenor Underwood, 19 July 1917 (in possession of Lady Boyer).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

the heaviest possible losses on the enemy in order to break their morale before winter: a plan which depended, of all things, on a month's reasonably dry autumn weather while the attack proceeded in three stages. At first fortune favoured the British. The Sunday morning before the attack, wrote Boyer, was a peaceful sunlit scene, in which even the enemy Gothas dropping bombs at random seemed so inconsequential that nobody took any notice of them. There was an odd serenity about the eve of battle. The issues seemed clear, free of the perplexities of civilian life, and despite the physical squalor of war, Boyer had few regrets: 'The recruit when he just enlists is nearer the truth of things and the right perspective than ever after . . .' It was nearly his last testament. The 1st Battalion was in at the dawn assault on Glencorse Wood on 20 September, and for the next fortnight took part in the slogging five-mile advance which brought the Allied troops to the ridge overlooking Passchendaele. Then the rain returned, and with it the execrable Flanders mud; but the generals, scenting German demoralization by Christmas, sent their men into one more attack. Nobody who survived the action on 10 October ever forgot the dawn barrage which met them at zero hour, or the heavy losses that followed. What happened to the 1st Division, including Boyer's unit, is best described in Dr Bean's account:

. . . In order to cause the enemy to spread his artillery-fire for an hour or two, instead of concentrating it upon the main front, the 1st Australian Division had, at zero hour of the attack, raided against Celtic Wood, a large, broken copse containing many pillboxes. Though reported as successful, the operation ended disastrously. Of 85 officers and men, only 14 had by next day returned unwounded. The missing were never heard of again. Their names were not in any list of prisoners received during the war. The Graves Commission found no trace of their bodies after it.<sup>7</sup>

Boyer was one of the more fortunate ones. Knocked out by a German gas-shell, he recovered to crawl into a German

<sup>7</sup> *Official History*, vol. IV, pp. 899-900.

pillbox where, in his words, 'I spewed and gasped nearly 48 hours without water, with only a dead Prussian Guardsman for company.' The stretcher party which eventually brought him back to the Ypres road was heavily shelled, and before the wounded lieutenant got to safety he had a splinter of shrapnel in his left shoulder. He was a fortnight in hospital at Le Touquet before he recovered enough to write a letter, and then he had to be returned to England immediately.

That ended the war for Boyer. He spent most of the winter in London, angrily chafing at hospital discipline—his most cheerful letter at the time to Elenor Underwood described how he managed to evade his nurses to attend a Drury Lane opera matinee—and rather bitterly resentful of the apparent indifference and selfishness of the London civilians. He knew he was lucky to be alive. In his battalion 20 of his fellow officers and over 400 men had been casualties in the three weeks between Ypres and Passchendaele. It irked him that the London Press seemed to spend more space on chimney-pots destroyed in air-raids than in telling the public about the slaughter on the Western Front. He commented sardonically on the speed with which civilians fled for the shelter of the underground railways at the first sign of an air-raid, and described one Sunday night during his convalescence spent 'playing ragtime to hysterical ladies with the loud pedal down to drown the shrapnel'. Late in February he was thought fit enough to return to France, but no sooner had he arrived than a remnant of gas in his lungs forced him back to hospital, and he was once more shipped back to England. This time the diagnosis was that the gas had left him with a permanent weakness in the lungs, and there was no question of further active service for him. In September 1918 he returned to Australia.

The next few months were probably the worst of his life. Aimless, cynical, shaken, he could see no purpose or vocation before him. To go back to the Methodist ministry was quite out of the question. He was having a hard enough time to retain any remnants of Christian faith at all, and certainly had no stomach for preaching a gospel of love when he was still feeling an ex-serviceman's resentment for those who had

lived comfortably and thanklessly at home without any real conception of what war meant to the men in the trenches. No doubt his despondency was partly due to the state of his health. His doctors advised him to leave Sydney for a warmer climate. Perhaps because of this advice he was considering about this time an invitation to go prospecting for gold in New Guinea; but eventually he dropped the idea in favour of going to Queensland. This invitation came from another returned man, Bob Croaker, who had married a sister of Elenor Underwood and recently taken up management of a sheep station, Boatman, for the New Zealand Loan and Mercantile Company. More for want of anything else to do than with any positive expectation of finding a career, Boyer left Sydney for Queensland in April 1919. In this almost accidental fashion he was to begin his lifelong connection with the pastoral industry.

Boatman was about 400 miles inland from Brisbane, and some 70 miles from Charleville, the nearest town of any size. Situated in the mulga country between the Maranoa and the Warrego, it was far enough west to be as yet unaffected by the changes which the coming of motor transport would bring. Station life was still isolated and self-sufficient, relying largely for its mails and news of the outside world on a coach service from the railway station at Morven—provided the trains were on time and the coachman sober. Yet by 1919 this district was long past its pioneering days. It was over half a century since the first parties had arrived with sheep (John Underwood, who was to become Boyer's father-in-law, had been out that way looking for country as early as 1864, and his group were by no means the first comers), and nearly thirty years since the Charleville railway had been completed just in time to be the salvation of the district during the depression and droughts of the nineties. Since the king drought of 1902, there had been an almost unbroken period of recovery and moderate prosperity, although the spread of rabbits, dingoes, and prickly-pear forced many properties out of sheep and into cattle. Rainfall, although erratic and uncertain, usually showed an adequate total; but in 1915 there had been a bad year to remind the pastoralists

that the good seasons would not last forever, and a good deal of artesian boring had been attempted on the more progressive stations. Improvement programs were limited, however, not only by the capacity of bullock-team transport, but also by the fact that, especially since the war, labour was dear and inclined to be militant. The district's future depended a good deal on wool and cattle prices holding at the high levels of wartime. In 1919 prices even seemed to be gaining slightly, giving rise to considerable optimism, especially among people with little experience of the pastoral industry.

For Boyer, the attractions of outback life were not immediate. After staying with the Croakers at Boatman he drifted back to Sydney for a while, still feeling the after-effects of the gas in his lungs, and still despondent with himself and his prospects. There must have been some therapeutic influence in his experiences in the Queensland bush, however, because before long he decided to go back. This time he was a working guest on Bicton station, in the same district as Boatman, as boundary rider in charge of a bore. It was solitary, monotonous work, but he fittened up considerably as a consequence. Gradually his frame of mind mellowed, and he began to spin plans for settling outback. Occasional swagmen and other travellers crossed his path, and through yarning with them he began to pick up knowledge of the ways and possibilities of the country. By the time Elenor Underwood came up to spend a holiday at Boatman, Boyer was over the worst of his difficulties, and cheerfully and enthusiastically planning for the future. He rode over from Bicton to propose that they should marry, find a likely piece of country, and try to build up a cattle station. He was accepted. It was the best decision he made in his life. His fiancée was not only a strikingly good-looking young woman, 'tall, dark and gracious' as one family friend testifies, but also had many qualities which complemented his own. Appreciating his idealism and optimism, she also had a shrewd, business-like mind which tempered his enthusiasms without in any way crippling them. She was completely happy in sharing his career, even when it consisted of trying to create a sheep-run out of a neglected

piece of prickly-pear country in the outback. It was a profoundly happy marriage.

Now began a time of actively scouring south-western Queensland in search of a likely spot for a cattle run. Opportunities existed, for the Queensland Government of the day was systematically pruning old-established pastoral properties of much of their acreage in order to encourage the settlement of smaller men, particularly returned soldiers. But in a district where much of the frontage country along the creeks and gullies was choked with prickly-pear, it was not easy to find a suitable block. When subdivision took place, the rule was for the Lands Department to accept tenders for the newly available block, holding a ballot to decide between applicants if, as usually happened, demand was strong. Boyer soon found out, however, that 'The curse of this balloting system is that big landholders put all sorts of hoboies in as dummies, use the land for 6 months, and then forfeit it. There were 31 total applications and about 10 of these were genuine landseekers . . .' for one block, and others were almost as keenly sought. The search went on through the summer months of 1919-20. He might have got a piece of country near Bourke, in New South Wales, but was unwilling to go far from the Warrego where he had first been attracted to the idea of pastoral life: 'I love this scrub and timbered country, it's isolated and yet very homely, while the plains are depressing.' Borrowing an elderly Studebaker, he inspected a promising block near Ambathala, and 'full to the eyes of brilliant ideas and plans' wrote to his fiancée describing how they would have their honeymoon journey en route to the property. He even bought a hundred steers for what turned out to be the over-high price of £950. Unfortunately, he neglected to pay current rent on the block in time, and the Lands Department foreclosed. Protest was unavailing, and the search was on again.

Meanwhile, Boyer had missed out on one of the major excitements in the history of Charleville. Various shady characters had found their way to the town, where they made a practice of greeting returned ex-servicemen with their

pockets full of pay and guiding them to the hospitality of the public bars. When the returning hero was sufficiently liquored, cards, two-up or, once in a while, standover tactics would part him from his money, after which his drinking companions would lose all interest in him. The police in Charleville seemed far too tolerant of these goings-on. Eventually the returned men decided to take the law into their own hands. One sultry December afternoon they got together in Charleville, rounded up the undesirables, escorted them to the Brisbane train, and warned them never to come back. As an added precaution, they telegraphed returned servicemen's organizations as far down the line as Roma. This proved unnecessary; none of the men who had been run out of Charleville showed the least desire to return. In the course of the operation, however, the Charleville ex-servicemen had clashed with the police, and the two officers who led the round-up were arrested on a charge of disturbing the peace. Bail was allowed, and for the present excitement subsided. By the time Boyer heard about these stirring events, and wired offering his services, he was rather disappointed to learn that further help was not needed. Two months later, however, when the arrested officers came to trial before the Circuit Court, ex-service organizations along the railway line were alerted, and three thousand ex-servicemen between Cunnamulla and Roma were believed to be at the ready awaiting the verdict. A good many returned soldiers managed to find business taking them to Charleville, and in all probability Dick Boyer was one of them. Whether the presence of so many ex-servicemen nonchalantly loitering around the streets of Charleville made any difference to the decision is impossible to judge at this distance, but at any rate the court in its wisdom found the two officers not guilty on all charges.<sup>8</sup> At the time the episode rather impressed Boyer as showing the part which ex-servicemen might have to play in cleaning up abuses on the home

<sup>8</sup> The details for this story come from a rough notebook of Boyer's in which evidently he worked out sketches for the *Bulletin*, *Smith's Weekly*, and other publications, and which from internal evidence can be dated about 1923, only a few years after the events described. I have not been able to see the

front, but in later life, perhaps more aware of the ways in which the ex-service ideal might be misused, he told the story simply as an example of the rough-and-ready methods of a bush community in those days.

While in Charleville in February 1920, he got to know the local doctor, H. L. St Vincent Welch, who turned out to be interested in investing money in a pastoral property, and soon agreed to go into partnership with Boyer. Fortified by this backing, he then went to Ularunda station, not far from Boatman. One of the biggest and oldest properties in the district, Ularunda was the top station in the neighbourhood. It was owned by a family named Fletcher, who had made a policy of reinvesting their money in the property. It had the most fencing of any station in the district, the biggest mill, the biggest kitchen-range, and the most employees. One of the last local properties to persevere with sheep, Ularunda at its peak ran 60,000 sheep, shorn by steam-driven machinery in a large shed of Mungalala pine. Dick Boyer was a frequent and welcome visitor at Ularunda. The boss, Ernest Fletcher, trim, wiry, Vandyke-bearded, a strong-minded rationalist and atheist, spent many a warm evening on the homestead verandah in intellectual sparring about the younger man's hopeful religious convictions. The household included his two brothers, their sister and housekeeper Mrs Wilkinson, and a niece, Dorothy, who later became a

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Charleville newspaper for that period. According to the Brisbane Press, the two arrested ex-officers were accused of inciting a riot, and summoned to appear before the local Magistrate's Court on 24 December 1919. Two days later a large number of police, variously estimated at between twenty-two and seventy, were railed to Charleville and patrolled the town until the magistrate, after an eight days' remand, referred the case to the Circuit Court. Considerable local indignation was reported at the presence of so many police. It was, however, a period when, because of industrial unrest and because of an unrestrained Press campaign against the Theodore Government, incidents of violence were quite common in Queensland country towns; and Charleville, suffering from a local meat famine and a good deal of unemployment, may have been thought a potential danger spot. When the Circuit Court heard the case in March 1920, I can find no direct confirmation of Boyer's story that the district's ex-servicemen were alerted to be present; but the *Queenslander* reports that the jury found their verdict very quickly, and that there was loud cheering in Court, so the story does not sound at all improbable. See *Brisbane Courier*, 2 and 26 Dec. 1919; *Queenslander*, 3 and 17 Jan., 20 March 1920.



novelist of some repute and modelled at least one of her characters on Boyer. There was also young Walter Cotterell, who was to marry Dorothy Wilkinson, and the old head stockman, Bill Pallet, whose Falstaffian girth—he weighed about twenty-three stone in his prime—was a constant problem when it came to getting on and off his horse Redlight, but made no difference to his ability as a first-class bushman. One of the old tough breed, he was once thrown from his horse while mustering alone after sheep, and impaled himself on a stump. So, the story goes, ‘Bill pushed back his guts inside, took the surcingle from his horse because it was the only strap big enough for the job, wound it twice round his middle, and rode back home . . .’. He was healed within six weeks. Years later, just before he died, he gave strict instructions that there was to be no funeral or formality about his last rites. ‘Just cut a good piece off me for the dogs, and bury the rest.’ In fact, his friends got Dick Boyer over to read a simple service, and he was buried in an unmarked grave in the bush. Nobody now knows the exact spot, so the old bushman got his way about having no memorial.

Boyer’s object in visiting Ularunda was to inspect an unoccupied block of country east and north of the Fletchers’ homestead. Previously held as part of Ularunda, it was an area of 38,652 acres fenced on three sides. The Ularunda management were still making some use of this country, although in expectation of its resumption by the government they had ceased paying rent on it when the old lease ran out. Timbered mainly with mulga and box, with a little ironbark and kurrajong, the land boasted two permanent water-holes on Durella Creek and a bore put down by the Fletchers in 1912. Attracted by the good grass and water, Boyer had only one doubt: the infestation of the northern part of the block by prickly-pear. Leasehold conditions for a grazing homestead included a proviso that pear should be eradicated within twelve months of taking up the country; but, Boyer thought, this condition was usually ignored: ‘It is impossible to do this, in fact the rotten stuff would break the National Bank to clear’. The more he

thought about the property, the more he liked the look of it. Within a fortnight his application was filed and this time accepted without delay. 'The beauty of the place is that we can run sheep—a much more profitable game than cattle for the selector . . .', he commented, 'I'm as excited as a kid with a new toy.' For the present, however, the unfenced run could be stocked only with cattle, and by various purchases Boyer now had 700 head to start with. He also purchased a horse and dray from a shooters' camp in a transaction which deserves quotation:

The men were out but arrived at the camp at dusk with a keg of rum and both pretty drunk. Wanted the dray badly so spent the night . . . This morning the spree continued and both got to fighting pitch. Their women folk (two young girls) smelling trouble took to the bush. By a bit of manoeuvring I ran in the horse I wanted and got the dray. Big row just before I left but soaped them over and got away with my prize. Had to ride my horse and drive the dray as well—ticklish job thro' the trackless scrub. Arrived here about 4 this afternoon. Now I've got to bump over the 43 miles between here and 'home' with the outfit. It will take me  $2\frac{1}{2}$  days good going.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly after this episode he was on his way to Sydney. It was barely a year since, disgruntled and shaken by his war experiences, he first left for Queensland with no particular aim in view save that of obeying doctor's orders. Mended in health and spirit, he was now tackling confidently a proposition of the kind which was to be so often attempted in vain by returned men: to become established on the land with a minimum of capital and a maximum of hard work. The time now seemed suitable for an even more important and successful venture. On 20 May 1920, in a quiet ceremony at her sister's home in Sydney, Richard Boyer and Elenor Underwood were married.

<sup>9</sup> Boyer to Elenor Underwood, 18 Apr. 1920 (in possession of Lady Boyer).

### 3 Durella

The Boyers' honeymoon was spent travelling in a T-model Ford from Sydney by way of Bourke and Cunnamulla to their new property, Durella. It was an apt introduction to the vicissitudes of outback life. Even on their first night's camping out of Sydney their provisions were stolen by a dog. All the way beyond Bourke they met with unseasonable rain and floods, until after crossing the Queensland border they had to halt for several days at Congoola, a small siding where the permanent population seemed to consist of two young railway clerks whose main occupation in life was writing leave passes for each other. When they finally continued the old Ford became hopelessly bogged when crossing the path of another storm. This time two bullock teams came to the rescue, dragging their utility through several miles of mud to the edge of the storm. That evening the rains caught up with them again, and they retreated to the Victa woolshed and camped in a wool bin. Next morning they were wakened by a party of kangaroo shooters who had taken refuge in the shed later that night and being first up in the morning had cooked the young couple a good breakfast. It was six weeks after their marriage before they arrived at Durella, but the heavy rains had given them hope of a splendid season with which to start their pastoral venture.

They had little else to begin with. Their homestead consisted of a 27-foot hospital marquee and two smaller tents erected alongside the big Durella waterhole. One tent was for sleeping, one for kitchen, and one for living room. Their original sleeping arrangements were spring mattresses on ground sheets, but after awakening one night to find that

the creek had come down in flood and was swamping their tent, they mounted the mattresses on drums and improvised a wardrobe from kerosene-tins. They had a well beside the creek for domestic water, and a tin bath-tub in one of the tents provided bathing and laundry facilities. For economy and for want of refrigeration they killed none of their stock for meat, but lived mainly off rabbits—of which there were plenty. Their improvements consisted of a quantity of boundary fencing, including nine miles of rabbit-proof, and the Number One bore with a 20,000 gallon tank and some new heavy cattle troughing, all inherited from the management of Ularunda, who did not let their genuine friendliness towards their new neighbours prevent them from driving a sufficiently hard bargain over payment. And that, apart from Dick Boyer's own initiative and his wife's loyalty and good sense, was the sum total of their assets.

Many ex-servicemen were tempted to go on the land in similar circumstances after World War I, and the number of failures was to be a melancholy story during the twenties and thirties. Nor was success certain for the Boyers. They had little money, despite the backing of Dr St Vincent Welch. As a result of his wartime experiences Dick Boyer's health was still far from robust, and despite his boyhood in country towns and his few months of jackarooing he still had a great deal to learn about the bush. Neighbours observed some of his early efforts with kindly amusement. They said he 'felled a tree like a Chinaman ringbarking', and he was not considered a skilled hand at mustering. They still enjoy the story of how Dick and a couple of friends were trying to shift a stubborn weaner out of the Durella water-hole; Boyer, to encourage the beast to move, took off all his clothes and waded in after it, but it unexpectedly turned and charged him, chasing the future chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission naked through a fine patch of prickly-pear. But because he was willing to learn and work hard, and because of his pleasant manner, most of these neighbours were glad to help and advise the new settler. Ularunda was especially hospitable to the Boyers, entertaining them for weekends, lending them reading matter, and

generally easing the hard months of early pioneering. Veteran stockmen such as Bill Pallet and Harry Heelan, who was also battling to establish himself on a small piece of country, gave a helping hand. It became known that the Boyers were generous—Heelan and Boyer returning to Durella one evening after a hard day's work found they had to wait for dinner because Boyer's wife had given away the first meal she cooked to a passing swagman—and that they worked hard.<sup>1</sup> Despite his lack of robust health, Boyer also had a formidable reputation as a fighting man, partly on the strength of his boxing experience at University and in the army, but mainly because of one episode of his early years on Durella. During a drought period, there came through Durella a tough-looking, loud-mouthed drover 'of fiery countenance and large proportions', who bullied his men and was widely disliked. While on Durella he took his mob of cattle off the stock route to pirate some of the little precious feed that remained. Boyer found him, ordered him back on to the stock route and off the place. A furious argument ensued with the drover's men as an audience. The argument was only resolved when Boyer invited the drover to dismount and settle matters with his fists. Although the drover could probably have half killed Boyer the bluff worked. The man wheeled his horse and removed the cattle. But the story grew with telling around the district until before long Boyer was reputed to have dragged this giant from his horse and thrashed him. He had little further trouble from drovers.

Boyer was one of those men about whom stories grew in the folklore of the district. They say, for instance, that when the Salvation Army chief, General Bramwell Booth, was touring Queensland, Boyer in common with most of the settlers in the district turned up to hear him preach. The General's eloquent address concluded with a mighty peroration in which he urged those present to contribute

<sup>1</sup> Some of Boyer's reminiscences of Queensland in the early twenties are included in his article, 'The significance of Joseph Furphy in Australian Literature', *Southerly*, No. 3, 1954, pp. 213-16. For the rest of this chapter, I have used the Durella papers, conversations with his wife and son, and oral tradition.

generously to the work of the Lord. An embarrassing silence reigned; until Dick Boyer got up and with becoming diffidence confessed that he had been much moved by the General's appeal, and pledged to donate half his wool clip to the work of the Salvation Army. This gesture from one of the poorest and newest of the district's graziers shamed others into action. One man rose and pledged £200, another £500, and several similar donations were eventually pledged. It was a heartening experience for the General; and it was only afterwards, as the men stood around yarning outside the shire hall, that somebody thought to ask Boyer how large he expected his next wool clip to be, only to receive the answer that in fact the Boyers were in cattle and had only two sheep on the property at that time . . . It is a pleasant story, but unfortunately it is not true.

Within three weeks of his arrival at Durella Boyer had launched a program of improvements. He began by starting to fence out a horse-paddock with a three-wire fence. His first major requirement was an improved system of watering points, and his early attempts to meet this need were primitive and laborious. With no other equipment than a wheelbarrow, pick, and shovel, he attempted singlehanded to place a bank across a gully. This heavy work set his health back, and all went for nothing, as the next big downpour washed away the little dam. His next effort to provide stock water was to purchase for a few pounds a 'tumbling Tommy' scoop—a small horse-drawn scoop which a man guided, tipped, and filled—with which tanks could be sunk. Between improvements, as no money was coming in during these early months, Dick Boyer took odd jobs in the neighbourhood, at one time working as a rouseabout during shearing on Ularunda, at another taking a contract to erect a line of rabbit-proof fencing. He tried writing occasional paragraphs for the *Bulletin* and *Smith's Weekly*, and earned several helpful cheques for a guinea or two from sharply-observed descriptions of the swagmen, shearers, and other passing characters; or else for retailing the story of local landmarks such as Clarke's Grave, where a lost traveller had perished during drought. He wrote these articles not as an observer

looking on at outback life but as one who completely identified himself with the Western Queensland scene. It was a hard life, full of improvisations, but personally satisfying, even if not quite what might have been expected of a Sydney University Master of Arts of seven years' standing.

In view of existing marketing arrangements and the general estimate of the district's capacity, the Boyers planned to concentrate on cattle. By the beginning of 1922 further purchases at between £3 and £5 a head brought the herd to over eight hundred, and the first calves were arriving. And then reverses came. After two flush seasons, the Morven district experienced two light years. Owing to foreign competition in the export trade the market for fat cattle collapsed overnight. The Boyers had at this time the unpleasant but not uncommon experience of freighting a truckload of fat steers to Sydney, which was delayed on the way and arrived to fetch only £3.14s. a head. They had originally cost £7.10s. and had been fattened for eighteen months on Durella. Beasts purchased for £4.18s. in 1921 now had a book value of £1.10s. The final touch came when their first stud bull disappeared one weekend while the Boyers were visiting Ularunda. He had tumbled down the homestead well, where his body was found contaminating their main supply of drinking water.

Now Durella was working on the narrowest of margins. In the financial year 1921/2 the property ran a deficit of £245, yet expenses were mounting. Pests had to be eradicated if the stock were to thrive, and this meant somehow purchasing and erecting netting to keep out the wild dogs. Rabbits competed for feed in dry seasons, and it often fell to Boyer's wife to drive the poison cart, distributing phosphorus and pollen from the back of the dray. (In the worst year, 1923, when her husband and the jackaroo were both sick, she was also cutting and burning down mulga to feed the milkers and the horses.) Financially the Boyers were able to survive on Durella only through a loan of £726 from the State Advances Corporation, a Queensland Government authority designed to help the establishment of

ex-servicemen on the land and at the time the only financial institution prepared to consider a struggling grazing selection as security. The State Lands Department, slow and bureaucratic though it often was, produced one or two pleasant surprises. A charge of £484 for rabbit netting was found, after five months' leisurely consideration, to be overestimated by one-third. More permanently helpful was the Prickly Pear Act of 1923, providing a cheap rate of leasehold to settlers on infested land prepared to undertake eradication. Not only was Durella included in this category, which meant a reduction in annual rental from  $1\frac{1}{2}$ d. to  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. an acre, but also the new rate was made retrospective to 1921, entitling the Boyers to the refund of a sizeable lump sum.

The country was not fully stocked, and the Boyers decided to try to make something from agistment. Two sheepmen were eventually found who sounded interested, but seemed reluctant to pasture their stock on cattle country where dingoes would be a hazard. To overcome their scruples Dick Boyer invited them to his tent homestead, where the deal could be discussed one evening over a bottle of Scotch—then a rare luxury, not to be lightly dispensed. While the bottle passed round, their friend, the overseer from Boatman, was posted in a neighbouring tent with instructions to play at full blast on an old gramophone the six or seven records which were all the Boyers possessed at the time—just in case it was necessary to drown the howling of wild dogs. The whisky finished, the Boyers persuaded their guests to stay the night and look over the property the next morning. It was a pity that, at one of the first gates they passed through, they encountered in broad daylight a large yellow dingo, so much at home that he hardly bothered to shift at their approach. Vainly Dick Boyer enthused about the quality of his land and his feed; he had somehow lost the interest of his guests, and the deal fell through. One or two other contracts for agistment followed later, but this was clearly no satisfactory basis for development.

Gradually amenities came. By the end of 1922 the Boyers had a telephone, attached to a box tree under the open sky



and connected to the exchange at Morven twenty-eight miles away. Their homestead by this time consisted of six tents and a humpy, and they had the best of reasons for wanting something more permanent. In February 1923 their first child was born: a son named Richard after his father. Choosing a site on a mulga ridge on the opposite side of Durella Creek, the Boyers had a prefabricated timber house sent up from Brisbane. It arrived on two bullock waggons in June, and to get the load over the last creek the driver had to yoke both teams to one waggon and urge them across virtually on their knees. After that Harry Heelan and Dick Boyer (supervised by his infant son, who apparently would stop crying only while they were hammering at work), assembled the house themselves and by July the Boyers were ready to move into the building which remains the nucleus of the modern Durella homestead. Encouraged by this step forward, the Boyers then ventured to apply for a third block of land adjoining their original holding. It was another slice of Ularunda country, undeveloped but for two bores for which compensation would have to be found. The clerks at the Lands Department found that theirs was the only application correctly submitted in accordance with legal form, awarded the leasehold to the Boyers, and so increased their holding to 61,000 acres in all. This scarcely qualified them as plutocrats; they had to sell ten cattle to pay the survey fee for their new block. And hardly had they committed themselves to this new expansion when the Boyers met a demand from Dr St Vincent Welch for release from the partnership. Dismayed at the downturn in cattle prices, the doctor was prepared to sell out his share in Durella for £548. Somehow the money was found, but interest payments were an extra charge on the property for nearly ten years. Meanwhile they were confronted by a demand from the Lands Department for the erection of a boundary fence between the two blocks. Since the survey followed the flood plain of Durella Creek, Boyer argued that this would be a waste of time; but the authorities insisted, and capital had to be found for this unnecessary fence.

Then, early in 1924, the drought broke:

Last Thursday terrific rains from the range to here brought the Creek down in the worst flood since the big one in 1890. It started off by washing away the house dam at Tregoning, the railway tank and the new dam. Coming into Durella it took away half a mile of dognetting and was over the sill of the 18 mile gate. Swept down the creek a sheet of water stretching from ridge to ridge taking nearly the whole of our stock-route fence and altering the look of the country so that I could hardly find the road. At the South paddock the cattleyards are half down, the dead wool washed out of the woolshed and the yards piled high with debris and pear. . . .<sup>2</sup>

But the paddocks were 'a glory of green', and the Boyers were able to keep going by letting their pastures for agistment until their property was developed enough to support them. This was the last dry year until 1932, but cattle prices remained desperately low. Durella had yet to show that it could make profits. The only hope for the Boyers was to open up their back country where prickly-pear was no great problem, and convert to sheep. This called for more money, and although Mowbray Boyer agreed to invest a few hundred pounds in the property, the backing of a substantial finance company had to be secured. Moreover the Lands Department, although no longer insisting on the construction of a boundary fence between the Durella blocks after the half-erected structure was swept away in the floods, was still demanding that the Boyers should have somebody living on their third block of country—either a partner or a bailiff. This would have meant building a cottage and paying someone to live ten miles from the homestead, and the money simply was not there to comply. An application for relief from this provision was refused by the Lands Department. It was then that Boyer's wife decided that it was time to see the Minister for Lands, and accompanied by their young son she went down to Brisbane. The Minister at first refused her an appointment, but she politely stated her intention of waiting outside his office with her small child

<sup>2</sup> Boyer to his wife, no date.

until the interview was granted, and this had the desired effect. She managed to convince him that the bailiffing provision was a hardship to men making a start on the land, and the Boyers got their exemption. Her next visit was to the Australian Mercantile and Land Finance Company, from whom they were seeking backing for the change from cattle to sheep. The proposition was not especially attractive to the company, and the manager was quite equivocal until Elenor Boyer was aroused to ask him: 'Mr Devereux, will you or won't you provide the finance requested? At present you're merely wasting my time and I yours.' The shock of this confrontation had its effect on a financier accustomed to deference from hard-up graziers; and most, if not all, of the finance was forthcoming. She certainly had a good business instinct, as the connection between Durella and the A.M.L.F. has continued to the present day.

The arrangement was that the A.M.L.F. should pay off Durella's outstanding liabilities and provide further accommodation to a total of just over £7,100, against which sheep could be purchased and further fencing and watering-points provided. This would be gradually paid off against a wool-clip which was estimated to bring about £2,400 annually from 6,000 sheep and perhaps 1,000 lambs. The new departure began unpromisingly, as the first mob of merino ewes purchased from a Longreach grazier turned out to include a number of broken-mouthed and cancered specimens, who had been badly handled in droving. Such as they were, they were a nucleus for the future, and after selling off the majority of their cattle at what was then the very satisfactory price of £6 a head, the Boyers at last found their affairs beginning to prosper. Dick Boyer often claimed that the switch from cattle to sheep under this new arrangement represented the takeoff which established them in the eyes of the pastoral community, not as mere cattle cockies but as a station with a future.

A busy program of improvements followed. The inexperienced novice from Sydney had developed considerable resource as an improviser and handyman. To the critical

eyes of veterans, he may never have seemed a bushman; but his notions of pushing an energetic policy of mechanization suited the needs of his time better than the conservatism of old hands. Not that he was uninfluenced by neighbouring examples. The Fletchers of Ularunda, ploughing their profits back into the country, had been ahead of their time in such matters as the provision of artificial waters and the use of tractors to fell mulga as feed in poor seasons. They were well ahead of their neighbours in the conservation of surface waters. Through accurate surveys they constructed drains to harvest the run-off from fairly flat country, which was a much cheaper process than boring. Durella played something of a pioneer role in showing how the benefits of mechanization might be applied even to smaller properties. The Boyers are credited with introducing the first spray-dips into their district, and were among the first pastoralists to use tractors for tank-sinking. And their preference for motor transport over horse wherever possible went clean against the accepted traditions of bush life. Their methods were justified by the simple fact that at last Durella was beginning to pay its way. It was to become the only property in the district which never ran a deficit during the depression of the thirties, although in one year the profit was only £11. So the inexperienced new chum achieved practical success through the use of a trained and lively intelligence: as his friend Sir John Medley was later to observe, 'those who sometimes feel doubtful about the practical value of a University education can take comfort from his case'.<sup>3</sup>

Durella was developed according to a carefully thought-out plan. First, in the years between 1926 and 1930 the fencing of the property against wild dogs and rabbits was completed, and considerable progress made with subdivision into paddocks. A new bore and several tanks were put down, and a woolshed and yards constructed for shearing. Next a start was made with an extensive program of ringbarking. Previously graziers had avoided the more thickly wooded country, where little grass or herbage had a chance to grow. Because it cost 4s. 6d. an acre to clear heavily timbered

\* 'Sir Richard Boyer', *Australian Quarterly*, Sept. 1961, p. 54.

land, as contrasted with the normal figure of 1s. 6d. or 2s., many doubted whether the heavier country would repay ringing. In the belief that prolific growth indicated superior country, and that once the trees had been killed off the nitrogen content of the soil would stimulate a better growth of grass, Boyer concentrated his efforts on the heavier country. The decision paid off. The ringbarked country was soon covered with a promising range of feed, and the sheep thrived. A further boost came in the late twenties with the introduction to the district of the cactoblastis insect, which before long entirely cleaned the country of prickly-pear infestation. Durella was among the first stations to benefit from the clearing of valuable pastures along the river frontages, although this new potential brought with it a need for further investment in clearing, fencing, and watering the extra available acreage. So, with increased carrying capacity, with a run of adequate if not spectacular seasons, and a vigorous policy of improvements, Durella stood in a strong position to weather the depression after 1929.

A few modest luxuries reflected these improved conditions. The telephone was now installed within the homestead. Wireless came in 1925. Tennis courts were laid out on the site where the first tents had been pitched, and tennis parties became a Durella tradition. Yet, despite the strong community feeling which to a considerable extent overcame loneliness, it was still an isolated life. It was not just that Boyer's wife had to travel eighty miles to Charleville each time a child arrived—their daughter, named Marianne after Boyer's mother, was born in 1927—but that they might have to travel almost the same distance for a weekend's tennis with friends on the Maranoa. Within the homestead, the only means of keeping food fresh was a Coolgardie safe, and every summer saw fresh meat go bad, vegetables wither, and butter melt. The first kerosene refrigerator did not arrive until the mid-thirties. A more hazardous reminder of the isolation of the bush came on the day in 1928 when Boyer was away from the homestead and his wife was confronted by a rather wild-looking individual whom she recognized as a madman wanted by the police for murdering a man

with an axe. She placated him with something to drink, and he eventually made off, so that she was able to telephone the police at Morven. Perhaps the episode reflected not just the isolation of outback life, but also the strength of the bush code of respect for women and children which was ingrained even in a psychopathic criminal.

The normal pattern of station life, however, was a placid enough succession of seasonal routines, with each year adding to the solidarity and prosperity of Durella. By November 1933 the Boyers were in an assured enough position to add another block of country to their holding: Letterkenny, eight miles by four, purchased for £1,200 and bringing the total acreage of Durella to 85,588. The proposition looked unattractive, for the Letterkenny block required not only fencing and tank-sinking, but also the eradication of unusually large packs of dingoes. Conventional methods seemed unavailing against them, as the dogs became cunning about poison, and Boyer decided to attempt wiping them out in one large-scale campaign. About sixty men were brought together on Durella, some paid hands but mostly neighbours with an interest in cleaning up a notorious breeding-ground. All were equipped with stock-whips and rattles, and the plan was to advance towards one corner of Letterkenny noisily driving the dogs before them into a small area where they could be picked off by guns. It was essentially the same strategy as Governor Arthur's Black War in Tasmania, and it had about as little success. The scrub was too thick for a successfully co-ordinated drive. The first day the men flushed a lot of kangaroos, but no dogs; the next drive produced two foxes and a few emus. After that, men were set to watching the water-holes, in the hope of starving the dogs out, but despite a fortnight of vigilance beginning with 4 a.m. breakfasts, the dingoes were still cheekily killing several sheep daily. This stretched manpower considerably. Boyer's wife stood guard at one water-hole with a veteran bushman, Charlie Ogden; his eleven-year-old son, although unable to walk because of a leg in plaster, was posted with old Harry Heelan at another part of the creek. Gradually the numbers were reduced by

shooting and poisoning, until when there were only two or three left the force was reduced to a very experienced half-caste trapper. It was he who eventually got the last of the pack, a notorious outlaw sired by a staghound, trap-shy and so wary that he eluded five spring-guns that had been set for him. It was only after eighteen months that Letterkenny ceased to be for Boyer 'a fearful burden with no return', and instead became a reliable pasture even in seasons when the rest of Durella was eaten almost bare.

By 1937, when Boyer moved to Brisbane and put in his wife's nephew as manager, Durella was at its peak of capacity, shearing more than 20,000 sheep. The homestead had been twice enlarged, and its out-buildings included a woolshed, yards, and recently erected shearers' quarters. Total investment in the property included about £7,000 spent on fencing, £3,000 on bores, tanks, and other watering points, and about £1,700 paid at various times for ring-barking some 17,000 acres. Materially it was a handsome achievement, but for Boyer the building of Durella was not something which could be given a meaning simply in terms of profit. Through Durella he had recovered his bearings after the harsh experiences of wartime, and found a creative and purposeful activity around which to shape his life. Beginning bush life as an absolute novice, he had broadened his experience and his tolerance of other viewpoints; he was never again to condemn those who thought differently in the hard, uncompromising terms which as a young officer he had used of the anti-conscriptionists. The emotional attachment which he gave first to the church and later to the army was now diffused into a less demonstrative but even more firmly-rooted feeling for the Queensland bush and the values which he found in it. Even after he moved into the wider world of affairs and had to live in the city, Durella was his centre. He hated to be too long away from there, and after the heaviest rounds of public business found his therapy in returning to Durella. Even in the height of a howling midsummer drought he could write happily how 'This sweat, axe and saddle life certainly suits my old frame,

and I'm enjoying the relaxation from cerebral activity.'<sup>4</sup> He had become a thorough countryman, but a countryman well read and intellectually disciplined.

Boyer's reading and intellectual development on Durella are not easy to document. Certainly his interests did not wither, but especially in the early pioneering years there must have been little time for reading. A man who has been clearing prickly-pear or rounding up stock all day is often ready to fall asleep before his evening meal is finished. And Durella was far away from good libraries. All the same, Boyer made the effort to keep abreast with current trends in philosophy. Whatever else he missed, he made it a rule always to read the *Hibbert Journal*, and this more than anything else stimulated his sporadic but wide reading in contemporary theology. His interest in Australian politics at that time was much that of the average Queensland woolgrower, except for a most uncommon awareness of the world beyond Australia, which gradually led him to read with increasing discrimination as much as he could lay his hands on about the League of Nations and similar ventures in international co-operation. If his years in isolation at Durella left him with no more than an eagerly receptive mind for reading and assimilating new ideas, this was perhaps more than a conventional professional life might have given him.

Boyer had always had it at the back of his mind that, if and when Durella prospered, he would seek some opportunity of serving the community in public life. With no taste for self-aggrandisement, he nevertheless shared a conviction not uncommon among returned officers after World War I that those whose means and education permitted owed it to the men who had not survived to take a role in Australian public affairs. This is not to say that they were interested solely in developing returned soldiers' pressure-groups. As Geoffrey Fairbairn wrote of his father, who was one of that generation:

The atmosphere was entirely free of Nationalistic, let alone racialistic, tones . . . The War was a traumatic

<sup>4</sup> Boyer to his wife, 29 Dec. 1945.



experience that must never be inflicted upon another generation. But it was always there in its terrible ambivalence: a bright courage, lacking in civilian life, was there too.<sup>5</sup>

Many of these men slightly disdained politics. Even when men of Boyer's generation went into Parliament, they were handicapped by an insufficient concern for their own survival in office. Charles Hawker, of whom Sir Keith Hancock has written so movingly, in resigning from the Lyons ministry because he had promised his constituents to vote for a larger cut in parliamentary salaries than the government proposed, showed a temper not unlike R. G. Casey, who possibly missed becoming Prime Minister in 1939 because he 'wouldn't have kicked anyone to death in trying to get it.'<sup>6</sup> A time came when Boyer felt the spell of politics but it was probably as well for his own peace of mind that he resisted it.

In one important way he showed the effect of the isolation which kept him out of public life before 1935. While building up Durella he was too busy and too poor for outside activities of any sort, beyond taking the annual Anzac Day service at Morven. Local politics, the usual standby of ambitious countrymen, had no particular fascination for him, and in any case the municipal centre, Charleville, was over eighty miles away by second-rate roads, too far to attend monthly meetings and the intervening committees. The family's only change from Durella was a yearly holiday in Sydney, with a four-day journey by utility at either end. The result was that Boyer, although he had plenty of practical experience of life on the land, and although he kept well abreast of the world's affairs by reading, was curiously innocent of the day-to-day rough-and-tumble of public life. In that rather graceless era of Australian politics which went from Billy Hughes and Theodore to Lang and Albert Dunstan, Boyer was no more than a remote spectator of events. In consequence he

<sup>5</sup> 'Personal History', *Nation* (Sydney), 8 Aug. 1964, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> 'Uncommon Men', *Age* (Melbourne) 2 Jan. 1965. For Charles Hawker, see W. K. Hancock, *Country and Calling* (London, 1954), pp. 122-5.

retained an undiluted idealism and a faith in liberal principles which few of his contemporaries possessed to the same degree. It was with this uncommon combination of intellect, practical experience, and unabashed faith in the power of ideals that Boyer, after the age of forty, determined to go out from Durella to find some way of serving the community.

## 4 The Politics of Woolgrowing

It seems that by the early thirties Boyer had by no means made up his mind about the form which his interest in public affairs would take. The impression one gets of him at this period is not of a man clearly seeing that his future work lies in philosophy or international affairs or the politics and economics of the grazing industry, but rather of a mind restlessly ranging among a number of possibilities, throwing his enthusiasm and talents into several in turn, without getting far with any. He first went into print on the question of marketing. Most pastoralists during the depression were convinced that every other industry was protected but their own. City manufacturers hedged their products with tariffs and passed the burden of prices on to the consumers. Trade unions combined to force the payment of wages based not on the value of their services or of the industry's capacity to pay but on the maximum that could be screwed out of the community through the Arbitration Courts. Even the farmer, who (in Boyer's words), 'from time immemorial, has wanted nothing better than to be left alone [and was] shy even of co-operation',<sup>1</sup> had retorted with wheat, sugar, and butter pools which cushioned the industry against overseas competition by lifting home prices. In arguing against the Australian taste for high tariff protection, Boyer reflected the views of many graziers and probably most of the rank-and-file of Country Party voters; but, possibly through an inheritance of free-trade liberalism from his Manchester family background, he added a fairly unusual tendency to argue the case in ethical terms. If his first pamphlet, *Wheat*

<sup>1</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'The Ethical Basis of Trade Relations', *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*, vol. X (1932), p. 119.

*Pool or Whirlpool?*, was simply a piece of amateur propaganda against organized marketing, his second publication was scholarly enough to be accepted by the *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*. Its theme is that economics cannot be divorced from ethics, and that considerations of justice and equity apply as much in trade relations as in any other human activity. From this Boyer goes on to argue that most protective tariffs and obstructions to free trade are 'a principle of offensive war, to force an advantage from trade which normally could not accrue . . . and to hamper in every way the efforts of the customer to do likewise.'<sup>2</sup> In Australian politics there should be a retreat from the policy of 'pools' and high protection, and in international affairs a general agreement on trade and tariffs, perhaps supervised by the League of Nations, as a means of reducing international tensions. One hardly knows which is more remarkable: his faith that ethical considerations could turn an Australian government against the demands of numerous industry pressure groups clamouring for protection or his belief at a time of intense economic nationalism in the possibility of regulatory international agreements of the sort which in fact developed after World War II.<sup>3</sup> Both his insistence on the importance of moral issues in politics and his interest in the potentialities of the League of Nations were significant pointers for Boyer's future.

Encouraged by the reception of this article, Boyer turned his thoughts to an academic career. His old professor of philosophy, Sir Francis Anderson, favoured the idea, and Boyer went so far as to prepare an application for a lectureship in the subject at the University of Sydney. Then, on the point of mailing, he changed his mind. University life was very tempting, he reflected, but was it really his most effective way of serving the community or would it absorb

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Neither of these ideas was much in vogue in Australia at that time, although, as Mr H. G. Gelber has reminded me, they were common enough among liberal-minded idealists elsewhere. In the United States Roosevelt's early administrators (especially Cordell Hull) favoured the reducing of tariffs and were critical of economic nationalism.

him so happily that he would in fact contribute no more than he had in his isolation on Durella? Not without occasional regrets, he put the idea firmly behind him. Then, during 1933 and 1934, he was sidetracked into theological controversy, an interest apparently sparked off by the Angus case. Few issues which made headlines in the thirties are now so utterly forgotten, but at the time many, Boyer among them, saw it as a crisis of Protestantism of incalculable importance. The controversy arose over the teachings of Dr Samuel Angus, who from an Ulster background and a Princeton doctorate had proceeded, after two slightly exotic years as chaplain of the Scots Church at Algiers, to occupy from 1914 a chair of theology at St Andrew's Presbyterian College in the University of Sydney. Many of his fellow clergy feared that his views went too far in discarding any concept of Christ's crucifixion as a sacrifice for human sin and in describing the Passion entirely as an example of God's self-sacrifice in sharing through Jesus the common lot of man. These and other opinions verged on that Unitarianism which has long been regarded as an especial snare for Presbyterians, and were especially disturbing in one entrusted with instructing young candidates for the ministry. For long it was impossible to pin any specific charge of false doctrine on Dr Angus, especially as his students reacted differently to his teaching: if one young man, shaken by doubts, was restored to faith only after a session of all-night prayer with his parents, many others spoke enthusiastically of the way he made Christianity real to them. Action at last followed an address Dr Angus delivered at Lithgow in October 1932, in which he reputedly asserted that Jesus made no claim to inherent sinlessness and would have repudiated any claim that his death was a necessary atonement for human sin. After a protracted hearing of the allegations against him, the Presbyterian Assembly of New South Wales decided by a majority vote to accept his assurance of faith without further discussion of his teachings. Since the majority included many of his old pupils, his opponents felt justified in seeking another tribunal, and with zeal undiminished they appealed to the Federal Assembly. This body reversed the

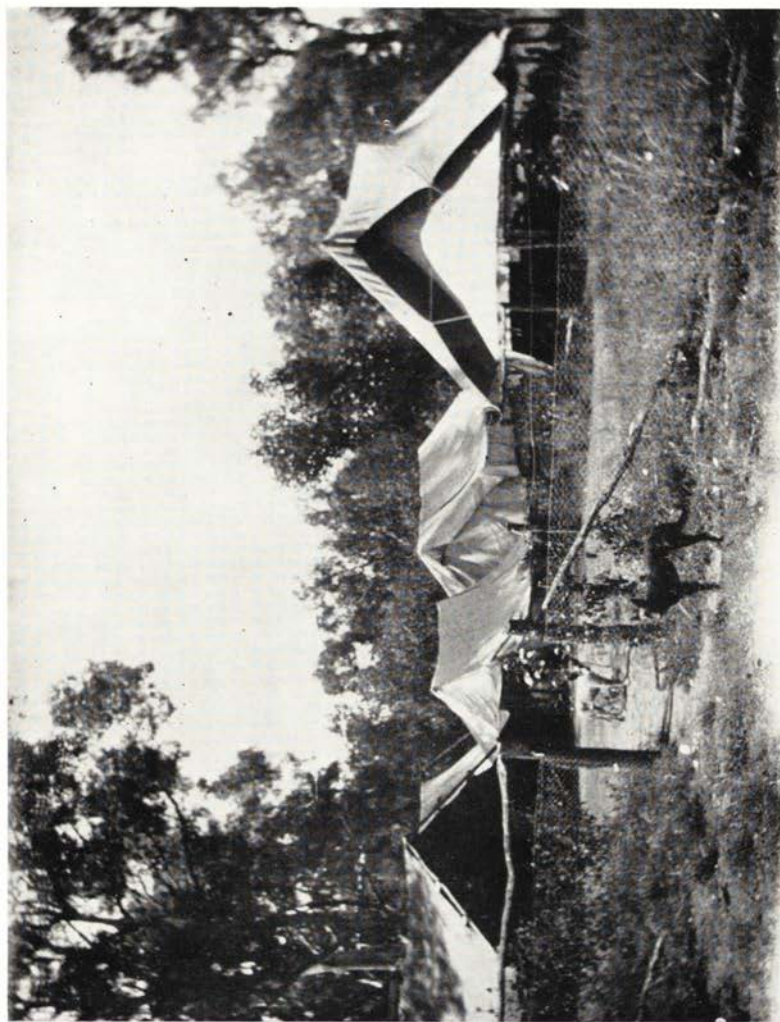
decision, mildly condemned some of the views attributed to Dr Angus, but gracefully accepted his promise that he would eschew contentious teaching. The matter lapsed, only to be revived on the publication of Angus's next book, which showed no amendment in his views; and the quarrel dragged on unhappily until his death in 1943.

Boyer, who was holidaying near Sydney during one of the periods when the controversy was at its height, became deeply committed to the side of Angus. As a young Methodist probationer he had been attracted to the liberal modernist point of view, and this may partly have influenced his decision not to continue in the cloth. Approving as he did the attempt of modernists like Angus to reconcile Christian belief with the historical and scientific insights of the twentieth century, Boyer saw in the Angus case a perfect illustration of new and challenging ideas being opposed by the weight of orthodox authority. To insist on a formal dogma struck him as interposing a man-made barrier between the individual and Christ. Like a good Protestant he saw liberty of conscience as all-important, without perhaps considering whether individualism was really compatible with the idea of a corporate church. Christianity underpinned Boyer's liberalism, but his liberalism really required a Christianity as little institutionalized as possible: in many ways he had a Quaker temperament.

The Angus controversy stirred him so deeply that within three months he drafted a manuscript of some 70,000 words in defence of the professor. This document begins somewhat loosely and repetitiously, although the quality of thought sharpens and clarifies in the later phases. His ideas tended to express themselves in the language of the late nineteenth-century philosophy taught him by Sir Francis Anderson at Sydney University; they were admirable and inspiring, but they lacked the precision and bite which a later Professor Anderson was to require of his students. The trouble was that the issues at stake in the Angus controversy were already old-fashioned by European standards, and there was little original to say on them. Much of the time Boyer was simply affirming with considerable fervour the necessity for each

man to work out his own salvation without the intervention of traditional doctrines framed for other times and other societies. His concern was that by insisting on adherence to a party line the Christian churches might alienate many sympathetically-inclined laymen. His theology was at its best where his reading had kept him abreast of contemporary trends, and he argued forcefully and well when he took on Karl Barth, whose authoritarian tendencies he disliked. Yet, reading his manuscript, one feels that, despite the deep sense of involvement evident in Boyer's handling of the controversy, it might have been a dead-end if he had concentrated on theology. He was not then aware that his best service to his liberal humanist ideals was his ability to translate them into practical politics; perhaps to some extent he was using the Angus case as a focus around which to work out his personal philosophy before involving himself in public life, perhaps he still needed to justify to himself his decision not to continue in the ministry. Although never again involved in polemical writing such as his Angus manuscript, Boyer was always fascinated by theology, and even at the end of his life looked forward to writing on metaphysics as the main task of his retirement. Such a sustained interest in the moral standards underlying human conduct would seem to be uncommon among the public men of twentieth-century Australia.

What might be called the point of take-off in Boyer's public career occurred in May 1935, when almost at three days' notice he decided that the time had come to visit Great Britain and Europe with his wife and children, and to give himself a fresher and wider picture of the world overseas. It was a momentous decision—despite recent improvements at Durella he was not rich—for it launched him on two of his major interests: international affairs and the politics of woolgrowing. During August 1935 he spent several days touring Saxony, one of the main woolgrowing areas of Germany. Here he had several conversations with wool merchants, textile industrialists, and allied interests. He wanted to find out why Germany, previously one of Australia's best customers for wool, had cut its imports of



*Durella homestead in 1922*



Australian wool by three-quarters between 1933 and 1935 and what if anything could be done to reverse the trend. His inquiries were made purely as a private citizen, except that he carried introductions from the wool industry in Australia, but his findings were to have considerable repercussions among Australian pastoral circles.

Both as woolgrower and free-trader Boyer favoured increased trade with Germany. Since the 1932 Ottawa Conference strengthened preferential tariffs among British Commonwealth countries, Germany had been unable to arrange reciprocal trading arrangements with Australia, since Australian tariffs discriminated against German manufactures, and Germany because of her rearmament program and other expenses under Hitler could not afford the loss of foreign exchange due to a constantly adverse balance of payments. Although Germany, in consistency with Hitler's general policy of economic self-sufficiency, was turning to synthetics for her textile needs, Boyer's conversations in Saxony convinced him that a strong demand for wool would continue into the future. Yet Australia had sunk from first supplier of wool to Germany to third. Argentina and South Africa were ahead of her, and she was losing German custom even to North Africa and Turkey. South Africa got around the problem of exchange by a barter agreement under which South African wool worth £2,500,000 was traded for specific classes of German manufactures. Why could not Australia conclude a similar agreement, Boyer argued, as a temporary means of retrieving the German wool trade until exchange conditions brightened? It could be done without jeopardizing Australia's first principle of loyalty to British Commonwealth agreements. Trade with Germany could be built up at the expense of the United States, with whom Australia's balance of trade was chronically lopsided. Among Australian imports from the United States (five times the volume of her exports) motor vehicles were a major item. Germany was expanding production in this field, and was so avid for credits that exports would be given priority over a keen home market. Germany could also supply Romanian oil.

Why should not Australia, like South Africa, negotiate a barter agreement with Australian wool for German motor vehicles and petrol?

In urging this policy, Boyer's considerations were not merely commercial. He was, as might have been expected from his free-trade principles, particularly alive to the danger that economic nationalism, beginning with trade barriers and tariff wars, could end in total enmity between nations. Travelling in Nazi Germany he felt the full shock of ultra-nationalism, and noticed—it was a lesson which he never forgot during his years in broadcasting—the brilliance with which the government used mass media of every kind to whip up patriotic fervour. Boyer in these years unashamedly favoured appeasement in the sense that the democracies should try to meet Axis provocation not with aggressive behaviour, which would merely confirm the dictators in their belligerence, but with conciliatory attempts to understand their needs and problems. If Germany could satisfy her economic needs through trade, she would be under less temptation to play the aggressor. Boyer was never a pacifist, but, knowing war from personal experience, he felt like many others of his generation that much should be sacrificed to avoid it. With the classic liberal faith in the power of educated and organized opinion to move governments, he believed that even dictatorships might be turned aside from bullying in the face of a strong enough appeal from world opinion. The League of Nations was the only body capable of mobilizing liberal opinion, and when he visited Geneva immediately after his German tour he felt that he was about to witness the crucial test of its effectiveness. He was there on the day that the League debated Italy's aggression against Abyssinia:

The League, I felt, had carried on its precarious existence since the War by evading its major problems and by refusing to put its power and its machinery for war-prevention to the test. Now, however, Italy had called the bluff, the issue could not be evaded, and the whole jerry-built structure would fall to the ground in the clash of

self-interest, and I was interested, in a morbid, as well as a regretful way, in this historic funeral.<sup>4</sup>

By contrast with the pageantry of Nazi Germany, the League was informal, unemphatic, underplayed its moments of drama. Boyer was nevertheless impressed. So far from witnessing the League's deathbed, he thought he saw its 'coming of age'. One by one Britain, France, and the U.S.S.R. joined in condemning Italy's act of aggression. Finally the Italian delegate walked out of the proceedings. At first many of the League's sympathizers, and Boyer among them, had great hopes that the civilized nations' disapprobation would deter Mussolini's aggressions. It even seemed as if public opinion was mobilizing to press the governments of the world into support of the League. In Great Britain, under the inspiration of Lord Cecil, the League of Nations Union held the famous 'Peace Ballot', in which eleven million voters in an unofficial poll overwhelmingly affirmed their support for the principles of Geneva. Supporters of the League believed that the Peace Ballot would nerve the British Government into upholding the League more heartily, and Boyer thought its influence immensely valuable. This he saw as the sort of example which similar groups in Australia should emulate. 'In a democracy you must not only have a policy, ideal, programme, but every elector *must* understand and believe in it. We have to fight a narrow nationalism aggravated by geographical isolation.'<sup>5</sup>

So he returned to Australia convinced of the need to stir public opinion into a livelier concern with the problems of international peace-keeping. Australia in 1935-6 seemed mostly to be drifting apathetically in Britain's wake. Boyer was a strong believer in the British Commonwealth and its symbolism—when King George V died in January 1936, he was in Brisbane, and wrote to his wife: 'I'm duly arrayed in a black tie and scowl darkly at all coloured neckwear'—but like most intelligent men of his generation, he saw that the

<sup>4</sup> 'The League of Nations Union and the League' (MS. of talk, probably given to the Brisbane branch of the League of Nations Union, Jan. 1936).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

Commonwealth would stagnate if it merely continued to depend on the initiatives of Great Britain, and he had hopes that Australia would not only take a less dependent role in forming Commonwealth policy, but exercise her influence positively for peace and co-operation. As it was, the Lyons Government's few ventures into external affairs seemed ill-informed and capricious. As a free-trader believing that economic rivalry was a prime cause of war Boyer disliked, for instance, the May 1936 trade diversion policy which suddenly imposed prohibitive tariffs on a number of imports from Japan, so provoking Japanese reprisals against Australian wool. This sort of policy in Boyer's eyes merely inflamed the touchy nationalism of the Japanese, without any advantage or justification to Australia except to satisfy a few pressure groups. Nor was Australia equipped to formulate an intelligent foreign policy. With a meagre Department of External Affairs, Australia had no consular or diplomatic representation overseas except the gross multiplication in London provided by six State Agents-General and a Federal High Commissioner. In the absence of expert official opinion, organizations such as the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the League of Nations Union were among the few centres in Australia where world affairs came under systematic discussion. Into the affairs of these societies Boyer threw himself energetically. He was encouraged by his old philosophy professor, Sir Francis Anderson, now president of the League of Nations Union. It is remarkable how often in Australia the most internationally-minded public figures have come from a Nonconformist background: Anderson, Boyer, Ian Clunies Ross, Paul Hasluck, and John Burton,<sup>6</sup> who for all their

<sup>6</sup> Anderson had originally come to Australia to a call in the Australian Church, a Melbourne breakaway from Presbyterianism. Clunies Ross (1899-1959), a Presbyterian by background and an official in the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (Director from 1949) was delegate to the League of Nations in 1938 and wartime president of the Australian Institute of International Affairs. Hasluck, the son of Salvation Army officers, served with the Department of External Affairs from 1941 to 1947 before entering federal politics as a Liberal in 1949 to become Minister for Territories in 1951 and for External Affairs in 1964. Burton, son of a

widely differing viewpoints shared a missionary zeal to interest Australians in the fate of humanity overseas.

While Boyer was widening his acquaintance in these circles, he was also pressing ahead with his ideas about trade with Germany. Before long he found it necessary to turn lobbyist with politicians and the pastoral industry. With experience, he made a good impression with both classes for his ability to present a case lucidly, briefly, and without exaggeration. Previously little known, he quickly came into prominence as a spokesman for the pastoral industry, particularly in consequence of some able pamphleteering for the 'No' case during the 1937 Commonwealth referendum on marketing.<sup>7</sup> By this time his correspondents and friends covered a rapidly-growing cross-section of politicians, economists, public servants, graziers' leaders, and other administrators. In pre-war Australia the groups who formed and influenced policy were more compact than at present; even so, Boyer's progress was notable: by 1938 he had won not only the support but the friendship of figures as various as the newspaper proprietor Sir Keith Murdoch, the economist Professor Douglas Copland, and the president of the Australian Woolgrowers' Council Sir Dalziel Kelly. This part of his life is not very well documented, and the

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Methodist President-General, was appointed at the age of 32, in 1947, by Dr H. V. Evatt as Permanent Secretary of the Department of External Affairs. A Liberal Government removed him in 1950 to the post of High Commissioner in Ceylon; he resigned the next year to run as a Labor candidate in a safe Liberal seat, failed, and subsequently became a successful businessman and academic.

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately very few of Boyer's papers have survived for these years, and like most other aspects of his career in pastoral organizations, I have relied for a description of his role in the 1937 referendum on the recollections of his associates, such as Mr J. F. Meynink and Mr P. Newcomen. Boyer's arguments against federal control of marketing appear to have been based mainly on free-trade principles. He was not a great advocate for 'States Rights' as such, but he thought that a 'Yes' vote in the referendum would facilitate the establishment of protectionist 'pools' in various minor primary industries, and to this he was opposed both as a wool-grower and a Manchester Liberal. In later years, after the experience of World War II, he modified his stand against government control of trade and industry, but his sympathies were always against the protectionist bias of the Australian economy.

impression one gets from those who knew Boyer at this time was that his quick rise was very much a triumph of personality. Few of his contemporaries seemed so well to combine practical experience of the land, lively and continuing cultural interests, a broad intellectual approach to economic questions, and the ability to argue a business-like case lucidly and temperately.<sup>8</sup> Time and again his colleagues admired his manner of stating a case in good and forceful English, garnished with idealism and humour. Apparently these qualities were none too common in public life in the late thirties.

They gained quick recognition by the woolgrowers and cattlemen. In the aftermath of the depression Australian graziers were urgently concerned about their overseas markets. The views of a woolgrower who knew something of the European scene and had a definite plan to offer soon gained a hearing. Living at Durella during 1936 and 1937, after his return from abroad, he found it easy to gain acceptance in the counsels of the local pastoral industry. By 1938 he was chairman of the Warrego Graziers' Association and, having gained credit as one of the first to foresee the threat of synthetics to the wool market, was coming rapidly to the fore in the United Graziers' Association of Queensland. Yet although the tide was running with Boyer in his personal affairs, his campaign for more trade with Germany foundered, like so many causes in the 1930s, against the bland inertia of the Federal Government. During 1936-8, although South Africa's example in concluding barter agreements was not imitated, every British Commonwealth country but Australia signed an agreement facilitating trade with Germany, and the Empire Producers' Conference of 1938 urged its members to adjust their tariffs in order to build up foreign markets in primary produce. This encouraged Boyer to make an all-out effort to stir the wool industry and the government into action. He carefully prepared a memorandum on the German-Australian wool trade which was submitted on 24 October 1938 to a special

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, F. J. O'Connor's appreciation of him in *Country Life*, 20 Apr. 1945.

meeting of the Australian Woolgrowers' Council. Instead of urging a barter agreement, Boyer now recommended following the example of Canada, where trade with Germany had been stimulated by an agreement computing the rate of exchange for customs purposes on certain goods at 20 per cent lower than the normal basis. He presented his arguments ably—Germany's share of Australia's exports had fallen from 9 to 2 per cent in two years, Germany was estimated to require over 400,000 bales of wool more than her current consumption, foreign trade would aid Australia's economy and ease international tensions—but his cause was almost lost through the intervention of the Federal Minister for Trade, Sir Henry Gullett, who addressed the meeting in opposition to Boyer's proposals. Gullett, a tough-minded economic nationalist, argued that an agreement with Germany would prejudice the principle of British Commonwealth preference and that if German cars or other manufactures were imported they would squeeze out not American but British competitors. Boyer had to defend his views in hard-fought debate, and eventually the vote went his way. After several hectic days of newspaper controversy with Gullett, Boyer was one of a deputation to present the case to the Prime Minister, Lyons. Lyons promised to give the matter serious thought, and nothing more was heard of it. Boyer, encouraged by the support of Sir Keith Murdoch's newspapers, continued to canvass the scheme for several months, but without success. Hitler was by now on the rampage, and after the successive assaults on Austria and Czechoslovakia, Australian public opinion was in no state for anything so amicable as a German trade agreement. 'To advocate anything at the moment', wrote Dalziel Kelly to Boyer, 'would make woolgrowers about as popular as rats under the house.'<sup>9</sup> Commercially his assumptions made good sense, but the time had passed for hoping that Germany might be contained by trade agreements.

Despite this reverse, Boyer's standing in the pastoral industry went on growing. His influence did not come from following the most obviously popular course and sacrificing

<sup>9</sup> Kelly to Boyer, 4 Apr. 1939.

principle to tactics. In April 1939, when the New South Wales pastoral organization moved to seek a federal subsidy of a penny a pound on wool production, Boyer circularized Queensland graziers in opposition to this attractive-sounding proposal. As ever opposed to high protection, he argued that the long-term interests of woolgrowers meant refusing any subsidy, or else the industry could not in consistency fight against the subsidization of farm produce and manufactures 'and the consequent rise in costs and loss of overseas markets'.<sup>10</sup> Since wool prices were still low, and a subsidy of 25 shillings a bale would have been welcome to many hard-pressed woolgrowers, this was not the most obvious line or argument to recommend to the industry; but it was consistent with the whole trend of Boyer's thought about marketing, and won considerable support. For all his concern for high principle, the graziers knew Boyer as a canny and tenacious fighter on roads-and-bridges affairs of purely local importance. One example must suffice. In the same month that he was upholding free-trade principles against the lure of subsidy, Boyer was also involved in a lengthy controversy with the State Government over the routing of the Condamine Highway. Instead of serving the existing townships (already, in officialdom's view, handsomely provided for by Queensland Railways), the route planned by the government was to run twenty or thirty miles south of the railway line through open pastoral country. The government spoke of the advantage to pastoralists of having a road through their properties, but the local graziers and business men were unconvinced and backed Boyer's objections. The coming of war left the question unresolved, and when at last the Condamine Highway was extended it followed the townships and not the original government route. Boyer was involved in a growing number of issues of this sort, but there was no narrowing of his horizons.

At the same time as he was becoming known among the graziers' organizations, he was also coming to prominence in the League of Nations Union and the Australian Institute of International Affairs. In September 1938 he was a delegate

<sup>10</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'The case against a wool subsidy' (typescript, Apr. 1939)



to the second British Commonwealth Relations Conference, held under the joint auspices of the A.I.I.A. and Chatham House in London at Lapstone in the Blue Mountains behind Sydney. This gathering, although entirely unofficial in its organization and function, attracted fairly high-powered delegations from Great Britain, the Irish Republic, and all the self-governing dominions: the British delegates included such men as Ernest Bevin, Lord Lothian, Sir Alfred Zimmern, Lionel Curtis, and H. V. Hodson. For a fortnight, under the deepening gloom of the Munich crisis, visitors and Australians discussed the problems and opportunities of the Commonwealth and sought ways and means of strengthening its co-operation. It was one of those meetings whose value (it was hoped) would show itself in shaping the attitudes of its participants when they returned home to take their share in influencing opinion and policy. It was the sort of exercise which appealed to Boyer, who had a great belief in the value of personal meetings and was good at making contacts on such occasions. Among the friends he made there were two of the Englishmen, Bevin and Hodson; Bevin kept in touch with him throughout the war years. And Lapstone stirred in Boyer an urge for further overseas travel, this time perhaps in some capacity as the representative of his country.

In 1939, when he made his second overseas tour, Boyer was a seasoned negotiator and public speaker, a rising man both among woolgrowers and Australians interested in overseas affairs, a figure of rather more local standing than the quiet Queensland grazier who had slipped into the gallery of the League of Nations Assembly to watch the honourable, ineffectual men of Geneva debating Abyssinia. His ideals were unblunted, but he had a better knowledge of the strength and outlook of the opposition and a wider experience of the forces shaping public opinion. He was accredited as a delegate to three international conferences in June 1939: the International Conference of Agriculture at Dresden, the World Wool Federation Conference at Brussels, and the International Chambers of Commerce at Copenhagen. Through the German consul in Sydney, with whom

he had dealings while marshalling information for his wool sales plan, Boyer and his wife received invitations to attend the Nazi party's Nuremburg Rally scheduled for the first week of September; after which they were to attend, by way of contrast, the League of Nations Assembly. In those years before Australia had career diplomats, suitable private citizens whose business took them to Europe were several times invited to serve Australia as representatives to the League and Boyer had only to advise the Federal Government of his interest to receive appointment as an official delegate.

The June conferences aroused in him a cautious optimism about world prospects. At Dresden there were 1,700 delegates from fifty-three nations all co-operating on the problems of agriculture: exchanging information about the latest improvements in seed and livestock, pooling their researches about disease prevention, and manifesting a preference for free trade and the reduction of trade barriers which was pleasant to find at a conference in such a stronghold of economic nationalism as Nazi Germany. The atmosphere of internationalism at the conference contrasted markedly with the military swagger and countless swastika flags everywhere in Dresden, but Boyer found among the people he met in Saxony little but distress at the prospect of a world war. If only, he reflected, governments could be made responsive to an informed and educated public opinion. . . . The Brussels conference of wool traders, a much smaller gathering than Dresden, encouraged him more. Here were men of commercial influence, competitors in trade, reaching agreement on business practices.

These men made no bones about passing resolutions to instruct their Governments in matters of policy, though it must be admitted that the totalitarian countries were careful not to trench on matters of high policy. Here then, before one's eyes was a real League of Nations establishing law, order and fairness to the limits of their power across the length and breadth of Europe and establishing a good-will that was all the more genuine

because of the tragic political enmity which each deplored.<sup>11</sup>

To see businessmen as a force for peace was perhaps not a fashionable viewpoint: but it was in contacts such as these between unpretentious men of affairs that Boyer saw as much hope of creating international goodwill as in the professional activities of diplomats and academic specialists. Thus he was especially receptive to the aims of the International Chambers of Commerce conference at Copenhagen: 'to facilitate the exchange of the entire world's resources in a degree that will allow every human being to be heir to its wealth irrespective of nationality.' This conference called strongly for planned commercial co-operation between nations so as to meet the natural deficiencies in each particular country which might lead to conflict and war. Resolutions to this effect were adopted enthusiastically by all delegations, German, Italian, and Japanese no less than British, French, and American, and the businessmen present agreed to lobby their governments for closer co-operation. This Boyer saw as the possible beginning of international order and goodwill and a lowering of temperatures in Europe. It was illusory; within two months the invasion of Poland started World War II. If the economic factor had been the sole cause of wars, it would have been reasonable to hope for peace through planned economic co-operation. As it was, there were pressures and aspirations in Nazi Germany—and in many other places—which defied the rational calculations of businessmen and humanists.

In the two months before the outbreak of war, Boyer was in London. He broadcast on the B.B.C. overseas service, once giving his impressions of the recent international conferences, and twice debating world affairs in a session called 'Cards on the Table' with H. V. Hodson, the editor of the *Round Table*, whom he knew from Lapstone.<sup>12</sup> They argued about British Commonwealth policy in the world

<sup>11</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'Empire Exchange. International co-operation in commerce and industry' (typescript, July 1939).

<sup>12</sup> 'Cards on the Table' (B.B.C. scripts for Empire Transmission V, 10-11 August and 17-18 August 1939).

crisis. Boyer thought Britain had cold feet about taking active measures to avoid conflict, and urged the preparation of some sort of peace manifesto which would unequivocally state the British Commonwealth's aims and ideals. He seems to have envisaged a document similar to the Atlantic Charter produced under stress of wartime two years later. Hodson took a less hopeful view. The dictatorships would take no notice of such a gesture, and therefore it was not worth trying lest public opinion become dejected and discouraged at Britain's apparent willingness to make concessions. The British Commonwealth must simply wait on events. This did not appeal to Boyer, who always felt that at least the attempt should be made to shape events for good, and he turned to a discussion of ways in which the British Commonwealth could be strengthened as a force for peace. He urged a relaxation of the Ottawa Conference system of imperial protection, a more positive drive towards colonial self-government, and attempts by the dominions to set up limited international agreements with neighbouring powers on specific areas and problems: for instance, could not Australia embark on some more formal program of co-operation with the Dutch on the development of New Guinea? (One ponders the implications: what if an Australian government in 1939, or even in 1945, had decisively pushed some project of partnership with the Dutch?) Hodson's rejoinders respected Boyer's enthusiasm but were cautious about the repercussions on imperial policy. In particular, he pointed to the complexities of returning to free trade. Without protection of their crops and industries, many of the poorer Africans and Asian colonies would suffer under free trade unless their social services were massively subsidized by Britain (who, he assumed and Boyer could not gainsay him, would be expected by the Commonwealth to carry nearly all the burden). So the debate ended inconclusively; but it left Boyer better known as a spokesman for international co-operation and a closer working together of members of the British Commonwealth.

Then the war came. Punctilious to the last, the German Foreign Office wrote to Boyer on 26 August regretfully

explaining that the Nuremburg Rally to which he was invited was unfortunately cancelled. So also, of course, was the September session of the League of Nations. These happenings did not leave Boyer unoccupied. In October he was off to the United States, to join Ian Clunies Ross in a campaign to contact American wool interests and gain their co-operation in a wool promotion scheme. This was Boyer's first major experience in commercial diplomacy, and it was a sufficiently testing introduction. The object of the mission was to secure American co-operation with the International Wool Secretariat in combating competition from synthetic fibres. The outlook was unpromising. A year previously, just before the appearance of the Secretariat, an American wool promotion bureau had died an early death, through disagreement over publicity methods between manufacturers and growers. The growers, who were a powerful lobby in the Senate, wanted legislation to compel manufacturers to state whether cloth was made of virgin or reworked wool and, while this issue was unsettled, refused to support any voluntary scheme for wool promotion. The growers also suspected that the Australians were interested mainly in marketing their own wool to the detriment not only of synthetics but also the home-grown article. Nor was the mission well timed in its approach to the manufacturers, because the outbreak of war left them in some uncertainty about future wool supplies. Immediately war was declared Australian wool exports had ceased, and the British and Australian governments were negotiating terms under which Britain would purchase the entire Australian wool-clip during the war. Until these negotiations were settled (which took till November) the American buyers could not know what quantity of Australian wool would be made available by the British Government, or on what terms. By the end of October, when Boyer and Clunies Ross began talks in New York, American manufacturers expected to be completely out of Australian wool in three months, with no assurance of further supplies and no forecast of the likely price.

The circumstances could hardly have done more to stress the uncertainty and want of co-operation in the wool industry as contrasted with the well-organized synthetics manufacturers. Through sheer personal diplomacy Clunies Ross and Boyer succeeded during their mission in keeping wool promotion alive in the United States. They made a good team, and were to become close life-long friends. With the same combination of the countryman's practicality, educated idealism, and good humour, they spoke the same language and were simultaneously being drawn deeper into problems of administration and government. They had also an invaluable local contact for their mission in the tireless American agent of the Secretariat, Earl Newsom, who arranged for them a series of conferences with leading wool dealers and manufacturers in New York and Boston. From these talks it emerged that the manufacturers were willing enough to join in 'general educative work to promote wool', but they thought nothing adequate could be achieved without the growers, whom they painted as the ruggedest and least co-operative of individualists. Undeterred, Boyer and Clunies Ross then interviewed the secretary of the National Woolgrowers' Association in Washington, who said he personally was sympathetic, but talked dolefully of the difficulties of raising a levy for promotion, especially as an ambitious scheme of lamb production was just being introduced. He suggested that they should discuss the subject with woolgrowers in Texas, 'the most important sheep state in the Union'. A rebuff followed, for the Texas Association declined to allow Clunies Ross to address their annual meeting. It was decided that he would stay in New York to complete negotiations with the dealers while Boyer ventured into the wool states to try personal conversations with the growers.

Once in Texas, Boyer was kept busy. He visited numerous properties, but had too little time for his liking to study the methods of the Texas woolgrowers and to see whether they had anything to teach Australia. To the tough but hospitable ranchers he preached the identity of American and Australian wool interests in the face of competition from

synthetics. These affluent sheepmasters in ten-gallon hats reacted just as Boyer's own neighbours might: not unreceptively, but cannily alive to every awkward problem. Some were still worried about Australian competition, but most were satisfied by Boyer's assertion that this was a tariff question completely outside the scope of a mission for wool promotion. Soon Boyer was on very cordial terms with the leading growers, who now promised 'to examine very favourably' a co-operative scheme of promotion at their annual meeting, and offered introductions to the most influential ranchers in the other wool states. Clunies Ross joined Boyer in San Antonio, and after a particularly successful meeting with the locals the Australians set out hopefully for the Western states. At Salt Lake City they met growers from Utah, Nevada, Idaho, Colorado, and Montana:

Dr Ross addressed the meeting at length on the world wool situation and the Secretariat's activities in Europe and America, while I endeavoured to explain the position from the point of view of a contributory grower. We found that the breakdown of the former promotion experiment had seriously prejudiced opinion against a renewed attempt, but our insistence that it was essential to have complete grower control . . . appeared to move much opposition.<sup>13</sup>

The combination of Clunies Ross, with all the scientific and economic data at his fingertips and Boyer, persuasive, straightforward, the model of a countryman—both with an intellectual sophistication which then, even more than now, was not always expected of Australians—must have been smoothly formidable. The further the two delegates took their personal contacts, the greater was their success. Their tour culminated with the Wyoming growers' organization voting unanimously for a wool promotion scheme financed by a levy of 10 cents a bag, and the Californians promising to support such a proposal. Boyer, as he sat down to compile

<sup>13</sup> 'Report on American tour in association with Dr I. Clunies Ross to secure American manufacturers and woolgrowers co-operation with the International Secretariat for Wool Publicity' (typescript, confidential, presented to Australian Wool Board (n.d.).)

his report to the Australian Wool Board, felt the satisfaction of a mission well accomplished. It still remained for the British and Australian governments to ensure adequate supplies for the American market, but publicity in America was now certain; and Clunies Ross was remaining behind in New York to tidy up the details of the growers' levy and to see if any co-operation was forthcoming from other woolgrowing countries such as Argentina.

While touring the American West, Boyer and Clunies Ross compiled a report on public feeling about the war. They based their observations not only on the woolgrowers they met but on every possible contact, including the dining-car stewards on the Pullman cars, and found a marked consensus throughout Texas and the West. Even the most isolationist businessman they encountered, a Colorado executive who argued that the United States should keep out of any more wars since they had not finished paying for the last, finished his comments by telling Boyer: 'I'm American, see. I'm neutral, but I hope like hell you lick the tar out of Hitler.'<sup>14</sup> Despite all this goodwill, Clunies Ross and Boyer found it largely unexploited by the British. Instead, inept censorship was preventing news of the British war effort from getting to the Americans, and at the same time the British were failing to give the United States a convincing picture of their war aims. Boyer may be quoted at some length:

Their suspicion of the Allies does not arise from any doubt as to the justice of their cause, but from doubt as to whether the ideals that motivate us are what they appear to be. Are we fighting for human freedom and a better world, or just for the integrity of French and British Empires, and if for both, how much of each and in what proportion? This is the huge mark of interrogation which is visible in practically every journal in America, and one has to admit that it is a fair question. After all, if we are to make the military defeat of Germany and our

<sup>14</sup> [R. J. F. Boyer and I. Clunies Ross], 'Observations on American opinion in Texas and certain Western states.' (typescript attached to letter from Clunies Ross to Boyer, 14 Dec. 1939.)



own security the only war aim to which we will commit ourselves by Governmental announcement, we cannot complain if our protestations of higher aims, only vaguely referred to, are treated with suspicion. Under these conditions, it is definitely our private war. If, on the other hand, while admitting the obvious motive of protecting our independence we made this objective secondary to the wider issue of restoring in the world the supremacy of the individual man's social, political and economic freedom, and commit ourselves to such international collaboration as may be necessary to secure it, our cause becomes that of every true democrat the world over, and would be hailed in this country with enthusiasm. Under these circumstances, it is surely a tragic blunder, that while the press of the United States have been asking during the two month period of war for just such a statement of war aims, none has been forthcoming. Before each speech of Mr Chamberlain there is eager expectancy and after it, reaction and suspicion, which the picturesque polemics of Mr Churchill do not dissipate. Meanwhile America goes on repeating her own articles of faith, the things she would be prepared to fight for, if necessary, with a sort of wistful suggestion that we, at heart believing the same, should be equally explicit and make common ground. But she is emphatic that these things are the only ones for which she is likely to intervene, or even to give full moral support.<sup>15</sup>

It may, of course, be questioned whether diplomacy is better served by generalities about moral principles rather than by specific statements of practically attainable aims. But it was perceptive of Boyer to stress at that time the need to explain the war to the Americans in moral terms. John Foster Dulles, that embodiment of American morality, had recently stated in a widely publicized speech at Detroit that because Britain and France had suggested no program for preventing the recurrence of Hitlerism after the war, he could see 'no reason in the long-range objectives of this war, for the United States becoming a participant.' This was the sort of thinking which had to be met, and in Clunies Ross

<sup>15</sup> 'The American Angle on War Aims as seen by an Australian in the U.S.A.' (MS., dated at San Antonio, Texas, 20 Nov. 1939.)

and Boyer's report they suggested that Canada and Australia had an important role to play in interpreting Britain to the Americans. They had found the grossest ignorance among Americans, however well informed about world affairs in general, about the nature of the British Commonwealth link: most of them still seemed to think that Australia was tied to Britain's apron-strings. This lamentable impression could be corrected if, with Canada, the Australian Government cultivated stronger ties with the United States, encouraged more visits from American politicians and journalists, and got the Americans into the habit of regarding the Commonwealth as a voluntary association of democracies. Meanwhile it was highly desirable that Britain should produce as soon as possible a clear statement of her ultimate war aims, in order to refute the Dulles view that her only reason for being in the war was self-defence.

This report reflected two dominant themes in Boyer's thought, which must have been reinforced by working with the like-minded Clunies Ross. One was the necessity for a country to have its long-term values and purposes continually in view and stated unambiguously. Before the war he had urged that one way of curbing the dictators was to state frequently and clearly the basically pacific intentions of Britain and the Commonwealth, with firm indications of what would not be tolerated from aggressors; and, among others, the historian A. J. P. Taylor has argued that Hitler invaded Poland only because the confused and uncertain utterances of the Chamberlain Government left him with the impression that he could get away with it.<sup>16</sup> Since the outbreak of war, Boyer had been one of a number of British Commonwealth spokesmen urging a British statement of war aims, a view which apparently was at that time pressed quite hard by R. G. Menzies.<sup>17</sup> Such a statement was to come only with the definition of the Four Freedoms in the Atlantic Charter, and it served more to satisfy public opinion in allied and neutral countries than as a specific declaration of future policy.

<sup>16</sup> *The Origins of the Second World War* (London, 1961), ch. XI.

<sup>17</sup> F. L. McDougall to Boyer, 31 Oct. 1939.

Meanwhile, Boyer was to return home convinced of the necessity for Australia to seize the diplomatic initiative as a mediator between Britain and the United States. Australia, in Boyer's view, could not figure as a great power, but she was uniquely well qualified to serve as a bridge between nations: as a self-governing young country explaining America to the British and an example of British liberal democracy with which to reassure the Americans, as an outpost of Western civilization in South-East Asia and a sympathizer interpreting Asian aspirations to the West, as a land of socialism without doctrines and capitalism without class barriers which could make contact with the various social and political systems of the world. Boyer was of course not the only Australian who read his country's potential thus in 1939, though he was undoubtedly one of the more articulate. Such was the outlook of many of the thoughtful minority who had addressed themselves before the war to the study of Australia's role in world affairs; it was an outlook which found powerful if occasionally self-righteous expression through H. V. Evatt's years as Minister for External Affairs. It may be doubted, however, whether Evatt could have carried Australia into an active foreign policy except that, before the war, in the absence of an established diplomatic corps, groups such as the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the League of Nations Union had provided a forum where opinions on overseas policy could be developed and spread. Before 1945, informed outside opinion was far more influential in advising official policy than it has become since the professionalization of the Department of External Affairs under successive Liberal ministers. Until enough diplomatic personnel were trained, Australia had to depend for the execution of foreign policy on the services of well-informed amateurs, of whom Evatt was perhaps the epitome. It was fortunate for Boyer's career that he reached the height of his powers at the time when the exigencies of wartime meant that Australia especially needed men of his experience and—in its broadest sense—education. His training was now complete, and the time was coming for him to translate his liberalism into action.

## 5 The War Years

On his return to Australia Boyer found a telegram awaiting him announcing his appointment as one of the five members of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, with effect from 1 January 1940.<sup>1</sup> The next day he was telephoned by a reporter who pressed him for details of his musical talents; 'Well,' said Boyer thoughtfully, 'I play the mouth-organ. . . .' It is impossible to establish at whose initiative it was that Boyer's name went forward to the government but the background to his appointment is clear enough. Up to that time the commissioners had all been Sydney or Melbourne residents, and the 'outside' states, Queensland and Western Australia, were for the first time given representation in 1940. The Perth appointee was Sinclair McGibbon, a city businessman with close ties with the United Australia Party. It was therefore desirable that the Queensland representative should have rural interests and no strong political affiliations. Boyer, as well as filling these requirements, had a varied experience of public affairs, a deep interest in the humanities, and sufficient private means to afford the time for the Commission's affairs. Public life in Australia, then even more than now, was on a comparatively small and intimate scale, and from Boyer's activities in woolgrowers' organizations and international affairs he was already quite widely known in Canberra. He accepted the position because he was deeply impressed with the potentialities of mass media for the worst type of propaganda such as he had witnessed in Nazi Germany or for education in the principles of liberal democracy. At this stage he never envisaged how completely he would become identified with the A.B.C.

<sup>1</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter cited as *S.M.H.*), 1 Jan. 1940.

Instead he was struggling with the temptation to go into Federal politics. It was that brief period of 1939-40 when, following Sir Earle Page's vituperative outburst against Menzies, the Country Party walked out of the non-Labor coalition, leaving the United Australia Party to govern alone. Boyer, who had not been particularly impressed with the Lyons ministry either for its economic policy or its grasp of foreign affairs, was inclined to hope for better things of Menzies, whose leadership he then thought abler, more liberal-minded, and more intellectually coherent. It looked as if there might be a vacancy for the local federal seat, Maranoa, where the sitting member was due to retire in 1940. For several months Boyer thought seriously about trying for nomination, and in the end decided against it only when he had actually received the offer. The decision was in every way fortunate. Maranoa went to the Labor candidate at the general election. The Menzies Government found its majority reduced to vanishing-point, and was to lose office within twelve months through its own internal feuding. Boyer lacked the necessary ruthlessness or ambition to have had much hope of happiness or survival in these cut-throat politics, and soon came to recognize this himself. Travelling down to Melbourne a short while before the elections to see Sir Keith Murdoch about a position with the Department of Information, he wrote back to his wife:

Am making some valuable progress here, but there is a serious rift between K[*eith*] M[*urdoch*] and the P.M., and what with this and the possibility of a change of Govt., there doesn't appear to be much stability about the entire Dept. . . . Gerald Packer sends you his own and wife's regards. He, Ray Watt, & Mrs Couchman are all candidates for election—even K.M. may yet stand. I feel it something of a distinction *not* to be an aspirant.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps his most important work during the war was as chief spokesman for the pastoral industry. It surprised nobody in the United Graziers' Association of Queensland when, on the retirement of his friend J. F. Meynink in May

<sup>2</sup> Boyer to Mrs Boyer, 'Wednesday' (? Aug. 1940).

1941, Boyer became State president of the organization. He held this office for three years during the most critical period of World War II, including one year (1942) as president of the federal body, the Australian Woolgrowers' Council. In both these capacities his colleagues admired the clarity with which he could seize the essentials of an issue and clothe them in precise and forceful language. This enabled him as chairman to get through business effectively without steam-rolling different points of view. It was also useful in the many deputations which the pastoral industry had to send at that time to State and Federal governments. Boyer became recognized in Brisbane and Canberra as a courteous and efficient spokesman who wasted no time and presented his case without extraneous side-issues. He held deep convictions about the importance of the wool industry and its potential for helping to decentralize settlement in Australia. 'I confess frankly,' he told his fellow-graziers at their 1942 annual general meeting,

that I am appalled by the attitude of many public men as to the place which our major primary industry holds in their esteem and in their plans for Australia's future. There is a growing tendency to regard the Australian pastoral industry as a relic of our pioneering days which we should endeavour to dispense with as early as possible in favour of occupations more befitting an up-to-date civilization. There is a clear tendency on the part of Australians to apologise for the fact that so much of our territory is occupied with the raising of livestock, as though this were the mark of an underdeveloped and primitive people.<sup>3</sup>

There spoke the free-trader who had attacked the effect of Australia's tariff policies on the woolgrower; but his concern for decentralization was not due simply to sectional pressure grouping. It must become a means of securing the good life for those who lived outside the cities:

In the necessity for meeting day-to-day expenses and the hazards of nature, there has been far too little opportunity

<sup>3</sup> United Graziers' Association of Queensland, Minutes, 52nd annual meeting, 13 May 1942.

to make the homes and the lives of our bush people, whether employer or employee, as attractive as they should be. Our country towns have shown little progress . . . The forgotten country town, boasting only its store and hotel, with no library, no water supply, no music, no entertainment is a menace to this country's well-being. We cannot afford to have the bush a place where settlers and workers alike stay for a time and then are forced to move on by the demands of education or the needs of the womenfolk and children. It must be made a place where those who love it can settle for life and rear their families in conditions equal to those of city dwellers. We ourselves and our Governments must realize that a healthy bush community and a stable pastoral industry is not just a matter of good wages or of good returns to the landholder, but of the civic development in bush towns and communities.<sup>4</sup>

Holding these views, he was not prepared to view the pressure group for which he acted as merely a means of lobbying the government into granting the wool industry as many concessions and privileges as possible. Late in 1941 he went so far as to denounce the selfishness of pressure groups that sought government influence for themselves rather than the national interest: a significant view coming from the spokesman of one of Australia's most important lobbies.<sup>5</sup> As chairman, it was his principle for the Association 'to make no demand on the wartime resources of this country which by careful examination we have not felt to be justified up to the hilt, nor to press any matter to the embarrassment of the war efficiency of this country.'<sup>6</sup> Even in wartime this sort of self-denying ordinance was not to be expected automatically from every business interest or trade union. For the wool industry, emerging from ten years of

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 54th annual meeting, 17 May 1944. The Association resolved that this presidential address should be printed in its entirety and a copy forwarded to every member.

<sup>5</sup> *S.M.H.*, 24 Oct. 1941: and see comments on this statement by L. F. Crisp, *The Parliamentary Government of the Commonwealth of Australia* (Adelaide, 1949), pp. 56 and 287.

<sup>6</sup> United Graziers' Association of Queensland, Minutes, 54th annual meeting, 17 May 1944.

depression, the policy of restraint was not a theoretical platitude, but was maintained in the face of the heaviest pressure of circumstances. Beef and wool producers, acutely short of labour, transport, and materials, had to maintain and if possible enlarge production, against the expectation of Japanese invasion. This pressure came after a long spell of low returns and poor seasons, when many graziers had been unable to afford necessary improvements. 'It has required prodigious work on the part of those left to carry on,' wrote Boyer in 1943,

and has called for all the ingenuity of the bushman to make shift with what is available to keep his properties in operation. Our improvements are falling into disrepair, with no hope of attention; noxious weeds and pests are spreading alarmingly over areas which have been put clean at great expense in the past. We are building up a debit of property deterioration which it will take us many years to overtake. Our future earnings must be heavily mortgaged to recover the leeway which these war years involve. Nevertheless . . . the large issue of this country's integrity from foreign invasion completely overshadows all such considerations.<sup>7</sup>

The task confronting Boyer and his colleagues was to alleviate as far as possible the effect of these difficulties on the pastoral industry, co-operating as closely as possible with the Federal Government but at the same time limiting active government interference in the industry. Boyer's personal success in these negotiations may be gauged by the fact that not only was he well thought of by the first Menzies Government, which might have been expected to side with the squatters, but also, despite severe disputes in 1942 between graziers and rural trade unions, he won the high regard of John Curtin (who in full knowledge of his politics and interests was to re-appoint him to the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and later promote him to chairman). This was not easy, because Labor back-benchers had been schooled to regard the pastoralists as a natural target, and during their early months in office there were persistent

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 53rd annual meeting, 26 May 1943.



demands for Commonwealth interference to 'rationalize' the wool industry. There were also tricky political implications when in August 1942 the New South Wales branch of the Australian Workers' Union decided to demand an increase in shearing rates. Boyer, concerned to avert a strike at a critical stage of the war, got together his old Sydney University contemporary, the Country Party front-bencher J. P. Abbott, and two other colleagues, and hurried off to Canberra to consult Curtin and Evatt. The rate claimed by the shearers was to offset the lag in adjusting wage rates to the rising cost of living. Evatt pointed out that the pastoralists could introduce a wage scale anticipatory of cost of living adjustments, instead of, as at present, retrospective; and on a modified basis of this solution a compromise was worked out. The important thing was that Boyer through his diplomacy was establishing good relations between the graziers and the authorities. The Curtin Government knew it would not be subjected to unreasonable requests, and was prepared to consider the pastoral point of view more sympathetically than might have been expected.

This led to several important concessions. Boyer's first success was in arranging for shearing programs to be carried out in Queensland in 1942 and 1943 without government intervention. Because pastoralists in New South Wales and Victoria had been unable to agree on altering their shearing routines to fit a roster which would make best use of available labour, the Federal Government had to use its wartime powers to impose a schedule on them. After vigorous persuasion by Boyer and his colleagues on the U.G.A.Q. committee, Queensland graziers agreed that voluntary regulation was better than government compulsion, and succeeded in working out a roster; and Boyer tried to drive home the lesson that the future of the wool industry, particularly in marketing, depended on this principle of voluntary co-operation. There was, however, little scope for this with a wartime marketing situation in which all Australian exports of beef and wool were purchased by the British Government, while the Commonwealth regulated home prices. During 1942 Boyer managed to negotiate price

increases in wool and meat, as well as assisting in a successful move to secure a decision from the Director-General of Manpower that nobody employed on the land could leave to go into secondary industry. The policy of co-operation with the Labor Government turned out to be perfectly compatible with pastoralists' interests; and for this policy of co-operation a good deal of credit must go to Boyer.

It was characteristic of him that Boyer spent much thought on the post-war prospects of the industry, and before leaving the presidency of the U.G.A.Q. in May 1944 he initiated two moves which were aimed at establishing the pastoral industry more securely than it had been before the war, without resorting to subsidies and tariffs. One proposal, which was successfully campaigned by his friend and successor, Peter Newcomen, urged on the Commonwealth Government the exemption from income tax liability of all water and earth works improvements carried out on pastoral properties. This concession was included in Commonwealth legislation in 1947, and gave a great stimulus to improvement programs on sheep and cattle stations; the U.G.A.Q. considered it 'one of the most worthwhile concessions that the Association has been instrumental in obtaining for the industry.'<sup>8</sup>

Marketing was the second field in which Boyer hoped to encourage post-war planning in the pastoral industry. He expected that if after the war the world returned to the unrestricted economic nationalism of the thirties, wool prices, after an immediate post-war period of shortage, would slump heavily unless under the guidance of the United Nations permanent international trade agreements were negotiated.

If [he wrote] we and our Allies have the wisdom and grace to adhere to the principles of the Atlantic Charter, to assure freedom of access to all nations, to raw materials and trade, to assist backward countries to active economic

<sup>8</sup> R. K. Tompson, *Summarized History of Grazing Industry Organization* (Brisbane, 1959), p. 6.

development—then there will be no fear of overproduction or of shrinking markets.<sup>9</sup>

In 1944 it was not possible to foresee which alternative awaited the wool market, and the pastoral industry needed to devise ways of expanding its potential for meat production. Boyer was drawn into this question in October 1942, when he was appointed to represent the interests of producers on the Commonwealth Meat Industry Commission, set up at that time by the Federal Government to create a machinery for the assessment of meat prices during rationing and to ensure that existing channels of trade were utilized fully. One great limitation proved to be transport. In Boyer's own State, all the meatworks were at coastal centres so that livestock had to be trucked hundreds of miles by rail. Queensland railways responded valiantly to wartime pressures, but the service was never fast enough at the best of times, and many beasts lost a good deal of condition before slaughter. It was uneconomic to rail any but the prime of sheep, and inland killing centres were ruled out by a shortage of chilled railway trucks in which to freight carcasses. This meant that graziers in Western Queensland had to find pasture for large numbers of surplus sheep, mainly aged and difficult of fattening because of seasonal conditions, which would die on the property whenever a drought occurred.

One solution was to make use of dehydration, which had been developed during the war to economize on overseas shipping space but could equally well be adapted for inland transport. Through the Commonwealth Meat Industry Commission the Federal Government subsidized the erection of a number of dehydration plants, mostly in connection with existing meatworks, and here Boyer saw promising possibilities. With Commonwealth help an inland killing centre and dehydration works could be established to treat medium and low grade mutton for export. Winton was an obvious site, as it was centre for a large area of sheep country and

<sup>9</sup> United Graziers' Association of Queensland, Minutes, 54th annual meeting, 17 May 1944.

railhead to both Townsville and Rockhampton, each of which already had meatworks and storage facilities. Such a centre would provide Western Queensland graziers with a commercial outlet in bad seasons and some measure of insurance if wool prices after the war dropped back to depression levels. Also—and this appealed to Boyer as much as the benefits for the pastoral industry—the Winton scheme would alleviate the shortages of food which would be felt after the war in Great Britain and Europe. After his retirement from the U.G.A.Q. presidency in May 1944 Boyer was busy canvassing the Winton scheme among the neighbouring pastoralists. An enthusiast for the co-operative principle, he wanted the scheme financed by the pastoralists who would supply and benefit from the meatworks, and by the middle of 1945 over 30,000 £1 shares had been taken out in the Queensland Dried Meats Co-operative Association, of which Boyer was president. With a £15,000 loan from the Commonwealth Government the new company began life adequately financed, in the midst of a bad drought which seemed perfectly to underline Boyer's argument about the loss of stock which could not be shifted.

Meanwhile, the war had affected his life in a number of other ways. His visit to Sir Keith Murdoch shortly before the 1940 elections had led to his appointment as director of the American division of the Department of Information, doubtless on the strength of his growing involvement with radio and his visit to the United States in 1939. As with so many early wartime organizations, the duties of the job were loosely defined and consisted mainly of assessing the impact of Australian and Allied propaganda in the United States and of looking after the itineraries of such American newspapermen and radio commentators as found their way out to Australia. Macmahon Ball, the head of Melbourne University's department of political science, was controller of broadcasting in the department, and his correspondence with Boyer covered a mixed range of the preoccupations of the early war years: Ball asking Boyer to open a series of shortwave talks on 'What Britain Stands for'—

The idea behind the series is to show that, despite the common accusations against it of complacency and hypocrisy and other unpleasant traits, the British spirit does stand, however incompletely, for some important civilized values, and that the difference between the British and Nazi spirit is nearly a difference between day and night.<sup>10</sup>

Boyer to Ball, querying a decision to drop shortwave broadcasts to Europe and suggesting a monitoring service to assess their effect; Ball forwarding a suggestion that two Australian speakers should visit America for a three-month tour of Rotary Clubs explaining Australia's war aims; Boyer reporting that the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of Sydney University had put their signatures to a manifesto supporting Allied war aims and the principles of the Atlantic Charter: 'It is a sheep station to a gooseberry that the rest of the professorial staff would have their minds made up by these two signatures, so you can put over a proper blitz in Melbourne'.<sup>11</sup> Somehow it is difficult to avoid regarding the work of the Department of Information during these early war years as a little of a sideshow, and its main importance in Boyer's career was to give greater scope for his interests in broadcasting and international affairs.

Through his concern with Australian-American ties, Boyer became prominent in the affairs of the Institute of Pacific Relations. This organization had been founded in 1925 to promote research and discussion on problems affecting the Pacific area as a whole at a time when official diplomatic contacts were few (Australia, for instance, had no ambassadors until 1940) and when Pacific studies were almost unknown at universities and research institutes. Conferences occurred every two or three years, at which the delegates were a blend of officials, semi-officials, and influential private

<sup>10</sup> Ball to Boyer, 10 Oct. 1940 (File MP272/Series 5, Commonwealth Archives, Brighton, Victoria).

<sup>11</sup> Boyer to Ball, 1 July 1941 (*ibid.*). I cannot help feeling that Boyer mistook his academics. Anyone nonconformist enough to object to signing a statement in favour of the Atlantic Charter principles would hardly be moved by the attitude of his Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor; probably the reverse.

citizens. Without any official standing of its own, the I.P.R. was credited with a significant indirect influence over thinking on foreign policy among its member nations. This informal influence caused its downfall around 1950, when the Committee on Un-American Activities, seeking a scapegoat when China went communist, cast enough slurs on the I.P.R. to frighten supporting organizations into withdrawing their funds. During the war, however, the I.P.R. was probably at the height of its influence. Between the collapse of the League of Nations and the founding of the United Nations Organization, it was one of the very few forums open for international exchange of views. In Australia, for instance, the Department of External Affairs kept in touch with the I.P.R.'s proceedings, and regarded the attendance of a strong Australian delegation as necessary even in the middle of the war. The Australian Institute of International Affairs, then under the chairmanship of Ian Clunies Ross, was affiliated to the I.P.R., and it was through this contact that Boyer was nominated a delegate to two successive I.P.R. conferences.

The first conference which Boyer attended was held at Mont Tremblant, Quebec, in December 1942. The rest of the Australian delegation consisted of Paul Hasluck, Lloyd Ross, and Mrs. E. M. Hinder;<sup>12</sup> Ian Clunies Ross, as vice-chairman of the I.P.R., was also present. Lloyd Ross and Boyer left Australia together on 29 November. The journey across the Pacific took three days in a noisy U.S. air force transport crowded to twice normal capacity with airmen on furlough from the Solomons. 'We were not popular with the American crew,' Boyer commented, 'some of whom had been in the Brisbane street brawls and feeling very sore with our men.'<sup>13</sup> For the two middle-aged Australians, perched on a heap of mailbags except when they emerged for heavy

<sup>12</sup> Ross was then forty-one years old, a D.Litt. of Melbourne University who since 1935 had been secretary of the Australian Railways Union. Mrs Hinder, born in 1893, after some years as staff supervisor in a Sydney emporium had gone to China on welfare work in 1926, and from 1933 to 1941 was chief of the industrial and social division of the Shanghai Municipal Council.

<sup>13</sup> Diary, 29 Nov. 1942.

servicemen's breakfasts on hot tropical airstrips, the arrival at San Francisco was very welcome, but more was to come. To reach Montreal took another three days of dodging among storms and blizzards, by a route which dog-legged through Phoenix, Fort Worth, Nashville, Cleveland, and Albany, with the landscape covered with snow from the Kentucky border north. There were the usual dreary inconveniences of wartime travel: 'very cold, and we all rush into the heated waiting rooms at every airport . . . frequent incidents at these airports where people on low priorities are put off to make way for those on high', and re-routings because of storms which still took their aircraft through skies 'so rough you couldn't let go your chair to be sick, though we were all pale to green.'<sup>14</sup> And after twenty hours constantly in the air, there was Montreal, with the bells of horse-drawn sleighs striking the crisp air as they drove past the old French houses with iron lamps over their doors, and at last: 'We are ushered into the warmth of the Hotel Windsor by commissionaires looking like Cossacks in full dress . . . We have coffee and doughnuts, and so to bed.'

Next day, after another 120 miles by train and sleigh to the Mont Tremblant chalet, a large isolated ski resort, the Australians arrived to find that since delegates were to address the conference in alphabetical order of their countries, Boyer was almost immediately required, tired and totally unprepared, to address the opening session. The Australians soon found themselves embroiled in a lively discussion which broke the bounds of the rather vaguely defined program. The theme of the conference was to consider how the United Nations (the term was just coming into vogue for the Allied bloc) could best establish conditions of racial, political, and economic justice and welfare, and how these aspirations could be translated into a practical program. The conference was divided into four study groups. These reported back for discussion, en masse, proposals for further research which might lead to national and international action. The I.P.R. did not make resolutions or recommendations, but saw its task as a preliminary sorting

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 Dec. 1942.

out and clarification of issues in the Pacific requiring co-operation between nations. In fact, Boyer reported, 'in debating either existing military or political problems or future readjustments in the Pacific area, the issues raised invariably demanded some basic global assumptions before any colour of reality could be imparted to the discussion.' Problems in the Pacific were used as a test case for global theories about such issues as the treatment of minorities, the relations of different racial groups or colonial self-determination. 'China', reported Boyer, 'was naturally obsessed with the question of immediate air and military aid to Chungking, with her position as an equal partner in Allied Nations War Councils, and with her position after the war vis-à-vis a conquered Japan and a rebuilding world.' France and the Netherlands were concerned about the prospect for their colonies; India, Thailand, Korea, and the Philippines sought guarantees of independence. And

all these issues hinged upon (1) the question as to whether the 'Allied Nations' was a reality or merely a euphemism for an Anglo-American military bloc and (2) the question as to whether the Atlantic Charter was a real commitment on the part of the British and American Governments or an unattainable ideal issued for propaganda purposes.<sup>15</sup>

These issues were highlighted, especially for the Australian, New Zealand, and Canadian delegations, by a rift between the British and U.S. delegations. Some of the U.S. spokesmen were much disturbed by Winston Churchill's recent Mansion House speech, in which he assured the world that he had not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire. This sort of talk, said the Americans, prejudged the issue for non-self-governing countries, 'in a way which made postwar planning or Allied moral pretensions a hollow pretence', and besides causing disillusionment among colonial peoples and former colonials (among whom the Americans evidently numbered themselves), flouted the

<sup>15</sup> Report on the Pacific Relations Conference, Mont Tremblant, Quebec, 4-16 Dec. 1942, p. 3.



Atlantic Charter. The British delegates countered by alleging that, if it came to invoking the Atlantic Charter the United States had small grounds for claiming moral leadership. Congress had not yet endorsed Roosevelt's adherence to the Charter, and on the unpromising precedent of what happened about Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations after World War I, there was no guarantee that the U.S.A. would even support the Atlantic Charter. To this the Americans replied that the best way to guard against an American lapse into isolationism was for Britain to show more convincing sincerity over her colonial policy.

This Anglo-American disagreement, 'basic and recurrent throughout the Conference', caused the Australian delegation 'pessimism and alarm'. Not only were their two major allies failing to act in unison, but they seemed disposed to exclude the lesser powers from effective policy-making and, through their stubborn pursuit of their own interests, to commit the post-war world to 'a heavy national defence programme and to intensified nationalism in economic affairs'. At this juncture the delegations from Australia, New Zealand, and Canada found themselves playing an unexpectedly prominent role as mediators. Members of the British Commonwealth, without responsibility for Colonial Office policy, they could defend British conduct against unjust criticism while making no bones about repudiating Churchill's uncompromising Empire Toryism. On the other hand, while energetically voicing their appreciation of the American alliance, the Dominions could and did challenge the American tendency to evade post-war commitments except in the Pacific where she would be the major power. Canada had undoubtedly the most experience of striking a balance between Britain and the United States, and Australia's contribution was handicapped by the smallness of her delegation; but because of the close agreement between Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, the three Commonwealth countries found themselves becoming an effective combination whose views had a marked effect on the findings of the conference. They could not, of course, provide a solution for the genuine and deep divisions of views and

interest between Britain and the United States; but they could help to prevent these differences from spreading, by suggesting ways in which the I.P.R.'s activities could be directed towards conciliation. Specifically the I.P.R. agreed to conduct research into how the U.K. might dispel uncertainties about its acceptance of the Atlantic Charter and how the U.S.A. could give a stronger lead in translating its ideals into practice. A number of other investigations were planned on such subjects as self-government for colonial territories, discriminatory immigration policies, the status of China among the Allies, the political deadlock in India, and international rivalries in aviation.

Of greater significance than any of these individual questions, however, was the way in which the Dominions had taken a lead among the small nations at the conference in demanding

equal voice and responsibility for all Allied nations irrespective of present ability to contribute to the general pool; a global welfare policy covering both collective military security and equality of economic opportunity aimed at progressive rising living standards in all countries, and unequivocal commitments by all the United Nations to the principles of the Atlantic Charter without either present reservations or future freedom of revision.<sup>16</sup>

Here unmistakably are the principles which Australians like Evatt and Canadians like Pearson were to urge with considerable effect on the United Nations Assembly a few years later. These views did not originate at Mont Tremblant; they reflected much of the recent thinking of liberal-minded students of world affairs in the Dominions; but the conflicts at Mont Tremblant provided one of the earliest opportunities, if not the earliest, for these attitudes to be translated into action, and for Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders to discover how nearly they agreed on their role towards Britain and the United States. The importance of the I.P.R. meeting at Mont Tremblant lay not in whatever small influence it may have had on official

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

thinking on these questions among member-nations but in clarifying and defining problems about which decisions would have to be taken at the official level and in pooling the ideas of Britain and the United States. Boyer was so impressed with the possibilities of co-operation suggested at Mont Tremblant that his report to the Department of External Affairs urged Australia to take the initiative in arranging further conferences between Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, so as to co-ordinate their aims and policies for the United Nations Organization of the future. This was not taken up to any extent, although Australia's role under Evatt's guidance as a champion of small nations might have been more effective for closer consultation and co-operation with Canada.

Boyer led the Australian delegation to the next I.P.R. conference in January 1945. His colleagues were Professor Kenneth Bailey, who was later to go on to the U.N. conference at San Francisco, and Canon Bill Edwards, an old friend of Boyer's since the Lapstone Conference.<sup>17</sup> After a briefing by Evatt, they left Sydney on 27 December 1944 by Liberator bomber, travelling for the first thousand miles through the dust of Australia's drought-stricken inland being blown out to sea. Compared with the conditions of 1942 their air journey, although short on sleep, was almost luxurious. The only event of note came during a stopover at Dallas, Texas, on New Year's Eve, when they strolled downtown to see the Christmas decorations:

In the bus coming home we three sat in the rear seats (the only ones available), forgetting that this was the Deep South and we were in the Jim Crow (coloured) section—much to the amusement of the white passengers. However, we sat firmly on, feeling virtuously that we were striking a blow against racial discrimination.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Edwards was a Sydney University contemporary of Boyer's who served with the A.I.F. in World War I and then took orders in the Church of England. From 1929 to 1947 he was the headmaster of Canberra Grammar School. Bailey, born in 1898, had held a chair in the Faculty of Law at Melbourne University since 1926; in 1946 he was to become Commonwealth Solicitor-General, and in 1964 High Commissioner to Canada.

<sup>18</sup> Boyer to his wife, 1 Jan. 1945.

They arrived on New Year's Day in Washington to be joined by members of the Australian embassy there, Sir Frederic Eggleston, Alan Watt, and J. B. Brigden, and went on to the conference quarters in the luxury hotel at Hot Springs, Virginia.

The main business of the conference was to consider the economic, cultural, and political problems of the post-war Pacific, especially the colonial territories and a defeated Japan. 'How' it was asked 'should the organization of collective security be designed in the Pacific area in order to ensure a durable peace?' Despite the promise of victory, the background was uneasy. Britain, the U.S.A., and Soviet Russia were at odds over Poland and the Mediterranean. De Gaulle's France and Chiang Kai-shek's China touchily asserted their status as great powers. Unrest in India foreshadowed the rise of anti-colonialism. The old Adam of nationalism was strong among many governments, and support for a United Nations Organization was by no means certain. The Australians, urged by Evatt to lose no chance of encouraging the idea of a strong international organization, found themselves plunged into hard debate over the Dumbarton Oaks decisions on the shape of the future United Nations. A week after arrival (8 January 1945) Boyer wrote to his wife:

My conviction that the chances of international organization are being decided one way or another in these next three months is more than borne out by the feeling of everybody here. There are, as you know, serious divergences between the Allied Powers on the principles of the postwar world which are engendering a defeatist [*sic*] attitude towards collective action . . . [we] feel deeply the responsibility of throwing our bit of weight into the balance for what it is worth—and this conf<sup>ee</sup> touches the people who are really at the wheel of current history.

Boyer thought it 'the most strenuous conference of its kind I have ever attended'.<sup>19</sup> Because the final decision of the major powers was set down for March, with the San Francisco conference to follow in April, most of the delegates

<sup>19</sup> Boyer to his wife, 14 Jan. 1945.

developed a sense of urgency, furthered by the presence of many of the men responsible for the Dumbarton Oaks draft agreement taking copious notes on the attitudes of national groups. The conference was divided into four large discussion groups, and Boyer was chosen as chairman of one of these 'round tables', comprising fifty assorted delegates. He found a pleasing 'absurdity' in a situation where

these prescient and distinguished personages, who include admirals, diplomats and experts of all shapes and sizes, are required to defer, at least momentarily, to a bloke who was digging a lavatory for shearers a fortnight ago, and will probably be mending the same lavatory a month or two hence.<sup>20</sup>

It was as well the responsibility weighed lightly on him, as debate was long and intense. The Australians were particularly concerned at the attitude of some of the U.S.A. representatives, who seemed inclined to press proposals that promoted Soviet influence as distinct from that of the West, and were equally worried at the cynical attitude of some of the British and French towards the whole prospect of international organization. Still, by all accounts, Boyer chaired his discussion group with the skill of a practised hand, and managed to launch a favourite idea of Canon Edwards's and his own into the final meeting of the whole conference. According to the official record, which as a rule was very sparing in its comments on individual contributions:

An Australian member argued most forcefully for a modification in this part of the Dumbarton Oaks draft to provide for an international force—presumably simply an air force at first—to be contributed to the security organization by member countries but to be completely internationalized and entirely under the jurisdiction of the world organization. Such a force would not of itself be a threat to the integrity of any nation. He argued that the idea was practicable, for air forces are not so deeply bedded in tradition as to raise great difficulty in detaching portions from the national forces for service under the international body. The war, moreover, has demonstrated

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 Jan. 1945.

the success of combined operations, and set a precedent for the type of international military arm suggested. This force, the Australian member contended, would not have to be large for it would be of a highly mobile nature and its activities, at least for some time to come, would be largely in the nature of a police force.<sup>21</sup>

This stirred plenty of controversy. The idea, of course, was not original to Boyer and Edwards, but had been in the air in the United States in the months leading to the Dumbarton Oaks agreement. The Americans were understandably wary about any such scheme because of the political and constitutional impossibility of having American servicemen ordered into action by other than American authorities. Whether the Australian Department of External Affairs knew that Boyer and Edwards would raise the matter at the I.P.R. conference is impossible to determine. All sorts of questions were asked at the conference. Could such an international air force be asked to prepare plans against the great powers? Might an American pilot seconded to this air force be required to bomb Pearl Harbour? Would the United Nations develop its own *esprit de corps*, or would it merely attract adventurers and mercenaries? Here in embryo were some of the problems of the Congo situation fifteen years later. Wisely, the delegates did not attempt to solve them; in the words of the official record:

Members of the conference had come to recognize that in the present situation the nations must try to build a structure of international action; but at the same time there was at the back of their minds an insistent warning not to put all their faith in that structure, so that if it failed there would be something soft to fall on.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, the proposal for an international 'air police-force' was given a prominent place in the final report, and Boyer left the conference feeling 'very satisfied with the

<sup>21</sup> Institute of Pacific Relations, *Security in the Pacific* (Washington, 1945), p. 83.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Sir Kenneth Bailey, in a letter of 30 Mar. 1965, has been good enough to give me his impressions of this conference.

showing our team made . . . We threw our combined weight on the side of thorough-going international action against an appalling array of cynicism from some quarters."<sup>23</sup> He feared that, with the return of peace, reviving nationalism would bury the ideal of a world organization, and hoped that the decisions reached at Hot Springs might turn the scale a little towards internationalism. So far as Australia was directly concerned, the I.P.R. conference probably had little effect on official policy, as by the time the delegates were back in Australia to present their reports Evatt and Forde were already on their way to San Francisco for the establishment of the United Nations. Their views were already strongly committed to an international organization. Whether the Hot Springs conference in fact played any part in influencing policy among other member-nations is impossible to establish. For Boyer, the experience was a sobering reminder of the difficulty with which the most obviously liberal and humane values could be nurtured in a world of power politics.

Straight from the pressure of the Hot Springs conference he went into a packed three-week lecture tour of Michigan and Wisconsin, addressing large, indefatigable American audiences on Australia and the British Empire. It was an entirely different America from the ranching country he had visited five years previously, and despite a gruelling routine which involved forty addresses in three weeks to audiences averaging over one thousand, interminable slogging over snow-covered roads by Greyhound bus, strenuous questioning and no less strenuous hospitality, he enjoyed it all enough to pen some lively observations on the people he met. The rich, with their virulent abuse of Roosevelt, shocked and amused him. At Midland, the owner of a chemical plant

Invited me into his office to tell me he disagreed violently with much of my speech—which he attended. His objection was to the Australian foreign policy of an expanding economy with rising living standards for depressed peoples. He's the most perfect Roosevelt hater I have ever met. His

<sup>23</sup> Boyer to his wife, 20 Jan. 1945.

view is that poverty and depressions are the people's own fault and shd. be left to work themselves out. He (Dow), started from nothing and now look at him: Let everybody else do the same. Half a dozen of his top executives applauded duly. I politely disagreed, but I am sure he writes us off as dangerous communists. Heavens there *never* were Barons so powerful as some of these big Industrialists, or so cock-eyed in their view of life.<sup>24</sup>

Boyer got 'great pleasure out of shocking such people with the story of Australian experiments in social reform',<sup>25</sup> but this was not the sort of American he wanted to meet. By contrast, his reception at Chesaning, Michigan, after fourteen hours on the road, was much more to his taste. His account reveals as much of himself as of the people he met:

Arriving here, very tired, found it a little farming town of 2,000 people with the most delightful old world Puritan atmosphere. The local butcher and his enormous wife met me, hustled me into a car, and drove off to a country 'Grange', a log community hall where a dance was in progress. You'd have loved it. All the men were in shirt sleeves, the music coming from an aged fiddler and an accordion while one farmer after another acted as 'caller'—which means bellowing the words of the music and stamping the time. Nothing was danced but the old-time squares—quadrilles, polkas, and schottishes [*sic*]. Old and young they hit it up until 3.15 a.m. while I sat on a form trying to keep awake and talk farming to the men. Coffee, doughnuts and pumpkin pie were on tap in the cellar, while the snow swirled around outside. As the local hotel is 'not entertaining' I am taken home to stay the weekend with the butcher couple in a cosy little house in town . . . They are the kindest and simplest of folk—just the type of the farm people out of Orange. There are anti-macassars on every chair, china dogs on the piano, and stern family puritans looking down on you from the walls. Mrs Hill has no children, is a sort of unofficial Mother to all the strays in the place. They are Methodists and I am taken to Church on Sunday morning, introduced to everybody in the congregation and prayed for (plus you and the rest

<sup>24</sup> Boyer to his wife, 5 Feb. 1945.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1945.



of my anxious family at home) from the pulpit by the minister. It is all very heart-warming, and something I am glad to have met. This is the real, god-fearing, puritan heart of America that lies at the back of the artificial facade of Hollywood and Broadway. In the afternoon 6 of their friends arrive, family connections. They are all in the big automobile works of Buick or Chevrolet that are only a few miles from here. They are getting on in life, big salaries, huge cars and so on, but are still simple folk of farm stock who split their infinitives and believe in God. . . .<sup>26</sup>

And a few days later he wrote

I am tremendously impressed by the intense religious factor in American life. People talk religion as naturally as they discuss the weather and no meeting—even Rotary meetings—open without prayer—quite long ones. I am always asked about religious life in Australia, and do my best to make a good showing consistent with some elements of truth.<sup>27</sup>

The tour concluded with a riotous meeting at Cresswell (Michigan) where twelve hundred high school students urged Boyer to the piano to give them 'Waltzing Matilda'.

Then they shouted for the Australian National Anthem, and I gave them the deplorable 'Advance Australia Fair'. When I looked up the whole school was standing to attention and saluting, finishing up with terrific cheers for Australia. It was really affecting because it was quite spontaneous.<sup>28</sup>

With this rousing finale behind him, Boyer hoped after his strenuous lecture tour to catch up with a little rest during two days in Canada, before going on to the Commonwealth Relations Conference in London. On his first night, however, he got no sleep at all because of the grinding of the icebergs in the nearby St Lawrence River; and on his second, in a Montreal almost snowbound and crowded out with servicemen and their womenfolk in town for the weekend, he

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 29 Jan. 1945.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 10 Feb. 1945.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

found there was standing room only in the lobby of the opulent hotel where he was booked. After great search he spent the night muffled up in his overcoat and two sets of woollens in an unheated but expensive room in 'a disreputable down-town house'. The next day he was flown by Liberator bomber over the North Pole to Britain, and prepared, more than a little wearily, to join Kenneth Bailey at the Commonwealth Relations Conference.

He enjoyed his fortnight in wartime Britain. Although, like many an Australian before and since, he hated the drab, gloomy streets of workmen's houses and wondered why the inhabitants had not all migrated to Australia, he was also stirred by the beauty of the country; 'I would be afraid of living here,' he wrote returning to London from visiting relatives at Chester, 'the pull of history would make an orthodox conservative of me.'<sup>29</sup> Not that there was much of the conservative about his performance at the Commonwealth Relations Conference. Their host, the British cabinet minister Leo Amery, made a poor impression on his overseas visitors at the opening reception, which he gave 'at the most dismal house at Belgrave Square you could imagine. It was very dreary and we all left early.'<sup>30</sup> Boyer and his fellow delegates were doubtless unaware of the personal tragedy in Amery's life at that time; but his opinions were enough to antagonize them. At a round table conference of delegates chaired by Boyer, Amery

shocked us all by his cynicism and the extent of his reactionary conservatism. As a member of the Cabinet one had to be respectful, but it was deeply satisfying for me to have the opportunity, when called on to reply, to say what I have been burning to say over here to a Cabinet member.<sup>31</sup>

If he had not already had a good deal of confidential talk in private with Ernest Bevin, Boyer would have been seriously disillusioned with the prospects of the Commonwealth. As it was, Boyer thought that the arguments put up

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 Mar. 1945.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

by Dominions spokesmen in rebuttal of Amery would have considerable influence on British policy:

All the Dominions have made it clear that Commonwealth ties are as strong or stronger than ever and are valued by us all. These ties, however, cannot be thought of as a close defensive arrangement against outside influence, trade or security collaboration. The war has taught us our dependence on wide international action both for security and prosperity. In fact, we urged that the British Commonwealth's own interests were primarily dependent upon the achievement of a world security system in general and on U.S.-U.K. collaboration in particular. Strange as it may seem, these propositions are very far from being accepted by Conservative circles over here. There seems to be a strong psychological reaction against accepting British dependence on outside assistance and U.K.'s secondary position to the U.S. in military and naval and industrial power. This leads to a strong inclination to induce the dominions to 'gang up' against a 'hostile' world, rather than to take the lead in world organization. Apart from the obvious political impossibility of this policy (especially in Canada and S. Africa) we urged its disastrous effect on our mutual cohesion and U.K.'s own long-term interests. British Labour and Liberal circles are O.K. but Conservative views are disturbing.<sup>32</sup>

Clearly the intricacies of diplomacy were beginning to fascinate Boyer. With his conviction that the next few months would be crucial in shaping post-war international organization, he must have regretted at times that he was not going on to San Francisco with Kenneth Bailey. But Boyer, never a man to enjoy too prolonged an absence from his home and family, had commitments in Australia and these commitments were suddenly on the increase; for at the beginning of March, while he was at the Commonwealth Relations Conference, it was unexpectedly suggested to him that he might be chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 Mar. 1945.

<sup>33</sup> I am particularly grateful to Mr Harry Gelber for his helpful criticisms of this chapter.

## 6 The A.B.C. in 1945

'To understand the development of Australian broadcasting policy,' wrote Boyer in 1946, a year after he became chairman of the A.B.C.,

it is necessary to view it in the light of the place that broadcasting has taken in the world generally. Everywhere in the world some control of broadcasting by government is in operation. This is not due primarily to any general desire of governments to intervene in private operation for its own sake, but stems from the purely technical fact that there are a limited number of radio frequencies that can be properly used. It has thus been generally accepted the world over that the frequencies possible in the air are ultimately a national asset which should not irrevocably be alienated to any other person or interest. Even in the United States, where commercial radio flourishes unopposed, licences to broadcast are religiously retained as public property and are revocable annually at the will of the State. This limitation, imposed in the first instance by purely technical considerations, has produced . . . a general world-wide acceptance of the principle that the yardstick of public interest is the measure by which the frequencies available shall in the last resort be allotted. Beyond these central principles, broadcasting policy in the world deviates sharply and can roughly be divided into three well recognised systems which may be called: The Continental, the American, and the British.<sup>1</sup>

By Continental, he meant a system where direct monopoly of broadcasting was 'an instrument in the hands of the government of the day'; by American, exclusively commercial

<sup>1</sup> 'Do we need national broadcasting', MS Talk, 21 Aug. 1946.

radio; and by British, a concept of national broadcasting where

a body should be set up by Parliament roughly representative of the people as a whole who would be charged with broadcasting purely in the public interest; who would, secondly, be relieved of the necessity of broadcasting for commercial profit; and thirdly, would be independent of day-to-day control by the government in power.<sup>2</sup>

Boyer would have described Australian broadcasting, where a B.B.C.-type national service coexisted with commercial stations, as a modified version of the British system. There were differences, however, which perhaps he insufficiently stressed, between the backgrounds of national broadcasting in Britain and Australia. The B.B.C. had been dominated from the outset by a masterful general manager, Reith, with clear notions of the principles on which to build:

It should be the endeavour of the Broadcasting Authority to bring to the greatest number of people as much as possible of contentment, of beauty and of wisdom (which comprehends knowledge and much more besides)—and this over every range of worthy human endeavour and achievement. Or the responsibility may be defined as we have often defined it, in terms of the mental and moral state of the community. No authority, charged with such a task, should be timid of giving idealism a place, and a high place in its policy. The long view may not be coincident with the popular view, but principle will be vindicated in the end.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to this purposeful manifesto—so like Boyer's own hopes for the A.B.C.—Australian broadcasting had grown up improvised and piecemeal, with no careful thought about aims and ideals. In 1923, the year when Reith laid down his foundations of policy, Australian legislators took their first look at radio's potentialities. They saw it as a means of raising government revenue. A number of experimental private stations were already operating, and wireless licences were introduced on a scale ranging from ten

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> [Sir John Reith], 'The Aim' (1937?). Offprint, undated, in Boyer MSS.

shillings to £4, assessed under the 'sealed set' system on the number of stations to which a set had access. Next year private enterprise was allowed to operate wireless services under government licence. Class 'A' stations were to be subsidized by revenue from listeners' licences but were limited in the quantity of advertising they could carry. Class 'B' had no subsidy but no restrictions on advertising. Distance between major centres of population in the State capitals ruled out for the time any question of a nation-wide service. In this accidental way Australia decided to expect different things of its government-subsidized and its commercial radio.<sup>4</sup> Because of the subsidy, Class 'A' stations could afford to pay for music, drama, or talks by live performers. They had the opportunity, if they wished, of shaping public taste. Class 'B' stations had merely to reflect it. Relying for survival on advertising, they had to attract as many listeners as possible by appealing to the cheapest common denominators of taste. In this they succeeded. By 1932 it was already estimated that three-quarters of the Australian listening public chose the 'canned' music and light variety of the 'B' stations. This meant that the 'A' stations were increasingly unattractive to private enterprise. It is doubtful that the Commonwealth Government foresaw this clearly in 1924. There is no evidence then that it intended to enter broadcasting on its own account or to adopt in any way the aims and methods of the B.B.C.

By 1927 the pressure for government intervention had grown. A Royal Commission reported that country districts were not adequately served under existing arrangements. City stations programming for city audiences failed to meet the obvious needs of the man on the land. Government revenue from wireless licences (the Royal Commission recommended) should be used to redress the balance, and the 'A' stations should either pool their resources or amalgamate to provide extended services. The government instead decided to place all the 'A' stations under control of

<sup>4</sup> R. Curnow, 'The origin of Australian broadcasting, 1900-23', in I. Bedford and R. Curnow, *Initiative and Organization*, Sydney Studies in Politics, No. 3 (Melbourne, 1963).

the Post Office, which was to provide all technical resources. Instead of providing programs, the government gave an exclusive three-year contract to the Australian Broadcasting Company, a firm owned and controlled by theatrical interests. The government's concern was whether as many Australians as possible could hear radio programs, not what quality of programs they heard. By the time the company's contract expired at the end of 1930, however, all political parties had come round to agreeing on the need for a national service. Labor, which was in office but not in power, was thought to contemplate nationalizing all radio, less from admiration of the British example than from distrust of the capitalist press which already owned a substantial share in commercial stations. Preoccupied with the depression and its own faction fights, the Labor Government soon shrank from the new and costly responsibilities of nationalization; instead a Bill was drafted in 1931 to place Class 'A' broadcasting under an Australian Broadcasting Commission. When Labor fell to a United Australia Party Government in January 1932, the Bill was taken over almost intact and was passed with only a few amendments. It was this Act which on 1 July 1932 established the Australian Broadcasting Commission. Some have contended that the A.B.C., owing its origin to parliamentary decision, was from its birth less independent than the B.B.C., which was founded by royal charter. Such a view over-estimates the effect of paper safeguards on a government determined to control the national mass media. When Archie Cameron was Postmaster-General, he allegedly told the chairman of the A.B.C.: 'Forget your charter, I don't believe in boards or commissions—I believe in ministerial control.'<sup>5</sup> He was not the only Australian cabinet minister who had held these views; merely the most forthright.

The administrative framework of the A.B.C. was patterned on the B.B.C. The Postmaster-General continued to be the minister responsible for broadcasting, but policy was to be planned by a five-member commission appointed by the government and retiring at staggered intervals to ensure

<sup>5</sup> F. Dixon, 'Inside the ABC', *Century*, 7 Dec. 1962.

continuity. The Commission had fairly wide discretionary powers. Its financial position was assured by an allocation of twelve shillings out of every twenty-four shilling licence fee issued. The A.B.C. was also entitled to issue tax-free debentures to the value of £50,000 and in certain circumstances—which were never availed of—to broadcast sponsored programs. The Commission had to seek ministerial approval only when spending over £5,000 on any one item or when proposing to enter into any agreement for five years or more. In staffing, the Commission's freedom of recruitment was enlarged through exemption from the Commonwealth Public Service Act. On the vexed question of censorship, despite strong warnings from W. M. Hughes on the evils of government interference, the Postmaster-General was empowered, acting in the public interest, to ban or to command the broadcasting of any particular material by the A.B.C.; however, the Commission was specifically given discretion over political broadcasting. Much, it seemed, would depend on the calibre of the men who ran the A.B.C.

As with the B.B.C., the chief executive officer of the A.B.C. was to be a general manager responsible to the five commissioners. In practice Australia varied significantly from Britain. The Labor Government's plan had been for the chairman to receive a salary of £1,500 a year, the vice-chairman £500, and members £300; but the U.A.P. reduced the chairman and vice-chairman to £500 and £400 respectively, ostensibly as an economy but also to emphasize that the positions were not meant as full-time appointments, nor as comfortable jobs for political hacks. The consequence was of course that only people with spare time and other means of livelihood could afford to serve on the Commission, and this tended from the start to perpetuate a built-in bias against Labor sympathizers. Of thirty people who served on the Commission from 1932 to Boyer's death in 1961, probably not more than a quarter were in the habit of voting Labor, and most of these were appointed under the Curtin and Chifley Governments. If members of the Australian Broadcasting Commission have behaved with political impartiality, it is little thanks to the governments who



appointed them. This factor grew in significance because relations between the chairman of the Commission and the general manager also deviated from British usage. Reith had been running the B.B.C. for five years before the first chairman was appointed, and no holder of that office, sympathetic or otherwise, managed to wrest the initiative in policy-making from him. Federal Parliament, in debating the 1932 Act, was uncertain how powerful the general manager of the A.B.C. should be. The most general view was that a parallel should be drawn with the business world, as S. M. Bruce had done, comparing the commissioners with a board of directors, 'to determine the broad policy to be followed, leaving it to the chief executive officer to carry out that policy.'<sup>6</sup> This parallel was reinforced by the fact that the general manager and all staff under him were appointees of the Commission, not the Commonwealth Public Service. Certainly the first chairman of the A.B.C., Charles Lloyd Jones, had full-time business interests in Sydney to occupy him and, although he undertook a world tour at his own cost to examine broadcasting standards outside Australia, seemed content to leave the detailed working out of policy to the general manager. The problem was to find an Australian Reith. The first general manager, H. P. Williams, died not long after appointment in March 1933. His successor, Major W. T. Conder, a former governor of Pentridge gaol and organizer of Victoria's centenary celebrations, had several years' experience behind him as a manager of a broadcasting company. Yet apparently he failed to make much of a mark either with the public or with A.B.C. staff. Then, in June 1934, pressure of business forced Lloyd Jones to resign the chairmanship. He was succeeded by the man who more than anyone else was the founding father of the A.B.C.: William James Cleary.<sup>7</sup>

Forty-nine years old when appointed, Cleary was a forceful and therefore controversial character. A self-made man,

<sup>6</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1932, vol. 134, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Senator A. J. McLachlan's tribute: 'Mr Cleary had practically the whole responsibility of establishing this important organization, and those of us who have had commercial experience will realize the magnitude of his task.' (Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1937, vol. 154, p. 708.)

manager of Tooth's Brewery in his thirties, Senate member and evening lecturer on business organization at Sydney University, he had seemed just the man to revitalize the N.S.W. Government Railways and was made Chief Commissioner in 1929. At the onset of the depression he had to make unpopular decisions which the unions found no more acceptable for his being a newcomer and a businessman, and when J. T. Lang took over as Premier and Minister for Railways in 1930, he and Cleary clashed frequently. Eventually Cleary had to quit after a rumpus over his dismissal of a Lang-protected senior official accused of corruption. After Lang's downfall in 1932 he returned to the railways for a few months but refused permanent reinstatement. A cultivated man, appreciative of music, capable as few businessmen were of expressing himself in clear, forceful prose, he was readily available for the chairmanship of the A.B.C. Drive, energy, under-employed administrative talents: these were all qualities greatly needed at the A.B.C., and all qualities which Cleary could supply. He had also a formidable capacity for keeping his own counsel, a mind incapable of change, once decided, and a polite reticence which very few could penetrate; but when he gave his confidence, it was without reserve.

Within a year (at the end of June 1935) Major Conder resigned, for reasons unstated, and it was plain that Cleary's was the guiding influence at the A.B.C. In building up an administrative framework, hiring and firing staff, and superintending program policy, Cleary was giving the A.B.C. much more time and energy than had been expected of a part-time chairman, and this was showing results in improved morale and efficiency. Even the captious critics in Federal Parliament were impressed. When, after three months without a general manager, Senator Leckie took it upon himself to grumble at the interference of the 'well-meaning amateurs' on the Commission in the daily running of the A.B.C., he was refuted by colleagues on both sides of the House testifying to how the service had improved. Speculations were aired in the Press that no new general manager would be appointed and that the chairman would continue

to run the A.B.C. with the help of a liaison manager to keep in touch with state managers. Confirmation was seen in the appointment on 10 October 1935 of Charles Moses, a well-known sporting commentator, as federal liaison officer. If such a move was contemplated, the Federal Government would not back it; and three weeks later, on 1 November, Moses became general manager with the same salary and responsibilities as his predecessor.

Throughout his career Cleary, who had no son of his own, had the knack of picking and grooming promising young men for advancement. In choosing the thirty-five-year-old Moses he went over the heads of many senior candidates. He showed unusual discernment, for Moses had been in radio only five years. A zealot for physical exercise, Moses had contrived, as a young English migrant battling through a succession of jobs in the twenties, to keep up his sporting interests. An athlete and a boxer, he also played cricket, soccer, rugby, and hockey, and was good at them all. This qualified him to join the A.B.C. as sports commentator in 1930. The work was made for him. In the next few years his commentaries became well-known throughout Australia, especially during the 'bodyline' tour of the English cricket team in 1932-3 and the London-to-Australia air race of 1934—in the course of which, incidentally, he went to Charleville and met, among the local graziers, Richard Boyer. He became sporting editor at Sydney, where his combination of youthful drive, pleasing manners, and assured charm made an unusual impression on Cleary. Perhaps Cleary hoped, by appointing Moses general manager, to find a partner with his own capacity for hard work and with more than his own capacity for mixing with people. They made an effective team, building up the A.B.C.'s existing strengths, such as schools broadcasts, and entering new ventures such as concert promotion and a semi-independent news service.

Broadcasting was not originally the sphere in which Moses had hoped for leadership. Born in the north of England in 1900, he was disappointed in being just too young for active service in World War I, and his liking for military experience had led him to volunteer for two years' service

as lieutenant with the forces attempting to suppress the Irish Republican Army. He had survived, and even succeeded in marrying an Irishwoman, but his prospects as an army officer had not improved, and this encouraged his emigration to Australia. With a concept of leadership which must have been influenced by his army and sporting experiences, Moses now found himself at the A.B.C. wielding the delicate authority of a young man who has been promoted quickly over a good many heads. It was not to be expected that he could at once take over the whole range of decision-making and policy-forming that Cleary had been exercising. For the next few years, until World War II, critics of the A.B.C. tended to direct their fire against Cleary at least as much as Moses. 'The personal responsibility of the general manager in Australia is very much less than that of the Director-General in Britain', wrote Macmahon Ball in 1938. 'This means that the Australian Commissioners play a much more active and continuous part in the internal management of broadcasting than the members of the B.B.C.'<sup>8</sup> The management of the A.B.C. in those years tended to be divided between Cleary as chairman and Moses as general manager, with the advantage of seniority on Cleary's side. Moses would have preferred the original concept by which the general manager was comparable to the managing director of a large firm, looking to his directors only for broad policy directives and for overall support in his running of the concern. Cleary had given the chairman a much more actively creative role, both in policy-making and in guiding the relations of the A.B.C. with officials, politicians, and the outside world. It remained to be seen how long Moses, who candidly felt 'that I could run the ABC better than anyone else'<sup>9</sup> would find this arrangement workable. One way in which the general manager could increase his own importance was by short-circuiting the Commission and making his own contacts with senior ministers and civil servants; but this simply made for friction with the chairman.

<sup>8</sup> *Press, Radio and World Affairs* (Melbourne, 1938), p. 126.

<sup>9</sup> 'Uncommon Men', *Age* (Melbourne), 22 Apr. 1964.

The position was still unresolved when World War II broke out, and Moses promptly enlisted with a commission in the 8th Division of the A.I.F. T. W. Bearup, the acting-general manager, was an old A.B.C. hand who worked well during these years with Cleary, so that during Boyer's early years as a member of the Commission there was no pressure to define the division of responsibilities between chairman and general manager. This uncertainty was not helped by political wavering, and remained ground for potential dispute. A. G. Cameron, Postmaster-General early in 1939, wanted direct ministerial control of broadcasting, and planned to replace the general manager with a director-general. His proposed Bill to amend the 1932 Act, drafted (according to a party colleague) without consulting either broadcasting or postal officials, was disliked even by his own party; and with the split between Menzies and Page in April 1939 he went out of office. Eric Harrison, his successor, proposed on the other hand to make the general manager chief executive officer armed with specific powers against interference by the Commission, but his Bill, introduced in September 1939, did not reach the statute book because of wartime pressure of business. In 1941 the Menzies Government made a third attempt, this time with Senator George McLeay as Postmaster-General, to legislate. McLeay's Bill provided for enlargement of the Commission from five to seven, to include 'representatives of labour and culture'. It also gave the government the right to veto any action of the Commission. Parliament, almost deadlocked in numbers, referred the legislation to a joint parliamentary committee chaired by Senator Gibson, who as Postmaster-General had sponsored the first broadcasting legislation nearly twenty years earlier. It was a strong committee, including Sir Charles Marr, Dr Grenfell Price, Arthur Calwell and Senator S. K. Amour (of whom more would be heard), and its recommendations, more thoughtful and liberal than any of the government proposals, were mostly implemented with support of all parties in the Act of 1942.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> 'Report of the Joint Committee on Wireless Broadcasting'. Com., *Parl. Pap.*, 1940-43, vol. ii, pp. 435 et seq.

This was a blueprint for future A.B.C. development. Among its provisions, members of the Australian Broadcasting Commission were given higher salaries and secure tenure. The chairman was to be appointed for five years, the vice-chairman for four, and the members for three, retiring in rotation to ensure continuity. There would continue to be a general manager, who would attend meetings of the Commission but might be asked to retire if the nature of the business under discussion warranted it. The general manager's precise powers were unstated. In this form the Senate passed the legislation, but in May 1942 when the Bill came before the House of Representatives a change was made. This was almost certainly due to an unexpected appearance by Moses. Having escaped from the fall of Singapore in company with General Gordon Bennett in a commandeered Chinese junk, Moses had survived a gruelling journey to Perth, where he was promptly sent to hospital. When the Bill came before Parliament he was still far from well, but after hard talking he managed first to arrange his transfer to a Sydney hospital and then to persuade the medical authorities to let him go to Canberra while the Bill was being debated. According to Frank Dixon, then director of news with the A.B.C. and the main source of the story,<sup>11</sup> Moses went to Canberra to lobby Curtin, Beasley, and Menzies about the general manager's lack of specific authority, because, he told Dixon, 'if the bill passes in its present form I'll be merely an office boy.' He may simply have been following what C. P. Snow described as 'the first rule for any kind of politics: if there is a crisis, if anyone can do you harm or good . . . never mind your dignity, never mind your nerves, but *always be present in the flesh*.'<sup>12</sup> At any rate Menzies moved in committee that the Act should define the general manager as 'the chief executive officer of the Commission':

Where there is a relatively full-time chairman and a full-time manager there is always a grave danger of dual control, and that should be avoided. We should make it

<sup>11</sup> *Nation*, 5 Oct. 1963.

<sup>12</sup> *The New Men* (Penguin ed., London, 1959), p. 95.

clear that, whilst the Commission itself must have undisputed authority on matters of policy, the general manager shall be the chief executive officer.

Mr C. A. Morgan (Labor, Reid): But he must still be subject to the decisions of the Commission.

Mr Menzies: Entirely so, but my proposal is that Parliament should make his position clear.<sup>13</sup>

This was almost the sum total of discussion on the amendment, which passed unopposed. There seemed no immediate prospect of conflict within the A.B.C. Cleary was confirmed in the chairmanship for five years, and Moses was shortly to resume his army service. In fact, Cleary lasted three more years with the A.B.C., and Moses twenty-three.

Contrary to the Gibson committee's views, the number of commissioners remained at five. Cleary was chairman, with P. G. Foley as vice-chairman and Boyer, John Medley, and Mrs Ernestine Hill as commissioners. Ernestine Hill was an author and journalist, well known for her descriptions of the outback and *My Love Must Wait*, a study of Matthew Flinders; Medley was perhaps Melbourne University's best loved Vice-Chancellor. During the years which followed, Boyer was the colleague most frequently consulted by Cleary: not perhaps so much from any special personal closeness but because he was the most experienced and readily available, since Foley, a quiet, deeply respected trade union official, a close personal friend of John Curtin, lived in Western Australia and was not in the best of health for travelling. The administration of the A.B.C. was complicated by a provision of the 1942 Act, following the Gibson committee, that a joint standing committee of parliament should be created to supervise national and commercial broadcasting in Australia. This committee was to have the power of sifting evidence on any question about broadcasting referred to it by the Postmaster-General or Parliament. In one way it was a commendable experiment to use parliamentary back-benchers for a fact-finding body of this sort, and it would be interesting to know if the idea was consciously modelled on the United States system of congressional committees. In

<sup>13</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1942, vol. 171, p. 2085.

other respects the idea had drawbacks. Under Australian conditions of thorough party discipline, it was inevitable that over some issues the standing committee would divide on political lines, with the majority supporting the government of the day. This made the standing committee suspect as a means of government control of broadcasting, and the Press did not fail to seize on this point. In fact the committee's powers were not great. Cleary, and Boyer after him, consistently took the view that its findings were not mandatory until debated and adopted by Parliament. Although the standing committee involved the A.B.C. and commercial stations in lengthy inquisitions of considerable public interest and potential importance, none of its fifteen reports presented to Parliament, some at least embodying massive research, was ever debated or made a basis for legislation. But its reports sometimes inspired action by the Postmaster-General, so that from 1942 to 1948 the standing committee was an overseer whom the A.B.C. could not ignore and had to placate.

In its first year, with Arthur Calwell as chairman and most of the Gibson committee as members, the standing committee kept on reasonably even terms with the A.B.C., but after the 1943 elections confirmed Labor in power, it rode the A.B.C. somewhat roughly. The new chairman was Senator S. K. Amour, a forty-three-year-old Sydney man with a background in insurance, who owed his place in the Senate to the accident that his name began with 'A'.<sup>14</sup> As chairman of the standing committee he was conscientious according to his lights, but his mind revealed self-confidence rather than subtlety or a love of the arts. Cleary fought interference as hard as he could, but he was a man almost without allies. With icy precision he could state a carefully marshalled case in lucid and forceful English; but he would not manoeuvre, he would not compromise, and he would not

<sup>14</sup> Under the Senate voting system before 1940, ballot papers listed candidates in alphabetical order. Labor nominated four candidates whose names began with 'A' in 1937, correctly reasoning that they would win the votes of many unthinking electors (the 'donkey vote') who, instead of listing the candidates in order of preference, simply filled in their papers straight from top to bottom.



disguise his inflexibility by a warm and conciliatory manner. Curtin found him difficult to talk to, and some of his ministers, such as Beasley and Ward, found it impossible after years of hostility from the capitalist Press to refrain from interfering in the way the A.B.C. presented its news. Nor was Cleary's position easy within the A.B.C.<sup>15</sup> In February 1943 the Federal Government decided to release Charles Moses from the army to resume the general managership. The Commission, and Cleary in particular, were much annoyed at not being consulted by the government over this move. It was not simply a question of personalities. By returning Moses to the A.B.C., the government showed a lack of faith in the existing management and called into question the Commission's right to choose its own staff. Curtin made no secret of the fact that he had recalled Moses because of dissatisfaction with the running of the A.B.C., and seemed unconcerned at compromising its autonomy. Moses took over the reins in masterful style; Frank Dixon states that at his first staff conference he was very critical of the way work had gone on in his absence, and behaved with all the confidence of a man who knew he had influential backing. It was not just that he had decided views on the way the A.B.C. should be run and was unlikely to submit to Cleary's judgment. There was now the further complication that Cleary was at odds with some of the politicians, and they would tend to try to work through Moses, who even if he resisted such pressures would almost certainly be compromised by them. In the troublesome period which followed his return, the general manager of the A.B.C. was not in the closest *rapproch* with his chairman, and this weakened the Commission's ability to play an independent hand.

More than anything else the A.B.C. in the public mind was in constant hot water over the questions of censorship and political pressure. Both these problems were at their most acute during the war years. The problem of censorship depended, as it still does, on public opinion. The A.B.C.'s

<sup>15</sup> On Cleary, see the character study in *S.M.H.*, 28 Feb. 1945.

traditional policy on contentious issues was to avoid offending any considerable element among the listening public. Where controversial views were aired, particularly on religious and political themes, they were to be balanced by giving the opposite point of view equal coverage. This ideal of 'balanced programs', easier to satirize than to administer, was reinforced in Cleary's time by fairly ruthless censorship. In June 1937, for instance, the adult educationist, Colin Badger, refused to give a talk on 'Machiavelli and the Modern Dictators' because Perth A.B.C. officials wanted him to omit a few disrespectful references to Hitler and Mussolini. Greater controversy occurred in May 1938 when A. W. Foster, a Victorian county court judge, had a talk on the history of human liberties so heavily censored because of its references to intolerance by the Christian churches that he too refused to broadcast. Cleary approved of this censorship, probably because he wanted to minimize the grounds on which outsiders might interfere in the program content of the A.B.C.; as it was, the then Postmaster-General, McLachlan, said 'the only fault I can find with the Broadcasting Commission is that it ever entertained a proposal to broadcast the address in question',<sup>16</sup> and it was left to the *Sydney Sun* to print the offending talk. It was a pretty sorry state of affairs when the A.B.C. could only preserve its dubious independence by severe self-censorship, but its caution was doubtless realistic in the mealy-mouthed 1930s, when the Australian Government banned James Joyce's *Ulysses* and attempted to exclude a visiting Englishwoman from the country for fear she might commit adultery. In such a climate of opinion Boyer was not merely uttering a platitude when, interviewed on his appointment to the Commission, he said 'that broadcasting control should err on the side of liberality in giving people representing different interests in the community the right to state their views.'<sup>17</sup>

During the war political interference with the A.B.C. was frequent and cheeky. Neither Menzies nor Curtin desired

<sup>16</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1938, vol. 155, p. 1019.

<sup>17</sup> *S.M.H.*, 1 Jan. 1940.

the regimentation of the A.B.C., but they did not always curb their more roughshod colleagues. As Postmaster-General, A. G. Cameron bullied the A.B.C. about its reportage of disagreements within the Country Party. When Eric Harrison became Postmaster-General later in 1939, instructions were given to Cleary to make sure that the A.B.C.'s regular news commentator, 'The Watchman', voiced no criticism of the Menzies Government, although no restriction was placed on what he said about the Opposition.<sup>18</sup> The next Postmaster-General, H. V. Thorby, once threatened to recommend the abolition of the A.B.C. unless broadcasts eliminated all mention of the Douglas social credit movement (can he possibly have thought it was some sort of desperate left-wing conspiracy?). Matters did not improve when Labor came to power in October 1941. Several of the new cabinet, frustrated by years of press hostility, saw the national news service as the ideal medium for ensuring coverage for their own views. Several ministers lost no opportunity of releasing statements for A.B.C. broadcasts, and complained at length if they got insufficient publicity. The Postmaster-General, Senator W. P. Ashley, a mild, pliable man, had at that time power to direct that the A.B.C. should broadcast or refrain from broadcasting any matter whatever. In the early months of the Curtin Government this power was delegated to a cabinet sub-committee comprising Ashley and two of his most acutely radio-conscious colleagues: H. V. Evatt and J. S. Beasley. A number of minor incidents culminated in a showdown on 4 January 1942, when Beasley took offence because the A.B.C., having sent a reporter to ask his views on America's role in the south-west Pacific, failed to use the material in its 7 p.m. news bulletin. Beasley telephoned several senior officials of the A.B.C. demanding that the item be broadcast, even if it meant interrupting a performance of Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird* which was then on the air, and he refused to be

<sup>18</sup> Cleary in evidence before the standing committee on broadcasting. *S.M.H.*, 1 Dec. 1944.

mollified when his pearls were scattered before the community at the next regular news bulletin.<sup>19</sup> Three days later Cleary and the acting-general manager, T. W. Bearup, were summoned to Canberra for an interview with Ashley, Evatt, and Beasley. High words passed at the meeting, but in the end the only positive instructions issued to the Commission were orders to slant news coverage more positively towards Australia and the south-west Pacific. This was Evatt's doing; Beasley contented himself with a tirade against the A.B.C. officials, and having got that off his chest sometimes sided with them in later altercations with other ministers.<sup>20</sup>

The 1942 Act for the first time gave the A.B.C. some explicit protection against political meddling. The Commission was specifically empowered to take decisions on the time, extent, and content of political material. While it was still obliged to obey ministerial directives, these could be conveyed only by the Postmaster-General, and any case where he ordered the broadcasting or omission of material had to be reported in the next annual report of the Commission. In some respects, the pressure lightened for the A.B.C. During Cleary's time the minister exercised his powers only three times, and then it was to order the broadcasting of material of such public concern as post office trading hours and starting-price betting regulations. After a while, however, other forms of ministerial interference began anew. Ministers and members of Parliament yearned to have their every statement publicized in news broadcasts, and protested strongly if the A.B.C. was not generous enough. Evatt was always ready to complain if he was overlooked, and E. J. Ward made trouble several times. Among the backbenchers, Leslie Haylen, as an experienced journalist, knew how to time his press statements skilfully, and once made the Sunday evening news bulletin seven weeks running. Quite often news items of this sort consisted simply of ministers' opinions about subjects not immediately relevant to the war effort; two of the biggest controversies

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 29 Nov. 1944.

<sup>20</sup> These episodes were described by Cleary in evidence before the parliamentary standing committee on broadcasting: *S.M.H.*, 29 Nov., 1 Dec. 1944.

over Ward, for instance, concerned reportage of his views on appointing a governor-general and his criticism of the patriotism of Geelong College boys. The question of whether and how often to broadcast these items cost A.B.C. staff a good deal of time and trouble. It also gave the Press and the non-Labor parties grounds for attacking the government for attempting to turn A.B.C. news services into their tame propaganda machine.

Meanwhile, the A.B.C. was still under fire on issues of morality and good taste. In September 1942 the broadcasting of a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon at Wesley Church, Melbourne, was cancelled by A.B.C. officials because the speaker, Professor Woodruff, was for the second time proposing to attack the evils of the liquor trade, and no broadcast had been arranged to present the opposite point of view; and the A.B.C. was criticized in Parliament for that. Two years later, during a Nation's Forum of the Air, Dr Norman Haire vigorously advocated the practice of contraception, thus shocking the consciences of public men so powerfully that four members got up in Parliament—Amour and Mulcahy on the Labor side, Foll and McLachlan among their opponents—to attack the A.B.C. for allowing discussion of such a topic. Given such surveillance by those who controlled its purse-strings, could the A.B.C. be blamed for excessive caution in approaching matters of controversy?

For finance was behind all the problems of the A.B.C., and war conditions aggravated the problem. The 1932 Act granted the A.B.C. twelve shillings out of every licence fee issued annually. This was a satisfactory source of income so long as the number of listeners went on increasing, as it did consistently while Australia was emerging from the depression. Cleary foresaw early that the number of licence-holders would eventually level off as the listening public reached saturation point, so that the A.B.C.'s income would stand still while commitments went on growing. A.B.C. studios in almost every State capital were housed in make-shift quarters not originally intended for broadcasting, and for the sake of both program quality and staff morale proper premises were badly needed. Under Cleary the Commission

adopted a policy of putting away as much as possible into reserves, mainly as a building fund, but the outbreak of war checked the rise in licence numbers, so that 1939-40 was the last year when the A.B.C. could add to its holdings. Then in 1940 came an unwelcome setback. Among the transients to hold the position of Postmaster-General in those years was H. V. Thorby, whose chief contributions to public life were a startling bluntness in debate<sup>21</sup> and a myopic zeal for cutting government expenditure. Shortly before his defeat at the 1940 elections Thorby took it upon himself to make a gesture to the voters by reducing the cost of wireless licences from a guinea to a pound, and the A.B.C.'s share of each fee from twelve to ten shillings.

This threw the A.B.C. into grave straits. Already the gap between income and expenditure had narrowed to vanishing-point, not just because of wartime expenses, but because of the increasing number of A.B.C. commitments. Unlike the commercial stations, whose programs were almost entirely recorded music and serials, the A.B.C. had the responsibility of fostering various forms of local talent. Under Cleary and Moses, the A.B.C. before the war pioneered live performances by Australian orchestras, subsidized celebrity concerts and tours, and from 1935 took the initiative in bringing eminent soloists and conductors to Australia. Its drama department, its sports commentaries, even its talks on current affairs broke ground which commercial radio almost completely ignored in those years; and its school broadcasts were its most original and widely appreciated contribution to Australian life. All these commitments, as well as widening the choice of the listening public, gave the A.B.C. an important role as patron of musicians, actors, lecturers,

<sup>21</sup> Don Whittington (*Ring the Bells*, p. 35) quotes the *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 20 Dec. 1938, for Thorby's rejoinder to a mild criticism of his administration by Curtin, then Leader of the Opposition: 'I hope the time comes when I've got power to put traitors like that up against a wall and shoot them. Curtin is a political crank beneath contempt. I would not even spit on him.' It should in fairness be mentioned that Sir Earle Page (*Truant Surgeon*, p. 293) pays tribute to the amount of attention which Thorby devoted, as Minister for Defence, to the establishment of munition factories.

and others whose contributions to Australia's culture found recognition and pay from few other sources.

But the A.B.C. relied entirely on government money. Expenditure was tightly budgeted, and a cut in funds such as Thorby imposed in 1940 could be met only by reduced services. Because of wartime enlistments and restrictions the full gravity of the situation was masked, but with rising costs and growing shortages of material the A.B.C. could no longer plan for future expansion even as far ahead as the post-war period. Clearly lost no opportunity of demanding better financial treatment, but the Gibson committee in 1942 recommended only a rise from ten to eleven shillings per licence fee, and it was not until 1944 that the A.B.C.'s share was restored to the full twelve shillings. This was subject to yearly renewal, and was by that time plainly inadequate to meet and hold rising costs. In consequence the A.B.C. had to be extremely close-fisted about any new project involving extra expense.

Tight money influenced A.B.C. policy everywhere. As a Commonwealth instrumentality, the Commission pegged salaries for many of its officers. Since commercial stations had greater freedom to make increases, there was a slow but steady drain of staff from the A.B.C., and those who remained felt discontented. The A.B.C. Staff Association and Senior Officers' Association began in those years to make their presence felt and some clash of personalities resulted. Charles Moses showed no great distaste for the task of curbing discontent, and, for instance when Haydn Beck, the A.B.C. orchestra leader, resigned and complained to the Press of poor payment, Moses made efficient work of discrediting Beck's case.<sup>22</sup> The grading of senior officers continued to be a cause of discontent, aggravated by the conditions under which they had to plan programs. Initiative and experiment were discouraged by the need to watch every penny. Any program which failed to attract a quickly favourable audience reaction, any enterprise which did not pay its way, such as the *ABC Weekly*, was subject to searching and critical inquiry by the A.B.C. management, and the

<sup>22</sup> *S.M.H.*, 7, 8, 11, and 12 Sept. 1944.

more sensitive members of the staff began to feel overworked and underappreciated. More than any question of personalities, however, the A.B.C.'s biggest headache during the war years, other than finance, was the development of its news services.

Before the war A.B.C. news broadcasting led a hand-to-mouth existence. At a time when the B.B.C. news bulletins were laying the foundations of a reputation for impartiality and wide coverage which would give it the wartime public's utmost confidence, the A.B.C. was tied by government parsimony and—the tired old phrase seems for once unavoidable—vested newspaper interests. Before 1936 A.B.C. news broadcasts were prepared separately in each state capital under a gentlemen's agreement under which the A.B.C. paid the Australian Associated Press £200 a year for the use of news.<sup>23</sup> The A.B.C. was not allowed by this agreement to check news for accuracy or to supplement it by using its own staff. Only two morning bulletins were permitted, and no evening news before 7.55 p.m. Often bulletins consisted simply of the announcer on duty reading such items as took his fancy from the local dailies. So fearful were the newspapers of this dynamic competition that they lost few opportunities of girding at the A.B.C., and the Australian Newspaper Proprietors' Association set its face sternly against making conditions easier for radio news broadcasting, even though the A.B.C. contended with some justice that radio news bulletins stimulated newspaper sales, rather than reducing them. Nor did the commercial radio stations, many of them controlled by newspaper interests, offer competition to stimulate the A.B.C. to greater things.

These restrictive conditions eventually moved Cleary, with the enthusiastic encouragement of his vice-chairman, Herbert Brookes, to lay the groundwork of a national news service. The federal editor appointed in August 1936 to build up this service was M. F. (Frank) Dixon, a seasoned newspaperman with long experience as a country editor and little love for the owners and controllers of the big

<sup>23</sup> See background material in the 14th report of the parliamentary standing committee on broadcasting, Com., *Parl. Pap.*, 1943-6, vol. iii, p. 1031.



metropolitan dailies. Ardent to make the A.B.C. a fully independent competitor with the Press, he found most of his colleagues and superiors too cautious, and confided his views of men and events to a diary which was to become, after his retirement in 1950, the basis of several lively but partisan accounts of the crusade for an independent news service.<sup>24</sup> After Dixon's arrival on the scene, the A.B.C. supplemented its news gathering services by taking a weekend cable service from London and appointing its own Canberra correspondent, but it was still unable to get regular access to either local or overseas news. Australian Associated Press, the newspaper consortium, would not modify its existing contracts with overseas cable services; and when the B.B.C. offered the A.B.C. relay rights to shortwave broadcasts beamed on Australia, the A.B.C. was unable to accept the offer because some of the B.B.C. material was supplied by Reuters, and its use might infringe these contracts.

With the outbreak of war, the Commonwealth Government put some pressure on the newspapers to co-operate with the A.B.C., and an agreement was negotiated between Charles Moses, Sir Keith Murdoch, and the secretary of Australian Associated Press, by which the A.B.C. paid £3,000 a year for the right to the Reuter news in B.B.C. bulletins, which it could then rebroadcast in full. During the war the A.B.C. built up a fairly comprehensive staff of correspondents, but relations with the newspapers continued uneasy. Some newspapers accused the A.B.C. of poaching their material, but their main pretext for shying off co-operation with the A.B.C. was the allegation that national news broadcasts sometimes became a medium for government propaganda, with which they did not wish to be associated. Within the A.B.C. one school of thought, of which Dixon was the most strenuous advocate, held that the A.B.C. should have an entirely independent news service, in no way dependent on outside agencies. This view was shared by

<sup>24</sup> The most extensive of these accounts was serialized weekly in *Century*, 12 Jan. 1962 to 26 July 1963. See also Dixon's articles, *Bulletin*, 4 Dec. 1950, and 'Bold experiment in nationally-owned news service', *Meanjin*, Autumn 1955, p. 115.

most federal cabinet ministers, who were reinforced by the Australian Journalists' Association in their belief that existing news channels might be tainted at the source,<sup>25</sup> and that the A.B.C. should stay completely independent of them. The other view was that, since the pressures of wartime had shown the possibility of co-operation between press and national radio, a long-term agreement should be drawn up under which the A.B.C. got access to all sources of news in return for an annual cash payment to Australian Associated Press. Although Cleary had been regarded as a difficult customer for the newspapers to deal with, by 1943 he had come down in favour of the second alternative. Boyer, Medley, and the other commissioners, including the trade unionist vice-chairman, Foley, supported this decision, if only because of the factor of cost. The A.B.C.'s tight budgeting would be less strained by sharing news-gathering services than by complete independence.

This brought Cleary and the Commission into political trouble. Acting on a report of two senior A.B.C. officials, the Commission unanimously recommended that the A.B.C. should enter into an agreement with Australian Associated Press, paying £7,500 a year for unrestricted access to overseas cables and £2,500 for local news. The Postmaster-General referred this proposal to the standing committee on broadcasting, now chaired by Senator S. K. Amour. Amour, like most Labor men, had an ingrained distrust of the Press, and disliked an arrangement tying the national news service to the same sources as the daily papers. On a straight party division, the standing committee by five votes to four decided against ratifying the agreement. Another clash during 1943 and 1944 occurred over the Commission's decision to buy a Canberra service from Australian United Press, leaving only a skeleton staff there to cover special events. The government, thinking this might afford a precedent for the bigger contract with Australian Associated Press, demanded that the agreement should be rescinded. Cleary, irritated by previous pressures and by the government's failure to

<sup>25</sup> *S.M.H.*, 1 Dec. 1944. (Cleary's evidence before the parliamentary standing committee on broadcasting.)

make adequate financial provision for the A.B.C., wanted to refuse the government's instructions and fight the issue to a showdown, and in this he was backed by Boyer and Medley. When Senator Ashley, the Postmaster-General, threatened to kill the press contracts by wielding his statutory power of checking any item of A.B.C. expenditure over £5,000, Cleary rejoined that this was only a short step to government direction of the sources from which the A.B.C. should collect its news, and might easily lead to bias.<sup>26</sup> The A.B.C. eventually had to yield the point; but interference continued. In April 1944 Calwell's Department of Information took over from the A.B.C. the running of the overseas service, Radio Australia. This was the second time the A.B.C. had been deprived of Radio Australia. The Department of Information had filched it in 1941, during Sir Keith Murdoch's empire-building days, but had returned it early in 1942. This new change implied an apparent lack of confidence, and the Commission resented it. Altogether it was a frustrating time for the Commission, and particularly for Cleary as chairman.

Cleary's personal position in the A.B.C. at the end of 1944 was not comfortable. He was carrying more than his usual responsibility on the Commission, as the vice-president, Foley, had suffered a heart attack and then died in October, and Ernestine Hill had resigned. This reduced the Commission to Cleary, Boyer, and Medley. Cleary was in full and frequent consultation with his two colleagues, but he was taking the brunt of the Commission's brushes with the government and the Amour committee, and he was by no means happy in his relations with his general manager. Charles Moses saw it as his function to weld the A.B.C. staff into an efficiently-working bureaucracy, and to attend to many of the Commission's negotiations with outside bodies, such as the Press and the politicians. Cleary felt that Moses assumed too much responsibility, and did not consult or inform the Commission enough about his activities. The most notable example of this lack of liaison was in December

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. quotations from Cleary to Ashley, 8 July 1943; also Boyer to his wife (no date, but from internal evidence about July 1943).

1944, during a conference with the commercial radio stations over the issue of whether the A.B.C. should continue to provide them with news services. Moses told the Federation of Commercial Stations that they would have to pay £9,000 a year for the news service and give an acknowledgment of it three times a day. These terms were rejected, as the commercial stations wanted to go over to their own services as soon as land-lines were provided. This was an issue of political importance, as the government did not wish to make the land-lines available, while the Liberal and Country parties supported the commercial stations. But apparently Moses put forward the A.B.C.'s terms without first referring them either to the Commission or to the Postmaster-General.<sup>27</sup>

Doubting his chief executive officer, rebuffed by the government's handling of A.B.C. matters, Cleary preserved his invincible calm, possibly awaiting an opportunity to appraise the situation while Moses was absent at the Empire Broadcasting Conference in London during the first quarter of 1945. He took the opportunity of discussing his problems with Boyer during an hour's conversation in Sydney in the last week of December, when Boyer was passing through on his way to the Hot Springs Conference. He began by informing Boyer that Cabinet was divided over choosing the next vice-chairman of the A.B.C. Half were for Boyer, and half for Edgar Dawes, a former Labor Party leader in South Australia who had been appointed to the Commission a few weeks earlier. Boyer, in his own words, did not 'care two hoots what they do with it',<sup>28</sup> and in fact in mid-January Dawes was chosen. An energetic man still in his early forties, Dawes had concluded his active political career in 1933 at the age of thirty-one, and was now serving on the Ministry of Munitions board of area management and developing a number of business interests, without, however, losing his Labor standpoint. To Boyer, personalities mattered very little. The most important consideration was that Cleary should take some effective step to resolve his difficulties with

<sup>27</sup> *Com., Parl. Deb.*, 1945, vol. 182, pp. 1570 and 1578.

<sup>28</sup> Boyer to his wife, 27-8 Dec. 1944.

Moses and the government. Any positive action on Cleary's part would be supported by the other commissioners. Only drift was dangerous.

The action on which Cleary at length decided came as a surprise to everyone. Late in February he resigned. With a reserve rare in Australian public life, he never divulged his reasons, then or later, and many speculations have been put forward about its timing. Federal Parliament was sitting at the time, and as soon as reports of Cleary's resignation leaked into the Sydney papers the Opposition were doing their best to embarrass the Curtin Government about it. At first, the Opposition spokesmen were clearly relying on guesswork. Questions put to Curtin in the House of Representatives on 28 February concentrated on the old business of Moses's recall from the army, and Curtin merely replied in his most oracular manner that the decision was taken after he had made certain inquiries and reached certain conclusions. A week later, however, H. L. Anthony, a Country Party member who made a speciality of the Postmaster-General's Department, launched a swingeing attack on government interference with the A.B.C. His speech is said to have been so trenchant that Menzies eventually asked Anthony to bring it to an end in respect for Curtin's poor health.<sup>29</sup> Anthony's case was certainly so well-informed that he must either have put in diligent research on the subject or have been well briefed by Cleary or by someone sharing Cleary's views. He cited the various instances of interference by Labor cabinet ministers in the running of the A.B.C., of which Cleary had complained in November 1944 to the standing committee. (He refrained, however, from citing that part of Cleary's evidence which dealt with ministerial interference under the Menzies Government.) He condemned the Prime Minister's action in releasing Moses from the army to manage the A.B.C. as a gesture of no confidence in Cleary and the acting-general manager, Bearup. And he deplored the government's failure to do anything about the Commission's plea for more finance and for power to negotiate its own agreement about news services.

<sup>29</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1945, vol. 181, p. 390-5.

All these were issues which had bedevilled the A.B.C. for a considerable while, and there had been no obvious increase in pressure during January and February 1945. At Cleary's last appearance before the standing committee, early in February, Senator Amour held forth on the A.B.C.'s need to concern itself less with culture for the highbrows and more with popular shows for the ordinary citizen, but this was an old theme with Labor politicians and scarcely important enough to drive the A.B.C. chairman to resignation. Cleary's own explanations hinted at personality difficulties. At a farewell party tendered him in April, he said that he had not found loyalty in quarters where he expected it, and his reply to the Commission's letter of thanks for his services conveyed a little the same impression:

In passing on to your colleagues this acknowledgement, would you be good enough also to assure them of my sincere hope that their ideals and labours will be shared by Governments and staff: Given that co-operation, you will win the crown of success which the importance of your work, and your devotion to it, deserve.<sup>30</sup>

'Given that co-operation'; but he was too discreet a man, or perhaps he felt he did not need, to spell out the ways in which this co-operation had been lacking. The letter went on to assure Boyer of Cleary's warmest personal regards. There was no suggestion of resentment towards his successor, and nothing in the evidence to support Frank Dixon's theory that Cleary hoped his resignation would provoke inquiry into his motives, only to find to his disappointment that neither Senator Cameron, the new Postmaster-General, nor Boyer, his successor, asked for his story. The fact simply seems to be that Cleary could see no end to the time when he was at odds with either the parliamentary standing committee or Charles Moses, or both. Having discussed the matter with Boyer in December, having consulted further with John Medley while both Boyer and Moses were absent abroad, Cleary made up his mind that he was no longer the personality best able to further the interests of the A.B.C.; and, with characteristic honesty, at once withdrew from a

<sup>30</sup> Cleary to Boyer, 5 May 1945.

scene where he could no longer be useful. Neither pride nor policy would have been served if Cleary had broken silence on the personality difficulties which contributed to his withdrawal. What is less easy to understand is the failure of the Australian community, in all the profuse honours lists which have appeared during the succeeding twenty years, to make the least acknowledgment of Cleary's work over a decade of building up the A.B.C. from weak beginnings.

Boyer, as the senior of the commissioners and a man of experience in varied walks of public life, was obviously a possible successor to Cleary. Within a day or two of Cleary's resignation, Medley was approached by the Director of Posts and Telegraphs, who informed him that the government wanted to contact Boyer in London with an invitation to take on the chairmanship immediately.

We spent [Medley recalled] a large part of the day in endeavours to make contact with him on a radio telephone which, even at the P.M.G.'s behest left much to be desired. But I doubt if my influence was necessary. He made some half-hearted demurrers, it is true, but I fancy that the offer was the answer to his dearest ambitions.<sup>31</sup>

Boyer's initial reactions were in fact cautious, especially since the London Press, probably taking its cue from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was already forecasting his appointment. 'I can get no adequate idea at this distance of what the trouble is, and therefore nothing to base my own attitude on', he wrote to his wife. 'Have made it clear, therefore, that any decision on my part will have to await my return.'<sup>32</sup> Wartime transport difficulties kept him away until Easter Monday, 2 April. This gave time for one or two highly imaginative conjectures about Cleary's successor. W. C. Taylor, a young Sydney solicitor in the A.L.P., already a director of the Commonwealth Bank and soon to become vice-chairman of T.A.A. and Qantas, was suggested by one

<sup>31</sup> Sir John Medley, 'Sir Richard Boyer', *Australian Quarterly*, Sept. 1961, pp. 54-5.

<sup>32</sup> Boyer to his wife, 2 Mar. 1945.

newspaper. T. S. Woodbridge was also mentioned, surprisingly, since he was general manager of the Australasian Performing Rights Association, with whom the A.B.C. had a running feud over royalties payments. In fact there was never much doubt that Boyer would get the appointment if he wanted it. The other commissioners, Dawes and Medley, were supporting him. The Curtin Government was anxious for him to accept. So far Cleary's silence had saved them embarrassment on the subject of government interference with the A.B.C., but if Boyer were to refuse appointment, and thus perhaps bring the Commission's grievances further into the open, the political consequences would be troublesome. These were implications of which Boyer was fully aware when he returned to Australia and began hurried consultations with Dawes and Medley.

The three commissioners agreed that, before accepting office, Boyer should get official assurances that the Commission would cease being subjected to political interference of the sort which had been too common in the recent past. On 12 April 1945 Boyer had an interview with John Curtin, and agreed to become chairman. His conditions were embodied in a press statement issued that day by the Prime Minister:

I have to-day had a consultation with a member of the Australian Broadcasting Commission (Mr. R. J. F. Boyer) and am happy to say that he has agreed to accept the office of Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It is most satisfactory that one who has had long experience in the administration of the law in relation to broadcasting is able to fill so important an office.

I have informed Mr. Boyer that the Government recognises that the intent of the Australian Broadcasting Act is to create a position of special independence of judgment and action for the national broadcasting instrumentality. This is, inevitably, the case because of its highly delicate function in broadcasting at public expense news statements and discussions which are potent influences on public opinion and attitudes. As the legislation provides, this peculiar function calls for an undoubted measure of independence for the controlling body of the national



broadcasting instrumentality which cannot be measured by the constitution of other semi-governmental boards or agencies which do not impinge on the tender and dangerous realms of moral, religious, aesthetic and political values.

In the last resort, the healthy and beneficent function of national broadcasting and the maintenance of public confidence in the system must rest in all matters touching these values, solely on the integrity and independent judgment of the persons chosen to determine and administer its policy, and not on either review by, or pressure from, any sources outside it, political or non-political. This principle holds good in spite of the necessary responsibility of the commission to Parliament, through the Minister, for the legitimate use of its funds under the terms of the Act, and all the sections of the Act should be read in the light of the above general intent of Parliament in the establishment of the commission.<sup>33</sup>

Boyer drafted almost all of this declaration, which he considered of the utmost importance. Press comments at the time certainly understood it as such. 'Striking off the fetters', the *Adelaide News* headlined its editorial on the subject:

That such a statement should have been issued by the Prime Minister is evidence confirming its need. It also justifies the persistent public demand that the national broadcasting utility should be placed beyond the reach of meddling Ministers and interfering politicians.

Mr. Boyer has made a good beginning. He undertakes his big job free and unfettered by political red tape. He must ever be on his guard to ensure that he and his officers retain this freedom inviolate.<sup>34</sup>

The only waspish note in a general chorus of approval came from the curmudgeonly Toryism of the old *Sydney Bulletin*:

All the same, he will have to be vigilant and firm to prevent Labor politicians interrupting programmes of Beethoven symphonies and Shakespeare plays with

<sup>33</sup> John Curtin, 'Australian Broadcasting Commission: Appointments—New Chairman', Prime Minister's Press Statement No. 502, Canberra, 12 Apr. 1945.

<sup>34</sup> *News*, 14 Apr. 1945.

'Flashes' on their momentous work for the peepul; and, for himself, he will need to remove a suspicion that he is rather too fond of hearing the sound of the Boyer voice . . .<sup>35</sup>

Otherwise the Press was unanimous in approving the new appointment. The *Sydney Morning Herald* spoke of 'a clearing of atmosphere', hoped that the new régime would live up to its aim of keeping its operations and policy in the public eye, and praised the way Boyer had begun. The *Melbourne Herald* and the *Hobart Mercury* also printed commendatory editorials, each taking the opportunity to tilt at past interference by Labor cabinet ministers.<sup>36</sup> Boyer, however, was not just concerned with scoring debating points. Two months later, at a lunch given by the Postmaster-General to the Commission, he took the opportunity of placing on record and publicizing as widely as possible his construction of Curtin's statement of principle:

The implications of the Prime Minister's statement we unreservedly accept. These implications are that Parliament looks to us to accept responsibility on its behalf for the choice and treatment of matter which touches the ethical, religious, political, and aesthetic tastes of the Community. This is a heavy responsibility—how heavy and continuous only those who have had the experience can fully know, for it is here that the storm-centre of national broadcasting lies both here and overseas. Were we merely a body to provide music, entertainment and welfare services, we should have a comparatively happy and peaceful life . . .

In this connection may I give you this assurance, that so far as this Commission is concerned we are unanimous in our determination that no sectional pressure, however powerful or persuasive, shall deter us from presenting as balanced and impartial a picture of events and issues as is humanly possible . . . We represent many diverse shades of political opinion, but in this we are of one mind. In the light of this forthright expression of responsibility,

<sup>35</sup> *Bulletin* (Sydney), 18 Apr. 1945.

<sup>36</sup> *S.M.H.*, 16 Apr. 1945; *Herald*, 13 Apr. 1945; *Mercury*, 14 Apr. 1945.

as stated by the Prime Minister and accepted by us, therefore, it must follow that such sins and failures as may attach to the A.B.C. are our sins and failures and no one else's. Only so, I suggest, can national broadcasting in Australia in the future be removed from the arena of party dispute to that of our fundamental unity as a people.

Finally may I state our hopes for the future. We do not regard our function as achieved if we merely keep out of trouble. What we believe to be your purpose in this institution is that it should be a positive factor in building an informed, critical and cultured democracy. I think we all realise that in the post-war years, we, in common with all other countries, are entering a period in which grave and far-reaching issues of social and political policy will agitate the nation. In that period, when political temperatures may rise and our cleavages may become more pronounced, it is our hope that national broadcasting may stand solid and serene in the middle of our national life, running no campaign, seeking to persuade to no opinion, but presenting the issues freely and fearlessly for the calm judgement of our people . . . . If we succeed in this attempt to make of the A.B.C. an impartial clearing-house for our ideas, and a stimulant to our thought, as well as an instrument of education and aesthetic culture, we shall, we believe, not only contribute most valuably to the healthy development of our democracy, but serve as a much-needed centre of national unity.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, Information release, 28 June 1945.

## 7 A.B.C. Chairman

When Boyer became chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission he was fifty-four years old, and in many ways at the top of his form. Matured and experienced in public life, he had made what is for many men the difficult transition from private obscurity to a high community position without detriment to the happiness and integrity of his family circle. Possibly he was closer to his family than ever before, as he was one of those men who, although enjoying the company of children when small, found it easier to communicate with them as adults and equals. A stimulating conversationalist around the family table, he enjoyed drawing his family out on questions of religion, politics, and public affairs, sharpening and testing his own ideas against the uninhibited criticisms of his children. After the war both were enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at his old university, Sydney, Dick majoring in economics and Marianne in history. The family had been living in Sydney in rented houses since 1940; with Boyer's appointment as chairman they settled permanently, buying a house at Wahroonga, on the North Shore line about ten miles out of the city. It was a comfortable red-brick, two-storey place, set about with trees and with room for a tennis court at the back, for city life was not going to tempt Dick Boyer into abandoning the old Durella tradition of weekend tennis parties for family and friends. The Boyers became well known for a thorough countryman's sense of hospitality, yet managed to make a rule of keeping two evenings free of outside engagements.

This rule was not just to insure against the submergence of family life in public affairs. It was one of the ways in

which Boyer's wife was able to keep a careful eye on his health and make sure that the pace of his working life did not wear him down now that he was no longer all the time outdoors. In his later years he existed on less than the normal ration of sleep, mainly because of a constant cough caused by the lingering after-effects of his gassing at Passchendaele and doubtless strengthened by his unrepentant smoking habits. During these sleepless spells he often read for much of the night; his tastes were all-embracing, except that he showed curiously little interest in the financial press. On the other hand, he was careful about his exercise, and when the doctors eventually forbade him tennis, took to long walks about the North Sydney suburbs, of which his knowledge became, like Sam Weller's of London, extensive and peculiar. (When, for instance, two Indian runner ducks strayed into the garden of a rented house into which the family had just moved, he was at once able to identify the flock from which they came.) But the most important therapeutic influence in his life was, as ever, Durella. Bush life was the sacrifice he most keenly felt, and whenever opportunity offered he managed to snatch a few days or weeks on his Queensland property. Right up to his seventieth year, he and his wife thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity of camping out under the stars in the Queensland bush, and seldom failed to return refreshed from such a visit. There was a certain conscious nostalgia in his attitude towards Durella—he once told a newspaper reporter that the three happiest years of his life were the first three he spent there—but this did not prevent him from inviting selected guests there from among his contacts in the broadcasting world, especially those who he thought might find some novelty in life on a pastoral property. (On at least one occasion the visitor proved almost too inexperienced. A visiting member of the B.B.C. staff was out with Boyer several miles from the Durella homestead loading a tractor on to a truck when the Englishman saw a brown mulga snake approaching his host from behind. Not wanting to appear panicky in the unaccustomed bush, the Englishman said nothing until the snake was almost upon Boyer, then he asked diffidently,

'Does that thing matter?') So although Durella receded a little into the background, it remained a basic element in Boyer's life. His roots were there, where he had recovered from the dislocations of the war and built up economic and personal independence. The seasonal routine and slower pace of station life were a relaxation which never failed him in times of pressure and crisis. Yet his love of the bush was by no means uncritical. He was perfectly well aware that it could narrow and inhibit the personalities of many who remained there too long and that it could never adequately provide scope for the duties to the community which he felt commanded his services.

The management of Durella was entrusted to Neil Heelan, son of the veteran settler Harry Heelan whose help the Boyers had so much appreciated during their pioneer years in Queensland. Neil Heelan was the most competent and trustworthy of managers, knowing the country shrewdly and intimately, and he ran Durella well. Boyer's contacts with outback Queensland were further strengthened when his son Dick, who graduated and married in December 1948, decided to go in for sheep on a block of country not far from Durella. This property had originally been named Thirsty Downs, but some former leaseholder with more Latin than realism had altered it to Aqua Downs, and although the Boyers thought this rather pretentious, it would have involved too much red tape to change the name back. For Boyer and his wife it was a source of great pleasure to watch the younger couple, in the changed circumstances of the post-war period, building up another property in which, although the problems of costs and labour were greater than in their day, the opportunities for introducing improvements and mechanization were also favoured by the wool boom.

Despite Boyer's responsibilities in broadcasting, he managed to keep an active interest in the welfare of the pastoral industry as a whole. The aspect which gave him most trouble was the future of the Winton meatworks. Although often absent from company board meetings, Boyer played a major part in its negotiations with Commonwealth officials and representatives of the meat industry in Sydney and Brisbane.

The post-war outlook was bleak. Although Australian plants could produce 3,000 tons of dehydrated meat yearly, the only customer was UNRRA, which was prepared to take 1,000 tons a year to feed the distressed and homeless of Europe. The Federal Government wanted the meatworks operators to buy out the Commonwealth's interest in the dehydration plants and search out markets for themselves. The trouble was that Britain had first priority on Australian exports, and with a dour future of meat rationing stretching before them the British authorities were most unlikely to agree to mutton being used for dehydration if it could possibly be shipped frozen or canned. Dehydration was only for sheep so poor that even Attlee's Britain did not want them; in which event they were worth slaughtering only if wool prices were at rock bottom.

Boyer was reluctant to abandon the Winton project after nursing it so far. When it became apparent that all the other dehydrators planned to discontinue production, he marshalled an able plea to the Commonwealth Government for permission to make a unilateral agreement with UNRRA to take Winton's output over a period of twelve to eighteen months. This, he argued, would in no way divert meat intended for export to Britain, since without dehydration none of the lower-grade mutton from Western Queensland would get to market anyway. Characteristically, he also pressed strongly Australia's moral responsibility to do as much as possible to feed the hungry in Europe. The Federal Government accepted his argument, and at the annual general meeting of shareholders at Winton in December 1945 Boyer was able to report that Winton and another works at Rockhampton were to remain open to supply Australian Government contracts with UNRRA. It looked as if UNRRA would be their customer for some time to come. Since Winton expected to treat 150,000 sheep in 1946, the plant was assured of immediate operation at its full capacity of ten to twelve tons weekly.

Luck failed Winton. Despite inevitable wrangles between the refrigeration engineers and the building contractors, the works were constructed as fast as shortage of materials

would permit, only to be seriously set back when in October a fire broke out inexplicably in the cool chambers. The main building was severely damaged, and although the loss was fully covered by insurance the opening date had to be put off first to February, then to mid-March. It was early April 1946 before the plant was complete, but this did not matter because the meatworkers were on strike in a Queensland-wide dispute which lasted fourteen weeks. Consequently it was mid-July before the first sheep went to slaughter, and the co-operative was well behind schedule in supplying the UNRRA contract. From this setback the scheme never really recovered. Owing to continued dry weather, at least 25,000 sheep which had been fit to kill in April were by July below the standard quality for dehydration. Faults developed in the machinery during the early weeks of operation, largely because of inexperience among the staff, and this spelt further delay while a refrigeration engineer came up from Sydney. Altogether the Winton works operated for a season of ten weeks, treating 33,064 sheep. From a turnover of £42,251 it netted a profit of £2,342, reducing the overall loss on the company to under £3,500. All things considered, it might have been worse.

The future was darkly clouded. Although Boyer had managed to negotiate an extension for fulfilling the UNRRA contract, UNRRA was due to go out of existence in December, and with it Winton's only market. After much anxious consultation, Boyer approached the Commonwealth Government in November 1946 for an extension of the Treasury loan under-pinning the Winton co-operative. Even if—a big if—more markets were found for dehydrated mutton, the Winton abattoirs would still not be working to potential capacity. If on the other hand its freezing capacity were enlarged, so as to enable the treatment of sub-standard beasts—'canners' for tinned meat and 'potters' for skin, tallow, and fertilizer—then stockowners would be able to get surplus sheep off their pastures and the co-operative's output would be so diversified as to double its hope of survival. Therefore the co-operative then asked for a further Treasury loan of £10,000, bringing its total



indebtedness to the federal authorities to £25,000, in order to complete the freezing rooms and install a fertilizer mill. After nearly three months the reply came and it was a refusal. Quite apart from constitutional limitations, government policy was against providing direct finance for commercial or co-operative undertakings under peacetime conditions. Indeed, Treasury strongly hoped the Winton enterprise would soon liquidate its liability to the Commonwealth and obtain all its financial needs from other sources. Boyer's first reaction was to advise the immediate sale of the works to private hands. Optimism reasserted itself, and the impulse to quit was overruled by the hope of securing more capital to complete the freezing units. Meanwhile, lacking an assured market, the abattoirs did not operate during 1947. By August the co-operative owed nearly £7,000 in liabilities over its £15,000 debt to the Commonwealth. When at last the offer came of a Commonwealth contract for 150 tons of dehydrated mutton, it could not be accepted, because the co-operative could not raise capital for running expenses. An appeal to the Queensland Government's Industries Assistance Board for £35,000 was in vain. The Board would help only when definite plans were made to enter the frozen mutton trade, and the co-operative could plan the necessary extensions only if the Board definitely promised assistance.

What permanently crippled the co-operative was the scarcity of sheep that arose in 1947 as a result of high wool prices. No grazier was going to send to the slaughter any sheep capable of carrying another year's wool, particularly since the Winton co-operative, in choosing to concentrate on dehydrated meat, had committed itself to a product for which there was no steady payable market. Following an annual general meeting in December 1947 Boyer circularized all shareholders urging their support by increasing their holding of shares by 30 per cent, in order to carry the works through this period of difficulty to the point where sheep would once more be available for killing at a reasonable price. 'Let us have no illusion that the present highly favourable conditions can be guaranteed for all time', he wrote. 'We have in these works the only known cushion

against such catastrophes as have occurred in the past, and you are asked to maintain this insurance if you feel such an insurance is necessary.<sup>1</sup> Prepared though the shareholders at the general meeting were to vote praise to the directors and success to the enterprise, the money was not forthcoming. Barely one-third of the 429 shareholders offered to contribute, and the directors were left to confront the debt and worry.

During 1948 the directors tried to wind up the company—a process inordinately complicated by pedantic legalisms—and dispose of the works by tender to a private buyer. Disappointment again: nobody applied. Wool prices were high beyond precedent, and the problem of surplus sheep no longer existed. The only solution seemed to be for the graziers still interested in the project to buy out the others and to carry on as a private company until they found a buyer. This involved Boyer throughout 1949 in lengthy negotiations on all sides: persuading the Commonwealth Government to write down the company's indebtedness, placating the building contractor who suddenly grew impatient after three years of waiting for the balance of his fee, supervising desultory negotiations with a speculator who thought he might lease or purchase the works to produce dried horseflesh for export, if he could get an export permit. These were poor shifts and expedients for a scheme which had been launched with such goodwill and enthusiasm.

At last in April 1950 the co-operative went into voluntary liquidation. Boyer and a number of its members formed the Graziers' Inland Meat Company to take over its assets until such time as a lessee or purchaser could be found. Nothing happened, because the Korean war pushed wool values so high that the bad old days when graziers had too many useless sheep on their pastures went completely out of mind. Despite occasional spurts of activity—in 1955 a federal commission of inquiry into the Air Beef project

<sup>1</sup> Queensland Dried Meats Co-operative Association, *Chairman's Report*, Third Annual General Meeting, Dec. 1947.

looked into Winton's possibilities as a terminal for air-freighted meat from the far west of Queensland—Boyer saw no progress during his lifetime. He retained an unshaken faith in the value of the enterprise.

As you know [he wrote to one friend] . . . we went through tremendous difficulties to have it established, and were only frustrated from success by the mysterious fire that took place and the fourteen weeks' meatworks strike. But for these, we should have recouped all our capital before the end of the war, and had the building debt-free. Further, I have not lost any of my convictions as to the necessity of inland killing. We may have been premature, but I'm certain that the day is not long distant when they will become the established order.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the original misjudgment on the prospects for dehydrated meat, the case for inland killing centres would remain sound so long as drought remained an occupational hazard of squatting.

Greater success marked Boyer's three-year term of office as chairman of the Commonwealth Council of the Australian Institute of International Affairs from 1946 to 1949. He took office in succession to Ian Clunies Ross at a time when there was considerable public interest in international affairs. The demise of the old League of Nations Union had left something of a vacuum in several State capitals where there was no existing organization to act as a focus for the internationally-minded. The Australian Institute of International Affairs had been founded in the early thirties, on the model of and as an associate of the British Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House. It conducted regular meetings in Melbourne and Sydney, where the efforts of a number of young enthusiasts such as H. D. Black, P. D. Phillips, and Macmahon Ball had nursed it through the thirties, and published a number of important studies on current problems in the south-west Pacific. Its practical educational function of bringing together specialists and interested laymen in order to produce a well-informed public greatly appealed to Boyer. During his term of office branches of the

<sup>2</sup> Boyer to E. C. P. Phillott, 21 July 1955.

Institute were successfully established in Adelaide, Perth, and Hobart, a full-time general secretary and executive officer was appointed, and in 1947 the Institute launched its quarterly journal, *Australian Outlook*, which at once established a reputation it has since maintained and enhanced. The only disappointment was that in some of the smaller branches there was a rather high proportion of university staff. Boyer was in no sense anti-academic, but he believed strongly in a widely-informed public as an essential in a democracy, and he felt particularly that businessmen should interest themselves in keeping abreast of the world outside Australia. For this reason he involved himself deeply in Sydney Rotary during these years, becoming chairman of their International Service committee. This committee was responsible not only for contacts between Rotarians in different parts of the world but also for the administration of Rotary travelling scholarships for young Australian graduates, and it did useful work in sponsoring displaced persons from Europe for settlement in Australia. Boyer also took office with the United Nations Appeal for Children and the Good Neighbour Council. To these organizations the informed and enthusiastic support of the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission was of course highly valuable. To Boyer they were simply a means of promoting international understanding among an Australian people whom isolation had tended to make self-centred. But the amount of time and energy which he devoted to these honorary causes was formidable.

All these activities would have kept him busy enough without the A.B.C. In practice, his responsibilities as (ostensibly part-time) chairman of the Commission kept him for at least half of an average working week in the office, as well as bringing him many evening engagements and a good deal of homework. It was a cardinal principle with Boyer that the chairman of the A.B.C. should be as widely accessible as possible. He took the trouble to answer all correspondence addressed to him as chairman, no matter how trivial, instead of passing it off to a subordinate; if people wrote to the chairman, he contended, they had a

right to expect an answer from the chairman. He also laid some stress on the A.B.C.'s duty to foster good public relations by as much participation in the community as possible. Personally he tried to achieve this by accepting as many public engagements as possible, and by encouraging the rest of the Commission to do the same. This was not, as the *Bulletin* unkindly suggested, because he loved the sound of his voice. The fact was that public speaking always imposed something of a strain on him. He described himself as morose and nervous before any public speech-making, although his camouflage on these occasions grew increasingly practised; and he was physically handicapped by the after-effects of his gassing at Passchendaele, which left a certain permanent strain on his voice production. He had a good ear for the structure of a speech, doubtless the legacy of his Methodist training in sermon-writing. From the same source he derived a tendency in his earlier speeches to finish on a somewhat rhetorical note of uplift; but with experience he managed to blend his idealism with a logical, persuasive, and good-humoured power of argument and an instinct for down-to-earth illustration which most hearers found convincing and easy to listen to.

He had an immense charm to which all sorts and conditions of people readily succumbed [wrote his colleague, Medley] but there was nothing superficial about it. His face was rugged—in repose almost grim—the face of a man who had to cope with difficult times in his younger days. But laughter was seldom very far away. I was often reminded, when listening to his stories of early experiences in the Army or on the land, of Falstaff's unforgettable picture, 'O, you shall see him laugh until his face be like a wet cloak ill laid up.' And there was the wry smile with which he would greet something that at once tickled and irritated him.<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Broadcasting Commission had never been regarded as an easy job to handle, and when Boyer took the chairmanship in April 1945 he and John Medley were the only members with any length of experience. The

\* 'Sir Richard Boyer', *Australian Quarterly*, Sept. 1961, p. 52.

new vice-chairman, Edgar Dawes, was to prove a valuable working partner. A shrewd and practised negotiator in industrial affairs, confident, down-to-earth, and painstaking, he was a good foil for Boyer. The A.B.C. official who described Boyer and Dawes as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza had a germ of truth in his ribaldry, for some of Boyer's idealism and flair for long-term aims rubbed off on Dawes, who in his turn was able to support Boyer from his experience of political manoeuvre. John Medley was an entirely different sort of man. Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University at a time when vice-chancellors found it easier to be scholars and gentlemen, he took his duties so good-humouredly that some of his colleagues were inclined to overlook his astute qualities as a committeeman. He was outstandingly skilful at reducing confused cross-currents of opinion to a polished summary, and when he chose was able to guide a committee along his lines of thought so unobtrusively that it hardly realized what was happening. He was not on the A.B.C. from any sense of ambition (he paid his salary as a commissioner into a discretionary fund to help needy students and graduates), but rather to foster its role as patron of culture and the arts. His own talent for light verse often enlivened Commission meetings and deflated the pretentious. At one Commission meeting there were influential outside complaints, backed by one of his colleagues, against a proposal for the A.B.C. to put on a repeat performance of Dorothy Sayers's series of plays about Christ, *The Man Born to be King*, when there was so much Australian material available. Medley killed the complaint by improvising a verse:

The A.B.C. regrets en masse  
That JESUS was not born at Yass;  
That being so, we hardly dare  
To put Him on Australian air.<sup>4</sup>

He and Boyer became close personal friends. Two other members of the Commission were both recent appointees, apparently chosen for their Labor background. Mrs Ivy

<sup>4</sup> This at any rate is the variant given me by kindness of Professor Manning Clark. Other historians may wish to dispute the precise text,

Kent, from Western Australia, was the mother of eight children and an immensely good-hearted woman whom everybody liked; unfortunately her contributions to the Commission's deliberations were not always short and to the point, and she perhaps did not carry as much weight with her colleagues as she deserved. John Stanislaus Hanlon was a man of John Curtin's own kidney, a veteran Labor journalist, thirty years editor of the *Worker*. His outlook was not unlike that of the journalist members of Parliament, Leslie Haylen and Allan Fraser, who believed that the A.B.C. was the one medium by which the anti-Labor bias of the daily Press could be countered. Their view, shared by Curtin and Chifley and many other Labor men of that generation, was that the A.B.C. should not spend its endeavours on highbrow intellectual fare for the minority, but should instead provide 'the man in the street' with pleasant, undemanding programs to entertain him as he relaxed at home in his lounge-room after tea. Such an A.B.C. policy, they thought, would wean the average Australian from too exclusive a reliance on the newspapers and the largely newspaper-dominated commercial radio stations. Quality of program hardly concerned them at all, except for a general distaste for 'canned American material' which was a little hard to square with a policy of giving the public what it thought it wanted. This was the sort of programming which Hanlon was inclined to advocate on the Commission, in marked contrast to Boyer's own concept of the A.B.C. as a guide to educate public cultural and musical taste. Fortunately, as an old Labor man Hanlon was also fully in favour of the A.B.C.'s role in general education, and although probably the commissioner least often in agreement with Boyer, he usually worked harmoniously enough with his colleagues.

As chairman of the Commission, Boyer was a master of the art of consensus, guiding his colleagues to an agreed line of policy which could be defended solidly before the government or the public. Late in life, Boyer committed to paper some reflections on chairing a public corporation; their practical wisdom is worth quoting at some length:

Whether it be a Cabinet or Government or Board of Directors, or a semi-Govl. Corporation, one's first duty is to put one's own views within the privacy of team discussion and to attempt to bring one's colleagues to see the virtue of one's own position. Indeed it is part of team work to seek unanimity and for that reason to accept compromise. No team can work if every member sits pat on his own convictions. It is the function of the Chairman not only to state his own case and give a high degree of leadership, but also to discover and finally to accept the highest common denominator of agreement. This, fundamentally is the only context within which corporate responsibility can be successfully carried out.

Within this general framework however there are obviously, from time to time, issues which one feels so important, that one feels compelled to register disagreement on the record. In my experience this should be done very sparingly. We very seldom take a vote on this Commission, and a record of dissent is even more rare. The 'consensus' usually goes after full uninhibited discussion, and as you can guess, we've often had very heated disagreements. We feel that, after all, it is the responsibility of the Cth. Govt. to appoint Commissioners and that the 'consensus' of the conflicting pts. of view is what is expected and required of us. Nevertheless we never inhibit any member from a recording of dissent. . . .

Your final sanction is, of course Resignation, or the threat of it. As to the threat as a coercive weapon I would advise *never* to use it unless you are prepared, *immediately*, to go on with it. It should be enough to let it be known, indirectly, that you're not in the job for the sake of a well-paid job. Your honesty will speak for itself. As to Resignation itself, be assured that it will always be accepted. Moreover one has to consider whether one's departure from a Board, even with public disclosure of your reasons, will do more good to the community than your staying to fight for what you feel to be right. Apart from any other consideration it is a two-edged sword which may wound not only one's self but also the public good, even tho' the dragon of the moment may be slain.



Nevertheless it is a final sanction that one may have to use, but never, I suggest, until after mature and unheated consideration and on *adequate grounds*. I would not think that 'adequate grounds' would be incompatibility with one's fellow members; No one will applaud you on that score, though I can imagine that *too* much incompatibility wd. make life too tough. . . .

Still and all, it comes down finally to one's own values and decision and the Resignation with all drums beating is sometimes the right thing to do—but only as a last resort in an intolerable situation.<sup>5</sup>

This philosophy was not easily worked out. In his early years as chairman especially Boyer lived on his nerves a good deal. He was inclined to worry his way through crises, and to take outside criticism seriously to heart. Once or twice when governments were unusually obtuse and his fears for the A.B.C.'s independence at their blackest, he is reported to have thought aloud about the possibility of resignation. Dramatically satisfying though such a gesture might have been, it never quite became necessary in these early years. Perhaps he was too patient under duress. The commonest criticism made of Boyer by both A.B.C. staff and federal politicians was that he was too accommodating when he met opposition, too ready to avoid unpleasantness by withdrawing from a position. This was possibly true during his early years in office, when he was feeling his way, and again towards the end of his life when his health was failing, although even at that period he could find the resources to defend his principles tenaciously. Most of the evidence, however, shows Boyer as quick to counter any encroachment on the authority of the A.B.C., persistent in arguing a case when there was any hope of carrying it, but prepared to cut his losses when a cause was irremediably lost. These are the characteristics of a reasonable man; whether they are the most successful in politics must, of course, be a matter for different opinions.

The pivot figure in the running of the A.B.C. was the general manager, Charles Moses. A man about whom

<sup>5</sup> Boyer to his son, 8 Apr. 1960.

neutrality seemed impossible, he was capable of inspiring great admiration and loyalty among some who knew him, and rancour and mistrust among others. All agreed that he possessed a formidable charm and an enormous capacity for work. He was largely the architect of the A.B.C.'s administrative structure. This was a more difficult undertaking than it would have been in most government departments, because many of the A.B.C. personnel were necessarily chosen for qualities of culture and creative skill rather than bureaucratic expertise. The general manager's task is to give as much rein as possible to the ideas and enterprise of his staff, while remembering the two cardinal principles of the civil service; work within your budget and never antagonize the government. Inevitably there will be members of the A.B.C. staff who complain that the management seems more concerned with trimming expenditure and deferring to the government than with fostering ideas and experiments in radio and television. Charles Moses endeavoured to reconcile this conflict of aims by centralizing the A.B.C. administration so that all decisions of any consequence were channelled through him. For this there were good reasons. In a service exposed more than most government instrumentalities to the informed and uninformed criticisms of public and politicians, morale depended on the extent to which the Commission and its top executive would back the judgment of their staff. This meant that the Commission and the general manager must be kept aware of the responsibilities which they were shouldering, and justified a fairly close centralized scrutiny of everything that went on in the A.B.C. It was a heavy burden for the general manager, and Moses carried it with a zest which came from the abundant physical energy of a man who walked fifty miles on his fiftieth birthday. In his vigorous drive to get things done he sometimes, in the staff's view, paid insufficient attention to their feelings. Certainly, as the A.B.C. establishment grew larger, there were occasions when the channels of communication between the staff, the general manager and the Commission somehow became blocked, either through

over-centralization or because of misunderstandings and clashes between personalities.

The extent of Moses's friendship and influence with the commissioners has been the subject of conjecture. Frank Dixon saw some symbolic significance in the fact that Moses was included in group photographs of the Commission. A writer in *The Australian* has asserted that when Dr J. R. Darling succeeded Boyer as chairman in 1961, he found it necessary to disabuse Moses of the idea that he had an automatic right to attend meetings of the Commission.<sup>6</sup> But, in fact, under the Australian Broadcasting Commission Act, the general manager has a statutory obligation to be in attendance at Commission meetings unless directed otherwise by the chairman, and Moses at no time received any special treatment from the Commission beyond his entitlement as general manager. There were certainly occasions when the Commission and Moses failed to see eye to eye, but there was never any question that Moses should be relieved of his post. His experience, his administrative talents, his adaptability to new ideas and impressions were qualities too valuable to be thrown aside. Much obviously depended on how he worked with Boyer, and this developed into a complex and ambivalent relationship. The two men had their disagreements, sometimes strong disagreements. These were likely, whoever the chairman and general manager happened to be, because there were no soundly established principles about the general manager's independence of action or otherwise, particularly in negotiations with politicians and government officials. When Boyer became chairman, much of his attention had to be given to working out the lines on which the Commission expected to be consulted by the general manager. For most of the time that Boyer was chairman, the working arrangement was broadly for Moses to have a free hand with the internal management of the A.B.C., subject only to the confirmation of senior staff appointments by the Commission, and Boyer and the Commission carried the responsibility for 'external affairs'.

<sup>6</sup> *Australian*, 21 Dec. 1964.

These included the A.B.C.'s relations with the Postmaster-General and the government, and with 'showing the flag' in the numerous public and ceremonial occasions when the A.B.C. had to be represented. It also involved answering criticisms of the A.B.C., particularly accusations of political bias. Probably neither Moses nor Boyer would have chosen the other as his ideal working partner. Yet they managed, despite their differences in temperament and outlook, to co-operate in the development of the A.B.C. with an effectiveness which neither might have achieved without the other. But they were never close. Even at their most informal, the letters Moses wrote Boyer were headed 'Dear Sir Richard', not 'Dear Dick'.

In his relations with staff, Boyer was influenced by a desire not to trespass on what was properly the general manager's sphere of decision. Moses was in many important respects the intermediary between Commission and staff, although the Commission always had the responsibility for salaries, conditions, and senior staff appointments. The immediate post-war years were not easy. The national broadcasting service, as a Commonwealth instrumentality, had pegged its salaries during the war whereas the commercial stations were able to offer their employees more. This led to some natural discontent among A.B.C. staff members—the surprising thing is that so few succumbed to the temptation to leave the service—and both the Staff Association and the Senior Officers' Association were pressing claims for increases. Under the original 1932 Act the Commission had been excluded from the Public Service Act and given complete power to make its own staffing regulations. The Gibson committee, fearing possible abuses of this discretionary power, wrote a clause into the 1942 Act giving the government the right to prescribe staff regulations, but this was not immediately acted upon. Instead, the Commission attempted to forestall criticism by appointing a Staff Association representative to its Appointments Advisory Committee. The parliamentary standing committee, however, tried quite strongly to assimilate A.B.C. staffing regulations into Public Service practice. Cleary had a battle

to retain the A.B.C.'s more enlightened principles over the employment of married women against the standing committee's desire to reduce them to the temporary and inferior status of the rest of the Public Service. This piece of bigotry was evaded for the time being by the Commission, but only on condition of an annual review of the situation. The Commission was on less tenable ground over a 1942 decision to exclude the news staff from its superannuation scheme. This, like the question of permanent status for certain journalists, rankled for several years and gave rise to some unpleasantness in 1946, when a senior member of news staff was dismissed after a dispute with Moses over the issue.<sup>7</sup>

Of more general importance was the question of arbitration over salaries and conditions. Most of the senior officers and staff wanted the establishment of an independent appeals board, and a few weeks after Boyer became chairman the standing committee recommended this. Boyer was seriously disturbed at the prospect:

The Commission's view is that the special nature of its operations, and in particular the fact that it is a business undertaking in competition with powerful newspapers and entrepreneurs, demand that it shall have the widest possible freedom in fixing the working conditions of staff.<sup>8</sup>

The Chifley Government nevertheless followed the standing committee's advice and in 1946 amendments to the Broadcasting Act brought A.B.C. staff under the Public Service Arbitrator and set up an appeals tribunal. (This, incidentally, meant that henceforward married women employed on the A.B.C. were discriminated against in the same way as those in the rest of the Public Service. Boyer saw no particular sense in this, but he had too many other fights on his hands at the time to make an issue of this question.) Subsequently Boyer came to admit that, although these

<sup>7</sup> On this episode see Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1947, vol. 192, p. 2606, vol. 194, p. 2231, and vol. 195, p. 2560; F. Dixon, 'Inside the ABC', *Century*, 22 Mar. 1963.

<sup>8</sup> 'Seventh report of the joint parliamentary standing committee on broadcasting', Com., *Parl. Pap.*, 1945-6, vol. iii, p. 895 et seq.

changes bringing the A.B.C. closer to Public Service usage exchanged the old system of informal bargaining for the complicated safeguards of government arbitration, there had been few ill effects on A.B.C. morale. 'The worst that can be said is that its tendency is to lessen the feeling of unity and common purpose as between the Commission and the staff, but even this has not proved as noteworthy as might be imagined.'<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this side of staff relations was always a little of a blind spot with him. Never having taken part in collective bargaining on behalf of his own personal interests, associating 'trade-union' activity with shearers and working-class organizations, he had some of his generation's inability to appreciate that professional men, however dedicated to their calling, must sometimes be preoccupied with bread-and-butter questions. Conscious of its responsibility to handle public money wisely, the Commission did not always succeed in leaving its staff with the feeling that it was completely on their side over salaries and conditions.

Otherwise Boyer as chairman began well in his relations with the staff. It was, of course, still the honeymoon period for the new chairman. Entering office with the backing of John Curtin's 'declaration of independence', he consolidated this first good impression by taking a warm, personal interest in the welfare and ideas of the A.B.C. staff, in a way which the shy, restrained Cleary could never achieve. He wanted his plans for national broadcasting to be the product of teamwork, not of directives from on high. Three months after he became chairman, the *Sydney Morning Herald* devoted a feature to its first impressions of his performance in office. It was certainly a change from the wrangles and the cynicism of which the A.B.C. had so often stood accused:

The accent of drama comes with the difference between Cleary and Boyer in the chair. With Boyer, it is a real get-together meeting, a brotherly pow-wow, something suggestive of the weekly class meetings which his father, the Rev. Frederick Boyer, conducted in various New South Wales circuits of the Methodist Church of long ago, and

<sup>9</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'The ABC—a criticism', *Public Administration*, vol. 12, No. 1, Mar. 1953, p. 56.

which he himself was to conduct as the first Methodist parson in Canberra. It was all so different with Cleary, an idealist certainly, but with feet on the ground and planted firmly to resist the shock of collision with lesser mortals.

For so long under the nervous stress of keying themselves up to a conference with Cleary, the A.B.C. managers and controllers find a restful relief in the friendly atmosphere induced by Boyer's humorously puckered lips, eyes narrowed by long years of the sun in western Queensland, but alight with goodwill and helped by crowsfeet of fellowship on either side, a clean-shaven skin that slightly flushes to give emphasis to some thought running from the mind into the voice. And the atmosphere is helped by cigarette-stained fingers, a leg suddenly thrown over an arm of the chair, a hunching of shoulders muscled by years of axe-chopping in the virgin country in the northern State.

The subject is the future of broadcasting. It is a many-sided subject. The Controllers have their special ideas, for each is a director of a special branch.

Boyer straightens his long, spare country frame and pulls the coat of his austerity suit into the right position. The special ideas may be all right, but the brotherhood is asked to relate them all to the thesis that Liberal Democracy as the chief agency of peace in the world can be both safeguarded and advanced only by the free exchange of opinions, that the accent of national broadcasting must be increasingly on ideas helpful to an appreciation of the world beyond our frontiers, or that culture is meaningless if it is merely a colourful dress for crude animal ambitions waiting only on circumstance.

This is just a summary of a stream of words which sometimes catches illustrations from the cattle and sheep country or from the public experiences which have come Boyer's way both here and on the other side of the world. Like Cleary, Boyer is never lost for a word, but, unlike Cleary, he paints pictures of far horizons in which earth and heaven meet. The pictures form and re-form until the class meeting almost breaks into hymns of aspiration.

In this class meeting of Managers and Controllers there is at once a feeling of a leader, a man who is out to do

things, to leave through the A.B.C. an impress on the nation, to build in future Australians a deep sense of responsibility for all problems involving the issue of peace in the world. Yet there is no feeling of penitence for the past. Once the charm of Boyer's evangelism is stilled in its last picture, the officials fall back into their past, with its anxieties about the encroachment of commercial broadcasting on the national field.

It is here that the tempo of the drama increases. The emphasis which Boyer's infectious idealism would give to ideas is conditioned by the audience which the A.B.C. is able to hold. It involves such a question as light entertainment. It involves the absurdity of offering £5/10/- a week for a script writer to compete against the light sessions put on by the commercial stations. It involves failure to bid enough for Gracie Fields. These and many similar questions provide the earth on which Boyer has to walk at perhaps the most critical period in the history of the national broadcasting service. Time will show whether the special contribution which Boyer is anxious to make can be adjusted to bolder and more enterprising policies to secure an increasing number of listeners for the national service.<sup>10</sup>

The first results of the new order came in November 1945, when the Commission decided on a major change in its program arrangements. This was the division of material between national stations so that one channel specialized in light programs and one in 'quality' material.

This decision was taken as a result of the Commission's experience through the years in regard to the problem of meeting widely different tastes within the community [wrote Boyer]. As a national service the Commission feels it incumbent upon it to provide radio fare of a very wide appeal, having, as it believes, an obligation not only to majority tastes but to significant minorities in the community.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *S.M.H.*, 18 July 1945.

<sup>11</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Fourteenth Annual Report and Balance Sheet, Year ended 30th June, 1946*, p. 4.



This problem of minority tastes—which in practice meant nearly all classical music, serious drama, talks and discussions—was uniquely a problem for the A.B.C. Commercial stations usually ignored programs of this sort (contrary to what is sometimes asserted, the record of commercial television in recent years has been somewhat better), so that the A.B.C. was left juggling the incompatible aims of serving the cultural minority and competing with the commercials for the ordinary listening public. Until Boyer's time the A.B.C. had tried placing items of different character side by side in the program of the same station so that a listener who had tuned in to hear the news or a program of light entertainment would be enticed to go on listening to some unfamiliar and perhaps more 'difficult' material. This had not worked. Listeners, whether highbrow or otherwise, preferred their programs 'neat'. The Commission therefore decided to classify its programs into two networks, one for quality programs and the other for light entertainment. This did not mean abandoning the attempt, even in the lighter program, 'not merely to pursue fleeting indications of public approval but to do something towards presenting better material for public approval, in other words there is taste-making as well as taste-meeting.' With Boyer as chairman, the Commission was always conscious of its responsibility for 'taste-making'.

For a man with Boyer's deep convictions about the importance of an educated public, 1945 was an encouraging time. This was the great age of adult education. Many servicemen had developed an interest in widening their horizons, and the universities were soon to be crowded with Commonwealth Rehabilitation Training Scheme students. Among the rest of the community there was a deepening of interest in reading, drama, and music; it was the beginning of the paperback era, of adult education summer schools, and the Olivier tour, which proved that Australians were ready for adult theatre. The A.B.C.'s particular contribution to this demand was music. Already its financial responsibilities in supporting state orchestras were heavy, but the Commission had never been in a position to do more than

maintain a permanent nucleus of musicians, reinforced when occasion demanded by extra players recruited casually. In Boyer's first year a more satisfactory arrangement was pioneered in Sydney. The New South Wales State Government was persuaded to offer an annual subsidy of £20,000 towards the cost of a permanent symphony orchestra in Sydney, and the Municipal Council of Sydney weighed in with a promise of a further £10,000 a year. 'The arrangement', wrote Boyer after a few months, 'is not only proving of immense value to the musical life of that city, but is providing a standard of orchestral performance both for broadcasting and public presentation of a quality hitherto impossible.'<sup>12</sup> So began a permanent orchestra which under the leadership of Eugene Goossens, Nikolai Malko, and Dean Dixon has set the standard for Australian music. The example was soon imitated. By mid-1946 a similar arrangement was being negotiated with the local State Government and city council on behalf of the Brisbane orchestra. Hobart followed suit two years later. By this time the possession of a full A.B.C. symphony orchestra was becoming a little of a prestige symbol for a State capital, and it was not long before Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth made the necessary arrangements. Both Boyer and Moses were keen on promoting this side of the Commission's activities, and between them shared the responsibility for getting the politicians and aldermen interested in putting up support for the orchestras. This was one of the most consistently successful enterprises of the A.B.C. In every major city of Australia, A.B.C. concerts quickly became an indispensable part of cultural life, especially for young adult audiences; and the orchestras were essential support for the visiting musical celebrities who came in growing numbers on Australian tours under A.B.C. sponsorship.

Of course this was not the only contribution the Commission had to make to education. Ever since his visit to Germany in 1935 Boyer had been chillingly aware of the propaganda potential in radio, and every liberal instinct in

<sup>12</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

him demanded that broadcasting in Australia should not be misused or neglected but should contribute something positive to the culture and values of the community. To the State governments controlling Australian education, the main aim was the utilitarian one of turning out citizens adequately equipped for the work-force. The A.B.C. aimed to offer as much as practicable towards a broader concept of education and culture. Boyer, with all his idealism, was well aware that the Commission was open to criticisms that it tried to foist its own enthusiasms on the public; and his answer was to find a new way of consulting the public. This was the genesis of the Radio in Education Conference held over four days in January 1946 at Canberra. Over one hundred educationists from all over Australia were invited to discuss the social implications of radio in education and to suggest lines of development. Inspired by seminars arranged by the Institute of Education by Radio under the sponsorship of Ohio State University, this conference was the first of its kind in the British Commonwealth and aroused a good deal of press and public interest. As an exercise in public relations, showing that the Commission was willing and eager for qualified outside advice, the conference also had its value; limited, perhaps, only by the fact that most of those present were educationists who shared Boyer's liberal-minded hopes for culture and the humanities, and there still remained the problem of influencing the politicians and businessmen who could finance the work of education. At the very least, the conference spelt out, as never before in Australia, the influence of mass media in shaping men's minds.

Chifley opened the conference with a brief, homely, ineloquent speech which touched on the fundamentals:

It is an important task to entertain and at the same time to bring in small doses of short informative talks, and so make a more tolerant community. The world is suffering from grave intolerance. We can teach the people that they all have a responsibility as citizens, no matter how humble or how high their occupation. It is very important that

each should be brought to realize that he has a great responsibility to each of his fellow citizens.<sup>18</sup>

Boyer followed, tracing the way in which radio had advanced from 'a new and ingenious household gadget to brighten our leisure moments' to 'a publicity medium . . . capable of serving God and the devil with terrifying impartiality.' So far as the Australian listening public was concerned, Boyer was emphatic about the A.B.C.'s order of priorities:

We believe that the greatest service to adult education that National Radio can perform is to give the community information, more information and all the information that the community needs for its civic judgments. This does not mean that we do not value in the highest degree the services to musical literary and artistic appreciation which a National Radio can and does perform. But the stark fact remains, as the last few years have shown, that you can have a community highly equipped aesthetically which is nevertheless well on its way to destruction because of its neglect of the practice of individual rational and moral judgment. We simply cannot afford to face our democratic future without an earnest endeavour to build a community which is much more informed more critical and more alert in moral judgment than we are to-day.

The A.B.C. has always regarded adult education viewed in this light, as peculiarly a major responsibility of its service, and I think our efforts to meet it have had some success. On the other hand our experience has not always been encouraging. There seem to me to be two types of mind in any community which require principally to be considered. The first, and the most numerous, are those who are frankly indifferent to any knowledge which does not directly bear upon their income or their pleasure. For these the radio dial is twirled automatically and persistently to the lightest of light sessions, and the country's problems are shrugged off as of no interest or concern. There is an intriguing problem here as to whether and in what degree it is possible to awaken a wider interest in minds already atrophied by long disuse.

<sup>18</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Radio in Education Conference*, (Sydney, 1946), p. 3.

Something can be done through the medium of the serial, the bright actuality or the news session, but the direct approach falls heavily to the ground.

The second type of mind, however, is perhaps even more difficult to serve and even more of a threat to democratic health. I refer to the closed mind, the one-track thinker, the zealot who is impervious to fact, to argument, to anything and everything which does not accord with his pre-conceived point of view. Such minds are to be found in every profession and in every political party as well as on the lunatic fringe of outright obsession. It is their boast that nothing will ever induce them to change their minds. They draw enormous personal satisfaction from the illusion that all their opponents in political faith, religious belief and international attitude are evil and sinister. To such life is not the gradual unfolding of new facets of truth and perception, it is a pitched battle between right thinkers and wrong thinkers, with themselves always on the side of the angels. Adult Education therefore is anathema if it conceives its function as presenting all information and all points of view for the community's judgment.

The files of the A.B.C. are a melancholy testimony to the prevalence of such attitudes. They abound with furious demands that the National Stations programme only such speakers and such news items as the indignant listener approves of, and that they suppress or ignore whatever is contrary. Mention or discussion of differing points of view are classed as 'propaganda', as subversive or as the undermining of truth as the complainant sees it. There is little, I am afraid, that either Radio or the written word can do for folk who have wilfully quenched the light of enquiry within them.

But between these two extremes lie the great bulk of our people instinct with a native and kindly tolerance and with a readiness to change their minds in the face of new evidence, new ideas and more complete information.<sup>14</sup>

From the conference the A.B.C. got a very clear mandate on the future policy. Speaker after speaker wanted the A.B.C. to continue and extend its educational role. Their criticisms

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

were almost entirely concerned with those areas where the A.B.C. did not go far enough. There should be more listener research, they said; more propagation of good material by some periodical similar to the B.B.C.'s *Listener*; less hesitation in attempting controversial and experimental programs; greater freedom of enterprise at the production level; and independence from outside pressures or censorship. Rather than compete with the commercials in giving the public the lowest common denominator of what it wanted, the A.B.C. should not fear to create standards for its public and defy intolerant criticism. Not everyone present shared Boyer's faith in an instinctive 'native and kindly tolerance' among the Australian public, but the conference tended to agree that the A.B.C., where necessary, should be ahead of public standards, rather than too faithfully reflect them.

Such advice, Boyer wrote, was all 'very encouraging to a body which has had to suffer continual jibes and complaints for its failure to fill the programme hours with an unending stream of laughs, thrills, or wiggles'.<sup>15</sup> Reviewing the conference he promised that 'although it was too early to know what had emerged from it . . . the A.B.C. would treat its suggestions with the seriousness and concentration they deserved.'<sup>16</sup> One or two minor advances were soon made. Although there was no money for an Australian *Listener*, a start was made with a monthly broadsheet, *Talk*, which was to publish the best scripts. The A.B.C. also undertook to consult universities, adult-education authorities, libraries, and similar bodies to find how its services could best supplement inadequate educational facilities. On the wider issue of developing and responding to public taste, Boyer was glad of the conference's advice not to play too safe, but wryly commented: 'The question as to what subjects were broadcastable or not was one on which the Conference took a very broad view, much broader indeed than is normally

<sup>15</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'Radio in Education Conference, Canberra', *Australian Quarterly*, June 1946.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Radio in Education Conference*, p. 98.

taken by the Australian community in general.' Already twitted by politicians for commanding only 15 per cent of the listening public, the Commission was well aware it would have a long battle ahead to persuade any Commonwealth Government, Labor or Liberal, to give it a greater administrative and financial independence. Without that independence, it would be hard for the A.B.C. to play the creative and stimulating role which its well-wishers hoped for it, and which alone justified its very existence as an alternative to commercial radio.

## 8 The A.B.C. and the Politicians

Under the Chifley Government the Australian Broadcasting Commission had a chequered history of success in preserving its independence. Curtin's statement of 12 April 1945 was a valuable statement of intentions by the Federal Government, but attempts at political interference from other quarters did not stop. Politicians of every party claimed the right not only to criticize program content but also to demand, sometimes for the most frivolous reasons, the full rigour of official discipline against A.B.C. staff responsible for some program which displeased them. To judge from their elected representatives, Australians complained if their national broadcasting service was at all stimulating, and complained if it played safe. This was a noticeable feature of Boyer's first years of office, the era of the Chifley Government from 1945 to 1949. These were four of the most contentious years in modern Australian politics, and few politicians were prepared to trust the A.B.C.'s impartiality, unless that impartiality consisted of saying nothing which could be thought remotely unfavourable to their own side. As in Cleary's time, Labor men continued to see the A.B.C. as a corrective to the bias of newspapers and commercial radio, while the Liberals and Country Party keenly searched out any hint of a leftward slant in the national programs. Because of the high political temperature, men on both sides were a little trigger-happy in attacking the A.B.C., and Boyer was kept busy rebuffing these pressures. Fortunately, he was on good terms with the two ministers most influential over the destinies of the A.B.C., and both were genuinely concerned for the independence of the national service. Chifley, who became Prime Minister in July 1945, was frankly another of



those Labor men who listened to the A.B.C. mainly for its news service, and had little interest in its 'highbrow' fare; but he was emphatic that there should be no ministerial pressures on the Commission except through the correct channel, the Postmaster-General. This was Senator Don Cameron, who succeeded Ashley early in 1945. An older, quieter, firmer minister than Ashley, Cameron got on well with Boyer; he introduced Joseph Furphy's *Such is Life* to Boyer, who had not previously read it but became an enthusiast for a book which reflected so much of the flavour of his early years in outback Queensland. Of the ministers who had given Cleary so much trouble, Beasley was now in London and Evatt amply occupied by foreign affairs, but their place was taken by Arthur Calwell, who was now Minister for Information and represented the Postmaster-General in the House of Representatives. Calwell's interfering came more from well-meant impetuosity than from any innately dictatorial propensities, but he was often a self-righteous nuisance and his colleagues were somewhat too tolerant of his meddling. He had not the slightest compunction in bullying the A.B.C. if it put on a program he disapproved of. He once boasted of demanding and obtaining an apology from Boyer for what he called 'a most mischievous broadcast in the most appallingly bad taste which ridiculed European immigrants to Australia', and on another occasion he took it upon himself to reprimand Boyer over 'a very unfair attack by Professor Julius Stone on General Macarthur'.<sup>1</sup> This sort of thing several times stimulated opposition front-benchers such as Harrison and Anthony to accuse him of wanting to dictate to the A.B.C.

Not that the Liberal and Country parties spared the A.B.C. from attack. Menzies was seldom involved in this. He was at this time on cordial terms with both Boyer and Moses, and lacked the active zeal for censorship which distinguished some of his colleagues. But Eric Harrison, for instance, had a keener nose for heresy. In December 1945, at a party conference in New South Wales, he disapprovingly noted that the Commission included several members who

<sup>1</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1947, vol. 192, p. 3213.

voted Labor and asserted that 'there was a subtle twist to every bit of propaganda put over by the A.B.C., and the Department of Information used every means at its disposal to get party propaganda.'<sup>2</sup> Like so many other critics of the A.B.C., Harrison curiously neglected to cite specific examples, but his words inspired one lady delegate to move a resolution opposing 'the continual use of the national broadcasting stations for disseminating socialistic and anti-British propaganda', which the conference carried, apparently without dissent. Next day, Harrison went on to state that the parliamentary standing committee dictated to the Commission, and that A.B.C. commentators and news readers had 'a definite communistic slant.' Boyer immediately replied that the standing committee had no power to dictate to the A.B.C., and did not do so; as for allegations of political bias, those came almost uniformly from every political party, which probably argued that the A.B.C. was striking a fair balance.

The Liberals were unconvinced. A week later during a steelworkers' strike Professor F. A. Bland (soon to become a Liberal M.P.) objected to a news broadcast reporting accusations made by the strike leaders against B.H.P. He alleged that the strike leaders were communists, and demanded their statements should not be publicized. This was an issue which was to embroil the A.B.C. for several years. The late forties were a time of considerable industrial unrest in Australia. These strikes were not all communist-led, but any militant left-wing union leader was likely to be called a communist, and the aggressive behaviour of Soviet Russia in those years caused many to fear the growth of communist influence within Australia. This placed great strain on the A.B.C.'s policy of objectivity. Given that the left-wing militants were a minority, and in many circles an unpopular minority, was it proper for the A.B.C. to report their activities and views when these made news important enough to deserve reporting? Boyer, although in no sense a man of the Left, held that the communists, while legal, were entitled to impartial reportage. If their activities were

<sup>2</sup> *S.M.H.*, 3 Dec. 1945; and Boyer's reply, 4 Dec. 1945.

so subversive as to merit banning, this was a job for Parliament, not for the A.B.C. This view prevailed with the Commission. It was almost certainly not shared by the majority of Australians, in whose view free speech ought not extend to anything which might be shocking, offensive, or unpopular. Even the A.B.C. news editors once (June 1948) requested authority to censor all material which might be regarded as communist propaganda. Boyer was emphatic in refusing, saying that while the communist movement was legal it could not be ignored; news editors would have to use their discretion in handling controversial matter.<sup>3</sup> When Boyer first became chairman in 1945 the experiment had been tried of empowering the assistant general manager to censor news bulletins for political propaganda, but after criticism of this arrangement in Parliament by Leslie Haylen, it was soon abandoned as unworkable. From then on, at a time when the A.B.C. was under real pressure to play safe, it consistently refused to suppress or censor unpopular material.

Partly this was due to the backing of Chifley and Cameron.<sup>4</sup> With their support the A.B.C. was able to withstand many of the pressures to interfere with program content. Where the Commission was less successful was in trying to influence government policy towards the administration of national broadcasting. The main post-war issues confronting the A.B.C. were inadequate finance, the future of the news service, control of technical facilities for broadcasting, and control of Radio Australia. On each of these questions Boyer and the Commission failed to have their

<sup>3</sup> F. Dixon, 'Inside the ABC', *Century*, 3 May 1963. Dixon's comment is in character: 'News editors knew this "passing of the buck" meant the Commission retained the right to find fault with what they did at any time—a carry-over from the days of Cleary.'

<sup>4</sup> The only ministerial directive which Cameron issued in his four years as Postmaster-General was one in June 1946, requiring the A.B.C. not to broadcast any talks about venereal disease and sexual matters. This was unanimously recommended by the Parliamentary Standing Committee, and accurately enough reflected Australian community opinion on the propriety of discussing such matters openly; it was 1965 before these subjects were accepted on television. The point was not one which the A.B.C. showed any wish to challenge.

views accepted by the government. The overall result was that the formal administration of the A.B.C. became rather more like that of any other government corporation. Boyer's consolation was that, although the A.B.C. in these years had not much voice in shaping its terms of reference, at least it enjoyed considerable freedom in carrying them out. The Commission also proved its ability to stand up to searching inquiry, and the Broadcasting Act of 1948 eventually came as a vindication of its management and to some extent a promise of easier times.

Finance was the basic problem, intensifying after the war. A rising cost of living was reflected in increased salaries and performing fees. Many discharged ex-servicemen had to be absorbed back into the service, replacing temporary, part-time, and female staff taken on during the war. More was demanded of radio by the public.

The world over, there is a high level of competitive effort in the finer points of broadcasting in all its aspects [wrote Boyer in 1946]. The Commission and its officers, therefore, have of necessity been faced not only with the personnel problems of the postwar period, but with the new standards of excellence demanded by a listening public for whose ear there has been a period of the most intensive competition.<sup>5</sup>

Commercial stations, free to go after as much advertising revenue as they could get, were not carrying the same responsibilities as the A.B.C. in sponsoring educational and 'live' musical programs. Of the Commission's revenue (£946,772 in 1944-5), over 40 per cent was spent on music, including the support of state orchestras. Another 8 per cent went on youth education, a field which Boyer was anxious to expand. Talks, drama, and features took £174,000, a figure on which the A.B.C. was finding it impossible to keep up the production of documentaries or to make much headway with their recently introduced rural session. Since its share of the licence fee was cut to ten shillings in 1940, the A.B.C. had acted under strict economy, and the 1944 return to

<sup>5</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Fourteenth Annual Report and Balance Sheet, Year ended 30th June, 1946*, p. 4.

twelve shillings hardly kept pace with rising costs. The Commission was meeting its debts only by drawing on the reserves which Cleary had accumulated for building. Retrenchment of some services (such as the national military band, whose appeal was largely to the older generation) was unavoidable. In March 1946 Boyer presented the Postmaster-General with a tightly argued case for raising the A.B.C.'s share of the licence fee to fifteen shillings. Senator Cameron referred the question to the parliamentary standing committee, who lost no time in recommending the increase; not, however, as a straight rise in the fee, but as a special grant from the revenue controllable by Cabinet.

This temporarily solved the worst of the A.B.C.'s financial difficulties, though at some compromise to its independence and without opening any possibility of long-term developmental planning. The financial situation was further complicated by the question of an independent national news service. When Boyer became chairman he saw it as one of his first tasks to attempt to win the Commonwealth Government's assent to some permanent arrangement for news-gathering. The fundamental need was to secure a complete coverage of available news. The Commission, wrote Boyer,

should be in the best position to deal with news objectively and dispassionately and to broadcast when and in what manner it deems fit . . . its objective should be to develop the service to the highest degree of reliability and independence of any group or section of the community.<sup>6</sup>

With these admirable objectives few disagreed, but there was more than one view about the best way of securing them. The A.B.C. director of news, Dixon, was still preaching the virtues of an entirely independent news-gathering service, fortified by the knowledge that this appealed to the Labor Government. Boyer, although fully agreeing that in the long run the A.B.C. should get all its news completely independently of outside sources, was worried about the

<sup>6</sup> 'Fourteenth report of the joint parliamentary standing committee on broadcasting', Com., *Parl. Pap.*, 1943-6, vol. iii, pp. 1031 et seq.

expense. For this reason he wanted government consent to an agreement to buy news from Australian Associated Press. Dixon has alleged that Boyer opposed his fight for an independent news service out of friendliness for the newspapers and particularly the *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'The suggestion that he was concerned with the cost will hardly bear examination', asserted Dixon. 'Obviously a government which directs one of its instrumentalities to undertake a certain service will see that it has ample funds to do it.'<sup>7</sup> There was no 'obviously' about it; the Commission's funds had been anything but ample since 1940, and there had been several varying estimates of costing an independent news service, whereas a contract with Australian Associated Press at least committed the A.B.C. to a limited and predictable outlay.

There were other considerations. To establish a network of correspondents, the A.B.C. would often have to depend on local journalists or others who were also under contract to the press and agencies. It could never be entirely 'independent' in the sense of drawing its news from sources totally distinct from the newspapers. Intent on building his empire, Dixon never adequately defined his concept of 'independence'. As for the newspapers, because of the political complexities involved, they were in fact reluctant to engage in dealings with the A.B.C. True, relations between Press and national radio had become very much better in Boyer's time, and the old accusations were less often heard about A.B.C. news bulletin filching material from the newspapers and using too much government propaganda. But finance was undoubtedly the reason for Boyer's reluctance to advance immediately to an independent news service.

Three of the other commissioners, Dawes, Medley, and Mrs Kent, entirely supported Boyer on this point; at least two of them were Labor voters, and none could be accused of any tie with newspaper interests. The dissentient was J. S. Hanlon, a veteran Labor journalist who thought that

<sup>7</sup> 'Inside the ABC', *Century*, 19 July 1963.

an independent service would cost little more than a contract with Australian Associated Press. Even he would not push his opinion to a disagreement with Boyer, on the grounds that once negotiations had been started with the press agencies there was no point in vacillation; so in fact the Commission unanimously supported Boyer in a second attempt to work out an agreement which might meet the approval of the standing committee and the government. The problem of fixing a fair price for the contract was solved in October 1945, with the consent of both sides, by arbitration of the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner, Professor Copland. He named an annual figure of £20,000 for the first draft agreement, comprising £12,500 for overseas news and £7,500 for Australian. The Commission also proposed employing nineteen journalists to cover the intake of news at the various newspaper offices throughout the Commonwealth; this would increase the total annual cost of the A.B.C. news service to £83,000 (it was then £49,000), as against the £155,000 which Boyer estimated—as it turned out, a little conservatively—would be necessary for the A.B.C. to set up an entirely independent news-gathering service. This new agreement was forwarded early in December to the Postmaster-General for formal approval, but Cameron insisted on referring it again to the parliamentary standing committee, at whose hands its fate was predictable enough.

Once again the standing committee split on party lines, with the Labor majority reporting in favour of an independent news service. Boyer had argued before them that, although the A.B.C. should retain the right to collect its own news, the cost of its own exclusive service would be prohibitive; the Canadian and South African broadcasting corporations, on the contrary, relied entirely on the agencies. Cost, the standing committee answered, was not the paramount consideration. The A.B.C. must provide a source of news untainted by private interests. The Chifley Government accepted this view, and in July 1946 introduced legislation providing for an independent news service. At the same time, somewhat to Boyer's disquiet and annoyance, two more amendments to the Broadcasting Act were brought

in without the consent of the Commission. Both arose from recommendations by the standing committee. One governed staff regulations, classifying the grounds for promotion, dismissal, retirements, and appeals, and bringing the A.B.C. into line with the usages of the Commonwealth Public Service.<sup>8</sup> The other provided for the broadcasting of parliamentary debates. This was in itself a service for keeping the public informed which Boyer favoured; but it was introduced without consideration for A.B.C. programming arrangements. Instead of providing a special channel for parliamentary broadcasts, the politicians insisted on monopolizing one of the existing A.B.C. stations in each State for the entire time that Parliament was sitting. This meant that regular programs had to be shifted or omitted, no matter how trivial the business before the House. All this legislation passed through Parliament quite smoothly, and despite its natural annoyance at not being sufficiently consulted, the Commission had no alternative but to accept these changes. In fact, once assured of adequate finance, Boyer saw that the news service could make 'a distinctive and beneficial contribution to public information in this country' and during the next two or three years vigorously defended it against accusations of bias and extravagance.

Having compelled the A.B.C. to accept a news service for which it had not asked, the government compensated by not giving it some of the things it wanted. The A.B.C. was anxious, for instance, to recover control of overseas short-wave broadcasting from the Department of Information, as without Radio Australia it was impossible for the A.B.C. to share in international broadcasting. Boyer made several attempts to win government consent for the change, but not even the prospect of more economical running moved the Chifley ministry. Radio Australia was Calwell's favourite ewe-lamb, 'the Voice of Australia', as he called it, 'which tells the world of the policies of the Australian government of the day and of the Australian people' and whose 'signal is just as strong throughout the world as that of the wealthy

<sup>8</sup> See pp. 144-5 above.



British Broadcasting Corporation and the lavish Voice of America'.<sup>9</sup> He would never surrender it to an A.B.C. over whose running he had no ministerial authority and whose management he had several times criticized in the House of Representatives. Calwell's intervention was also probably responsible for the A.B.C.'s failure to get further in their fight for a new deal with the Australasian Performing Rights Association. This was a grievance which the A.B.C. had borne, in common with commercial stations, for a long time. Since before the war the A.P.R.A. had levied fees on the use of recorded music which (especially when compared with the sums which got back to the original composers) seemed excessive. The A.B.C. had managed to bring these fees under voluntary arbitration in 1938, but the situation was still less satisfactory than, for example, in Canada, where the rate was set by government arbitration. The Gibson committee reported in 1942 in favour of compulsory arbitration, but although Evatt as Attorney-General saw no objection to this, no action was taken during the war. Boyer in 1947 encouraged Charles Moses to negotiate with representatives of the suburban and country commercial stations for a combined approach to Evatt for amendments to the Copyright Act. Calwell, who was none too well informed on the subject, ridiculed this move, claiming that the commercial stations had secured A.B.C. support for it by promising to support a motion in the House of Representatives to restore Radio Australia to the A.B.C. This was nonsense (as probably was the counter-charge made at the time, that Calwell was friendly with lobbyists for the A.P.R.A.). But in such an atmosphere it was useless to expect any consideration of the subject on its merits. Pressed later by H. L. Anthony on the government's inaction, Calwell first claimed that the A.B.C. had never requested the government to provide arbitration and later took refuge in the fact that an international copyright conference was to be held shortly. The fact was that the necessary legislation would have been complex and technical, and Evatt and Calwell were too busy

<sup>9</sup> Com., *Parl Deb.*, 1947, vol. 192, p. 3213.

with more exciting preoccupations to defer to the A.B.C.'s request.<sup>10</sup>

Another point of policy to which Boyer in these early years attached some importance was control of the A.B.C.'s technical services. When the Commission was set up in the depression year of 1932, money could not be found for its own technical and engineering services, which were provided by the Postmaster-General's Department. Later governments refused the A.B.C. control of its own technicians, partly because duplication was thought uneconomical and partly because such a change would have been opposed by the Postmaster-General's Department, who would have found it an implicit criticism of their methods and did not welcome potential competition for skilled staff. Boyer did not regard this as a good arrangement, because it placed another limitation on the A.B.C.'s autonomy, but he was unable to persuade any Postmaster-General to allow the national radio service its own technical facilities. On the other hand, the Chifley administration in 1948 unsolicitedly gave the A.B.C. a monopoly of frequency modulation broadcasting, an innovation which promised greater range, greater freedom from static or other interference, and high-quality reproduction. It was, however, an expensive process. The cost of conversion was estimated at anywhere between nine and twenty million pounds, and even then the range of stations broadcasting over transmitters attuned to frequency modulation would be fifty miles or less, so that it was useless outside the major State capitals. Moreover, it was suitable only for 'live' shows, and not for recorded programs. Altogether frequency modulation was something of a white elephant. It never got beyond the experimental stage in Australia, and was eventually abandoned in 1961 because of the swing from radio to television. These considerations did not still criticism of the government for 'favouritism' towards the A.B.C. If only this 'favouritism' had been exercised in areas the A.B.C. really wanted! As it was, Boyer

<sup>10</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1947, vol. 190, p. 422; vol. 192, pp. 3213, 3330.

had to come out once more on the defensive against Press critics:

The A.B.C. has not requested, and does not desire, any technical advantages over commercial stations. We are content to rely solely upon the excellence of our programmes and our service to all sections of the community for our place in the public regard. I have no information as to whether the Government's decision is long term or merely experimental policy. These, however, are decisions outside the authority of the A.B.C. I must protest, however, against the revival of statements during the present controversy that the A.B.C. is the voice of the Government. It never has been, and is not now, either in its news service or in any other function. It is not only our authority and duty, but also a point of honour for the Commission and staff to serve all political parties and sections of the community with scrupulous fairness, and within the limits of human frailty this has been achieved. If ever the national service became a direct instrument of Government, it should be abolished, but while it serves the whole community impartially as a clearing ground for our controversies and a centre of national unity, it should have the support of all interests.<sup>11</sup>

What sapped the independence of the A.B.C. as much as anything was lack of money. Their share of the licence fee was less and less adequate to meet rising costs, and the A.B.C. was in the position of depending every few months on a handout of bridging finance from the Commonwealth Government. These frequent applications for help were seen by many politicians as evidence of spendthrift habits; why could not the A.B.C. live within its means as it had before the war? In the House of Representatives in March 1947 Kim Beazley spoke of the mounting cost of the A.B.C. and urged the appointment of a Treasury representative on the Commission 'to ensure that wasteful expenditure shall not be incurred.'<sup>12</sup> Caucus shortly afterwards backed a move by Arthur Calwell for a committee of inquiry to investigate

<sup>11</sup> Press statement issued 17 Sept. 1948.

<sup>12</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1947, vol. 190, p. 524.

the Commission's accountancy and administrative methods. Calwell made no secret of what he expected the inquiry to reveal. Announcing its appointment in Parliament, he candidly described the A.B.C. as 'a body that wastes a lot of money' and claimed that the government was 'not satisfied with the way in which the undertaking is being managed at the present time';<sup>13</sup> which must have been encouraging for the Commission. The examining committee comprised A. A. Fitzgerald, chairman of the Commonwealth Grants Commission, W. T. Harris, a former Treasury official, and E. C. Bonney, Director-General of Information. Their report was awaited with some anxiety by Boyer and his colleagues. But they were vindicated. After an exhaustive search into every detail of the A.B.C. organization, the Fitzgerald committee failed to find any significant evidence of bad financial management by the A.B.C. It would have been surprising if they had; one of Charles Moses's outstanding characteristics as general manager was careful financial planning, and the Commission itself was always careful to assess the return in broadcast services gained by any expenditure. Calwell, of course, never withdrew his reckless criticisms, and Boyer did not waste time countering them. Instead, he used the appearance of the Fitzgerald report as an opportunity to drive home a few basic principles in a Press statement:

I do not think it is clearly enough realised that providing the administration is sound the national broadcasting services cannot be regarded as a simple issue of financial profit and loss. The A.B.C. could give programmes of a sort at almost any level of expenditure. The real issue is as to the quality and scope of services rendered. Once this is determined the result is naturally expressed in its financial equivalent. Over two years ago we informed the Government that a distinct recession in both quality and scope of the A.B.C. would have to be faced if our income remained based on the listeners' licence fee fixed in 1932, and that we should be forced to this retrenchment unless a new financial deal were forthcoming . . . The Report

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 192, p. 3213.

just issued opens the door for this long deferred action by Parliament.<sup>14</sup>

The Chifley Government was commendably prompt in bringing down legislation based on the Fitzgerald recommendations. These formed the basis of the 1948 amendments to the Broadcasting Act which strengthened the A.B.C.'s finances but at the cost of greater Treasury control. The assessment of A.B.C. income on a proportion of the licence fee was abolished. Instead the A.B.C. was to receive a parliamentary grant from consolidated revenue, based on triennial estimates which allowed for a certain amount of long-term planning. Like any government department, the A.B.C.'s financial estimates would require Treasury approval. Membership of the Commission was to be enlarged from five members to seven, not, as some Labor members had once wished, to ensure a built-in representation of their viewpoint, but to make room for two senior public servants, one each from Treasury and the Postmaster-General's Department. The theory was that the Treasury man would be able to iron out problems over expenditure, and the Postmaster-General's representative would be helpful in liaising between the A.B.C. and its technical services. (Chifley still refused the A.B.C. control of its own technical services on the usual grounds of avoiding duplication.) Finally, the 1948 legislation set up the Australian Broadcasting Control Board, a three-man body with an overall responsibility for technical and program standards on both A.B.C. and commercial stations. The need for some such controlling authority had several justifications. The allocation of channels had to be systematized in a country with 34 national and 136 commercial radio stations, and although the licensing of new stations continued to be vested in the Postmaster-General, he was required by statute to consider the Board's recommendations. The Board's responsibilities also included advertising standards on the commercials and the co-ordination of programs between national and commercial stations.

<sup>14</sup> Press statement, issued 17 Mar. 1948: see also *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 18 Mar. 1948.

Boyer and the Commission had mixed reactions to these proposals. An assured and adequate income was a long-sought advantage, but it came with unwelcome strings. Boyer would have preferred a sum related as previously to the number of licence fees, which provided in some respects an irreducible basis; as it was now, there was always the faint possibility that a hostile ministry or Treasury might cripple the A.B.C.'s independence by cutting its finances. (In practice, as Boyer recognized, it had always been possible, even under the old system, for an unsympathetic Postmaster-General to cut the A.B.C.'s share of the licence fee.) Because of expanding costs and the need for new technical media requiring considerable outlay, the Commission was not inclined to press this point too far; but there was general concern about the appointment to the Commission of two permanent civil servants on indeterminate tenure. 'Because of its need to arbitrate in delicate matters of political opinion'<sup>15</sup> the Commission, in the view of its members, should have been of limited tenure and representative entirely of unofficial community interests. The *Sydney Morning Herald* in an editorial twitted the A.B.C. for its subservience in accepting those official watchdogs, and Boyer in reply stated:

As to the appointment of Public servants to the Commission, we have disapproved of this as a principle and said so publicly. It has yet to be proved, however, that two high officials of our Public Service cannot be found, or will not be appointed, who are prepared to undertake their responsibilities as Commissioners with the same honourable detachment from political or departmental pressures as have animated Commissioners hitherto.<sup>16</sup>

In practice the experiment was not entirely happy. P. E. R. Vanthoff, the Deputy Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, apparently fitted in easily enough, but P. W. Nette, First Assistant-Secretary from the Treasury, took a somewhat dominant line in querying expenditure at Commission meetings. Boyer, although personally on good terms with

<sup>15</sup> Press statement, issued 27 Nov. 1948.

<sup>16</sup> *S.M.H.*, 1 Dec. 1948: in reply to editorial of 30 Nov. 1948.

Nette, thought he could not reconcile his duties towards the Commission with his Treasury responsibilities. The position was not consistent; Nette was pre-judging as a member of the Commission submissions which would later come before him in his Treasury capacity, and it was hard to maintain Commission solidarity in these circumstances. With common discretion and goodwill on both sides the situation never became unworkable, but the presence of the two civil servants on the Commission was another sign of a change imposed by a government against the Commission's declared wishes.

Altogether the 1948 Act could have been much worse. The Broadcasting Control Board did not, as Boyer had once feared, supersede the Commission in any significant respect. The main effect of the Control Board was the withering away of the parliamentary standing committee. Since 1946 the Country Party had withdrawn from participation and the Liberals joined in criticizing the committee for spending the taxpayers' money jaunting around Australia to study inessentials. While several of the younger members of the committee had taken a lively interest in its researches, its head, Senator Amour, was not always regarded as the most constructive or temperate of thinkers, and the committee was perhaps outliving its usefulness even in Labor eyes. Although the Chifley Government kept it nominally in existence after the passage of the 1948 legislation, no business was referred to it, and when the Liberal-Country Party coalition took office in 1949, it was allowed to lapse, although officially abolished only in 1956. The Control Board exercised all its functions, but rode the A.B.C. rather more lightly. In addition some important powers, such as control over political and controversial material, were specifically left to the A.B.C. Senator Cameron, the Postmaster-General, introducing the Bill in the Senate, made a point of complimenting the A.B.C. on performing 'a difficult task with distinction', and stressed that it was the government's aim to ease and not to constrict the Commission's freedom.

The Liberal and Country parties attacked this legislation with exuberant imagination. For some months they had

forecast that Chifley would bring all broadcasting under government ownership (in which, after all, he would only have followed the example of Conservative Governments in Britain). Deprived of this pretext, they fastened on the proposed Broadcasting Control Board as a potential weapon of dictatorship. They were particularly incensed by a clause in the Bill forbidding the dramatization of any political issue less than five years old. This measure was inspired by a series of anti-Labor broadcasts on various commercial stations, 'John Henry Austral', which included somewhat unflattering caricatures of prominent Labor cabinet ministers discussing their alleged plans. Labor men complained that careless or gullible listeners might think they were listening to real transcripts. It was a nice question in the ethics of censorship, and the Opposition made the most of it. Senator Annabelle Rankin denounced the entire bill as

the most insidious and dangerous attack upon the Australian way of life and its ideals of democracy and freedom that has ever been presented to the Senate. The bill, which masquerades as a normal bill to effect changes in the administration of broadcasting, conceals a sinister and abhorrent determination to dragoon all broadcasting to a pre-determined government pattern, which will probably be used to limit still further the freedom which the Australian people at present enjoy. It represents, in fact, one step further towards the development of a totalitarian state. . . .<sup>17</sup>

Can anyone really have believed such stuff? Apparently; for in the House of Representatives several more politicians spoke in similar vein. John McEwen called the proposal 'the brainchild of a socialist dictator who wants to mould our thinking and to organize and control our way of life'. Eric Harrison claimed that the Control Board was a device to strangle the commercial stations, and talked at length of 'totalitarianism'. A. G. Cameron, the only speaker to show any solicitude for the A.B.C., feared that the Treasury representative would pare costs so much as to imperil efficiency. Howard Beale, with a literacy rare in such

<sup>17</sup> *Com., Parl. Deb.*, 1948, vol. 199, p. 2592.



surroundings, quoted Milton's *Areopagitica* against the bill.<sup>18</sup> Vain expedient; the legislation passed. The Liberal and Country parties reconciled themselves to these sinister edicts so completely that it was seven years after they gained power in 1949 before they got around to removing the public servants from the Commission, and the Broadcasting Control Board survives to this day, its powers undiminished.

From Boyer's point of view, the A.B.C.'s great gain from the 1948 legislation was more freedom over its control of political and contentious material. It was important for the A.B.C. not merely to be free from political censorship, but free from the reputation of susceptibility to political censorship. Opposition politicians were always alert for evidence of this. In 1947, for instance, T. W. White, a prominent Liberal, challenged the cancellation of a 'Nation's Forum of the Air' in which the admission of a quota of Asian migrants was to be discussed by senior civil servants, and had to be assured that the postponement was due only to the fact that these officials were required in Canberra during the sitting of Federal Parliament.<sup>19</sup> Typical of those politicians who wanted sterner government discipline for the A.B.C. was a Labor back-bencher, Max Falstein. When J. P. Abbott moved a controversial motion about the inroads of communism in Australia, naming many individuals as sympathizers, the A.B.C. news service in one news bulletin describing these allegations omitted Evatt's reply in rebuttal. At once Falstein denounced the A.B.C. as 'one-sided' and demanded an official reprimand.<sup>20</sup> Apparently no action was taken, but the incident showed how readily politicians took umbrage and wanted to wave the big stick. Even Allan Fraser, normally among the most liberal-minded of Labor back-benchers, once asked for the tabling in the Parliamentary Library of all scripts of news commentaries, in order to guard against commentators who made it their business to insinuate ideas into the minds of their listeners. This, however, proved impracticable, and the Australian public

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3314, 3328, and 3344.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1947, vol. 191, pp. 1413 and 1687.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1594.

continued to be exposed to the venturesome A.B.C. policy of occasionally employing news commentators with ideas.

Boyer was greatly concerned with having the A.B.C.'s independence written even more clearly into the Broadcasting Act, and his opportunity came during the 1948 amendments. A clause (Section 89) was written into the Act amplifying the 1942 proviso which gave the A.B.C. absolute discretion over the content, manner, and extent of political broadcasts. The Commission's powers were extended to the right of determination on all controversial subjects whatever. This clause was apparently the result of some persuasive talk by Boyer to Chifley. In the original draft of the 1948 Act the provision writing in the A.B.C.'s power over political broadcasts was omitted, probably for no reason more sinister than inadvertency on the part of the draftsmen while making provision for the creation of the Broadcasting Control Board. This omission did not come to the Commission's notice until the Bill was actually before Parliament. Boyer and Dawes were extremely concerned at the drastic effect which this change would have on public confidence in the A.B.C., and sought an interview with Chifley. What followed, as Boyer later recollected it, was characteristic of both men:

Mr. Chifley heard our story with the whimsical and friendly calm so typical of him, and then said quite simply that he had had no idea the Bill contained the modification to which we objected and about which he thoroughly agreed with us. He stressed, however, that since the Bill as a whole had been agreed to at a Party meeting and was now in its second reading in the Senate it would be difficult to make a change. I told him that I appreciated that fact, but nevertheless its passage could have only the effects I had mentioned. He nodded his head and then without hesitation assured us that the vital clause would be preserved. What went on behind the scenes I had no means of knowing, but during the committee stage in the Senate the Postmaster-General moved the amendment promised by the Prime Minister, fully restoring the former force of the vital clause.

Later, during the passage of the Bill through the House of Representatives, Mr. Chifley dropped into a chair beside the one in which I was sitting in the Speaker's Gallery and asked me whether I realised what had been done. I said I was very grateful and was sure he had done the right thing. He said that the significant thing to which he was referring was that, in his recollection, this was the first time that a Bill which had been approved by the Party had been substantially amended in Parliament without reference back to the Party. This to me was a new insight on Chifley, who had a public reputation for placing Party solidarity above every other consideration. It indicated to me that on an issue of vital significance he was prepared to act swiftly and effectively on the strength of his personal leadership.<sup>21</sup>

Boyer was delighted with this proviso. He had been worried in case the A.B.C.'s right to be the judge of its own controversial material should have been alienated to the Broadcasting Control Board. After years of persuasion, he now felt that the A.B.C. had a parliamentary charter to resist interference.

All the same, he was aware that his first three years of office had seen too many inroads on the independence of the A.B.C. The attacks which came from members on both sides of Parliament were the most obvious source of interference, but because Cameron was a sensible and unexcitable Postmaster-General, the A.B.C. could usually find acceptable answers without too much fuss and inquisition. More serious was the way in which the A.B.C. had been rebuffed on a number of important issues affecting its own welfare. The A.B.C. had been refused control of Radio Australia, and even of its own technical services. Its wishes about the news service had been overruled on political grounds. And the Chifley Government, setting an example which its Liberal-Country Party successor would continue, showed no wish at all to uphold the financial independence of the national broadcasting service. Perhaps, indeed, as Boyer consoled himself, an income derived from a share in the annual

<sup>21</sup> L. F. Crisp, *Ben Chifley* (Melbourne, 1961), pp. 268-9; quoting a letter by Boyer.

licence fee was as precarious as one dependent on an annual government grant; but the fact was that neither gave the A.B.C. an income which was both adequate and independent. Could the A.B.C. boast any real autonomy when the government held the power of the purse?

Another man might have despaired and resigned the chairmanship. Boyer did not. He had already seen how little Cleary could effect by resigning at a time when, in fact, some of the worst pressures were already lifting, and although the temptation to resign was sometimes strong, Boyer reflected that he could probably achieve more by staying within the organization and fighting each battle as it arose. Early in 1949, however, he was in some doubt whether he would survive as chairman of the A.B.C. after his term expired in the June of that year. Some Labor men were calling for the appointment of a chairman more completely of their way of thinking, and the move had some support within cabinet.<sup>22</sup> Arthur Calwell, for one, had no very high opinion of those who ran the A.B.C. But the forces on Boyer's side were considerable. His opponents had no convincing alternative to offer. Of the Labor men on the Commission, Dawes, the vice-chairman, was entirely loyal and closely associated with Boyer's policies; and Hanlon was a sick man, who died later that year. Boyer's hard work to maintain a truly impartial national radio service was appreciated by important sectors of the labour movement. Neither Chifley nor Cameron wanted a change, and several influential Labor leaders, such as McGirr of New South Wales, thought it wiser to retain an experienced chairman like Boyer whose impartiality was well known, than to set a bad precedent by appointing one of their own people. So in June Boyer was reappointed, with Dawes as vice-chairman. Boyer's feelings at continuing in office were ruefully summed up in a letter on 3 June 1949 to an old pastoralist friend, Sir Norman Kater:

Personally, I am rather appalled at facing another term in what you can well realize is a somewhat unenviable

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, the views of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council, as reported in the *Argus*, 17 Feb. 1949; also *S.M.H.*, 10 Feb. 1949.

position. It did, however, seem to me that to hold the fort here against political abuse, and for some modest contribution toward our general well-being in taste and morals, was something which one could not lightly disregard as a point of duty.

However, here I am for better or for worse, and though I may not be able to see the term out I intend to make what contribution is possible in these difficult days. As you may guess, the appointment was not made without some rather violent opposition.

His forebodings were justified, as the next few months were to be unusually stormy. An early sign of this was a parliamentary question by a Country Party veteran, B. H. Corser, about a radio play by D'Arcy Niland, *The Boy from the Never Never*, about a country lad who claimed to see Christ as a swagman in the desert. The idea of presenting Jesus not as a stained-glass figure but as part of contemporary Australian society upset Corser badly:

Does the Postmaster-General approve of the action of the Australian Broadcasting Commission in permitting to be broadcast a play in which the utterances of a man portraying Christ are interspersed with bar-room conversation and cheap gibes?<sup>23</sup>

he demanded of this 'highly blasphemous' production. The A.B.C. patiently refuted the charge of blasphemy. It was soon to have heavier troubles.

The challenge of the left wing in Australian politics reached its peak in 1949, when it was successfully met by the Chifley Government, but not without creating a strong reaction in favour of the Liberals, who scented victory and from their side also pressed a hard attack on Labor. The atmosphere of politics was unusually electric, and in such times the A.B.C.'s policy of impartiality came most seriously under fire. Opposition members renewed their allegations of government interference. A plain guide to the attitude of politicians on both sides of the fence had been shown in February 1949, when L. W. Hamilton, a Country Party

<sup>23</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1949, vol. 203, p. 1553.

back-bencher, rose to deplore two A.B.C. news broadcasts giving publicity to the communists. In one, Jim Healy, secretary of the waterside workers and a union boss respected by many non-communists, was quoted for his opinions on the basic wage issue; in the other instance, a report was given of a brawl involving communist demonstrators outside a Perth theatre showing a film called *The Iron Curtain*. Calwell half-heartedly defended these items as legitimate news; but his first reaction was to agree 'No one wishes reports of brawls to be reported by the A.B.C.'<sup>24</sup> Unpleasant and contentious subjects were best kept quiet. Unfortunately it was impossible to avoid all mention of them. In July the coal-miners came out on a strike which was generally regarded as a straightout challenge to the arbitration system. Communist-led, the strike was certainly unpopular with the majority of Australians, arousing the opposition not only of the Liberal and Country parties, but also the Labor Governments of Queensland, New South Wales, and the Commonwealth. In these circumstances it took some liberal-mindedness to suggest that the strikers' viewpoint had any right to consideration by the A.B.C. Such a view proved too radical for Queensland. In the third week of the strike the Labor Premier of that State, E. M. Hanlon, decided to broadcast an appeal to its miners to return to work. Arrangements were made for commercial stations to broadcast at 6.15 p.m. on 24 July, but the A.B.C. refused to make time available, on the grounds that it must preserve its neutrality. It had already broadcast at Chifley's request a statement by the chairman of the Coal Board on the government's position and intentions for the public welfare (and was incidentally attacked some weeks after the strike by Labor's Senator Morrow for failing to give the miners right of reply to that announcement).<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the best course would have been to agree to Hanlon's broadcast but to insist that the miners should be allowed a right of reply; but the A.B.C. had been so much pushed around by politicians in recent

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 1949, vol. 201, pp. 437 and 1088. For other examples, see 1949, vol. 202, p. 61; vol. 205, p. 1406.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., vol. 203, p. 1989.

years that it felt the need to show that it was not at the beck and call of every figure in authority who wanted broadcasting time. If it accepted Hanlon's broadcast, the A.B.C. felt it would merely become the voice of one State government and a partisan in an issue dividing the people of Australia. This was entirely consistent with Boyer's deepest convictions on the A.B.C.'s responsibilities, even although he and the rest of the Commission were, in this particular instance, entirely of the same opinion as Hanlon.

The Queensland Premier was not a big enough man to understand such reasoning, let alone agree with it; nor was he mollified by copious reportage of his speech in the 7 p.m. news bulletin.

The A.B.C. [he said] apparently could not participate in any action of the Government which would, in any way, offend the Communist Party, and was more concerned keeping sweet with the Communist Party than allowing the people to know the truth of the situation . . . Anyone who is neutral in a position like this, is of not much value as a citizen.<sup>26</sup>

The Queensland Liberal Party leader, Hiley, weighed in with similar views. 'This action should serve as a warning of what can happen when a Government commands a monopoly of any service', he said. 'The Premier of the State should at all times command facilities to make a broadcast on such a subject.' The two statements did not seem easily reconcilable either with each other or with the A.B.C.'s position, which was not a monopoly; but Hiley, like Hanlon, was loyally supported by the Brisbane Press, especially after Boyer's explanation that 'We do not feel we can extend the privilege without granting the right of reply to the dissident minority.' 'What rot!' retorted the *Brisbane Telegraph* in an editorial headlined 'Stupid Policy', 'If that principle were applied in every case no controversial subject would ever be discussed over national stations.'<sup>27</sup> The *Courier-Mail* thought the A.B.C.'s action an insult to the State of Queensland,

<sup>26</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 July 1949.

<sup>27</sup> *Brisbane Telegraph*, 25 July 1949.

because the A.B.C. as a federal instrumentality should not have dictated to the head of the sovereign State of Queensland endeavouring to persuade Queensland miners to return to work. As for the rights of the dissident minority:

Is there no difference between a rabble-rousing communist and the elected head of a State? Somebody seemed to think not. It is time to remind the Federal Government that this State is not prepared to kow-tow to any power-drunk egotist in Canberra.

This editorial stung Boyer into an unusually caustic reply, in which he denied any pressure on the Commission and repeated his belief that more important even than a State Premier's claims was 'the deep principle of A.B.C. impartiality in all internal Australian disputes, however right or wrong the participants.'<sup>28</sup> Leaving aside the matter of Queensland's prestige, one may doubt whether many listeners agreed in thinking A.B.C. impartiality more important than putting the miners in their place.

The approach of the elections caught the A.B.C. in another embarrassment over the communists. In Cleary's time there had been a rule that every political party with five or more members in the House of Representatives was entitled to broadcasting time on the national network. In the 1946 elections the Commission had allowed the Communist Party fifteen minutes of free time, apparently on the grounds that it had secured  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent of the vote at the previous polls and had representation in one State Parliament. This passed unnoticed at the time, but in September 1949 Menzies rose to protest against every party having the right of broadcast, and urged that the new Broadcasting Control Board should impose the old rule on all stations, national and commercial alike, so that the communists would not qualify. Calwell explained that the decision had been entirely the responsibility of the A.B.C., not the government; and it was left to Leslie Haylen, ironically enough a man who after twenty years in Parliament lost his seat largely through smears of pro-communism,

<sup>28</sup> *Courier-Mail*, 26 July and 4 Aug. 1949.



to put for Labor the case against giving the communists time:

The proposal to treat communism as merely a political force, instead of a subversive agency, was too democratic for an age in which democratic parties have learned to know where their enemies are. I reject as outside the scope of reason and fair play any project that would give the Communists free use of the air in order to disseminate their doctrines.<sup>29</sup>

Considering how much the A.B.C. was accused of timidity in the face of political pressure, the situation was an odd one. It was Boyer, the pastoralist and Methodist, whose old-fashioned liberalism led him to propose that the Communist Party, however repugnant to the majority, was entitled to a hearing while it remained a lawful party; it was the Labor men, Calwell and Haylen, who rejected this view as 'too democratic', and successfully urged the Broadcasting Control Board to frame a ruling which forbade the communists a hearing. There were two curious sequels to this episode. The first was that J. T. Lang, representing the one-man Lang Labor Party, was given one session on the A.B.C., and used it to give the widest publicity to his damaging charges that Chifley practised usury during the depression; it is doubtful whether anything the communists said would have produced anything near the same shocking effect. The other was that for years afterwards Calwell believed that Boyer had deliberately engineered the proposal to give the Communist Party broadcasting time in order to embarrass the Labor Government electorally with the appearance of being soft on the Reds.<sup>30</sup> He was incapable, as most Australian politicians were incapable, of believing that anyone might genuinely accept the Voltairean liberal tradition: 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.'

Not unexpectedly the Chifley Government lost the December 1949 elections to the Liberal-Country Party coalition, and H. L. Anthony, a Country Party front-bencher who had vigorously attacked Labor broadcasting

<sup>29</sup> *Com., Parl. Deb.*, 1949, vol. 204, p. 653.

<sup>30</sup> *H. of R.D.*, 1956, vol. 10, p. 1829.

policy, became Postmaster-General. Fifty-two years old at the time of his appointment, Anthony was a Richmond River banana farmer who had represented his district in the House of Representatives since 1937; this was his first portfolio. 'I'm glad they picked a cocky', was Boyer's first reaction to the appointment. He expected to be able to talk Anthony's language, and was not long in inviting the new Postmaster-General on a visit to Durella. In fact, there was a good deal of uncertainty within the A.B.C. about the changes which the new ministry might bring. Out of office for eight years, they might want to probe into every corner of broadcasting policy and undo every achievement of their Labor rivals. As it turned out, they made few important changes at the A.B.C. Despite earlier Liberal criticisms, the independent news service remained untouched and amply financed. Perhaps its independence became more of a reality, since Liberal and Country Party ministers, being on better terms with the newspapers than their Labor predecessors, had less temptation to exploit the A.B.C. as a medium for their opinions. The one major broadcasting policy change on which the government was determined was the abolition of the Department of Information. This meant that the A.B.C. was to recover control of the Radio Australia short-wave service of which it had been bereft by Calwell in 1944, thus bringing Australian practice into line with the United Kingdom and Canada. It was what Boyer and the commissioners had sought for several years. These considerations weighed less with the new government than the desire to economize by closing down a propaganda medium which they felt had become too much associated with the Labor Government's foreign policy. In its eagerness to effect the change, the government gave remarkably little thought to its implications. The original cabinet directive on the transfer of Radio Australia planned a stringent cut in overseas services and the dismissal of at least half the personnel associated with the shortwave service; however, there would be an increase in shortwave broadcasts within Australia and New Guinea. Such at any rate was the brief which Boyer and Moses received early in March 1950 at a conference

in Canberra with officials of the External Affairs and Postmaster-General's departments.

Obediently, Moses and his subordinates planned to pare overseas services to a minimum. All foreign-language broadcasts would cease, except for one hour daily in Indonesian-Malay. Monitoring of Russian and German broadcasts would be carried out, if at all, by the Department of External Affairs. Two-thirds of the current Radio Australia staff, including many experienced journalists, announcers, and linguists, would be dismissed with a month's notice. This drastic retrenchment was not intended to show any lack of concern with Australia's image among her neighbours. It was planned to rely more heavily on broadcasting over the shortwave transmitters selections from the home national programs, including the usual domestic news bulletins, with additional material as required. On this basis the A.B.C. hoped to run shortwave services at some £39,000 a year cheaper than the Department of Information. Nobody at first questioned the wisdom of the government's decision to effect this economy by cutting down so heavily on Australia's broadcasts to her neighbours. Nor was there any sign of government awareness of the possible unsuitability of unedited domestic material for foreign broadcasts.

As the day for the A.B.C.'s inauguration of its shortwave services, 1 May, drew closer doubts arose in at least two quarters. Senior executives of the A.B.C. began to wonder whether it was practicable to broadcast home material unedited for foreign consumption, particularly since the two transmitters intended for the Australian inland were capable of being received in overseas countries. Were parliamentary broadcasts, especially on foreign affairs, fit fare for our Asian neighbours? Did not some of the news commentaries by such speakers as Macmahon Ball and Peter Russo contain 'dangerous' material? Should not talks be carefully watched?—even 'Guest of Honour' might sometimes have to be dropped from overseas transmission. Were news bulletins for home consumption really suitable or interesting for overseas audiences? These doubts all arose among the senior A.B.C. management without prompting

either from outside pressures or the Commission; indeed the Commission's only intervention to date had been a mild plea for the retention of half-an-hour's broadcast in French for New Caledonia and Indo-China. Even the one surviving foreign-language broadcast was causing some difficulty, as it was brought to the A.B.C.'s attention that the Malay spoken in Indonesia was rather unlike that spoken in Malaya: and in order to provide a little more material for non-English speakers and to prepare special news bulletins for overseas listeners, it might be necessary—though of course, with the utmost frugality—to retain a few more staff.

Meanwhile, the Department of External Affairs was having second thoughts. The minister at that time was Percy Spender, ebullient, self-confident, and uneasily yoked with a permanent secretary of the department, John Burton, who was too egregiously one of Evatt's bright young men; it was Burton who had been meeting Boyer and Moses about the transfer of Radio Australia. Somewhat faster than the majority of his cabinet colleagues, Spender was awakening to the fact that by cutting back Radio Australia the government was dismantling a potential force for overseas propaganda just at a time when the Cold War against the communist powers was imminently expected to kindle. Intelligence departments in the armed services spoke of the value they attached to the maintenance of a South-East Asian radio audience from the point of view of political warfare. Reports from New Caledonia and Indo-China revealed a considerable audience for the Radio Australia French service. Cabinet, Spender decided, must revise its policy about overseas broadcasting. On 27 April he instructed Burton to communicate urgently to Boyer his new ideas for Radio Australia. Spender, although agreeing with the A.B.C. policy of using as much domestic material as possible on the shortwave services, wanted more specialized news bulletins and commentaries, if necessary with extra staff. He also favoured maintaining and extending foreign-language broadcasts. So far his views suited Boyer and the Commission perfectly; but then came the disagreeable bit. Spender regarded it as quite essential that the Department of

External Affairs should advise on the content of programs and that he as minister should issue instructions about Radio Australia broadcasts.

These proposals reached Boyer during a meeting of the Commission. Spender's last request was entirely unpalatable. If the Minister for External Affairs had the right to interfere at will in the running of the A.B.C.'s shortwave services, this would not merely lead to friction between the officers of the two departments but would jeopardize any prospect of the overseas service establishing a name for impartiality and reliability in Asian eyes, and would strike at the autonomy of the A.B.C. These were considerations which Boyer thought crucial. His task was to fend off Spender's claim to intervene in the running of A.B.C. shortwave services while at the same time securing, if possible, the right to expand special overseas services beyond the meagre amount possible under the government's original proposals. His first move was to telephone Anthony while the Commission meeting was still in progress and to discuss Spender's move with him. The Postmaster-General was not so deeply concerned as Boyer about the threat to the autonomy of the A.B.C., but he was in no mood to see any part of his own department coming unnecessarily under the surveillance of some other minister, and—to put it at the very least—he did not forbid the A.B.C. to resist Spender's claim. Within an hour of receiving Spender's message Boyer's telegram of reply was on its way. The considerations mentioned by the Department of External Affairs would be borne in mind by the A.B.C. in programming for Radio Australia; but the question of policy control raised important issues which would have to be worked out between ministers at the appropriate cabinet sub-committee. Having gained time, Boyer lost no time in interviewing Spender on 1 May, and on the following day wrote presenting the Commission's views to both Spender and Anthony. To Spender, he was polite but firm:

May I say that the Commission, which discussed this matter very carefully at its meeting last week, is very sensible of the close interest which your Ministry has in

the impact of our Australian shortwave broadcasts overseas, and it is our desire to serve in this matter to the fullest extent and to your complete satisfaction. On the other hand, our experience in the operation of this service under the previous Government, as well as the experience of the Canadian and British Governments in facing the same problem, has led the Commission to set out what it feels to be an approach to this matter which will avoid all those difficulties which are inevitable in divided or undefined responsibility, while at the same time achieving what you have in mind. . . .

You will note that our suggestion for the resolution of this problem is the desire of the Commission to be furnished with statements from time to time by yourself on governmental policy and the free flow of background information at the operational level, reinforced if desired by the secondment of an official of your department to the Service. Within this framework the Commission hopes that you will agree to accord it such confidence as would enable it to assume full responsibility for the actual compilation of programme content in the same manner as is done in Canada and the United Kingdom.

I feel sure you will appreciate that the Commission's approach to this problem is not in any sense one of prestige or exclusiveness, but merely to ensure the maximum utility and smooth working of the service both at this end and abroad in a manner which our own and overseas experience seems to indicate as advisable.

This put the A.B.C.'s position clearly, but left Spender in a position where he could withdraw his request without loss of face. To Anthony, who had to fight the A.B.C.'s battles in cabinet, Boyer put the issue more bluntly:

The only issue outstanding appears to be that of the measure of day to day responsibility requested by the Department of External Affairs, and the general nature of our overseas service. In brief, this might be expressed as follows: as to whether shortwave broadcasts should be either 'The Overseas Service of the Department of External Affairs' or 'The Overseas Service of the A.B.C.' The Commission's view is that if the Department of

External Affairs feels it necessary to have a day to day direction of programme content, it would be preferable if that Department assumed the full responsibility of the service. On the other hand, if the A.B.C., is to accept that responsibility, it should be made clear so as to prevent any future difficulty. In the latter case, the Commission, as you will note by our statement, could and would give the fullest regard to all the assistance and guidance which External Affairs could give. There is a world of difference, however, between assistance and guidance, and direction.

'There is a world of difference, however, between assistance and guidance, and direction': a good principle for arming Anthony for the cabinet meeting, but Boyer had shrewdly refrained from thrusting it at Spender, who might then have stood up for a right of direction. Anthony's willingness to take the A.B.C.'s part was doubtless reinforced by the next sentence of Boyer's letter:

I may mention that the Commission's views on this matter are reinforced by difficulties which we had when formerly in charge of this service under the previous Government.

A seasoned critic of the Labor administration, Anthony could hardly have missed the hint; but it was not yet certain that the A.B.C. would have its own way on the point. Spender's reply yielded no ground. Radio Australia was in his eyes an instrument of foreign policy, and had to be brought continually into line with the requirements of foreign policy. The Department of External Affairs would not have adequate control of programs if it was merely communicating background policy information in the manner suggested by the A.B.C., and it would be cumbersome if there had to be a ministerial directive to the A.B.C. every time External Affairs wanted something done. The Commission considered Spender's reply at its next meeting on 17-18 May, but was unmoved. Boyer's reply reduced the question to its essentials:

(1) How best can the Overseas Service serve this country at this time having full regard to all the circumstances?

As you know, the Commission's view is that even if thought of as 'an instrument of Government policy', the

indirect factual and balanced presentation of Australian life and views is more effective in the ideological struggle than the direct angled approach which is apt to be self-defeating in the long term.

(2) Whichever attitude your Government finally decides to approve, the problem of minute-to-minute responsibility for the actual building of programmes will require to be devolved upon the actual radio personnel engaged, whether under the direct instruction of your own Department or of the A.B.C. It is for this reason, and this only, that we have suggested that the operational staff should be quite clear as to what authority they are finally accountable.

We find it hard to believe that you feel we are unworthy of such a trust, reinforced as we should be with advice help and information from yourself and your Department.<sup>81</sup>

How could Spender gracefully rebuff such a conclusion, especially when Boyer accompanied it later in the same letter with warm congratulations on the success of the Colombo Plan conference and offers of any service he could perform for Spender during a forthcoming tour of Britain and North America? The cabinet sub-committee which met on 31 May to consider the future of Radio Australia came down very much on the A.B.C.'s side. Permission was granted to base Radio Australia programs on material used in medium-wave home broadcasts, but to provide special supplementary news commentaries and other programs for South-East Asia and the western Pacific. The Department of External Affairs would be represented at the A.B.C. by a liaison officer, who would work in collaboration with the Radio Australia editorial staff in preparing news broadcasts and commentaries. The liaison officer would bear the responsibility for pointing out any matter which conflicted with official foreign policy, but the final and formal responsibility for content rested with the editor and the A.B.C.

To Boyer, this A.B.C. control of overseas broadcasting was an objective of the utmost importance. It implied that, instead of merely serving as an instrument of official

<sup>81</sup> Boyer to Spender, 17 May 1950.



propaganda, Radio Australia would as far as possible give its listeners in South-East Asia and the Pacific a balanced and honest picture of Australia. Boyer's hope was for the A.B.C. to build up in neighbouring countries a reputation for reliability at least comparable with that enjoyed by the B.B.C. overseas service. Honesty, in his view, was the best form of national propaganda. In practice conflict between the independence of the A.B.C. and the concern for national security of the Department of External Affairs was unlikely. External Affairs was going through a somewhat difficult period of reorganization as the new government weeded out the influence of Evatt and Burton, and in any case official policy was so unclear about its expectations from Radio Australia that the Department had to rely for a while on the initiatives of the broadcasting staff. On the other hand the inbuilt caution of A.B.C. officials about broadcasting 'dangerous material' was reinforced by the knowledge that any government dissatisfaction with the content of Radio Australia programs would be followed by renewed pressure for official control. When eventually Radio Australia acquired its own panel of news commentators—as late as 1955—the Department of External Affairs was invited to approve the names chosen. A.B.C. liaison with the department was very close, and regular meetings were held to discuss the content of commentaries and to iron out any potential difficulties. And because of tight budgeting during the 1951-2 recession, it was some years before the A.B.C. could carry out any ambitious plans for expanding and developing Radio Australia.

Internally, the question of censorship became much quieter during the early years of the Menzies Government. It may be that political pressures were subtler and more indirect, but there is not the slightest evidence among Boyer's papers for making such an assertion, and other causes seem more likely. The Menzies Government was on better terms than Labor with much of the Press, and had less need to exploit the A.B.C. to get a hearing for its views. The communist issue, which had provided so much fuel for controversy during the late forties, faded quickly. It may

not be too naïve to suggest that the A.B.C. was at last managing to establish its credentials as an impartial organization which would not let itself be manipulated. One episode somewhat tarnished this image. This concerned Macmahon Ball, who as a commentator unusually experienced in Asian affairs was given time for a regular Sunday feature, 'Australia and the Pacific'. During the Korean crisis of 1950 he was not always uncritical of Allied strategy, so that a Country Party back-bencher, Turnbull, was moved to ask a question in the House of Representatives. Since Ball's program often expressed 'a fear of displeasing the Soviet Union', would the Postmaster-General arrange for a speaker to present the other side? The Postmaster-General said he would examine scripts of the program and there matters remained for six weeks until Macmahon Ball produced a script for broadcasting on 16 November, in which he strongly criticized the extension of the war into North Korea. The A.B.C. talks staff urged Ball to modify some of his statements; when he refused, the talk was not broadcast. Soon afterwards, the Director of Talks wrote to Ball informing him that he would broadcast only on alternate Sundays and not, as previously, every week. The letter of explanation stated that the change was made 'following on the various questions that have been asked about your broadcasts both in Parliament and out of it' but that 'the Commission is quite firm in standing to the decision to invite you to broadcast these commentaries.'<sup>32</sup>

To Ball, this simply looked as if his sessions were being cut by one half as the result of political pressure on the A.B.C. Questions were asked in the House of Representatives, and Boyer, in denying political pressure, found himself involved in a press controversy with his old colleague. Boyer's case rested on the 'standing policy of the Commission that no one commentator, however popular, should be permitted to retain a fixed monopolistic position in our programme, particularly when dealing with a single controversial subject.'

<sup>32</sup> *Argus*, 1 Dec. 1950.

Because these broadcasts deal with a highly controversial subject on which there has been much discussion both in Parliament and among the listening public, the Commission felt that it should take especial care to ensure that Professor Ball's views, while given full expression, should be adequately balanced by those of other speakers.<sup>33</sup>

This undoubtedly had been the Commission's policy in Boyer's time, although previously there was a long period when 'The Watchman' had been the A.B.C.'s sole news commentator. The difficulty was that an exception had deliberately been made in allowing Macmahon Ball to monopolize 'Australia and the Pacific'; and once this decision was made, it was somewhat invidious to cut down Ball's broadcasting time only at the moment when his views became unacceptable to the government party. Pressed by E. J. Ward, Anthony pointed out quite truthfully that he had not censored the program except to secure scripts for perusal after a question was asked in the House: 'the honorable member is well aware that the A.B.C. is not subject to ministerial control.'<sup>34</sup> Where A.B.C. officials already thought Ball's material too 'dangerous' for overseas broadcasting, however, the Commission may have been a little sensitive about offending, a little too quick to avert controversy; and it was here that its reputation for timidity flourished. In a straight-out collision with ministerial direction, there was no doubt that the A.B.C. would stick to its guns, but when it came to subtler points of avoiding needless trouble the A.B.C. was no more heroic than the community which created it.

Apart from this episode, the only serious hint of ministerial interference came from changes in the personnel of the Commission itself. In 1951 Mrs Ivy Kent's appointment was not renewed, and she was replaced by Dame Enid Lyons, who had just retired as a Liberal cabinet minister. The next year a more controversial change occurred when C. W. Anderson was dismissed from the Commission by the Postmaster-General for failure to attend two consecutive

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 29-30 Nov. 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1950, vol. 211, p. 3507.

meetings. Technically this was an adequate ground for dismissal, but in fact Anderson not unnaturally supposed that it had been invoked in his case because Anthony disliked his political beliefs. Anderson was a young and vigorous Labor politician who at thirty had become general secretary of the New South Wales Trades and Labour Council, and in the next year (1949) had been appointed a member of the Commission to replace the deceased Labor veteran, J. S. Hanlon. Boyer's part in this was largely confined to forwarding to the Postmaster-General Anderson's explanations for his absences—mainly pressure of party business which prevented him attending meetings outside Sydney. He apparently did not exert himself much to secure a reversal of the decision, nor to comment when Anderson was replaced not by another Labor man but by a retired postal official, J. C. Stewart. Perhaps he regarded it as inevitable that any government would try to tilt the balance of representation on the Commission its own way. Rather than waste effort arguing about personalities on these grounds, he should concentrate on making sure that, once appointed, members of the Commission shared the essential ideals of impartiality and resistance to sectional pressures.

During the early fifties attacks on the A.B.C. in the Commonwealth Parliament became notably fewer. There were occasional eruptions of the familiar kind from the Labor Party in 1951 and 1952. Calwell by now frankly expressed a wish to abolish the Commission, placing broadcasting under a special federal cabinet minister, with parliamentary control of expenditure; to be fair, he also wanted parliamentary control over the commercial stations. Calwell and several other Labor men lamented the dropping of 'Advance Australia Fair' as the signature tune for the national news—Boyer, who thought the tune deplorable, had been prevented from doing so by the Chifley Government, which was sensitive about such gestures. Such criticisms, however, became increasingly fewer; after 1952 there is a gap of several years before Hansard reports another parliamentary onslaught on the national broadcasting system.

Perhaps the Menzies Government's attitude about intervention with the A.B.C. in those years emerged most clearly in an episode which occurred in 1951, when J. M. Mullens, a Labor member who later left the party during the D.L.P. split, attacked an A.B.C. discussion group on China which had been insufficiently anti-communist, perhaps because it included what he erroneously described as the 'notorious "party liners" Dr Peter Russo . . . and Mr C. P. Fitzgerald',

Why is it that persons who hold views of this kind can always find an outlet for their expression through the Australian Broadcasting Commission, whilst the opposing viewpoint rarely, if ever, finds expression from the national stations? [asked Mullens, engagingly adding] Incidentally, I offer myself as an exponent of this opposing viewpoint.<sup>35</sup>

Menzies's answer was in his loftiest manner:

I had the singular good fortune not to hear the broadcast in question, and therefore I am quite unable to make any comment on it. As for the principles adopted by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in making its broadcasts, it is not for mere mortals like myself to endeavour to understand it.

The reply was good politics. Without exposing his own party to the least suspicion of sympathy or involvement with the policies of an independent A.B.C., Menzies nevertheless made it perfectly clear that he would not meddle with that independence. For several years the government adhered to this line. Anthony, the Postmaster-General, was chiefly concerned with adequate radio facilities for country areas, and never in his six years of office issued a formal ministerial directive on A.B.C. policy or program content. Casey, who was in charge of External Affairs after 1951, shared many interests with Boyer, and his department's contacts with the A.B.C. over Radio Australia were usually amicable. It looked as if the A.B.C.'s right to plan programs free of political interference was at last recognized. Yet it remained

<sup>35</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1951, vol. 213, p. 906.

a question of how much this freedom depended on the personalities in office and how cautiously the Commission and its officers felt obliged to exercise this freedom. The A.B.C. under Boyer, by sticking consistently to the principle of impartiality, had won greater confidence from politicians and public. The risk was that impartiality might dwindle to a distaste of strong opinions of any kind. The A.B.C.'s record was soon to come under judgment when the question arose of deciding who should be entrusted with the introduction into Australia of television.

## 9 The Control of Television

In the early post-war years few Australians appreciated the potential of television. The 1946 Television Act merely extended the Commonwealth Government's powers over radio to cover the new medium, and even two years later it was possible for Arthur Calwell, then Minister for Information, to assert: 'Television particularly is largely dependent on finance, and there is not much likelihood of its being tried out in Australia for a considerable time. . . .'<sup>1</sup> Nor was he alone in his views. Although television had been inaugurated in England in 1936, and was now screened by over fifty stations in the United States, the A.B.C. found authoritative opinion overseas highly doubtful as to whether or in what circumstances television could in the long run support itself. There was every evidence that the Australian public at large had little conception of the medium's possibilities. Nevertheless early in 1948 senior officials of the Postmaster-General's Department were sent to the United States to investigate television developments. On their findings the department advised the Chifley Government that, if only for defence reasons, Australia could not long delay adopting television. Stimulated by Press curiosity the Postmaster-General (Senator Cameron) lost no time in announcing that tenders would be called for experimental transmitters and receivers in each of the State capitals.

This was in July 1948. On the wider issue of the form in which television would be made available to the public, the Chifley Government moved much more cautiously. Many Labor members of Parliament wanted television to be solely a government undertaking. At that time there was no sign

<sup>1</sup> Com., *Parl. Deb.*, 1948, vol. 196, p. 1239.

of commercial television in Great Britain, while the standard of commercial programs in the United States was not reassuring. By mid-1949 the Chifley Government had decided that television programs would, at least for a start, be provided by a national service, and the Australian Broadcasting Control Board was asked to undertake preparatory work on technical standards and transmitters. Despite the government's lack of enthusiasm for commercial television, the A.B.C. was nevertheless seriously considering the introduction of commercial sponsorship of national television programs, at least in the early stages until public response and working costs could be ascertained more definitely. Official thinking was still based on the idea that it would be a long time before television met expenses unaided.

In planning for television the A.B.C. was handicapped by uncertainty about whether the government would entrust it with control of the medium. Film and theatre interests were believed to be lobbying for an entirely new program authority, on whose policy and content they might exercise greater influence. In August 1949 Boyer, on behalf of the Commissioners, wrote to the Postmaster-General strongly urging the A.B.C.'s claims to develop the new medium. Television, Boyer pointed out, in spite of its new and intriguing technique, was fundamentally as natural an extension of sound broadcasting as talking films were of the silent films. Both in America and Europe television was being built into the existing radio framework, using the skills of radio staff and avoiding duplication or cut-throat competition. This was especially desirable in Australia, where experienced staff were at a premium and where many of the A.B.C. personnel were already somewhat concerned about their future prospects if, as seemed likely, television to a large extent superseded radio. British and Canadian experience underlined the wisdom of running radio and television within the same authority. Last, and the most important point, the A.B.C. hoped that its ideals of impartiality and service to the community were sufficiently well established to merit the responsibilities of television. These arguments prevailed with the Chifley Government



and the A.B.C. was given the responsibility for setting up television in Australia. Even if commercial television came later, the formative experiments in technique and program standards would rest entirely with the A.B.C.

Detailed plans were already sketched even before the government's decision was known. These estimates covered staff requirements and a timetable for planning: three months of intensive training of studio production units under overseas experts; then six months of experimental transmissions during which training could be taken over by A.B.C. staff with overseas experience, and experimental programs filmed; then the opening of the first 'live' broadcasting service, probably at Sydney because the A.B.C. already held suitable temporary premises there; then, at intervals of three months, further studios at Melbourne, at Brisbane and Adelaide, at Hobart and Perth. Program planning was still modest, in the expectation of difficulty in obtaining suitable films at reasonable cost. For the first year of broadcasting the A.B.C. envisaged on weekdays one hour in the morning (for demonstrations in connection with the sale of sets), one hour in the afternoon (a women's session, comprising two programs with repeat performances), and two hours at night, probably between 7.30 and 9.30 p.m. At weekends there would also be one morning hour, but Saturday afternoon would provide three and a half hours of sporting commentary, as well as two hours at night; and Sunday would include no afternoon programs but an evening transmission, beginning at 6 p.m. with a special children's session and continuing to 9.30. In addition the A.B.C. hoped to provide at least three schools broadcasts a week, as well as covering such notable events as royal visits and Anzac Day marches. As yet there was no promise of the complete afternoon and evening coverage which television in Australia would later achieve. This was at least partly because the A.B.C. did not know how many suitable commercial films would be available for transmission, and preferred to base its plans on 'live' studio broadcasts and overseas television transcriptions. But it was not easy to detect, at this stage of

planning, any adequate notion of quite how influential television would become.

Government policy on television was altered in several respects by the Menzies administration which came to power in December 1949. A cabinet meeting on 29 June 1950 confirmed that television should be developed on a gradual scale by a national service controlled by the A.B.C. and that the first A.B.C. television station should be set up in Sydney. But cabinet clearly felt that permanent arrangements were as yet impracticable and that the final shape of Australian television would depend on 'experience in the technical and preliminary aspects'. The timetable suggested in 1949 (to cover all State capitals within nine months of opening in Sydney) disappeared from consideration. Government thinking stressed the experimental nature of television 'in view of the novel problems which will be encountered, the great expense which was to be incurred, and the need for avoiding any action which will involve the Commonwealth in unnecessary commitments'. The most important change in policy was over commercial television: one commercial licence would be issued in Sydney, Melbourne, and any other capital city where it was felt that an applicant's capacity to provide a service justified issuing a licence. So, although the A.B.C. would pioneer television in Sydney, it could be by no means certain of arriving first in the field elsewhere. And the coming of commercial television spelt growing competition not only for the viewing public but for the limited number of skilled staff and performers available in Australia. For the present, however, commercial licensing had to be held in abeyance until appropriate legislation could be passed. Only the A.B.C. was authorized by the 1946 Act to go ahead.

While cabinet was determining the framework within which the new medium would develop, Boyer during the winter months of 1950 was visiting Great Britain and the United States to make a special study of television development. He returned in September vividly impressed with television's power for social change, and more than ever convinced of the need to ensure worthy standards through

the A.B.C. It was now plain that here was something more far-reaching than a simple technical improvement, such as the substitution of talking pictures for silent cinema, with which television had previously been compared. Television, wrote Boyer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

is infinitely more dynamic and potent than radio ever was. You can't be half-hearted about it. When you turn the knob it demands the whole of your attention, just as a cinema does. . . . You can best describe television as 'atomic radio'.<sup>2</sup>

Many whom Boyer met overseas were pessimistic about its influence. Television, they said, would become a mass-conditioning device, numbing the viewers' ability to think and criticize, drawing children from their education and adults from their reading, wasting time on a grand scale and undermining democracy. An eminent diplomat implored Boyer to 'urge that Australia never gives entry to this menace on any terms'. (Only South Africa has in fact tried this policy.) Even Sir William Haley, Director-General of the B.B.C., warned him that without due care television could become 'the greatest social disaster of our time'.

Boyer was nevertheless convinced that 'TV, if handled with a sense of responsibility, can more than outweigh those hazards in a positive contribution to our knowledge and even to our thinking'. He saw its potential to widen horizons among lower-income groups whose chances to travel and meet interesting people were limited. He welcomed its promise of giving the public a 'ringside seat' in watching the conduct of public affairs, such as he had seen in the intensely popular American broadcasts of proceedings in the United Nations at the time of the Korean crisis. He expected that politicians would be quicker than in fact they were to seize the advantages of the new medium; and education, news, current affairs, all were fields in which television could benefit the public interest. The prospects of the new medium were exciting, and he wrote 'we should welcome it as we welcome all new knowledge, face its hazards and reap its

<sup>2</sup> *S.M.H.*, 20 Sept. 1950.

rewards'. To the new Postmaster-General, Anthony, he wrote: 'here in Australia we need to set standards not only of technical excellence but of good taste and social responsibility early in the life of the medium'.<sup>3</sup> He was far from assuming that these qualities would come automatically, and returned to Australia determined to promote as far as possible the A.B.C.'s claims to set standards.

Almost at once he was plunged into a busy round of meetings. The Postmaster-General had requested the new Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, Giles Chippindall, to convene a meeting with his predecessor, L. B. Fanning<sup>4</sup> (one of the officials sent on the pioneering study of television in the United States in 1948 and since that year chairman of the Broadcasting Control Board), and Boyer representing the A.B.C. in order to co-ordinate the work of the three bodies, especially in planning technical requirements and draft legislation for consideration by the Postmaster-General. Three men who knew their own minds and worked well together, Chippindall, Fanning, and Boyer became a standing committee after their first meeting. Although on good terms personally, they soon found several deep differences in viewpoint between the A.B.C. and the Postmaster-General's Department. The most important of these concerned control of the technicians servicing A.B.C. television. It had long been a grievance at the A.B.C. that technical staff were controlled by the Postmaster-General's Department for the purposes of radio broadcasting, and the extension of this principle to television, where much closer co-ordination between producer and technicians was needed, was expected to cause endless inconvenience. This was particularly likely because the A.B.C. wanted to develop

<sup>3</sup> Boyer to Anthony, 12 Sept. 1950.

<sup>4</sup> Fanning and Chippindall had each entered the Postmaster-General's Department at the age of fifteen and worked their way up to become Director-General, Fanning from 1938 to 1949 and Chippindall from 1949 to 1959. Fanning was now (1949-51) chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board. Chippindall from 1949 had also been a member of the Australian National Airlines Commission, of which he was chairman 1959-66. He was knighted in 1955. He was a first-class head of his department, and Boyer got on well with him.

television on the British pattern of co-operation between producer and senior engineer, rather than the American system of programming under a combined technical direction which greatly reduced the importance of the individual producer. The A.B.C. also expected that the industrial awards covering postal employees would hinder the employment of skilled technicians, for whom the market was competitive. The Post Office's objections to an independent A.B.C. technical staff stemmed largely from a dislike of divided responsibility, especially the practical difficulty in discriminating between studio technicians who would pass under A.B.C. control and communications engineers responsible for broadcasting, who would remain under P.M.G. control.

Partly to resolve this issue, Boyer pressed very strongly for the seconding of an experienced B.B.C. official to supervise the planning of television in Australia. He declared his motives very candidly in a private letter to the B.B.C.'s Sir William Haley:

In our extraordinary setup of division of responsibility between technical and programme functions, I need hardly say how important some really strong advice as to control of major studio and broadcasting technical operations of TV would be. I anticipate a somewhat hard battle on this issue.<sup>5</sup>

Boyer, especially after his visit to Britain in 1950, was strongly impressed by the standards and example of the B.B.C., and hoped that its prestige might be influential enough to sway developments in Australia. There were a number of problems where a B.B.C. official experienced in television would be a valuable ally. The A.B.C. did not know, for instance, whether it would be allocated any special finance for television, over and above its normal requirements, and if so whether the supply of finance for television would be any more permanent and satisfactory than that which national radio had experienced. Nor was it even certain that in the long run the A.B.C. would continue to

<sup>5</sup> Boyer to Haley, 27 Sept. 1950.

control national television. Boyer feared that television might be vested in a new corporation, which would 'become the stamping-ground only of the film and theatrical fraternity', providing no effective alternative to the commercial stations:

If it is to serve us aright I feel very strongly that it should be as close to our existing radio organisation as to inherit not only its traditions of purposeful citizen-making, but also be directly allied to such departments as talks and education. This first organizational move I regard as being critical in history, and I feel sure you would have a similar feeling. I need not mention other major policy points, such as freedom from governmental control and the granting of statutory finance, which I know all your officers will as a matter of course endorse.<sup>6</sup>

Cabinet agreement was secured for the invitation of the British Controller of Television, the novelist Norman Collins; he had just resigned his post after disagreements over the financial management of his department, but the B.B.C. wanted to keep his services and welcomed the Australian offer as an opportunity 'to keep him within the family'. (As it turned out, Collins did not return, but went on to become one of the chief architects of commercial television in Britain.) Eventually, however, Collins did not go to Australia. Instead, early in 1951, it was decided to send a three-man study mission to the United States, Canada, and Britain. This was to include Charles Moses from the A.B.C., a senior official from the Postmaster-General's Department, and another from the Broadcasting Control Board.

Meanwhile the Television Committee—Chippindall, Fanning, and Boyer—were proceeding with plans for the pioneer television station at Sydney. The transmitter was to be erected at Gore Hill, on the Pacific Highway about four miles north of the centre of Sydney. The studios were to be incorporated in the Forbes Street premises of the A.B.C. A proposal to begin construction of a separate television building was rejected after some controversy, both on the grounds of economy and also because, by integrating

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

its radio and television services, the A.B.C. hoped to strengthen its claim to retain television. Boyer, indeed, was still arguing for television as an A.B.C. monopoly. As late as November 1951 he prepared a detailed report for the Television Committee in which he forcefully argued the case for a national television monopoly. He began by pointing out that the implications of television as a public medium had so far been argued around practical issues of cost and technical difficulty, rather than the impact of program policy on the standards of public life. Television, Boyer was convinced, had a uniquely powerful capacity to stir the reactions of viewers, and, while adult members of the community could look after themselves, the crucial consideration was its influence in shaping the minds of children. American experience suggested that, although such programs as the televising of United Nations meetings and the Kefauver sub-committee on crime might pass as informative, the presence of television cameras could easily interfere with the processes of justice and decision-making. In any case, the high costs of television meant that stations dependent on advertising were dominated by the quest for good ratings, and would concentrate on trivial and sensational programs with the cheapest and most obvious mass appeal.

The major United States networks attempted very little educational broadcasting, and what they offered was sometimes derisory: Boyer cited the executive who claimed that toothpaste advertisements had an educational value because they taught children the need for dental care. Their news programs were unbalanced, because stress was given to items which could be excitingly illustrated, regardless of their intrinsic importance—Boyer contrasted this unfavourably with the B.B.C. policy of using only 'stills' in news broadcasts, reserving films for the commentaries and follow-up programs. (Even with the B.B.C. and the A.B.C. it has since been contended that 'hard' news tends to give place to events which make agreeable viewing.) The effect of television on entertainment was also controversial. If it favoured opera, ballet, and drama, it might neglect music;

if it offered unrivalled facilities for covering sporting events, it might end up by filling this demand with bouts of women wrestlers and other unedifying spectacles, such as infested American television; if it gave more scope for light entertainment, this could easily emphasize clowning and spectacle rather than wit or skill. In short, Gresham's law applied in commercial television: bad material drove out good; and because of television's influence in the home,

we have a situation in which the unrestricted choice and enjoyment of the adult be freely circumscribed for the sake of the child population . . . The stakes in the whole moral and cultural climate of the rising generation are too high to be determined by purely commercial factors.<sup>7</sup>

Lobbyists for commercial television claimed that the American example would not apply in Australia. Commercial television would improve the standard of programs by offering competition, and (it was solemnly stated) by providing entertainment 'depicting our own way of life, and grounded on our own traditions, not those of Hollywood.'<sup>8</sup> There was never any serious possibility that the Liberal-Country Party coalition would go back on its decision to allow commercial television. In fighting as long as possible for a national monopoly of television, Boyer was partly standing up for principle, partly keeping up as far as possible the A.B.C.'s claim at least to set the standards for Australian television, and perhaps partly covering the possibility that the next elections might see the return of a Labor Government pledged to the support of a national service monopoly of television. The debate was protracted because the 1951-2 financial crisis marked a setback in the introduction of television. The Commonwealth Government decided not to go ahead with the Sydney transmitter. Instead, early in 1953, a Royal Commission was set up under the chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Sir George Paton. It was required to investigate fully the best means of introducing television to the Australian community, but in one important respect the terms

<sup>7</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'Television Report', 26 Nov. 1951.

<sup>8</sup> C. G. Scrimgeour, quoted *Anglican*, 6 Mar. 1953.



of reference were already determined. Government policy was firmly fixed on developing both national and commercial television, and in 1953 an Act of Parliament was passed repealing the Chifley Government's 1946 legislation to make television a national monopoly.

This still left room for important decisions. The A.B.C. hoped that it would be given control of national television with the same autonomy and the same charter to cater for minority interests as it had in radio. If the A.B.C. got television, this would vindicate its record in radio; but the decision was not yet quite certain, and a good deal depended on the Royal Commission. In consultation with his colleagues and Moses, Boyer took great care in preparing the A.B.C.'s submission to the inquiry. In it, he argued for a pioneer role in television for the A.B.C. Believing that television's rate of growth would be limited by the availability of resources and capital, the A.B.C. expected at first that only one television transmitter would be provided in each of the larger state capitals. If so, the A.B.C. wanted to be sure of getting this channel, in order to set a standard of balanced and varied programs which would educate the public to expect more of television than commercial services would otherwise give them. The sharing of time between national and commercial services on one transmitter was rejected as 'full of practical difficulties' and not enabling either service to give of its best.<sup>9</sup> When commercial television came, Boyer argued, there would be only a few channels available, and there was danger of a near-monopoly by a few private interests. Television stations should be owned by a public authority and leased to program companies combining a considerable number of commercial interests. (This was the system adopted in Great Britain in 1955.) Broadcasting time should be limited to about twenty-five hours a week, since there was not enough good material to justify longer hours, and the necessity to fill in time led quickly to the dilution of standards. In any case, following B.B.C. practice, there should be a gap between children's

<sup>9</sup> 'Report of the Royal Commission on Television', Com., *Parl. Pap.*, 1954-5, vol. iii, pp. 679 et seq.

sessions shown in the late afternoon and evening programs for adults, to make control of children's viewing easier. In short, the whole tenor of Boyer's evidence was concerned with the moral and intellectual potentialities of television and the need to guard against the corruption of standards.

The position Boyer was defending was by no means impregnable. On the one hand, a sector of those who hoped to benefit from commercial television was urging its immediate introduction, without any regulation except public taste. On the other, some witnesses before the Royal Commission entirely opposed any form of television, not only on moral and social grounds but also because it was claimed that the economy could not support it. The Royal Commission managed to steer between these extremes; in the words of one authoritative commentator: 'The background established by the inquiry has lifted the community out of the atmosphere of bewilderment and confusion so beloved alike of quack medical salesmen and Cassandras of doom.'<sup>10</sup> It did not endorse all the A.B.C.'s submissions, but at least it unhesitatingly recommended that the Commission should have charge of national television with the same authority as it had over radio; also it accepted the point that the A.B.C. should have control of its own television technicians, and from that time on the Postmaster-General's Department was prepared to concede this. On the other hand the Royal Commission considered that commercial television should begin at the same time as the national service, and with one dissentient rejected, on unstated 'practical considerations', the idea that transmitters, even for commercial television, should be controlled by a national authority. This point had been urged not only by Boyer but by Sir Ernest Fisk and by R. G. Osborne, the newly appointed chairman of the Broadcasting Control Board. The only 'practical considerations' against it were the terms of the 1953 Television Act, which possibly ruled out such a course. All the same, the Royal Commission did not declare open season for commercial television. The Broadcasting Control Board, it found, should be armed with power to hear

<sup>10</sup> N. Rosenthal, 'Television in perspective', *Meanjin*, 1954, p. 183.

applications for licences, to prevent ownership concentrating into a few hands, and to control the quality and content of commercial advertising and programs. It did not report in favour of sharing channels between national and commercial services, even in country areas where only one service might be available. The commercial interests and many politicians objected to this procedure, because they thought it would be difficult to arrange and would limit the development of private enterprise stations. However, where a commercial station found itself in a monopoly position, it might be required to carry 'selected public service programmes' from the national television service, including a children's session. In short, as with the national airlines, the banks, and radio, television was to be another example of the distinctively Australian practice of backing both private and government enterprise and setting them to compete under elaborate rules to ensure fair play.

The Royal Commission's report was made public early in 1954. The A.B.C. was on the whole pleased with its support, but there still remained a period of anxiety until cabinet decided whether to follow its recommendations. At its July meeting the A.B.C. decided to support the Royal Commission's findings, and on the 30th, after consulting his colleagues, Boyer wrote to Anthony stressing the importance which the A.B.C. attached to control of its own technical services and independence in its presentation of political, religious, and controversial broadcasting. Cabinet met on 10 September and approved the main findings of the Royal Commission. Television would be introduced gradually, commencing with one national and two commercial stations each at Sydney and Melbourne, the Australian Broadcasting Commission as the authority in charge of national programs and the Broadcasting Control Board having the oversight of commercial television. So far so good, but from the A.B.C.'s point of view there was one large uncertainty about the future, for the Postmaster-General, Anthony, gave notice that he intended to submit proposals for the reconstruction of the A.B.C. He did not spell out what he had in mind, but several months later, in March 1955, the *Sydney Morning*

*Herald* published a story claiming that Anthony planned to replace the existing part-time Commission with three full-time commissioners. One report of the plan was that Sir Giles Chippindall, the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, was designated as chairman, with one commissioner experienced in radio and one in television as his colleagues.<sup>11</sup>

There certainly seems to have been something in the story. Chippindall himself had a very high regard for Boyer, and was not in the least anxious to step into his shoes. But Anthony had convinced himself that television was so complex a medium that it could not properly be controlled except by technical experts.

The introduction of television will impose very great added responsibilities on the Commission [he wrote].

It will not only be confronted with the many problems of a financial, administrative, programme and technical character associated with the new service, but it will be required, at the same time, to ensure that the broadcasting service is maintained at a high standard. In addition, the Commission will, if this submission is approved, be embarking upon the operation and control of technical facilities in the television studios, a task which will give rise to many difficulties because of the Commission's complete lack of practical experience in the technical field. There are good grounds for doubt as to whether the Commission, as at present constituted, consisting as it does of a part-time Chairman and six other part-time Members who meet, as a general rule, once monthly, and who at such meetings are required to consider many important matters covering a very wide field, is properly equipped to cope with the responsibilities which will now be imposed on it.<sup>12</sup>

This raised fundamental issues about the control of national radio. Was the community better served by the present

<sup>11</sup> *S.M.H.*, 31 Mar. 1955.

<sup>12</sup> The Postmaster-General, 'Television and Broadcasting, Proposed Legislation' (memorandum, 24 Aug. 1955): schedule 1, 'The National Television Service and the National Broadcasting Service', para. 8.

Australian Broadcasting Commission, a committee of representative citizens chosen for their ability to ensure a balanced and independent program policy? Or should power be vested in three full-time experts with managerial responsibilities in addition to their role in policy formation? Boyer thought the pressure for changing the Commission arose 'because we are suspected of keeping too loose a hold on day-to-day matters',<sup>18</sup> in other words because the Commission was not interfering enough in the choice of programs and speakers. In Boyer's time the Commission never had regarded its duties as including this sort of inquisition, but its political masters of all parties had often enough shown an itch to keep the Commission's staff under tighter discipline. A three-man expert committee might have been able to safeguard A.B.C. independence by blinding its ministerial chiefs with science; but lacking the Commission's public aim of representing a cross-section of community views, it might more probably have proved malleable to political pressure.

As it happened, Boyer was in a position of some strength. In November 1954 the Acting Postmaster-General, Sir Philip McBride, an able and influential Liberal minister keen for the advancement of television, had revived the three-man Television Committee. Chippindall was again chairman, with Boyer and R. G. Osborne, the chairman of the Broadcasting Control Board. This gave official standing to what was already a close working partnership, which became the Postmaster-General's chief source of advice and information on planning for television. Early in February 1955 the Television Committee took up the question of legislation. Boyer persuaded Chippindall and Osborne that it would be highly desirable for the committee to assist the Postmaster-General's thinking on the future reconstruction of the A.B.C. by submitting to him a joint statement of their views. His colleagues agreed, and Boyer promptly drew up a memorandum putting the A.B.C.'s point of view. The only change which was desirable in the Australian Broadcasting Commission was its enlargement, as

<sup>18</sup> Boyer to Dawes, 25 Feb. 1955.

recommended by the Royal Commission, from seven part-time members to nine, to represent a greater cross-section of regional and other interests. Boyer's memorandum showed that in Britain, Canada, and South Africa, even after the coming of television, the national broadcasting services were always vested in a board of part-time governors in order to ensure public responsibility without ministerial control:

In none of the countries mentioned has it been thought either necessary or desirable that the governors of a national radio and television service should be experts either in the technical or programme aspects of the electronic media. It has always been considered that the governors, in addition to their fitness to act in the representative character mentioned above, should be persons of wide experience, liberal sympathies, and business acumen in the expenditure of public moneys. They are regarded more as representatives of the community acting as trustees for an intimate public utility rather than as experts in any field. Indeed, the place of the expert is on the executive staff, and the good estate of a service of this nature is not always served by his seat on the policy board.<sup>14</sup>

The Television Committee not surprisingly endorsed Boyer's views. This meant that the A.B.C., instead of being on the defensive against the plan to replace it by a three-man expert committee, had secured assent to its own views from the Control Board and the senior officials of the Postmaster-General's Department. No alternative scheme could be brought in except as a deliberate (and politically explosive) expression of no confidence in all three bodies.

The next problem was to convince the Postmaster-General. Having given publicity to the plan for a three-man expert committee, the *Sydney Morning Herald* went ahead to condemn the scheme editorially. The A.B.C., it claimed, was in no danger of behaving too independently. Policy should be kept separate from management, and the present satisfactory citizen Commission should not be tampered with.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'The Constitution of the Australian Broadcasting Commission', memorandum to the Television Committee, 18 Feb. 1955.

<sup>15</sup> *S.M.H.*, 2 Apr. 1955.

What force these arguments had is impossible to assess, but early in May it was reported that a meeting of the Federal Liberal and Country parliamentary parties had shown strong opposition to any major change. Two members reported to have spoken forcibly in favour of the existing Commission were H. B. Turner, Boyer's independent-minded local federal member, and F. M. Osborne, with whom Boyer was also on good terms.<sup>16</sup> Not long after, the scheme for replacing the Commission was quietly shelved, and although Anthony was still unhappy about its lack of technical expertise, the most he was prepared to propose to cabinet in August was that, when the Commission's membership was expanded from seven to nine, one of the new members should be *ex officio* the general manager of the A.B.C. Somehow, by the time the Television Bill was framed early in 1956, this idea was dropped, too; and so, more surprisingly, was the 1948 legislation placing a Treasury official and one from the Post Office on the Commission.

These changes, restoring the purely unofficial and representative character of the Commission, were all that Boyer could have desired. It was not that he was on bad terms with the civil service members on the Commission, Vanthoff, the Postmaster-General's representative, and M. W. O'Donnell, since 1952 the Treasury man. But their presence was a continuing reminder of the government pressures of the late forties, and compromised the Commission's reputation for independence. Unfortunately, there is no direct evidence to show why cabinet changed its mind. It was surely more than a coincidence that in December 1955 because of ill health Anthony resigned his ministry and was replaced by another Country Party member, Charles Davidson. Although the same age as Anthony, fifty-eight, Davidson represented a younger generation in terms of political experience. An ex-serviceman, he entered politics in 1946 by wresting a Queensland sugar-growing constituency from Labor, thus missing the bitter in-fighting of the early Menzies-Fadden era. His style of politics was less aggressive, less dogmatic,

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5 May 1955.

more open to the reasoning of views other than his own. Boyer came to consider him one of the best ministers who had been responsible for national broadcasting.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the A.B.C.'s greater success in having its views accepted simply reflected the change from Anthony to Davidson. Certainly the new Postmaster-General's proposals about the membership of the Commission were just what Boyer wished. The two public servants were replaced by two more part-time commissioners, making seven in all, and commissioners' salaries were increased. In the end, the A.B.C. as Boyer chaired it had received a marked expression of confidence and a better legislative deal than had been expected. Boyer's part in this was not unrecognized at the time. 'To the extent that the A.B.C. had won a measure of independence,' wrote Professor L. C. Webb, 'this has been largely due to his courage and to his high sense of the responsibilities of his task.'<sup>18</sup> Certainly it was; but the survival of the Australian Broadcasting Commission in its semi-independent form had been a pretty near thing.

The 1956 Act seemed to justify Boyer's patience and tenacity and to answer criticisms that he and the Commission had been too passive in the face of successive government encroachments on their powers. By working within the machinery of government, by a tact and persuasion born of long experience of federal procedures, Boyer had managed to keep alive the concept of a national radio and television service which might be trusted to provide the community with honest information and comment, and to play something of a creative role culturally. This achievement confirmed his faith in the independent statutory corporation as a democratic device. In his view there was considerable merit in semi-governmental bodies such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission, deriving their powers from a government ministry to which they were ultimately responsible, but manned by a representative cross-section of the community with enough security of tenure to gain experience of their duties and independence of judgment

<sup>17</sup> Boyer to Walter Cawthorn, 25 Aug. 1959.

<sup>18</sup> *S.M.H.*, 25 Apr. 1956.





*Sir Richard Boyer and Mr Jawaharlal Nehru, New Delhi, 1956*

in formulating their policies. He thought such bodies managed to achieve the efficiency of government control while avoiding the vices of bureaucracy or domination by party or sectional interests, and warmly advocated the extension of the principle to other areas of policy-making. He had ceased to worry overmuch about the A.B.C.'s lack of an independent income. If adequate legislative safeguards of independence were written into its constitution, Boyer felt that a body such as the Commission need not greatly fear the government's power of the purse. It was a pity, but it was unavoidable, and it was unlikely that an Australian government would abuse its power.

Others were less sanguine. The issues were summed up very clearly in 1952 when Boyer was involved in a controversy with Joan Rydon, a Sydney University researcher in politics, who published some work on the effectiveness of the A.B.C. as an independent statutory corporation. Statutory corporations, in Mrs Rydon's words, were originally designed to combine the responsibilities of government ownership with independence 'to frame their own long-term policies, to control their own finances, to recruit and manage their own personnel.' In practice, despite confused and contradictory policies by all political parties, government control of the A.B.C. had gradually increased. Mrs Rydon argued from a detailed historical analysis of the A.B.C. that in one case after another—the 1940 dispute over licence fees, the argument about a news service, the issue of Treasury control—the Commission had always lost out to greater government intervention and closer assimilation to public service methods. Its independence had easily been eroded.<sup>19</sup>

Boyer, instead of retreating stuffily behind his official prestige, wrote an article in rejoinder. He commended Mrs Rydon's advocacy of the statutory corporation as a democratic device:

with the growing complexity of government on the one hand, and an instinctive aversion on the part of a

<sup>19</sup> J. Rydon, 'The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932-1942', *Public Administration*, vol. 11, No. 4, 1952, p. 12; and 'The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1942-1948', *ibid.*, p. 190.

democracy to governmental intervention in citizens' affairs, the statutory corporation operated by and under the control of an unofficial citizen body presents us with one of the most valuable compromises between public and private operation that has yet been devised

but he thought her pessimistic conclusions too sweeping. True, there had been some administrative assimilation to the public service, but the administrative framework was not the touchstone of independence.

The major activity and responsibility of the Commission, namely, the operation of the medium in the public interest in such a way as shall prevent it from becoming the tool of party or sectional interests, has been strengthened over the years rather than weakened.<sup>20</sup>

Mrs Rydon, however, was unconvinced, and replied pointing out that the Commission's discretionary powers had been confirmed by the 1948 Act only at a time when the Commission was yielding a great deal of practical autonomy through the loss of financial control. If, as Boyer claimed, recent governments had given the Commission more discretion and chosen its members more impartially, this was only because the Commission was a tame body which could be trusted not to show its teeth. Nor was she convinced that a Commission representative of many community viewpoints was necessarily on that account independent. On the contrary, there were more pressures to be careful. If the A.B.C. was guided by a concept of 'public interest' it could never offend the *status quo*:

From this basic fact stems the essential timidity of the A.B.C. and its responsiveness to criticism from any source. The fact is, bluntly, that the A.B.C. will never get support from a nebulous 'public', but that the best it can hope for is to be dependent on specific parties and interest groups, and through their support, independent of others. The position is that pressures, both formal and informal, are bound to prevent the A.B.C. from asserting any potential independence it may have. Only so long as the A.B.C.

<sup>20</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'The Australian Broadcasting Commission—a criticism', *ibid.*, vol. 12, No. 1, 1953, p. 56.

does not make use of its potential independence can it retain it. If the Commission should at any time attempt to oppose the Government, it is obvious that the outcome of any struggle must be victory for the Government.<sup>21</sup>

This was completely unacceptable doctrine to Boyer, whose whole outlook was governed by the concept of a greater public good to which competing sectional pressure groups should be subordinated, and who never accepted the view, so fashionable in the University of Sydney in recent years, that the whole study of politics was the classification of interest groups. Mrs Rydon's view, he protested, was based not on facts but on conjecture. Of course, the A.B.C. did not claim the independence of the newspapers 'who feel free to espouse this cause or that, or to attack governmental or opposition policies as they think fit.' It would be 'quite outrageous' for Parliament to spend public money on an independent propagandist. In practice, the A.B.C. aimed at offering 'adequate debate presenting opposing views on important issues', and he commented that:

pressures upon the A.B.C. to depart from a balanced presentation of news and views come not only from governments and political parties but from groups in the community and even individuals of professed liberal outlook who ought to know better.<sup>22</sup>

Instead, the A.B.C. had a statutory obligation to keep its news services and its commentaries independent, and the Commission was fully aware of its public duty to uphold the large principle of impartiality. This still left Mrs Rydon with the retort that in actual practice the A.B.C. failed to give opportunities for the expression of unpopular minority views and avoided broadcasting on controversial issues—religious, political, or moral—any opinions which attacked prevailing standards or vested interests.<sup>23</sup> The fact was that Boyer and Mrs Rydon were now arguing from different premises. She saw the national radio as something without

<sup>21</sup> J. Rydon, 'A Rejoinder', *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> R. J. F. Boyer, 'The Australian Broadcasting Commission—a further criticism', *ibid.*, vol. 12, No. 2, 1953, p. 113.

<sup>23</sup> J. Rydon, 'A Rejoinder', *ibid.*, p. 115.

any character of its own except in so far as it reflected the most powerful groups and attitudes in the community. The A.B.C. could be liberalized only by allowing access to it to as many different views as possible, but in practice the more influential groups in the community would always try to monopolize the air and exclude uncomfortable dissenters and would succeed because of financial and administrative restraints on the A.B.C. Boyer on the other hand believed that it was possible for the A.B.C. to hold the ring between conflicting viewpoints, to assess with some precision what constituted a fair balance, and to ensure that unpopular minorities were not left entirely voiceless. That individual A.B.C. decisions would be criticized was to be expected, but if the Commission built up a consistent reputation for responsibility, most of the public and the politicians would accept its judgment even when they disagreed with it.

Boyer consistently sought to test the A.B.C.'s achievements in the eyes of the informed public, and in November 1953 called what was termed an 'A.B.C. conference of advisers' at Canberra.<sup>24</sup> Enlarging on the approach tried in the 1946 Radio in Education Conference, the 1953 gathering had as its objective the collection of criticisms and suggestions for the improvement of the A.B.C. It included as wide a cross-section of the public as possible. Apart from seven commissioners and ten senior members of the A.B.C. staff, there were thirty-six delegates representing rural interests, women's groups, religious bodies, education, press, trade unions, and others. The opening was patronized by all the leading federal politicians, mostly in characteristic vein. Menzies was in genial mood: 'I would not have my listeners believe that I am not critical of the A.B.C. I am for example greatly exasperated at least once every three years by the broadcasting of election results.' The path of the A.B.C. was not easy: 'It must, like a Prime Minister . . . seek to avoid the extreme. It must move steadily towards the light, while not utterly denying the immense appeal of the darkness.'<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Conference of Advisers held at Canberra, November 23 and 24, 1953*.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Evatt spoke of the program changes he would like to see: more open political debates, fewer broadcasts about racing, and more of manly sports. Anthony mentioned the A.B.C.'s service to rural areas, Fadden spoke of its 'lofty standing', and Calwell pleasantly surprised those present with a warm tribute to its 'great and lasting service'.

The main part of the conference strikingly confirmed many of Boyer's policies and attitudes. The A.B.C. should not hesitate to cherish its independence. 'The people want a source of instruction to which they can turn, unhampered by the suspicion that private interest is playing its part in persuading them', said Dr C. E. W. Bean. Any errors in judgment or taste, said Mr Justice Barry, could be adequately corrected by an informed and vigorous public opinion. Departmental control was unnecessary. Some delegates criticized the continued control of the A.B.C.'s technical services by the Postmaster-General's Department, and Vant-hoff, the department's representative on the Commission, had to stress the role of his engineers in keeping up with modern technical developments and providing a trouble-free service. This was a battle which Boyer had not fought hard in recent years, because although in principle it was preferable to control its own technicians, in practice working relations with the P.M.G. staff were good, and there always seemed more urgent financial and administrative priorities. Of greater concern to most delegates was the A.B.C.'s attitude towards controversy. None thought the A.B.C. was too daring, and several urged greater boldness. Some thought the impartiality and quality of news broadcasts was deteriorating through becoming more parochial and less objective, though nearly everyone, especially the journalists, commended its independence. Others wanted more extempore discussions and greater boldness in the choice of topics for argument. Sir John Medley pointed out that public reactions were not always mature; in variety shows, for instance, scriptwriters found Australians could not always laugh at themselves or their politics. Perhaps controversy could be best served by the publication of a journal reporting the text of the best talks and features, like the B.B.C.'s *Listener*.

This was for many years among the A.B.C.'s future plans, but never materialized. The small periodical *Talk*, which might have become a *Listener* in embryo, had been discontinued as a financial failure within two years. Even the *ABC Weekly* was seldom out of difficulties, because many people used the radio programs published in the daily press. Want of money also stood in the way of several other suggestions urged at the conference, such as extending the A.B.C.'s activities as a patron of drama and music. Taken in all, however, the conference entirely endorsed the lines on which the national broadcasting service was being run. The basic decision which had to be made was whether to compete with the commercial stations by offering the same sort of undemanding popular program or to complement them by broadcasting material not otherwise available. Both must be attempted, but 'clearly, the provision of public moneys to the Commission implies an obligation to specialise in those fields which would not otherwise be adequately covered.'<sup>28</sup> The conference was, moreover, a valuable essay in public relations. Boyer thought to consolidate its work by setting up in each State capital an unofficial advisory committee to advise the A.B.C. on reactions to its programs and policies. It was not the least of Boyer's strengths as chairman that he saw the importance of keeping open the lines of communication between the government service and its public.

The most marked progress made during the mid-fifties was with Radio Australia. With his internationally-minded convictions, Boyer was especially concerned to nourish the A.B.C.'s overseas service, especially concentrating on South-East Asia and the Far East. In the early years since the A.B.C. had resumed control, Radio Australia was not lavishly financed, and this limited growth. In 1952 broadcasts were conducted only in English, Indonesian, Malay, and Thai. French and Mandarin Chinese were added in 1956, following an increased government awareness of the impact which Radio Australia might have on listeners in the Near North. This meant an even closer interest in the overseas service on

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

the part of the Department of External Affairs. Fortunately, relations between Boyer and the minister for that department, Casey, were personally very friendly, so that it was possible for Boyer to insist on the ultimate responsibility of the A.B.C. for program content and to ensure that the service never became merely a government mouthpiece. By 1957 it was at last possible for Radio Australia to venture on a regular program of news commentaries. A panel of speakers was chosen by the A.B.C. and approved by the Department of External Affairs. Background material was provided both by A.B.C. news staff and by External Affairs briefing similar to that given to the Press. The A.B.C. Director of Talks was responsible for content; if he felt there was 'any wrong emphasis' in a script he would check with the Director of Overseas Programmes and if necessary the general manager, but more than a year after the news commentaries began, he was able to stress that there had never been any need to do so.<sup>27</sup> A.B.C. staff met External Affairs officials for regular round-table conferences at which any difficulties were ironed out, and the Director of Overseas Programmes regularly discussed Radio Australia's material with Moses and Boyer, so that liaison generally was close and smooth. Boyer had established his point that the A.B.C. could be entrusted with overseas broadcasting without any direct censorship by External Affairs.

Whether the close consultation between that department and A.B.C. staff in any way inhibited the A.B.C.'s independence was somewhat controversial. Boyer would have argued, and cited the B.B.C. as precedent, that it was impossible for a national broadcasting service to transmit material obviously out of sympathy with the mainstream of Australian public opinion, while at the same time emphasizing that in Australia the government did not hold an entire monopoly of political virtue. It would in practice have been very difficult to criticize Australian diplomacy, especially in South-East Asia, and those who disagreed with the Menzies Government's conduct of foreign policy sometimes claimed

<sup>27</sup> Transcript of Public Service Arbitrator, Determination 11/1959: evidence of A. Carmichael, 8 July 1958.



that Radio Australia was barred from presenting critical opinions. If it was impossible to present other than official viewpoints, Radio Australia should be frankly under ministerial control, so relieving the A.B.C. from one compromise to its independence. This view was not accepted by Boyer, who thought it important that Australia should go as far as possible in dissociating its overseas broadcasts from any taint of official propaganda. The editor-in-chief of the news service, W. S. Hamilton, confirmed this view. Australia, once a colony and now not a great power, was not entirely dissimilar from the Asian nations, and could afford to present news objectively and impartially. 'We have evidence that news organizations, newsagency representatives, government organizations, and in fact government leaders consistently listen to Radio Australia broadcasts, and they know they can be trusted.'<sup>28</sup> In fact, there were bewildering variations in the apparent Asian reactions to Radio Australia. Where the Thai service was not drawing more than fifty listeners' letters a month, the Chinese program could produce over three thousand letters in the same period—many from Indonesia where, according to Charles Moses, they showed great curiosity for programs about space travel. Sometimes these inequalities in response were due to local conditions. The A.B.C. found, for instance, that its Mandarin Chinese programs were not much use to the Cantonese-speaking Chinese of Malaya, and their Vietnam program improved its rating considerably when it was shifted away from siesta time. Partly to avoid such blunders through ignorance of the local scene, Radio Australia set up a South-East Asian office in Singapore in 1957. This move was one which had Boyer's enthusiastic backing and in which his experience of negotiation with the government resulted in early action. Altogether, Radio Australia owed much to his wholehearted belief in Australia's role as a bridge between the Western powers and Asia. The only point where one or two of his colleagues felt that Boyer might have shown greater enthusiasm was in the spread of

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., evidence of W. S. Hamilton, 23 July 1958.

broadcasting in Papua-New Guinea, which he visited only once, and where his interest somehow had not kindled.

Both in radio and television, then, the record seemed to justify Boyer's optimism rather than the doubts of Joan Rydon. The A.B.C. seemed able, by judicious and well-prepared diplomacy, to keep its freedom of action wider than might have been expected. In the early years of the Menzies Government its ministers undoubtedly interfered less than their predecessors with the working of the A.B.C. But in the long run Mrs Rydon was right. The day was to come when the Prime Minister would quite arbitrarily forbid the A.B.C. to go on with a project which it undertook in order to educate the public, and would use the government's financial restraints over the Commission to effect his purpose. For the time being, however, it looked as if under Boyer the A.B.C. was gradually making a reality of its independence from political interference.

## 10 The Turning-point

On 5 November 1956 an audience of notables saw the national television service officially opened by the Prime Minister, who, involved though he was in the height of the Suez crisis, flew to Sydney for the ceremony. As often on such occasions, Robert Menzies was in graceful form, complimenting the Australian Broadcasting Commission on its achievement; he was sure that Australian television would soon set standards equal to those anywhere else in the world. Two weeks later the Melbourne studio was open, just in time for the Olympic Games. There had not been much margin to spare, and the A.B.C.'s habitual atmosphere of emergency had been more than usually pronounced; but plans had been carried out on schedule, and the Commission could accept the Prime Minister's compliments at their face value. They had been set a formidable task in planning the advent of television in little more than two years, and they had managed it.

Since the A.B.C. had received the green light for national television in September 1954, there had followed two of the busiest years of Boyer's career. The staff of the A.B.C. had seldom worked under such pressure: there was no forty-hour week for Charles Moses and his senior executives. As for Boyer, he was long past the fiction that the chairmanship of the A.B.C. was a part-time appointment. In constant consultation with Chippindall and Osborne over detailed policy planning, he was not only the link between the Commission and other government authorities but was also continually alert to the social and educational implications of what was planned for television. The aim now was to have national television in operation in Sydney and

Melbourne by November 1956, in time for the Melbourne Olympic Games; Adelaide and Brisbane were to follow in 1957, Perth and Hobart in 1958. It soon became apparent that costs would have to be spread further, and official policy changed to concentrating on services for Sydney and Melbourne and deferring the smaller centres until their completion. Pressure of time was still heavy on the A.B.C. It had one advantage over its commercial competitors in that it could start operations at once, whereas officially it would not be known until mid-1955 whose tenders the government and the Control Board would accept for the commercial channels. In fact, there was very little doubt indeed that the commercial television franchises would be given to the major press and commercial radio companies. Alone or in coalition, they were the only significant applicants for licences, and they were confident of success; as early as 1950 the Melbourne *Herald*, eventually the successful applicant for Victoria's Channel 7, had sent three technicians to England for television training. In Sydney the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* each dominated one successful commercial television syndicate; in Melbourne the franchises were awarded to the *Herald* and a combine including the *Age* and *Argus*. Each of these syndicates was able to draw on the staff of at least one commercial radio station for a nucleus of experienced personnel. Compared with the A.B.C., which had to seek the Postmaster-General's approval for employing any officer at over £1,500 a year, and Treasury consent for any purchase of land or buildings, the commercial stations enjoyed greater freedom and flexibility in planning. Yet the A.B.C. could never ignore the example of the commercial stations. Any press report which suggested that a commercial television company was spending less on any item than the A.B.C. usually brought a quick inquiry from Treasury asking why the A.B.C. could not cut its costs to the same level.<sup>1</sup> Inevitably though reluctantly, the A.B.C. organization to some extent found itself constantly matching itself against the commercials.

<sup>1</sup> First Assistant Secretary, Treasury to Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, 3 Aug. 1955; Boyer to Chippindall, 9 Aug. 1955.

Much of Boyer's attention went to the planning of studios and buildings. In Sydney the A.B.C. was able to start immediately on the Gore Hill property offered by Chippindall as far back as 1950. Various difficulties arose. The site was not big enough, and negotiations for adjoining blocks became fiendishly complicated. The best land available, an adjacent property of three and a half acres owned by a Melbourne manufacturing firm, was offered for £100,000; but the Department of the Interior valuation was only £45,000 and although the A.B.C. after much pressure received permission to bid up to £65,000 the block was lost to a commercial television company which paid £80,000 to use it as a site for a transmitter. Eventually the A.B.C. managed to repurchase most of this land from Associated Television, together with several other smaller blocks, to make up a parcel of land adequate for modern television studios; but it all took a good deal of time and scheming. Later, when construction began, the builders ran into unexpected trouble with the foundations, mainly because of the presence of huge slabs of concrete from old air-raid shelters. This delay meant that construction became an anxious race against time, solved only by concentrating on the most essential parts of the building and completing the rest after regular broadcasting had actually begun.

The situation in Melbourne was less complicated but even more troublesome. It was easy enough to site a transmitter on Mount Dandenong, but for a long time nowhere suitable for studios could be found. After looking a little desperately at some rather unsuitable Post Office property at Port Melbourne and an outer-suburban paddock on the wrong side of Melbourne, the A.B.C. was delighted to receive an offer of a most eligible site within five miles of the city: Ripponlea. The property lay in the grounds of one of the last surviving colonial mansions, whose owners found that town planning restrictions prevented them from disposing of their land for subdivision. Most of the area was laid out beautifully in gardens, and was scheduled for reservation as a public open space. There were three acres of flat paddock available immediately for the A.B.C., and the

owners gave the Commission an option of a further area which had been developed as a miniature botanical gardens with an artificial lake—an ideal setting for open-air television shots. No opposition was offered by the local council or the town planning authorities to the A.B.C.'s acquisition of this land. This looked like the solution to the A.B.C.'s Melbourne problems. Five years later, however, when the A.B.C. wanted to exercise its option over the miniature gardens, the owners changed their minds, and with the backing of the local council and federal member raised great public outcry about the wicked bureaucrats who wanted to alienate a piece of parkland. Eventually the Commonwealth Government had to exercise compulsory powers of acquisition, but this left the A.B.C. in bad odour in some quarters.

Once building was arranged, the next problem was finance. Here the immediate situation was met by Treasury loans for building capital, to be repaid from the national television service's income. How was this income to be found? Boyer was clear that an annual grant from consolidated revenue, such as was provided for radio, was inexpedient for television. Taxpayers, especially in the country, might justly object to paying revenue for something which only the city-dwellers of Sydney and Melbourne could enjoy, and—since nobody foresaw how fast the television habit would spread—only a minority of them. The A.B.C. at first suggested that its revenue should come from a £5 licence fee levied annually on all television owners. Later calculations suggested that this sum would be inadequate, so after some juggling with the possibilities of a higher licence fee, the A.B.C. decided to support the suggestion that in addition to the £5 there should be an excise duty of £10 levied on each cathode ray tube used in television sets. The Commonwealth Government accepted this idea, reducing the excise on cathode ray tubes to £7; and this assured the national television service of an income which offered some hope of paying back the large capital expenditure of its early years.

By the beginning of 1956 the pace of this expenditure was quickening. Orders were placed for a large variety of films,

since it was certain that in the first few months of operation the A.B.C. studios would not be ready for local productions and that most of the 'live' material which it would be possible to screen would have to come from sporting events, public ceremonies, and similar reportage. The A.B.C. did not neglect light entertainment, where it experienced most competition from the commercials, but also invested fairly heavily in documentaries, newsreels, and other informative material for which the demand was perhaps not so intense. This stockpiling of overseas material brought the A.B.C. into difficulties with Australia's lumbering apparatus of censorship. The worst inconveniences of the federal system could be skirted by the fact that all States (except, in some circumstances, Victoria and South Australia) had empowered the Commonwealth Film Censor to act for them; but Boyer was anxious that he should not have the right of censoring films for A.B.C. television. The film censor not only had the power to exclude films on the usual grounds of blasphemy, indecency, or injuriousness to morality; but could—and still can—deny a licence to any material likely to be offensive to the people of the British Empire or any friendly nation, or to be 'undesirable in the public interest'. The last phrase Boyer found disturbingly vague and general. It gave the Commonwealth censor a lot of power to edit controversial material in a way that could seriously fetter the A.B.C.'s freedom of action. Also, although this was a drawback the commercial channels shared, topical material such as newsreels could be held up waiting for censor's approval until all its freshness had gone.

Boyer gave a lot of thought to this problem, and at its November 1955 meeting the Commission decided to find out what powers the Commonwealth Film Censor had over the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and if necessary to request cabinet to exempt from censorship telerecordings and other films and newsreels made specifically for television. At the same time Charles Moses approached the Acting Comptroller-General of Customs with a request that his department should pass on its powers of censorship over A.B.C. material to the A.B.C. itself. No Australian customs

official ever willingly gave up any authority, and Moses was soon ruefully reporting a 'very limited response' on the part of the Acting Comptroller-General. By increasing the membership of the Film Censorship Board from three to four, and by getting the Chief Film Censor to give up some of his evenings to viewing newsreels, the Customs Department was blithely confident of coping with the mass of film which both A.B.C. and private channels were preparing to import for television. Further action had to be deferred while a general election was fought and the Menzies ministry was re-shuffled. In February 1956 Boyer wrote asking the new Postmaster-General, Charles Davidson, to empower film for national television to be passed directly to the A.B.C. for censorship:

my colleagues and I feel strongly that it would be wrong in principle and fraught with difficulties for the future if a second Commonwealth authority in the person of the Commonwealth Film Censor should intervene to determine these issues of good taste and possibly of political and religious consequence that, as you know, have always been the responsibility of the Commission.

Cabinet decided that film-type television programs, including documentaries, but apparently excluding newsreels, should go to the Commonwealth Film Censor. The Broadcasting Control Board was empowered to draw up a code of ethics for the censor's guidance; in the first instance Boyer was to confer with the Board's chairman, R. G. Osborne, and the Chief Censor, J. O. Alexander. When the Control Board's draft code came before him at the end of April, Boyer, although approving the code in general, made a number of criticisms of it; it went, he felt, into far too much detail, and added several vague, imprecise grounds for activity by the censor, such as 'vulgarity' and 'suggestiveness', which were very difficult to police sensibly or adequately. While much impressed with Alexander's personal wisdom and liberality, and while agreeing entirely about the desirability of the Board's standards, Boyer was unhappy about arming the censor so extensively:



It would be unrealistic to under-estimate the immense political power of the syndicates who will be operating commercial television in Sydney and Melbourne, whatever may be the position later on. For this reason I feel strongly inclined to strengthen the arm of the Commonwealth Censor as much as possible.

On the other hand, there is still enough of the 19th century liberal in me to look askance as a matter of principle at any extension of pre-censorship in public communications. I am sure you would agree that we should err, if anything, on the side of limiting censorship powers rather than increasing them, unless the case for increase was so overwhelming as to be beyond cavil.<sup>2</sup>

The Control Board's book of rules

should be regarded simply as a guide to television licensees and not as indices on which censorship authorities would be entitled to ban incoming or locally made films for television . . . Many of the standards which you have enumerated come, in our opinion, within the region of good taste and/or political and religious discrimination, which we feel to be beyond legitimate censorship powers.<sup>3</sup>

On the general classification of programs—into those suitable for children, those preferable for adults, and those definitely for adults only which might not be shown until the later part of the evening—there was no disagreement, although Boyer was privately doubtful whether children staying up late would be prevented by their parents from viewing 'adults only' material. He preferred the British system of putting an hour's interlude between children's programs and the adult fare in the evening, but he was unable to carry the Control Board with him on this point.

In discussions which lasted several months, the A.B.C. and the Control Board were never able, despite goodwill on both sides, entirely to reconcile their differences about censorship. The Control Board felt that their code of standards could not easily be improved, except in the light of experience, that detailed supervision was necessary for

<sup>2</sup> Boyer to R. G. Osborne, 19 Apr. 1956.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 May 1956.

commercial television, and that the Commonwealth Film Censor could hardly be expected to administer a double standard between commercial and national television. The Control Board was emphatic that 'religious or controversial programmes . . . are clearly no concern of the Censor's'.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand the Board wished to retain a clause banning programs deriding or discrediting 'significant social institutions', or showing 'insufficient respect for the individual opinions of the public'. There was a risk that these clauses would throttle controversy, and Boyer would not consent to them. Granted that the present Chief Censor was intelligent and discriminating, granted that the Minister for Customs, F. M. Osborne, was personally friendly to Boyer and alive to the dangers of a spread of censorship, the legislation would eventually have to be administered by other ministers and other censors. A member of the Control Board, Dr J. R. Darling, pointed out that the standards were necessary because, although the A.B.C. might trust its own officers to determine what was in good taste for the public, the commercial channels would accept anything that got past the censor as automatically fit for exhibition. Boyer's reply summed up where he stood on the issue:

Frankly, I think you are quite wrong in invoking censorship as the appropriate body to ensure your standards in all respects. Censorship in any free community is surely a function which should have imposed on it very definite limits. It is the essence of a democratic society that gross offences against the accepted ethos of the community can properly be dealt with at the source by the arbitrary function of banishment. A wide area must be left for citizens to choose their way between sin and virtue. In other words, we don't believe in sheltering the public conscience to the point at which error is by statute prohibit . . . We of the Commission feel sure we should not underwrite such functions for the Censor as we feel exceed general liberal principles, however keen we are (and I think you know my mind on this) on the highest standards of television output.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> R. G. Osborne to Boyer, 15 Aug. 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Boyer to Darling, 10 Sept. 1956.

In the end, when the opening of A.B.C. television was only a few weeks off, the Control Board and the A.B.C. agreed to argue the issue no further, leaving the A.B.C.'s autonomy in censorship to be worked out in practice. A senior A.B.C. official co-operated with a Control Board executive in drawing up working arrangements, and the question of censorship on grounds of taste or controversy was left to be decided from day-to-day experience. Time was to prove whether the A.B.C. would effectively keep its independence of judgment, but for the present Boyer was fairly sanguine.

Nobody could have been more concerned about the standards of television programs than Boyer. Conscious of television's influence on religious and political attitudes, its effect on spending habits, its educational potential, he weighed the A.B.C.'s performance as a means 'for the widening of our horizons in an age when the conditions of the world cry aloud for expanding loyalties and widening citizenship, and when the education of the mass of the people is becoming more urgent.'<sup>6</sup> Admitting television's entertainment value, he was moved most by its capacity to educate and inform, particularly when it became apparent that the most enthusiastic viewers came from the lower-income groups 'whose lives are restricted and whose opportunities for travel and wider knowledge are limited'.<sup>7</sup> With such a public in mind, Boyer was extremely concerned about the A.B.C.'s proposed standard of news presentation, for although the national television service would not be under the same obligation as radio to provide a complete independent news service, it would need to maintain the same standards of reliability and fair coverage. He was particularly worried lest competition from commercial television should force the A.B.C. news service willy-nilly into sensationalism and unbalanced coverage. Even the B.B.C. seemed to be yielding under pressure, so that the cameramen and not the news editors would dictate the content of television bulletins.

<sup>6</sup> Sir Richard Boyer, 'Television in perspective', *Australian Quarterly*, vol. XXIX, 3 Sept. 1957, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

He communicated his concern to the A.B.C.'s news editor-in-chief, W. S. Hamilton; Hamilton's reply showed clearly how much Boyer's outlook was reflected among the Commission's staff:

I know we will have to be constantly on our guard not to be betrayed by the bright lights of the visual. But objectivity and responsibility, which the Chairman has been so kind to commend in our sound news, are more than an attitude or a state of mind. It is something we live with, tremble with, and perspire with, from bulletin to bulletin. In other words, we achieve it by working at it—acting it, talking it, preaching it all the time. It is our daily bread. But we don't just happen by it. . . .

The Chairman puts his finger on two weaknesses in the approach to TV news when he refers to the technical achievement of our principles in news being turned over to the production boys in the studios; and secondly to the cameramen occupying an editorial or semi-editorial position. If I brought back nothing else from overseas, it was a determination not to allow these things to happen in the A.B.C., because, overseas, I did see them happening. They are happening, even in the B.B.C. because the journalists initially did not take the trouble to learn the technical approach to television; they could not talk the new language, they had to give away their professional judgment. I have already told my men, that, if they are in television news, they, and not the producer, must decide news values. We can speak from a position of some strength, because we *have* taken the trouble to find out what goes on in television. . . .<sup>8</sup>

'We can speak from a position of some strength, because we *have* taken the trouble to find out what goes on in television'; this had been the one great strength of the A.B.C. as it tried to establish itself in television. Certainly when the definitive Television Act was introduced in April 1956 it gave the A.B.C. more discretion than any previous piece of broadcasting legislation. The Commission itself remained in

<sup>8</sup> Memorandum, Hamilton to Moses, 26 July 1956; in reply to Boyer to Moses, 20 July 1956.

the pattern established by Cleary and Boyer, shedding its civil service representatives. The Control Board was no longer even theoretically responsible for A.B.C. program content. The A.B.C. had won control of its television technical services and secured adequate financing arrangements for the new medium. There would still be teething troubles, anxiety whether the Sydney and Melbourne studios would be completed on time, concern about the effect of commercial television in diluting program standards; but these were pressures always present in a national broadcasting service. The 1956 Television Act justified Boyer's concept and stewardship of the Australian Broadcasting Commission; there was no more than justice in the tribute the new Postmaster-General, Charles Davidson, paid to Boyer

who has been indefatigable in his efforts to improve the programmes and extend the influence of the national broadcasting service. The salary which the Government proposes to pay the Chairman of the commission is very modest payment for the long hours which he spends on the work of the Commission, but honorable members will agree with me that it is his very strong sense of public duty rather than any thought of reward which inspires Sir Richard.<sup>9</sup>

For he was Sir Richard now. In the New Year's honours of 1956 he was gazetted K.B.E. It was not an honour for which he had any particular personal ambition, but he accepted it as a pleasing compliment to the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The numerous letters of congratulation from people in many walks of life were a warming affirmation of his breadth of friendships. But perhaps this honour also prompted in Boyer thoughts about his future as chairman of the Commission. He was now in his sixty-fifth year, at an age when all men have to think seriously about the question of retirement. Then, in the early months of 1956, the issue was precipitated by an informal suggestion that he should go as High Commissioner to Canada. The temptation was immediate. He liked the idea

<sup>9</sup> *H. of R.D.*, 1956, vol. 10, p. 1535.

of serving as ambassador between two major British Commonwealth countries. The post, although responsible and worth while, was less strenuous than his present work at the A.B.C. On the other hand he was reluctant to quit the chairmanship while television was still under preparation, and it was not an entirely convenient moment in his personal affairs. His property at Durella required attention because of drought (had he but known, it was the onset of the poorest run of seasons since the nineties), and he had just taken on the oversight of his son's property at Aqua Downs while its owner moved with his wife and four children for two years to Oxford to read politics, philosophy, and economics. His first reaction was to refuse the Canadian suggestion. In September it was renewed through the personal intervention of R. G. Casey. This time Boyer came to the verge of accepting. Provided he need not take up the appointment until mid-1957 he thought he would have time to set the affairs of the A.B.C. in order and make some arrangements about Durella and Aqua Downs. It seemed ungracious to refuse the responsibility; and perhaps, for a man of sixty-five, the time had come to step down after a good innings at the A.B.C.<sup>10</sup>

Not that his responsibilities seemed in any important way to be ageing him. In the comfortable routine of his home at Wahroonga Boyer could always relax and recover from the responsibilities of his working day. Sometimes, when he was concentrating intensely on some particular problem, he lapsed into an engaging absent-mindedness. At such times he had been known to pause, lost in thought, for minutes at a time while midway through carving the family joint at Sunday dinner, or to dig over half a garden bed searching for a lost pair of spectacles which he had in fact pushed on to his forehead. But his wife and family were perfectly understanding about these foibles, as they were when he took to his study, deep in the latest *Hibbert Journal* and oblivious of jobs around the household which required his attention, for in this way he coped with the weight of

<sup>10</sup> Boyer to his son, no date (Sept. 1956).

his responsibilities, and the opportunities for uninterrupted thought were all too uncommon. Even on a fishing holiday, or at Durella, the family were conscious that any moment the telephone might draw him from domestic occupations.

He was still in every important way the pattern of a devoted family man. Indeed, his companionship with his children was closest after they grew up; he enjoyed being able to converse with them as equals, with original and stimulating ideas of their own. All the same, he derived enormous enjoyment from a growing family of grandchildren whom, as so often happens, he probably indulged more than he had his own son and daughter. Outside the family, he remained completely unspoilt by his eminence, and his dislike of display was particularly marked in matters of dress, in which he showed a fine, impartial carelessness. He was capable of leaving home for his office in slippers, or, unconscious of incongruity, of barracking a Test match from 'the Hill' in a Homburg. Yet his memory for people was impressive, and part of his brilliant charm lay in the warm and unforced attention with which he treated everyone he met, no matter what their importance. This capacity for taking a humane and generous interest in the people with whom he came into contact was part of the reason for his success in public life. On the other hand, he was not easily put upon, and his rare moments of anger were highly effective. He could firmly rebuff any attempt to limit or interfere with the authority of any undertaking for which he was responsible. At the A.B.C. during his years of office the inspiration and planning of high policy unmistakably bore the impression of his personality. In matters of detail his interventions tended to concern the moral or educational role of the A.B.C. It was thus his initiative which was largely responsible for founding the 'Plain Christianity' program. On another level, he was not above asking Gwen Meredith, author of the popular and long-running serial 'Blue Hills', to write in episodes highlighting some favourite good cause, such as the Good Neighbour Council or Alcoholics Anonymous.

Involvement in national radio was the main difficulty in the way of his accepting the High Commissionership in Canada. Where could a successor be found who, as chairman of the A.B.C., would carry on his ideals about political independence and program quality? One idea discussed at some length was that Edgar Dawes should succeed him for a term, during which a successor capable of taking over for a lengthy period could be groomed.<sup>11</sup> Dawes had eleven years' experience behind him as vice-chairman and had absorbed much of Boyer's outlook. However, it was thought desirable that the chairman should live in Sydney, and Dawes could not immediately leave his business interests in Adelaide; also it was not certain whether, as a former Labor man with some name for independent-mindedness, he was entirely *persona grata* with some of the most influential cabinet ministers. Sir John Medley was the only other commissioner with length of experience, and his health and strength were unequal to the chairmanship. Dame Enid Lyons was a former cabinet minister, experienced in public life, but a woman and therefore in Australian conditions impossible. In some quarters Charles Moses was thought of as a likely chairman, but there were obvious difficulties about promoting the general manager from within the organization. This meant that, if Boyer decided to retire, his successor would have to be someone entirely outside the Commission. A newcomer, however well qualified, would need to work himself into the team, where Boyer's relations with all the commissioners were already close and friendly. With three new members appointed in mid-1956, H. B. Halvorsen, Mrs Elsie Byth, and A. G. Lowndes—each of whom shared some common extra-curricular interest with Boyer<sup>12</sup>—and with the departure of the public servants

<sup>11</sup> These issues are discussed in detail in Dawes to Boyer, 18 Apr. 1956.

<sup>12</sup> Halvorsen, a Western Australian born in 1898, was an accountant, chairman of several businesses, and successively secretary-treasurer (1950-6) and then president of the Perth branch of the Australian-American Association, in which Boyer was also interested. Mrs Byth, wife of the City Solicitor of Brisbane and president of the National Council of Women, 1944-8, had been known to Boyer as president since 1945 of the Queensland division of the United Nations Association. Lowndes, economist, business executive, and



from its number, the Commission was more than ever a homogeneous group which looked to Boyer for guidance and inspiration. Eventually, Boyer decided that there were too many ties in Australia for him to sever by accepting the Canadian post; and once again he refused. At the time, it appeared the right decision. With hindsight, it appeared that service as High Commissioner at Ottawa would have made a happier end to Boyer's career than staying with the A.B.C.

This was not at first apparent. In the mid-fifties he was enjoying a vigorous, happy, and useful life. He had never been more in demand as a public speaker. That early Methodist training in the preparation of sermons had given him a practised instinct for the shape of a public address. Not that his public speaking was confined exclusively to Pleasant Sunday Afternoons, although despite, or perhaps because of, the doctrinal informality of his Christianity, he was often invited to address church groups. He seemed equally to appeal to businessmen, to farmers and graziers, and to academic audiences. The subject on which he was usually required to speak was the influence of mass media, in which his interests went well beyond the confines of the A.B.C. Since 1950 he was extremely regular in attending the Canberra summer schools of the Australian Institute of Political Science, and in 1955, for example, was one of the main speakers in the symposium, 'Liberty in Australia', on the subject of 'the freedom of the press'.<sup>13</sup> His theme was that the privileges and freedoms of the Press 'are derived only from public confidence and if this is lost they will inevitably disappear', that in Australia public confidence in the Press was dangerously weak, and that the Press should 'lay the spectre of public cynicism' by establishing a Press Council on the lines of that operated by newspapers in Britain, and by supporting a royal commission on mass

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grazier, had perhaps the closest contacts with Boyer, having been chairman of the Australian Institute of Political Science since 1952. When appointed to the Commission in 1956 he was forty-five years old, and a graduate of the Universities of Sydney and Cambridge.

<sup>13</sup> J. Wilkes, *Liberty in Australia* (Sydney, 1955), pp. 81-117. See the review by L. C. Webb, in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 274-5.

media. Disquieted by the contraction of newspaper control into a few hands, Boyer doubted whether the Press could claim the moral sanctions either of adequately reflecting a wide range of public opinion or of providing journalism of the best possible quality. Rejecting the more extreme charges that the Press was interested only in sex and dividends, he still thought that more could be done to raise popular standards. Public interest was not necessarily dependent on keeping to the lowest common denominator, for readers would respond to whatever was set before them, and responsible journalism did not necessarily mean low dividends: 'There is no future for Press freedom, nor, indeed, for any other freedom, once the individuals who make up our Australian community are regarded merely as customers or economic units.'

This paper sparked off a brisk controversy. The editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, John Douglas Pringle, defended the Press against some of Boyer's implications. In his concern about the responsibilities of the Press, Boyer, said Pringle, was taking its freedom for granted. In fact the Sydney Press had taken up several unpopular causes—an inquiry into alleged bashings by the police, the rights of a communist who wrote against the monarchy, the abuses inherent in compulsory unionism—where liberal-minded elements in the community maintained a dismaying silence. Would not any outside control limit the freedom of the Press? and might not the ethics committee of the Australian Journalists' Association be trusted to discipline breaches of taste and morality among the newspapers? 'I would rather have a turbulent, vigorous, vigilant Press, sometimes forgetful of its responsibilities, yet never forgetful of its rights, than a careful, sober, responsible Press, so fearful of offending authority that it can never defend liberty.' Both Boyer and Pringle were making important points, but to Boyer, with fifteen years with the A.B.C. to reinforce his beliefs in objective and balanced reportage, it was hard to accept that the handful of surviving newspaper proprietors in Australia would take their responsibilities to the public as seriously as a statutory corporation outside politics but representing a

cross-section of the community, such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission. This was the point at which Boyer's liberalism departed from the more cynical approach of many younger political scientists and commentators. Granted that mass media and the bodies which shape public policy were under pressure from many conflicting interest groups, Boyer believed in the possibility of transcending these sectional pressures and arriving at a view of the public interest which would be just and independent. He thought it possible, although difficult, for governments, newspapers, and other centres of power to uphold this standard of impartiality without succumbing to the strongest pressure group. To a working journalist, however, all impartiality tended to be relative, and any standard set up as an ideal ran the risk of imposing its own conformity. The A.B.C.'s role in endeavouring to provide a balanced and neutral coverage of events was valuable precisely because it co-existed with a competitive newspaper system in a country where the population was too sparse and scattered to support quality newspapers of the *Manchester Guardian* type. The important point about Boyer's comments were that they raised crucial issues which were not often enough ventilated in public. There would have been much merit in his suggestion for an informed inquiry into the workings of mass media. Nothing of the sort, of course, has happened.

What is notable about Boyer's later years is the combination of practicality and idealism which he brought to his interventions in public affairs; an ability to bear in mind long-term aims and the moral implications of a course of action without missing any aspect of the practical strategy of the moment. Thus, in September 1956 he intervened with his friends in the United Graziers' Association of Queensland in an endeavour to find some way of terminating the long-drawn-out shearers' strike which had been taking place all that year in Queensland in consequence of a reduction in prosperity loadings on the award wage. It was a complex situation. The Gair Labor Government in Queensland was not particularly sympathetic with the boisterous trade union chiefs who were behind the strike, but it suited them to

have the pastoralists carrying the brunt of the dispute, and they were in no hurry to mediate. Feelings had become embittered on both sides, and the pastoralists, making what use they could of non-union labour, were managing with some difficulty to get their sheep shorn, only to find that because their wool was declared 'black' by the transport unions it was twice necessary to cancel the usual Brisbane sales. In the rest of Australia agreement had been secured on an award rate of £7.9s.6d. per hundred, but in Queensland the Australian Workers' Union, incensed by the Arbitration Court's abolition of preference for its members in the shearing industry, refused to consider these terms, and the pastoralists were equally intransigent. In September Boyer made a determined effort to persuade the United Graziers' Association to take a more conciliatory line, on the grounds that the longer the dispute continued, the greater legacy of bitterness would remain in the industry afterwards; he felt that the union should be allowed to save face while arriving at a compromise.<sup>14</sup> The Association was at first politely disinclined to listen. Its members considered they had put up with a great deal while labour costs were high, and must now take the opportunity of cutting the trade union down to size. But Boyer's plea for moderation was apparently not entirely ineffectual, as at the beginning of October, when the Queensland Government at last submitted a plan for negotiation on the £7.9s.6d. rate, the United Graziers' Association accepted the proposal for discussion; it was the union which rejected this initiative by the Gair Government, for reasons which had less to do with the merits of the dispute than with their own internal party feuding. Eventually the strike ended when the Arbitration Court issued an interim award at £7.11s. On the whole, the graziers were better pleased than the shearers. Some pastoralists considered that they had come out of the dispute more strongly placed than they would have by an untimely show of conciliation when it was suggested by Boyer. Others contended that he had some influence in

<sup>14</sup> Boyer to Meynink, 7 and 17 Sept. 1956; Meynink to Boyer, 10 Sept. 1956.

moving the United Graziers' Association to consider, however reluctantly and conditionally, the Queensland Government's peace feelers. Whether in agreement with him or not, all recognized the propriety and sincerity of Boyer's intervention in a dispute where there were singularly few disinterested parties.

This was Boyer's only major foray into pastoral politics in his later years. A greater part of his time was taken by a revived interest in international affairs, stimulated when the Australian Government appointed him leader of the delegation to the ninth UNESCO conference in November 1956 in New Delhi. In itself the conference was fairly routine.<sup>15</sup> Its objectives, to promote education, international understanding, and cultural exchanges between nations of widely differing background, appealed strongly to Boyer's sentiments. The real value of this month in New Delhi for Boyer was to sharpen his awareness of the need to build bridges between the West and the newly emerging nations.

It was his first international conference in over ten years, and it began right in the middle of the Suez crisis, when the majority of Afro-Asian natives looked askance at Australia as a supporter of the Anglo-French intervention. For Boyer 'the obvious loss of our moral prestige in the early days of the intervention, throughout the whole of the African-Asian world, was a most distressing experience.' The first major decision of the UNESCO conference was to reject from the agenda all resolutions dealing with current international political issues, and once this was achieved the atmosphere warmed perceptibly, so that by the conclusion Boyer could write of 'unanimity and friendly co-operation' as a striking feature of the gathering. Not that the conference lacked contentious issues. The original European members of UNESCO, who provided by far the greater financial contributions, found themselves outvoted by an ever-increasing number of Afro-Asian and Latin American states; and the 'one nation, one vote' principle came under some fire from the larger contributors, some of whom sought

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO, *Report of 9th Conference New Delhi, 1956* (Paris, 1957).

to limit UNESCO's budget and activities. The United States, however, although contributing half the total funds, came down strongly in favour of a forward policy despite the financial obligations, and in this they were warmly supported by the Australian and Canadian delegations. To Boyer and his fellow-delegates UNESCO appeared a major avenue through which Australia could consolidate the standing in Asia it had won through such activities as the Colombo Plan:

It does now appear to us that this Organization which hitherto could justifiably be charged with considerable vagueness of direction and some unrealism of operation is now finding the spheres in which it can operate with real international benefit and at the same time is moving away from the more impractical and indeterminate projects which led to much earlier criticism.<sup>16</sup>

From India Boyer and his wife flew on to England, where during Christmas they enjoyed a rare interval of domesticity. All their family happened to be living there at that time. As well as their son and daughter-in-law at Oxford, the Boyers' daughter Marianne had accompanied her husband, Dr Peter Illbery, to Harwell, where he was researching in radio-biology. The families were living under the same roof in a twelfth-century manor-house, and the family reunion was celebrated in one of Britain's traditional, but very rare, white Christmases. Boyer took the opportunity to visit the nuclear reactor at Harwell with his son-in-law. His interest in the scientific aspects of the plant was practical and cursory, but his son-in-law found him intensely alive to its historic significance. Apparently one of the strongest impressions Boyer gained during this trip to England was of the influence of television in the home, for he could see at first hand in his grandchildren the fascination which television held for the young. But for the most part the Boyers' visit was given over to enjoying the unusual experience of having all their family gathered in one place, without worrying greatly about wider issues.

<sup>16</sup> General Conclusions (Report to Department of External Affairs, 1957).

These awaited him on his return to Australia in February 1957. Boyer was disturbed to find that his renewed enthusiasm for the United Nations met no wide response. The aftermath of Suez had chilled the climate of opinion:

I regret to say [wrote Boyer to a Canadian friend a few weeks later] that in our Government circles there is a very strong tendency to follow the Conservative Right Wing of the U.K. in its anti-U.N. and anti-U.S.A. policy, which I dislike intensely . . . the minority of us here . . . are countering the attitude as best we can.<sup>17</sup>

Boyer's efforts in this direction took a number of forms, in some of which he was discreetly countenanced by the Minister for External Affairs, his friend Casey. For several months he worked on plans to bring to Australia as guests of the A.B.C. front-ranking spokesmen from other British Commonwealth countries who might reinvigorate Australian support for the United Nations. Lester Pearson and L. W. Brockington from Canada and Sir Zafrullah Khan from Pakistan were among those considered, but it proved difficult to find any other sponsoring body which might share the costs of such a tour. The newly formed Australian-Canadian Association lacked the resources to help, and it was thought useless to appeal to the 'impoverished' universities of Sydney and Melbourne.<sup>18</sup> In the end, the scheme had to be dropped.

This left Boyer greatly concerned about the way in which government spokesmen, with Menzies in the lead, were losing no opportunity to belittle the United Nations and to insist on the right of every sovereign state to push its own line of power politics. One of the chief criticisms levelled against the United Nations was the excessive voting power of the smaller nations; as Menzies said in the bitterness of the Suez crisis, too much influence was exercised by 'people from Portugal and Colombia and little groups and bits and pieces',<sup>19</sup> who were allowed to participate in international peace-keeping forces from which the great powers were

<sup>17</sup> Boyer to Brockington, 2 Apr. 1957.

<sup>18</sup> Sir Owen Dixon to Boyer, 7 May 1957.

<sup>19</sup> *S.M.H.*, 21 Nov. 1956.

excluded. It was perhaps tactless for the Prime Minister of a country with ten million inhabitants thus to categorize Colombia with eleven and Portugal with eight and a half, but it was a common enough reaction in Great Britain and Australia in 1957. Boyer, through his experience of UNESCO, had come to dispute this objection, and was growing increasingly disturbed by those who argued in this way. Even at the age of sixty-six, when in most men the fires of whatever radicalism once burnt in them have died down, Boyer still felt the impulses of his Manchester Liberal conscience. He could not believe that in world affairs the smaller nations, among whom Australia must count itself, should abdicate their freedom of choice and consent to follow the lead of the great powers entirely. Without going so far as Evatt in claiming for Australia a unique and distinctive role of leadership among the smaller powers, Boyer thought that Australia—bridging Europe with Asia, Britain with the United States—could make her own special contribution to closing the gap between nations, and could hardly deny the right of other smaller powers to be heard. Particularly where issues of international morality were concerned, the great powers were not always the soundest judges. Suez had shocked Boyer into realizing that even Britain might behave in a way which was either unjust or inexpedient, or both. The United Nations, with all its imperfections, was the only arbiter which stood above national self-interest, and it must be supported.

He was provoked to public comment by an article on the United Nations in the London *Times*, which among other comments, observed that:

The inequity, and even absurdity, of equating the United States with Luxembourg, and Britain with Yemen, and India with Iceland, is only too obvious. In practice it has meant that an irresponsible majority of small States has managed to sway Assembly decisions against the larger and more responsible States.<sup>20</sup>

This aroused Boyer to set his thoughts on paper in a carefully drafted letter to *The Times*. He pointed out that

<sup>20</sup> *The Times*, 31 May 1957.



'the charge of inequitable influence in the United Nations Assembly confronts us with a dilemma in respect of our accepted principles of democratic procedure.' How could absolute equality be assessed? If population were the basis of representation, then mainland China and India were entitled to an embarrassingly large share of voting rights. If the weaker powers were excluded because of their immaturity, this contradicted the whole theory of democracy, 'that our destiny is safer in the hands of the whole people than of its elite, either in scholarship or in wealth or in birth.' The important point was that, despite inequalities and inconveniences, the great powers should continue to support the United Nations:

Granted all the reasons for regional security pacts as interim expedients, the great hope for British influence in world affairs rests fundamentally on the proven principles of our Christian democracy. We are now at the point of decision. We have either to apply the brakes to United Nations development or affirm our faith and take vital leadership on the basis of our hard-won and well-authenticated democratic principles. To those of us in the Commonwealth who look to Britain to take the lead in international morality, law, and democratic principle, this issue is of prodigious import.<sup>21</sup>

The letter was a long one, and Haley, the editor of *The Times*, whom Boyer knew well as a former head of the B.B.C., had it set in type but did not immediately use it. Then there came further influential criticisms of the United Nations. Sir Winston Churchill, at a meeting of the American Bar Association, grumbled about the ascendancy of the small powers in the United Nations, and his remarks were endorsed at the same time by Menzies. Haley now decided that the moment was opportune to release Boyer's letter in its entirety, which, since it ran to almost a column, meant giving it greater prominence than the average letter to *The Times*.

The impact was considerable. From readers of *The Times* Boyer received quite a large number of letters discussing

<sup>21</sup> *The Times*, 7 Aug. 1957.



*Boyer with Thai and Japanese staff of Radio Australia*

the issues raised. Among his supporters were Luther Evans, the Director-General of UNESCO, and the Nobel Peace Prize winner Philip Noel-Baker; United Nations Organization publicity media subsequently circulated Boyer's letter in several languages. The critics who wrote in rejoinder to him apparently came mainly from British universities, perhaps the most trenchant being that of Oxford's Professor Max Beloff:

I do not myself feel that your analogy from domestic political institutions is really relevant to these matters, and would not do so even if I shared your own satisfaction with the working of the principle of 'one man, one vote' . . . I can only refer you to your own Prime Minister for what I must hope is a more characteristic Australian reaction to the failure of the United Nations to do justice either in Eastern Europe or in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

In the light of this advice, it may be worth quoting Boyer's comments to Haley when the letter appeared.

I am afraid that my own Prime Minister will disagree violently with what I have written and there may be some repercussions at this end, quite unfavourable to myself. Be that as it may, there are times when one feels impelled to deliver one's soul and accept the consequences . . . It has been a new experience for our British people to have the majority view of United Nations critical of our actions and I suspect that it is the hurt to our amour-propre which has motivated the down-grading of the United Nations as a force for good in the world amongst so many of our people.<sup>23</sup>

In fact there were no immediate repercussions from the Prime Minister; any doubts which Menzies may have had over the soundness of Boyer's judgment on international issues were not to emerge for another few years.

It certainly made no difference to Boyer's standing in Australian public life. During 1957 he continued to set a cracking pace, with no abatement in the number and variety of his commitments. One week in July found him at the

<sup>22</sup> Beloff to Boyer, 7 Aug. 1957.

<sup>23</sup> Boyer to Haley, 9 Aug. 1957

opening of a new A.B.C. radio station at Bega, in the far south of New South Wales, the next at a similar function at Longreach in central Queensland. Never a week went by without its invitation to be guest speaker at some substantial public meeting or ceremony, and, as much as possible, Boyer accepted these duties because he saw them as a necessary part of the good public relations which the Australian Broadcasting Commission should foster with the community. His success in this role could be judged from the frequency with which such invitations came for him. Boyer, wrote a Sydney journalist at this period,

has given much more to the community than his job as chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission strictly demands. His contribution is hard to assess because it is intangible . . . the subtle, widespread effect of a truly liberal, independent and scholarly mind upon the community.<sup>24</sup>

In various ways, too, his reputation seemed undiminished with the Federal Government. In September consent was given to the early extension of A.B.C. television services to the State capitals other than Sydney and Melbourne, a mark of confidence which Boyer thought augured favourably for the Commission's interests. At the same time he was invited to assume the chairmanship of a committee of inquiry on recruitment to the Commonwealth Public Service. All seemed set for a further productive phase in Boyer's career.

On 8 September 1957 he travelled down to the Australian Administrative Staff College at Mount Eliza, Victoria. He was the first prominent outside speaker invited to the College, and he liked the concept of its principal, Sir Douglas Copland, of providing businessmen and civil servants with an intellectually disciplined training in management. The occasion produced one of the best speeches of his life, in which he blended his own personal philosophy and experience with some perceptive comment on the art of exercising authority:

May I suggest that there are two matters for your own good and the good of our society that you should keep in

<sup>24</sup> *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), Saturday, n.d. (cutting in Boyer MSS).

mind. First it is worth remembering that while your skill in administration is vital to our progress and lifts you to power and influence, there are other skills in human life, equally worthy and equally demanding in mental discipline that leave their holders in obscurity and in positions of little power over their fellows. For this reason the higher any of us may move in administration and management, the greater should be our personal humility. We should never fail to recognize that. Our particular skill rests on, and is made possible by, a multitude of skills of which we know little or nothing. If, as I believe, an administrative elite is inevitable in the years ahead of us, the manner in which that elite views its responsibilities is of vital import to the sort of vigorous individualistic, self-respecting society we hope Australia will always be. For that reason I suggest that you spread your prestige right down the line of delegation to those whose efforts you organise.

May I pause a moment on this question of delegation of authority. Everyone recognises adequate delegation as a hallmark of good administration. But it is more than a technique of management. It is the recognition that you have an obligation to the human units down the line of your organisation in respect of their status, not only in the firm or department, but in the eyes of their wives, families and associates. If one thing has impressed me in modern society, with its growth of large corporate organisations, it is the need to protect the officer or worker at the lower levels of service from anonymity. Every self-respecting person seeks, above all, to feel of some account, to have a status of dignity, to hold authority and prestige in some area of activity, of which he and his associates can be proud. The very basis of democracy is the denial that importance rests only at top levels. There is an ego in all of us that demands and justly demands some satisfaction. That is why you find officers more concerned about the title of their position and the authority they exercise than their salary position. I applaud this attitude. Our economic, as well as our social success, depends heavily on the degree to which in a highly organised and therefore classified society, we can retain the sense of individuality

and personal worth at every level. Personally, I deplore the facile tendency to personalise every institution in the figure who happens, for the moment, to occupy the top position. Leadership, by the most talented among us, is an obvious requirement of efficiency and progress, but leadership boomed to the point where all the virtues and vices of a Party or Organisation become centred in a single individual is bad for a whole variety of reasons. Surely in our day we have had enough of the 'Fuhrer Prinzip'. The health, both of a democratic society and an organisation private or public, is in the safeguarding of corporate responsibility, however precisely the hierarchical charts of authority may be drawn. This can only be assured by the refusal of those in top positions to recognise the totality of effort and talent by which they are surrounded and supported.

Equally, I urge that you retain a lively sense of your accountability upwards and do not seek to evade it. Accountability to those to whom we are responsible, be it Board of Directors, Shareholders, or Parliament, is the sole safeguard against the dire temptations of high officials to become a law unto themselves. It is worth remembering that the higher one goes the more urgent is the need to recognise that one can, and should, be brought to book for one's activities. There is no one, including the Prime Minister, who is not accountable to a higher authority, and no one of us, for reasons of personal prestige should seek to evade this responsibility. I feel very strongly on this issue of accountability, because the temptation to resist it is a very natural one. If you are in a position of high administrative responsibility, you are conscious that you know far more of the working of your department or organisation than those to whom you may be accountable. The manager of a highly specialised manufacturing or commercial firm can very easily feel that his Board of Directors, most or perhaps all of whom know little or nothing of his practical difficulties, should refrain from steering the course of action or questioning the wisdom of his activities. Even more anomalous, on the face of it, is the position of the Public Servant who finds himself accountable to a succession of Ministers, many of whom

may come to their portfolio with no experience in or knowledge of the long history of effort in his Department. Yet this principle of the expert being required to justify his activities before a layman is the core of our way of life, an imperative which has come up to us from the experience of centuries. Indeed, what is the major division in the human family today as between the East and West ideologies but this very issue—true accountability for government to the whole people or its denial in favour of the managers?

Secondly, I urge you, however demanding your job of management may be, to keep your personal interests as wide as possible. You will be a better administrator if you take time off to take keen intellectual, if not active, interest in cultural and social affairs, both local and international. Perhaps even more important is the consideration that the day must come when you will have to vacate your chair in favour of a younger man. There is no more pathetic figure than the highly placed manager or successful business man, who, at the point of retirement, faces a vacuum of interest and activity with little in prospect but, like Alexander, to weep because there are no more worlds to conquer.<sup>25</sup>

Almost this could have been his last testament. A few days later he was struck down by the first of what was eventually to prove a fatal series of coronary attacks.

<sup>25</sup> Address to Australian Administrative Staff College, 8 Sept. 1957.

## 11 Controversies

Boyer and this wife took a sea trip to aid his recovery from his coronary attack, and at the beginning of 1958 he was back as actively as ever with his multifarious public engagements. Although his health was never again entirely sound, he accepted a further three years' appointment as chairman of the Commission, and continued to act as chairman of the committee of inquiry into public service recruitment. Never a man to be sparing of his energies, he did not allow the state of his health to slacken his pace. Whenever the stress of life in Sydney became too pressing, he could always look forward to the therapy of Durella, where the slow, even routine of pastoral life, even in a time of dry seasons, seemed utterly safe and rewarding. Yet for part of his last few years he was a sick man. As not seldom happens in such cases, this happened to be at a period in the affairs of the A.B.C. which severely tested his experience and wisdom. Some of these difficulties ended in disappointment, some were surmounted, but the cumulative effect told heavily on his reserves.

Some of the problems which emerged early in 1958 arose from the recurrence of issues which had earlier seemed settled. One was the question of television censorship by the Department of Customs. Contrary to Boyer's hopes, this department, whose minister since late 1956 was Senator Denham Henty (replacing Boyer's friend F. M. Osborne), showed no hesitation in overruling the A.B.C. and imposing its own standard on imported films. Against the Commission's wishes, the Customs authorities in 1957 banned the screening of two documentaries. One, 'Shadow over Italy', was highly critical of the Roman Catholic Church's influence,



and was censored as an attack on established belief. The other, and more ominous as a pointer to the A.B.C.'s future difficulties, concerned an American-made film, 'Algiers Aflame', in which the commentators gave what the Department of Customs considered 'a rather one-sided account . . . in which much of the action was directed for the purpose of making the picture.'<sup>1</sup> Since its criticisms of French policy in Algeria were likely to be offensive to a friendly nation, this film too was banned. Here were two issues which hit at everything Boyer stood for. To suppress comment just because it might fail to please the French was bad enough, with its inference that any criticism of a pro-Western government should necessarily be gagged; but to censor the A.B.C.'s film imports without any attempt at consultation was striking hard at the national service's independence. Boyer in December 1957 persuaded the Postmaster-General to ask Senator Henty to give up his department's power to reject films on the grounds of offence to friendly nations or undesirability 'in the public interest'. Henty took the view that 'if censorship is to operate at all, the conscientiousness of the importer, who would be the judge in his own case, cannot be assumed', and entirely refused the A.B.C.'s request. This left a situation where, as Charles Moses put it, 'the censor leaves nothing for programme officers to do'.<sup>2</sup> The A.B.C. could import no controversial film without first satisfying the tender conscience of the Customs Department.

So Boyer's cherished concept of television as a forum for open discussion was watered down further by the great Australian fear of giving offence. For similar reasons, locally produced television programs placed a heavy load on the responsible A.B.C. officials, especially before preliminary videotaping became customary. Contention, in the words of one senior official, was 'the dominating factor in the whole of the approach of the Talks Department.' Balanced presentation was the A.B.C.'s primary responsibility, and this involved a careful choice of speakers. And yet:

<sup>1</sup> Henty to Davidson, 24 Jan. 1958.

<sup>2</sup> Public Service Arbitrator, Determination 11/1959; comment on Mr Newman Rosenthal's evidence, 23 July 1958.

We lose viewers when we become too cautious. That is one of the problems we are faced with, that we want to put on lively contentious programmes, we want people who are accustomed to contention. But we do have at the back of our mind the thought that we have to stand up to whatever they say, and we are powerless to stop them saying it.<sup>3</sup>

These were not new problems. They had already been present with any attempt at controversy on the radio:

Talk discussions very basically affect the Australian way of life; they are subjects on which public passions run high. They are subjects that can offend the major pressure groups of the nation both inside and outside Parliament. In other words Talks is the department that more than any other can involve the Commission in nation-wide criticism.<sup>4</sup>

After a comparatively quiet period, these pressures were again becoming evident. Government members as a rule refrained from overt criticism of the A.B.C. in Parliament, but some were not averse from informal approaches. Boyer was always prepared to listen when there was substance in a complaint, but for most he developed a skill in polite but firm stonewalling. Among the Opposition, Calwell was still rather obsessive about accusing Boyer and Moses of anti-Labor bias, but the A.B.C.'s most persistent critic was Evatt. His grievances were sometimes extremely petty, as when, during the visit of Harold Macmillan to the Commonwealth Parliament, Evatt complained that the television cameras favoured Menzies too much (the then Prime Minister was sitting next to the guest of honour, and could not conveniently be eliminated), and should have given equal prominence to himself as Leader of the Opposition. With such a reputation for complaining, Evatt could not have been surprised when, during the middle of the Suez crisis, Boyer declined to take very seriously his accusation that the A.B.C. had suppressed comment critical of the Anglo-French

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, evidence of Mr Alan Carmichael, 8 July 1958.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

action.<sup>5</sup> If anything, Boyer said, greater prominence had been given to opponents than to supporters of the Suez operation; and there, for the time, the matter rested.

All the same, for once Evatt was on to something serious, and his criticisms had worthwhile results. A news commentator had been silenced during the Suez crisis, although not through deliberate policy. On 1 November 1956 the Anglo-French attack on Egypt was launched. It was not reported in the Australian morning newspapers, but was broadcast in A.B.C. news bulletins. Rohan Rivett, editor of the *Adelaide News* and a regular commentator, was due to give the daily 1.15 p.m. news commentary, 'Notes on the News'. He thought the Suez action disastrous, as the opening paragraph of his commentary showed:

So, at this hour, Britain is at war, and without any doubt, is regarded throughout most of the world as an aggressor. It seems incredible, even a little shattering. No one can read with much pride or pleasure of R.A.F. bombs crashing on Egyptian centres. Still less of Egyptian civilians being killed merely because they are in some proximity to military installations or air ports.<sup>6</sup>

Granted the complexities of the issue, granted that 'no one can have any sympathy with Nasser, the man who dishonored his pledges', Rivett still saw a 'ruthless opportunism' in Britain's defiance of international opinion: 'The United Nations has been dealt a cruel kick in the stomach.' This was forthright comment, and the local talks officer at the A.B.C. Adelaide studio was concerned about its impact on listeners who might be alarmed by Rivett's remarks if they had not already heard the news bulletins. He telephoned Sydney and read the script to the Director of Talks, who agreed with his junior's misgivings and asked Rivett to modify his comments because 'such outright condemnation should await further information from official sources.' Rivett refused to give the broadcast under these conditions, but he accepted a subsequent invitation to express his views at greater length on the A.B.C. three days later, on the

<sup>5</sup> *S.M.H.*, 5 Nov. 1956.

<sup>6</sup> Text of script for 'Notes on the News', 1 Nov. 1956: Boyer MSS.

following Sunday. The action taken by the Director of Talks was reported to Moses and the Commission, who endorsed it. As Boyer later explained, many people, himself included, could not credit the first reports of the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt, and felt that 'strictures on Britain, the country on which so much of our national idealism was placed, were unjustified without further evidence.'<sup>7</sup>

There the matter might have rested, except that eighteen months later, during a parliamentary discussion on a minor procedural Bill about broadcasting, Evatt took the opportunity of renewing his charge that a commentator had been put off the air for criticizing the government during the Suez crisis.<sup>8</sup> Boyer, 'puzzled at Dr Evatt's apparent determination to destroy people's confidence in the A.B.C.'s integrity'<sup>9</sup> offered to produce Rivett's scripts for perusal and denied any pressure from any member of the government. He candidly admitted the circumstances in which Rivett was asked to alter his script, and Evatt, returning to the attack, stated that this proved that the A.B.C. displayed political bias, and called for an overhaul of censorship procedures. Boyer replied again, emphasizing that commentators always had complete responsibility for the factual content of their broadcasts and stressing the difficult situation in which A.B.C. officials found themselves; but by this time two or three newspaper commentators had opened fire, and the A.B.C. was frankly on the defensive. In the light of this experience Boyer caused instructions to be circulated that the A.B.C. was not to edit the scripts of its commentators either for statements of fact or expressions of opinion. Speakers might be persuaded by A.B.C. staff to make alterations, but if they refused, the final responsibility was theirs. This very explicit renunciation of censorship of course received no publicity among the A.B.C.'s critics, but it is still (1966) the basis on which guest commentators are invited to broadcast.

<sup>7</sup> *S.M.H.*, 24 Apr. 1958.

<sup>8</sup> *S.M.H.*, 5 May 1958.

<sup>9</sup> *S.M.H.*, 28 Apr. 1958.

Between 1956 and 1958 the Commission went through considerable travail over the question of staff relations. There had been for some years rumblings of discontent from the A.B.C. Staff Association, but for reasons which will be indicated later it may be doubted whether the Commission was aware how long-standing and widespread these staff grievances were. The importance of the 1956-8 controversy was twofold. It represented an attempt by the staff to transfer jurisdiction over hours and conditions from the Commission itself to an outside agency, the Public Service Arbitrator. And it badly damaged the image of unity which the Commission throughout Boyer's time had tried to foster. Boyer had always seen the care and responsibility of Australian cultural standards as an ideal in which commissioners, management, and A.B.C. staff could be as one. For a long time he was able to strike a response to this ideal among many of those who worked for the A.B.C. Harassed, cynical, unpretentious men could nevertheless appreciate the value of having a chairman who was a man of ideals, able to express clearly and unembarrassedly the aims and standards towards which the A.B.C. was working. But men cannot live on ideals alone. Particularly after the coming of television, commercial broadcasting was able to offer competitive salaries and conditions, which naturally inspired the A.B.C. Staff Association to press for improvements in their own lot. This was not perhaps the most congenial aspect of the Commission's business for Boyer; he seems never quite to have got used to the idea that professional men, working at creative and emotionally satisfying duties, might nevertheless need to band together to bargain with their employers. So far as matters which came before the Commission were concerned, he had the benefit of a vice-chairman, Edgar Dawes, experienced in many aspects of industrial negotiation. In practice, of course, much of the responsibility for staff relations, particularly the day-to-day handling of negotiations and the preparation of background information for the Commission, rested with the general manager, Charles Moses. In staffing matters, he

was assisted by the assistant general manager, A. W. Finlay, the newly appointed controller of administration, T. S. Duckmanton, and the senior personnel officer, L. S. Cunningham.

On 24 October 1956 the Staff Association filed an application with the Public Service Arbitrator to vary the current practice on overtime. Stripped of the mendicant verbiage which is obligatory in all such cases, the crux of the Staff Association's claim was to extend eligibility for overtime to a number of officers who were then excluded by decision of the Commission, and could thus be worked excessive hours without the compensation of time-and-a-half. The A.B.C. claimed that this provision applied only to senior officers whose higher pay and status compensated for their ineligibility for overtime rates; also that officers logging seventy-eight hours' overtime could take an extra week's annual holiday. The Staff Association rejected these safeguards as ineffectual and inadequate, and filed their claim with the Public Service Arbitrator. Invited by the Arbitrator to confer informally with the Staff Association before the case came to a hearing, the Commission at its December 1956 meeting decided that the Staff Association's claims should be resisted 'with the utmost vigour and all admissible argument available.' This decision was taken in the light of a report prepared by Charles Moses and his senior officers. It later emerged that the report omitted a number of important points in favour of the Staff Association's case, and although there was never evidence to suggest that any particular individual was responsible for these omissions, it was certainly extremely unfortunate that the liaison between the Commission, the A.B.C. administration, and its staff should have been so faulty. The result was that the case went before an Assistant Arbitrator for a full hearing and the Commission consequently lost some of its remaining discretionary powers over staff conditions.

After the hearing had gone on for three months, the Commission realized that there was more to the Staff Association's case than they had been informed of, and

requested an adjournment of proceedings for a round-table conference between three senior executives of the A.B.C. and three Staff Association representatives. By the time this conference took place, in February 1958, the Commission had accepted the main points requested by the Staff Association, and there remained for discussion a few minor details of overtime rights. It looked as if the matter was happily settled, with the staff gaining most of what they wanted, and the Commission, by a timely compromise, retaining at least in theory its old rights over staff hours. But the happy ending was not to be. Emboldened by its success the Staff Association circulated to Boyer and his colleagues on the Commission a transcript of the Assistant Arbitrator's remarks at the February 1958 meeting, in which he spoke of 'the earlier uncompromising attitude of the Commission.' This statement, commented the council of the Staff Association, suggested that the dispute need never have arisen if the Commission had listened to the Staff Association's 'strong and repeated protests' over the years. As it was, stated the Staff Association, the general manager had refused to amend or modify the position, and bitter feelings had been engendered. The Commission decided that this criticism could not go unnoticed, and drafted a statement which was read into the transcript at the next formal hearing by the Assistant Arbitrator. The Commission's statement expressed regret that some aspects of the overtime problem had not been brought to the general manager's attention by the responsible officers, pointed out that in any case all important decisions on staffing matters were made not by the general manager but by the Commission itself, and expressed the view that Moses 'has invariably displayed a sympathetic understanding of staff problems and the Commission has been impressed over a period of many years by his fair-minded approach to all matters affecting the staff.'

This was all very well, but it missed the point. The A.B.C. Staff Association, rightly or wrongly, felt that the general manager had been ignoring its legitimate grievances. The very fact that such a feeling could survive pointed at least

to a breakdown in communication between the Commission and its staff; in a less over-centralized organization this discontent might have been identified and dispelled. As it was, Moses was not at the time on the easiest terms with all of his senior officers. In July 1958 the Senior Officers' Association in their turn brought a pay claim before Mr Assistant Arbitrator Birkett, also basing their case on increased responsibilities since the coming of television. Moses, as the only A.B.C. official unaffected by the claim, had to represent the Commission's interests at the inquiry before the Arbitrator, and this involved cross-examining each senior officer's testimony. Before the hearing, preliminary negotiations had been conducted, according to the senior staff, 'in the best possible spirit and there was a genuine effort to reach agreement'. Moses was also in a complimentary mood. Commending the enthusiasm which led officers to supervise the early workings of television, he regretted that enthusiasm alone could not justify pay increases. As he was later to summarize the Commission's case:

We have been learning as we go, and we have been short-handed; but these temporary phases are passing and we are becoming more skilled and more professional in our work. No longer should it be necessary for the senior planning officers to feel that they ought to supervise every step.<sup>10</sup>

But in the presence of the Arbitrator, Moses cross-examined a number of his subordinates with a searching toughness. These exchanges rankled with some officers, and, as Moses himself put it, 'opened wounds which took a long time to heal.' Such an atmosphere was not the most hopeful for close and amicable relationship between the Commission and its staff.

The Assistant Arbitrator certainly felt that more needed to be said on the subject. At the final hearing of the Staff Association case, on 29 September 1958, he announced that it was his unenviable but necessary task to comment on 'the

<sup>10</sup> All quotations are from the minutes of evidence of Public Service Arbitrator, Determination 11/1958 and Determination 11/1959.



domestic affairs of a Commonwealth authority' in order to reply to the Commission's statement read into the transcript by Duckmanton on 4 June. He did not intend to attack any individual person. 'There was an attack upon a system, but that system by the same token could include people whom the representatives of the [Staff] Association are duty bound themselves to protect.' Then he proceeded to dissect the Commission's statement. To the Commission's plea of ignorance of the long hours worked by staff, he rejoined that these had been the subject of a report by the general manager as far back as 1953. It appeared that, contrary to the Commission's belief, major questions of staff policy had escaped their attention: 'it is, I think, worthy of the Commission's consideration that a matter which, to its members and its chief executive officer, may appear to be of relatively little importance may, to the Association's members and its executive, be of great importance'. Nor could the Arbitrator believe that the Commission had been fully informed of the Staff Association's numerous submissions about overtime since 1947, with their wealth of supporting legal advice. Otherwise, why had the Commission failed to agree to a conference with the Staff Association in 1956, instead of waiting until December 1957, midway through the hearing? Altogether, Mr Arbitrator Birkett concluded, the Commission had not done its homework before preparing its statement of 4 June, which, if unchallenged, might result in the blame for the unfortunate state of affairs inside the A.B.C. being cast on the wrong officers.

These criticisms embarrassed both Commission and general manager in their relations with staff for a long time to come. 'It is something that I personally feel very upset about', Moses told the Arbitrator at the next hearing of the senior officers' case: but he emphatically repeated his assertion that he had seen no part of the file on the overtime question. 'You will admit' suggested the Arbitrator, 'that your reports and recommendations to the Commission leave a very strong impression that you did see them.' But Moses had not. Busy with many things, he took it for granted that

his subordinates would bring him everything he needed to see. In fact Moses like everyone else was the victim of organizational deficiencies within the A.B.C. The service was still as centralized as it had been in the much smaller A.B.C. of Moses's early years of office before the war. Although new departments had been created which formally took a good deal of the load of detailed administration from the general manager, in practice all important decisions still stemmed from Moses or were channelled through him to the Commission. It was difficult for a man who had been at the head of affairs for twenty years to learn the secret of effective delegation, particularly when he took pride in the robust constitution which enabled him to shoulder these burdens, and it was equally difficult for the Commission to compel him to delegate responsibility without a suggestion of lack of confidence in his judgment. After the 1958 hearings, however, Boyer and his fellow commissioners could no longer ignore the breakdown of good staff relations. Perhaps after the sustained co-operative effort of getting television launched a reaction was inevitable, but the Assistant Arbitrator had spelt out the Commission's difficulties in all too explicit detail. Probably this came as more of a shock to Boyer personally because he had always found it easy to meet the A.B.C. staff sympathetically. Nearly everyone who worked for the A.B.C. in those years has a story of some personal experience of the chairman's approachability and helpfulness. The question was whether these qualities could survive at the institutional level.

How was this survival to be achieved? The proceedings before the Assistant Arbitrator showed the need for quicker and more reliable channels of communication between executive and staff. Grievances went too long unanswered because executive responsibility was overcentralized. The first step was to delegate part of the general manager's burden to a number of senior officers. This implied no detraction from Charles Moses (he was knighted in the New Year's honours of 1961 for conspicuous services to broadcasting), and was an obvious enough response to the

increasing staff numbers and responsibilities of the Commission. But administrative changes in themselves were not enough to rebuild morale. Early in 1959 Boyer encouraged the setting up of a body termed the Joint Consultative Council, whose purpose was loosely defined as 'the exchange of views at all levels'. Comprising representatives of staff groups, senior management, and the Commission itself, this Council was supposed to meet every two months, and by discussing all sorts of issues affecting the A.B.C. to serve as a means of contact and as a check against abuses. Approached cautiously by the Staff Association and without great enthusiasm by some of their superiors, the Joint Consultative Council lapsed into disuse after the end of 1959. In May 1960 legislation was introduced making the A.B.C.'s staff regulations comparable to Public Service Board practice. Arrangements were made for 'formal consultation and concurrence' between the Commission and the Public Service on determining salaries, conditions of employment and disciplinary measures. This brought the A.B.C. into line with CSIRO, the Snowy Mountains Authority, and other statutory corporations; but it went contrary to a principle of A.B.C. autonomy for which Boyer had fought for many years, and in the absence of any direct evidence on the matter, it is difficult to understand why he consented to the change. Certainly the move was unpopular with some members of the A.B.C. staff, partly because it led to the abolition of the Appointments Advisory Committee, a body on which the Staff Association was represented, and which, as its name suggested, was consulted on promotion policy. (An independent Promotions Appeal Board was, however, retained.) The Commission undertook to discuss major staff policy changes with the Staff Association, but as relations stood, this was hardly enough to allay discontent. By December 1960 the Staff Association was again complaining that staff were not adequately consulted about regulations affecting their conditions of appointment and work, and was asking for the right of direct access by its officials to the chairman of the A.B.C. and other commissioners, entirely by-passing

the general manager.<sup>11</sup> This was not agreed to, because it would have implied too great a lack of confidence in the senior executives of the A.B.C., but the very fact that the request was made was a significant comment on the feelings of the more vocal members of staff.

Something must be allowed for the natural tendency of staff associations to exaggerate their grievances and demand as great a voice as possible in policy formation; but the conclusion is inescapable that in Boyer's last years as chairman the lines of communication within the national broadcasting organization were faulty, and the A.B.C. fell short of his original grand design of a co-operative partnership between staff, management, and Commission. Some journalists commenting on the A.B.C. suggested that the Commission in recent years had lost the confidence of many of its staff. The commissioners have been portrayed as, in the eyes of their employees, 'autocratic and uncompromising', parsimonious when generosity was needed to retain good staff, timid in supporting their officers when there was pressure against outspoken programs, concerned less with broad outlines of policy than with planning trivial details like washrooms.<sup>12</sup> The facts are less dramatic. The most important criticism to be made of the commissioners was that, despite their theoretical impartiality, they were chosen at cabinet level from a list submitted by the A.B.C., and that since the enforced removal of Ivy Kent and C. W. Anderson in the early years of the Menzies ministry, no new member had been appointed who could possibly be considered a representative or sympathizer of Labor or the trade union movement. While it was well known that Boyer had set his face against any form of political censorship, and that in practice A.B.C. commentaries were quite often highly critical of government policy, it may well have happened that senior officials, anxious to play safe, occasionally invoked the Commission's name in damping down

<sup>11</sup> Secretary A.B.C. Staff Association to Boyer, 7 Dec. 1960.

<sup>12</sup> P. Coleman, 'The timid ABC', *Observer*, 23 Jan. 1960; 'As complex as the ABC', *Nation*, 17 June 1961; O. Ajala, 'Up and Down the ABC', *Nation*, 27 June 1964.

embarrassing initiatives. Readers of *David Copperfield* may remember the amiable lawyer, Mr Spenlow, who, whenever anyone asked him for help, replied that he would be only too happy to oblige, but he had to consider the views of his absent partner, Mr Jorkins—whom nobody had ever seen. When unpopular decisions were taken at the A.B.C., the commissioners were sometimes unwittingly cast for the role of Jorkins. All the same, there were usually one or two members of the Commission who liked to busy themselves with program details, and their criticisms may have been a factor in discouraging experimentation by producers and writers.<sup>13</sup> There had been no slackening in Boyer's zeal for the independence of the A.B.C. and the encouragement of its staff, but his health was not good, he was increasingly certain that his current term of office would be his last, and he had to conserve his energy for fighting really important battles. It was no longer physically possible for him to generate the same quickening of morale as he had encouraged on coming into office fifteen years earlier.

Yet Boyer was still aware of the need for good morale and public relations in large government organizations. During 1958 he gave much time and attention to his duties as chairman of the committee on public service recruitment. This led early in 1959 to the publication of the document known as the Boyer report, which did as much as any other single activity of Boyer's to bring him prominently before

<sup>13</sup> One example must suffice. In February 1961, in conjunction with the Festival of Perth, the A.B.C. television channel in Perth put on a performance of *A Sleep of Prisoners* by Christopher Fry. The popular local columnist, Kirwan Ward, considered the performance a 'shade too arty', with too many 'stratospheric flights of fancy'. An A.B.C. commissioner at once approvingly communicated this criticism to Boyer. Boyer does not seem to have passed on the criticism, but his comment in reply: 'it certainly looks as tho' we have strained a little for effect in this', hardly suggests strong support for experiment; one wonders what the Commission would have made of Samuel Beckett or Harold Pinter. The same commissioner is later alleged to have objected successfully to the screening of a 'Four Corners' program on capital punishment at the time of the execution of a notorious Perth murderer, but this assertion cannot be substantiated. See *Weekend News*, 4 Feb. 1961; Halvorsen to Boyer, 6 Feb. 1961; Boyer to Halvorsen, 16 Feb. 1961; M. MacCallum, 'An inside job', *Nation*, 14 Nov. 1964.

the public eye. A critical survey of recruitment and promotion methods in the public service, the Boyer report was able in general to commend the soundness and efficiency of the service, while finding a number of ways in which its procedures could be streamlined and brought up to date. Traditionally entry into the public service had been through competitive examinations, but this principle in the past had tended to ossify into a dogma that the only way to train a head of department was to start him at the age of fifteen as an office-boy and promote him one grade at a time, with strict regard to seniority. This discouragement of talent had been aggravated during the fifteen years after the end of World War I, when too strict an adherence to the principle of preference for ex-servicemen had frozen out recruitment from any other source. The result after World War II had been a shortage of qualified staff in the middle and higher grades of the public service, and although since 1934 graduates had been regularly recruited to non-'professional' positions, and the war had brought able outsiders to some senior posts, recruitment conditions and promotion prospects had never attracted enough well qualified people to the 'clerical-administrative' ranks, and there were still problems and anomalies for the Boyer committee to iron out. The committee showed considerable finesse in its approach to the controversial issues implicit in these problems. The principles of open competition were affirmed and ability made the overriding criterion for appointments. Preference for ex-servicemen was retained in a number of special cases, but the committee discarded it as a general principle in recruitment. The Boyer report recommended several ways in which techniques of selection and placement could be improved, and urged a concerted effort to make the public service more attractive to graduates and other recruits of quality. Recruitment suffered, the report suggested, because the civil service's prestige did not stand high with the public. This was partly due to ignorance, but partly also to the service's poor public relations. The officials with whom the public came most into contact tended sometimes to be hidebound and unimaginative, fearful of departing an inch

from the code of rules in which they had been trained. Able men were deterred from entering the service because promotion was thought to depend more on a niggling code of seniority than on merit. Public service regulations discriminated unduly against potentially useful sources of staff, such as married women and the physically handicapped. In short, what the Public Service Board needed was a touch of imagination in projecting its image; and it might best safeguard its standards by setting up a permanent research section and inviting an impartial inquiry on the lines of the Boyer committee once every ten years or so.<sup>14</sup>

While the report owed much to all five members of the committee,<sup>15</sup> and particularly to the expertise of R. S. Parker, Boyer's especial contribution lay in his skill as chairman. He was well-qualified for this role because of his ability to command respect from witnesses low and high; to impart a sense of leadership and team spirit to the committee; also to reconcile sometimes sharply divergent views . . . and to insist that the committee's recommendations should embody their honest opinions and not be watered down to make them more likely of acceptance. His own opinions were reflected in the report, especially in its insistence on a good public image for the civil service, modelled to some extent on the British tradition of an administrative class, Boyer insufficiently realized, perhaps, that such explicit reliance on this model would prove a fatal liability to the committee's proposals for administrative recruitment. This was perhaps the most important of the committee's findings to be rejected. The Public Service Board, which to some extent had inspired the Boyer inquiry, was on the whole well satisfied with the report, except that it was unenthusiastic about the idea of a regular outside

<sup>14</sup> Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Public Service Recruitment, Com., *Parl. Pap.*, 1959-60, vol. iii, p. 907.

<sup>15</sup> Apart from Boyer, the members of the committee were Professor T. Hytten, economist and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania; Professor R. S. Parker, then Reader in Public Administration at the Australian National University; Dr W. C. Radford, Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research; and Mr F. J. Webb, Commissioner of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission.

review, and in deference to trade union prejudices and the susceptibilities of State Governments, was at best lukewarm about the permanent employment of married women. On the other hand, the greater part of the Boyer committee's recommendations were put into practice over the ensuing seven years. Selection tests for the public service were improved, the system of classification was rationalized, and in 1966 the Federal Minister for Labour introduced legislation providing permanent status for married women in the public service. The Boyer report had a significant role in the shaping of future policy decisions about the public service. Much of its quality derived from the fact that its authors were not merely intelligent and experienced administrators, but humanists aware of the personal factors which made up institutions.

With this report completed, Boyer was able to concentrate on the problems of radio and television. Although in 1959 nothing definite had been mooted about his retirement, he was increasingly aware that his time as chairman was limited, and that, if only because of his uncertain health, there was a limit to the amount of long-term planning which he could undertake. In the time that was left to him, he saw his main task as ensuring that television developed as a medium for raising the standard of Australian culture and education, and not merely as a source of secondhand entertainment. On the positive side, this led him to take the initiative in fostering 'University of the Air', the first locally produced attempt to use television as a means of popular education. On the other hand, this preoccupation led him increasingly to despair of the performance of commercial television, and to urge with growing insistence that so powerful a medium of mass communication should be kept out of the hands of interests mainly concerned with profit-making.

'University of the Air' was very much Boyer's scheme. It was he who, in 1960, initiated negotiations with vice-chancellors and other university authorities for their advice and support, and it was his enthusiasm which sold the scheme to the other A.B.C. commissioners and staff. In essence, the program aimed at presenting material at a



sound adult education level, from recognized experts in scholarly fields, using the resources of television to present a more vivid and varied commentary than the speakers could otherwise command. The range of topics suggested in the early discussions was imaginatively ambitious; there would be programs not merely on the more obviously photogenic subjects such as zoology and Australian history, but also discussions of the problems of current political and economic theory. In practice, the program struck early difficulties. It turned out that some university lecturers, of eminent standing in their own speciality, could not master the techniques of television, and failed to do themselves justice before the cameras. There was an unfortunate brush with a geneticist from CSIRO whose script on cancer was thought by A.B.C. officials to be too gruesomely realistic; he withdrew from the series, and later broadcast the program, uncut, on a commercial television channel. Despite these mishaps, 'University of the Air' soon gained a following. If in later years the program failed to develop in scope and enterprise as much as Boyer had planned, this may be because after he ceased to be chairman the universities did not take so much part in planning as they had in the early stages when Boyer was personally interested in co-ordinating and pooling ideas. At the same time as he was exploiting the possibilities of television for education he was not neglecting radio. It was largely due to his incentive that in 1959 the A.B.C. initiated an annual series of lectures by an eminent scholar, on the model of the B.B.C.'s Reith lectures. Appropriately, these broadcasts have been known since 1961 as the Boyer lectures.

More and more he was convinced that the A.B.C. had to make the running in offering good material, since the commercial stations were simply not interested. Writing to Howard Beale, Australian Ambassador in Washington in 1959, Boyer commented:

At the moment my hands are pretty full with the problems of television, which have become a hot political issue. As you know, commercial television in Australia has been almost completely swallowed up by the metropolitan press

up to the moment, that is, in the six Capital Cities. In the next few months the battle will be joined as to whether our press magnates extend their empire into the provinces. The grasp of the few dominant figures in the press field on the means of communication is really becoming a little frightening. Here in Sydney the *S.M.H.* now controls not only the *Herald*, but both afternoon newspapers, a major radio network and a television station, with Newcastle and Wollongong in prospect and Brisbane already in the bag. The trouble is, of course, that TV is big money, both in initial capital and in dividend return, and the press are loath to permit other competitors in this rich advertising field. There are, however, a host of independent companies now entering the field, and there will be an interesting struggle ahead. As far as National Television is concerned we have, of course, our troubles, but they are not very serious. My main concern is to define the distinctive role which National Television should play as compared with Commercial. This is by no means easy, as most of our material, both National and Commercial, is purchased abroad and we are frequently outbidden for the best quality material. The Canadian National Service is having rather a torrid time and even the B.B.C. is staggering a little under the impact of ITV. . . .<sup>16</sup>

When the Commonwealth Government, acting on the advice of the Broadcasting Control Board, came to distribute licences for provincial commercial television stations in 1960, preference was given to applicants who formed companies independent of the metropolitan press both financially and in terms of the supply of program material. This frequently meant that the franchise went to a company dominated by the local country Press, a fact that raised howls of righteous indignation from the Sydney newspapers whose bids had been rejected. Boyer, although he had used his influence in supporting the Control Board's verdict against the city Press magnates, was still greatly troubled by the concentration of control into a few hands. In 1961, invited to submit evidence to the Pilkington Commission

<sup>16</sup> Boyer to Beale, 25 Aug. 1959.

which was then making an important and exhaustive inquiry into British television, Boyer stated his views forcefully:

If, for example, one sees television as being wholly or even predominantly a medium for entertainment, one would tend to lean towards its private operation; private enterprise having traditionally provided most of our entertainment . . . On the other hand, if one sees this new medium as primarily an informative and educational force one would tend to consider that it more properly belongs to those areas of social activity which do not have to sell their goods in the open market . . . In my personal view, the action taken by the United Kingdom Government in granting a monopoly of sound broadcasting to the B.B.C. proved the validity of this philosophy . . . Indeed, no country has reaped more benefit from the employment of an independent statutory corporation to operate its radio services . . . It has been possible for the governing body to pay more attention to intrinsic merit than would have been possible had they been catering primarily for majority appeal. . . .

Television cannot help being a major element in education and information and thereby in the formation of public attitudes and opinions . . . The fundamental decision in formulating a national policy for the conduct of television would appear to be whether its informative function should be made central to the entire programme schedule for the public benefit, or whether this aspect should be merely incidental to those items which can be relied upon to attract a majority audience. . . .

In Australia, Boyer went on to write, the Press, after taking comparatively little interest in commercial radio, had worked strenuously to secure television franchises, in order to protect its advertising income:

This development, it is fair to say, has given rise to considerable dismay and foreboding within the community. This is particularly evident in political circles, where it is now appreciated that this association has greatly strengthened the power of the press in determining public opinion and attitudes.

In addition, this association of metropolitan press and television interests greatly stimulated the 'big business' trend which was already becoming evident among the newspapers. This economic concentration is now such that any worthwhile diversification of the metropolitan press is almost impossible since it is extremely difficult to establish a successful newspaper without a strong commercial television interest. With the scarcity of television frequencies, it is clear that any challenge to existing press proprietors is virtually out of court. There is little need to emphasise the implications for a healthy democracy of such concentrations of political power. . . .

The strong entry of the press into commercial television was probably promoted less in the first instant by the desire to extend its power over public opinion or to extend its monopolistic position, than to protect its long-term income . . . The fault—and I do believe there is one—lies in the commercialisation of a medium which must of necessity be limited to a very few operators. . . .

In Australia the major arguments for allowing commercial television licences to operate in parallel with the national system are that viewers should have as wide a choice as possible and that there is a danger of monopolistic control in a single authority. While this argument *prima facie* appears to have democratic validity, it is very doubtful whether in fact it can be substantiated. Admittedly, with the multiplication of stations, whether national or commercial, a greater quantity of material is telecast and a measure of competition between stations becomes evident. Whether this in fact increases the variety in terms of *type* of programme is, however, doubtful. . . .

Advertisers, seeking to appeal to the widest possible audience, were degrading taste on commercial television to the lowest common denominator, Boyer argued. Popular entertainment programs on commercial television stations in Melbourne and Sydney in an average month (March 1961) accounted for between 70 and 75 per cent of all commercial program time after 2 p.m.; if children's programs were added, the total light entertainment content was at least 85 per cent. The A.B.C. by comparison devoted between 40 and 50 per cent of its program time to light

entertainment, and the same amount to news, documentaries, panels, and other items of a more serious nature. In the evening peak-hour period, between 7 and 9.30 p.m., the commercial channels devoted their entire viewing time to light entertainment, mainly crime and 'western' programs. The A.B.C. allocated between 60 and 65 per cent of peak-hour time to light entertainment.

In summary, the picture is one of the commercial channels saturating all main viewing periods with light material and relegating other types of programmes to less favourable times. This means, from the A.B.C. point of view, that any better type programme placed at a popular viewing time must compete against mass entertainment material, with predictable effects on the size of its audience.<sup>17</sup>

This was Boyer's last major commentary while in office on the problems of broadcasting and television, and it was apparently regarded by the Pilkington Commission as a very useful reinforcement to its views. Its report, as Boyer had hoped, came out very strongly in favour of regarding the maintenance of quality, rather than motives of profit or entertainment, as the paramount aim of British television policy. In Australia it was less easy than in Britain to counter the dilution of television program standards. Any attempt to criticize the usual fare offered on commercial television—light comedy, westerns, and 'cops-and-robbers' dramas which did not even have the merit of keeping local actors and producers in work—was usually countered by the hoary old democratic argument: this was the stuff the Australian people preferred. This was, of course, much the same argument that Doctor Johnson used in defence of public hangings: that the common people enjoyed them as entertainment. It meant, in the context of Australian television, that outside the A.B.C. there was no great pressure on television channels to improve and diversify the content of their programs. Perhaps the picture was not quite as bad as

<sup>17</sup> Cmnd. 1820: *Report of the Committee on Broadcasting, 1960*, Volume II, Appendix E; Memoranda submitted to the Committee (Papers 103-275), p. 1104.

Boyer suggested. As in England, after the first satiation of the public with light entertainment, the commercial television channels found themselves responding to a growing demand for factual or educational programs. Any successes which the A.B.C. had with serious material soon prompted imitation by a commercial station; for instance, scarcely had plans been formed for 'University of the Air' than a commercial television channel in Sydney was offering its own 'Doorway to Knowledge'. Indeed, the more sophisticated commercial operators were entirely willing to let the A.B.C. test audience reaction to serious programs, copying them only if they got a high rating and letting the A.B.C. deliberately cater for minority interests. This left the A.B.C. the problem of balancing its programs between quality and popular material. If it catered too much for minorities, it ran the risk of being accused of losing touch with the public, and thus not justifying its share of public revenue. If it went after competing with the commercials, it might be accused of lowering its standards without providing anything which was not already available on other channels. Boyer's view was emphatically in favour of quality. In framing his ideas for the Pilkington Commission he was summing up the principles developed and sustained during his long term as A.B.C. chairman.

## 12 Death of a Humanist

Early in 1961 Boyer knew for certain that he would be retiring when his current term of office expired at the end of June. He was approaching seventy, and his own inclination to retire was strongly reinforced by the Prime Minister's view (which, with a consistency rare in politicians, Menzies followed in his own career) that at seventy a man should consider stepping down from high public office. Menzies, although socially on cordial terms with Boyer, was not close enough to him to wish to make an exception in his case; each man respected the other's abilities, but they operated, so to speak, on different wavelengths. Basically there was not quite enough in common for closeness between the Melbourne lawyer and the Queensland countryman, the superb political tactician and the unrepentant idealist. Yet they had never come into serious conflict, and indeed his pastoralist friends in Queensland credited Boyer with considerable influence with the Prime Minister.

The exact nature of the relationship is possibly reflected in the appointment of Boyer's successor. There was no recognized 'heir-apparent' groomed to be chairman of the A.B.C. The senior commissioner was the vice-chairman, Edgar Dawes, who despite the receipt of a C.M.G. in 1958 was still an unlikely appointee because of his Labor background and various practical difficulties such as moving from Adelaide to live in Sydney, as the chairman should. Sir John Medley, the only other commissioner with length of experience, had retired in 1960. Among the newer commissioners the only one resident in Sydney was A. G. Lowndes, who had done a good deal to lighten Boyer's load during the last few years when his health was failing. But

the Menzies Government eventually decided on appointing a chairman from outside the Commission. This was Dr James Ralph Darling, who, at sixty-one had just retired after thirty successful years as headmaster of Geelong Grammar School. Respected in many influential Victorian circles, Dr Darling was a creative and imaginative headmaster, combining the traditional virtues of piety and learning with an astute knowledge of the world.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, with his interests in religion and the humanities, with contacts which touched many facets of Australian society, and with a concern for the moral and educational role of radio and television developed during five years as a part-time member of the Broadcasting Control Board, he was a fit successor for Boyer. Few appointees could have been more in sympathy with Boyer's ideals, and where differences existed in their outlooks, they were on details of tactics and policy, not on essentials. So although the initiative for nominating Boyer's successor was apparently taken by cabinet rather than by the outgoing chairman, the appointment was much in harmony with the traditions Boyer had set.

Retirement would not spell a life of idleness for Boyer. His engagements for public speaking were as numerous as ever: at a University of New South Wales graduation ceremony, at the Royal Perth Hospital, at the Sir John Morris oration in Hobart. He was very active, also, with the affairs of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Increasingly, too, his time was occupied with the problems of migrant assimilation. Since 1954 president of the New Settlers' League of New South Wales, he had become a leading figure with the Good Neighbour Councils, and in 1959 was appointed by the Federal Government to the Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council. The last committee on which he served was a fact-finding group from this Council surveying the incidence of mental illness in migrants.<sup>2</sup> In another of his

<sup>1</sup> See the character study in the introduction by Michael Persse to J. R. Darling, *The Education of a Civilized Man: a selection of speeches and sermons* (Melbourne, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth Immigration Advisory Council, *Report on the Incidence of Mental Illness among Migrants* (Canberra, 1961).



interests Boyer came back to a very early influence in his career. From 1952 he was a valued member of the council of the College for Leadership Training set up in that year by the Y.M.C.A. This college, a war memorial, provided a two-year educational program designed to produce 'Christian men and women who will provide significant leadership by which young people will be assisted, mainly during their recreational and leisure time activities, towards the achievement of rich, interesting and worthwhile lives.'<sup>3</sup> By the time of Boyer's death over one hundred graduates had taken up full-time work with youth agencies and social welfare institutions. At the time of his death the Y.M.C.A. put on record its great indebtedness to Boyer for his unusual contributions and influence.

Among his intellectual interests, political science and international affairs were still prominent. But what he most looked forward to in his retirement was returning to philosophy. Its fascination had been strong upon him from his university days under Sir Francis Anderson through the years on Durella, and had remained latent during a strenuous public career. His outlook was still grounded in Protestantism, but a Protestantism mellowed by years of an experience which had embraced close and confidential friendship with men such as Cardinal Gilroy; Boyer in his old age welcomed the stirrings of the ecumenical movement which came in with Pope John XXIII. Yet his optimism was not facile. In an age which had seen so much of totalitarianism and the retreat from reason, Boyer considered that even the amateur philosopher had to re-think and re-state the case for Liberal Christian humanism. Wise in the academic viewpoint, his friend Sir John Medley was not entirely convinced, and tried to persuade him to write his autobiography:

I often urged him to put on paper some of his reminiscences—now and then, I fancy, 'remembered with advantages'—which he could have done as delightfully as he told them. But he always replied that he intended to

\* For this facet of Sir Richard Boyer's work I am indebted to communications from Mr A. C. Top, Mr H. le Maistie and Mr A. E. Symons.

spend his leisure, when he had any, in formulating his philosophy of life and religion. In some ways I thought this a pity but it gives the clue to the secret of his charm.<sup>4</sup>

Medley's intuition may have been right. Boyer's philosophy probably revealed itself better in action than in any attempt to set it down on paper. But in any event the opportunity never arose. Less than a month before 30 June 1961, the date scheduled for his retirement, Boyer was dead. Since his coronary occlusion in 1957, his health had been precarious, and the series of attacks which eventually ended his life were exacerbated by the strain of worry over his last great battle within the A.B.C. This was the Intertel controversy, which overthrew all that Boyer thought he had achieved for the A.B.C. in freedom from government interference over program content and finance.

Intertel was set up after a conference in Vancouver in October 1960. Its members were Associated Rediffusion, one of the independent television networks of Great Britain; the Australian Broadcasting Commission; the Canadian Broadcasting Commission; and, for the United States, the National Education Television and Radio Center of America in conjunction with the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company. Its aim was to promote international understanding and a wider knowledge of current affairs through responsibly planned programs. Impartiality was important, so it was agreed that any subject in which one of the Intertel member-nations might be 'emotionally involved' would be handled by another member. Thus Canada, not the United States, would prepare a feature on Cuba. France would be described by Britain, not Canada with its strong enclave of French culture. Africa, England, the Overseas Chinese were other themes scheduled for treatment.

The subject entrusted to the A.B.C. was promising. It was a survey of relations between Canada and the United States, to be entitled 'Living with a Giant'. This is one of the basic themes of Canadian history and politics, essential to an understanding of North American affairs. Indeed, the

<sup>4</sup> 'Sir Richard Boyer', *Australian Quarterly*, Sept. 1961, pp. 52-3.

last two Canadian Prime Ministers have come to grief on their handling of relations with the United States. It was a topic particularly fit for treatment by Australia, which, like Canada, is one of the old Dominions of the British Commonwealth with considerable American links.

Australia's participation in Intertel, and the theme of the A.B.C.'s first contribution, were announced on 6 December 1960. In view of what followed, it is worth observing that no official objections followed this announcement. There can be no doubt that, in the normal course of events, the Postmaster-General, as the responsible minister, would have been informed of such a major project before the announcement was made. It was probably not necessary to seek Treasury consent, as the A.B.C. was confident of keeping its annual budget on Intertel within the £5,000 which is the limit the A.B.C. may spend without specific approval on any one project in any one year.

Work began in March 1961. Rohan Rivett became the script-writer. After the incident over the Suez broadcast, he had been in further controversy over his conduct of the *Adelaide News* during the Stuart affair.<sup>5</sup> No longer editor of the *News*, he was in a position to travel almost immediately to North America with the team collecting material for 'Living with a Giant'. Like other Commonwealth employees, members of the A.B.C. travelling overseas on official business require the approval of the Overseas Travel Committee. This body was set up early in the fifties, comprising a number of civil servants drawn from the Prime Minister's and External Affairs Departments. In 1961 R. G. Menzies held both portfolios. The Overseas Travel Committee exists for the very proper purpose of ensuring that government departments do not waste the taxpayers' money in frivolous or unnecessary jaunts abroad. Government departments usually exercise judgment in planning their officers' overseas travel, and the committee seldom has to exercise a veto. However, although permission continued to be granted for

<sup>5</sup> K. S. Inglis, *The Stuart Case* (Melbourne, 1961). (A S.A. murder case that grew into a violent controversy about the judicial and political systems involved.)

senior A.B.C. officials to attend Intertel conferences, it does not appear that the committee was prepared to authorize any travel to North America for scripting or filming 'Living with a Giant'.

Boyer was greatly disquieted at this refusal. Besides hamstringing a new and desirable project, it hit at the freedom of the A.B.C. from extraneous interference. After consulting the Commission and senior officials of the A.B.C., he sought an interview with the Prime Minister and the Postmaster-General to urge the reversal of the Overseas Travel Committee's stand. A somewhat constrained interview took place between them in the third week of April. Nothing was conceded, but the question was referred to cabinet. Cabinet's verdict was conveyed to Boyer in a letter dated 23 May 1961, and bearing the Postmaster-General's signature. It was a singularly graceless letter to send to a sick man who had been for sixteen years the trusted and efficient chairman of the A.B.C., and probably was not the Postmaster-General's personal responsibility. Cabinet did not forbid the A.B.C. to continue its membership of Intertel, nor did it make any suggestion that the A.B.C. should withdraw. But it was adamant in refusing any facilities for the making of 'Living with a Giant'. Its objections—which probably echoed the reasons already given by the Overseas Travel Committee—were based mainly on the ground that relations between the United States and Canada were so complex and delicate that it would be unwise for the A.B.C. to attempt a feature on the subject. The Prime Minister himself, it stated, would be unwilling to utter a public pronouncement on this issue; it was clearly undesirable that the A.B.C. should in any way seem to pass judgment on such contentious matters.

Considering that the A.B.C.'s intention to produce this feature had been public knowledge for nearly six months, cabinet's stern reproof was oddly belated. It was surprising that Davidson, as the minister responsible, had made no objections when the subject was first broached. The conclusion seems inescapable that the objections originated with the Prime Minister; that his opposition inspired the

failure of the Overseas Travel Committee to permit the 'Living with a Giant' team to go to North America; and that when Boyer persisted, it was Menzies who framed the arguments for cabinet's abrupt refusal. Until the relevant official files become available it is not possible to write with greater certainty, but the evidence is suggestive.

Menzies meant well. Undoubtedly relations between Canada and the United States were in a tricky state, particularly over the question of American nuclear arms based in Canada. As an experienced Commonwealth statesman, Menzies must have been seized with the necessity of keeping Australia unpartisan in any tension between its two North American allies. South Africa had recently left the British Commonwealth over the question of attempted interference by other nations in her domestic affairs, and Menzies was particularly anxious that Australia should in no way seem to countenance the slightest violation of another Commonwealth country's right to manage its own affairs. But it was one thing for a Prime Minister and his cabinet to keep a judicious silence on a contentious issue of this nature; it was quite another to stop, by any means, an independent inquiry into the subject by the A.B.C. Over Intertel the Menzies Government took the line that because the A.B.C. was a government organization, it should conduct itself with the discretion of a government mouthpiece and run no risk of seeming in any way to express a view which differed from current government policy. In other words, cabinet sought to impose on the A.B.C. the same restraints as were binding on the Prime Minister, ignoring the fact that the responsibilities of the A.B.C. and the responsibilities of the Prime Minister were quite different. Cabinet's attitude in fact was far less liberal than the scope allowed the B.B.C. by the British Government; it was also far from the standard upheld for the A.B.C. by Boyer and his fellow commissioners.

Cabinet's letter reached Boyer when he was seriously ill after a second coronary. It was a hard time at which to learn that, after sixteen years, the A.B.C.'s freedom from

political interference was once more threatened. In considerable distress of mind at a time when absolute rest was essential to his recovery, Boyer received a visit from two of the commissioners to his bedside to consider a reply to cabinet. It was in his mind to resign the chairmanship, for although he was due to retire on 30 June, he thought the gesture might serve to attract public notice to the issues at stake. But he was too ill for action. The Commission's reply to cabinet had to be drafted and despatched under another hand. Before there was time for an answer, Boyer was dead.

Eventually, after much manoeuvring, the Intertel question was settled, by a compromise. In its 1960-1 annual report to Parliament the A.B.C. alluded to the difficulties between itself and the government over the subject chosen for the first Intertel film. These difficulties, the Commission stated, would force the A.B.C. to withdraw from Intertel. It might, indeed, have been possible for Australia to remain a non-contributing member of Intertel, receiving the features produced by other countries as they appeared, but it is scarcely likely that the A.B.C. could have continued indefinitely on the Intertel receiving list without feeling obliged to offer payment, and this would have been an extra expense to budget for. The A.B.C. thus gave notice of withdrawal to Intertel, but was pressed to find ways and means of staying in. On this point, the Commission's report read:

This must ensure the Commission's ultimate responsibility in programme matters and, at the same time, recognise the wisdom of consultation with appropriate Government officers on such Intertel matters as have implications of international significance.<sup>6</sup>

Boyer's successor, Dr J. R. Darling, and Sir Charles Moses continued to explore the conditions under which Australia might go on with its participation in Intertel, and were successful in securing cabinet approval in May 1962 for the A.B.C.'s continued membership. The A.B.C. was to be

\* Australian Broadcasting Commission, *Twenty-ninth Annual Report*, 1960/1; also Davidson to Boyer, 23 May 1961.

responsible for the production of Intertel programs, but the possibility of consultation between the Commission and the Federal Government on the type of features for Intertel programs was not ruled out. Tahiti was the first subject chosen; Antarctica was suggested as a future possibility. Neither offered quite such controversial possibilities as 'Living with a Giant'; but when that feature was eventually produced by Associated Rediffusion, with Lord Boothby as commentator, it was shown on television in all Intertel countries, including Australia, without causing the least ripple in North American politics.

Boyer's last days were overshadowed by this wretched controversy. The remnant of his old spirit was still visible when he was visited by his brother Mowbray, a Methodist minister, who asked him whether there was anything on his mind about making his peace with the next world. 'I'm too busy trying to keep alive in this', replied Dick Boyer. But on 5 June he died. He was not quite three months short of his seventieth birthday.

Then the tributes followed. Menzies and Calwell, Dr H. C. Coombs and Sir John Latham and many other prominent Australians were cited in the Press. Canon Edwards, his lifelong friend, preached a moving funeral oration:

No man was ever more zealous to approve the things that are excellent. No one ever had a greater hatred of everything in life that was unworthy, cheap or second rate, and he expressed his hatred in forthright terms. He had little patience with those who sought to lower our standards.

Dick Boyer set before himself and others ideals of upright conduct, sincerity and strenuous industry and he was as diligent in his own pursuit of them as he was rigorous in stimulating others to a similar quest.<sup>7</sup>

One of the senior Commonwealth drivers at the funeral told Sir John Medley 'he hadn't seen such a turn-out since Ben Chifley's'—a high tribute and well deserved. The impression Boyer left could be pieced together from the scores of letters his family received; from the widow of the

<sup>7</sup> *S.M.H.*, 8 June 1961.

Queanbeyan minister who had supervised his first ministry; from men who had known him in grazing politics; from one of the old bushmen who had worked on Durella:

Just a short note hoping you & family in the very best of Health—good luck to you all well my dear friends I ham very sorry for poor Mr. Boyer to think I new him so well and liked him very much. My Deapest of Symphy to you and family May God bless you all. Wel friends it his keeping pretty dry out here at present we want rain bad. . . .<sup>8</sup>

Or, from Gympie in Queensland:

We have listened to men of high standing refer to him as a Great Australian. He was, indeed, just that, but we would say also he was a grand person to know . . .

Nor was it only his old bush friends who remembered him warmly. One woman wrote:

Only on one occasion did I meet your husband, Sir Richard, and that was on the occasion of a Good Neighbours Council meeting when I was introduced to him as a very new delegate. He shook hands and said how pleased he was that my Society was represented . . . he said it in such a way that I believed every word and felt infinitely more independent and more at ease in a new situation.

Another remembered Boyer in a different capacity:

I have never forgotten an occasion many years ago when the Political Science group was discussing whether Australia could afford large scale immigration. Everyone was attacking the question from the economic angle until Sir Richard lifted the whole discussion to the higher place of one's duty to one's fellow men.

One of the A.B.C. commissioners described how the audience at a concert party at Newcastle Waters in the Northern Territory had stood to attention in silence at the news of Boyer's death: another wrote: 'He stood to all of us for the very soul of honour.' From London, Sir William Haley

<sup>8</sup> This and later extracts are from private letters to Lady Boyer, not included in the Boyer MSS.



wrote: 'Sir Richard had more admirers in England than . . . he could possibly know about. His idealism, his kindness, his wisdom, had always inspired all he met.' The point was developed by Professor Fred Alexander:

I shall always think of him as a crusader for a cause, with all the enthusiasm and readiness to go all out for its success, even when practical experience taught him the need to temper speed with caution—to manoeuvre his way round difficulties instead of just going on knocking his head against some political or bureaucratic brick wall.

It is significant how often those who wrote about Boyer did not confine themselves to pious generalizations but went on to some specific, affectionately remembered recollection of his personality. Behind this warm and outgoing personality, however, Boyer brought to public life a set of consistent and clearly thought out principles. Right at the core of his upbringing, as Boyer himself recognized, was his background of Protestantism and Manchester Liberalism. His beliefs were an almost classic example of the tradition that men are autonomous individuals, with a duty to develop their intelligences and personalities to the best possible advantage, so that they may more fitly serve their community. From this foundation arose his strong belief in liberty of conscience, his hatred of censorship, his enthusiasm for education, his zeal for international understanding, and his unusual receptiveness, even in later life, to new and possibly heretical ideas. He brought to the context of Australian public life an unusually complete and intellectually well-grounded set of liberal principles. The question which demands an answer is whether any man equipped with ideals of this sort could survive and achieve anything useful in the Australian political environment, where some experienced observers have been able to discern nothing more than the quarrels of conflicting pressure groups, amongst whom any individual has little power to influence the course of events.

For a doubt remains. Given the idealism and the sagacity which commanded such respect and affection, was Boyer's

impact on Australian public life equal to his personal qualities? Could he appreciate and bridge the gap between the generalized ideals of his speeches and writings and the specific demands and compromises of government in action? One might argue that his background told against him. The very happiness of his family life from youth to old age, the ease with which friendships came to him, may have unfitted him for sustained conflict by making him too ready to understand and accommodate the views of others. His Protestant upbringing may have confirmed him too strongly in the evangelical theory that good societies arise when they are composed of good men, that private morality is the basis for public morality. He certainly believed in the moral value of education, and found it hard to credit that intelligent men could deliberately choose selfish or sectional policies to the detriment of the public good. These ideas, never at their strongest in Australia, have faded everywhere in the twentieth century. If Boyer was to exhibit the effectiveness of the good man in public life, he had to learn to put his ideals into practice at the institutional level, as well as at the level of personal contacts.

Judgment on his achievement is difficult, because most of the surviving records of his last sixteen years, after he became chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, reveal only his public face. It is possible to gauge his skill at negotiation, or to assess the lines of policy which he laid down for national broadcasting; but less can be said about the way in which the public career moulded the man. This in some ways impoverishes his biography, but stems largely from the circumstances. He was not much given to self-analysis, and had little time for it, and because he managed largely to divorce his working hours from his private life, there were few people in a position accurately to assess his whole character. Certainly in his public life he relied greatly on his ability to establish sympathetic personal relationships, an approach which worked best in a relatively small and informal administrative circle. As the pattern of Australian public life became more complex and formally structured, his task grew more difficult, just as his health

was failing. It was no longer enough to be a dedicated and public-spirited citizen, no matter how experienced or high-principled. An added quality of professionalism was required to contribute effectively to the shaping of public policy. Individual goodwill by itself could only go so far in building up the prestige and morale of a body such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission. The national broadcasting service needed strengthening as an institution, because the external pressures upon it had altered their form. It was no longer the carping of individual politicians that mattered so much as the demands made by government departments and institutionalized pressure-groups. Happier in personal relationships, Boyer had to meet these demands with diminished reserves of stamina and adaptability, and his last years sometimes lacked the sense of serenity and achievement which his career might have merited.

So, in assessing Sir Richard Boyer's contributions to public life, it is tempting to concentrate on the lost causes; the educational and cultural role of national broadcasting overshadowed by popular commercial competitors; the adventurous co-operation between staff and management promised in early years, replaced at the end by a certain caution and mistrust; the hard-won independence from interference by cabinet ministers swept away in one impatient gesture of the Prime Minister, so that in the years following Boyer's death both the government and outside pressure groups have been emboldened to nag at the A.B.C. whenever it attempts anything controversial. This is indisputable, but it is equally indisputable that the standard for judging the A.B.C. is the standard Boyer set. In an Australia, which until recent years had no 'quality' daily or weekly journals, and in which the newspapers were controlled by a handful of interests with limited and predictable political sympathies, the A.B.C. has been the one mass medium consistently endeavouring to provide a full and unslanted coverage of news and opinion. As a patron of musicians and actors, the A.B.C., despite financial limitations, supported Australian culture far beyond its commercial competitors. In a community

which has never been remarkable for its tolerance of dissenting and unpopular opinions, the A.B.C. has had to withstand great pressure to play safe. In upholding its own views against these pressures, the A.B.C.'s policy has sometimes been marked less by boldness than by persistence and diplomacy; but persistence and diplomacy have won more battles than headlong confrontation. Much of this was achieved between 1945 and 1961 because the A.B.C. had as its chairman a man not only with an unusually wide and diversified background and breadth of sympathies, but also with a clear idea of the standard which the national service should set itself to achieve. Given leadership more compliant to outside pressures, more restricted in its vision of the public good, more eager to compete with commercial broadcasting on its own terms instead of believing in the possibilities for education and culture, the national broadcasting service might easily have lapsed into the consistently second rate. It was Boyer's achievement to insist with this, as he did also with other aspects of public life, that although ideals and principles can never be translated into action with complete success, the attempt must be made. Public life in Australia is not, as some have thought, merely the preserve of fixers and organizers. Boyer's career showed that there was a place, and an influential place, for one who sat loose to party allegiances, spoke his mind, began with few advantages except a personality in which idealism, intellect, and practical experience were finely balanced. The example of this personality was perhaps as valuable a contribution as any of the individual causes which he fought.

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