

SCRIPT: [BRITAIN'S BROADCASTING MONOPOLY](#) by Trevor Brook

Presented at *Signals From The Edge*, University of Bedford, Luton, 1st March 2025

There is a set of 72 slides accompanying the talk.

ABSTRACT

In Britain, the Home Office and the GPO controlled broadcasting and obstructed change.

This overview covers the plethora of campaigns, studies, government reports, demonstrations and debates on liberalising radio, from the 1930s onwards

SCRIPT

[Title slide]

In Britain, the Home Office and the Post Office controlled broadcasting and obstructed change, while in the USA the attitude of the specialist regulator, the FCC, was more a case of: 'how can we fit this in?'

The first pirates had been caught in 1934...

two brothers in Norwich playing popular music...

to break Britain's broadcast monopoly...

in 1944, British and American investors planned broadcasting from ships after the war, while British radio manufacturer, Cossor, envisaged 924 private stations on the FM band...

That same year, Cossor proposed independent television stations, called Kinema Television...

Commercial radio was being debated in 1946...

1948's Beveridge Committee wanted immediate local radio...

There were more false hopes and promises of commercial radio in 1952...

Commercial television started in 1953...

but those assuming radio would soon follow were to be disappointed...

an East Molesey pirate was caught in 1959...

1960 saw very detailed plans which clearly showed...

the practicality of over 100 local stations...

which PYE transmitters...

even demonstrated publicly in 1960, on 250 metres medium wave...

Then, there was a study in the sixties...

from the National Commercial Radio Movement...

with pressure from the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting...

the Free Radio Campaign...

and the long-lived Free Radio Association...

Another demonstration was provided in 1961, for the Pilkington Report...

held at Castle Goring and led by Ian Collins of SCBC...

South Coast BroadCasting Company...

Then, Parliament debated and extinguished the issue...

Twenty years after the original idea, offshore pirates appeared in 1964, provoking, in 1965...

the Institute for Economic Affairs to support competition in radio...

while the Reform Group wrote: "*We approve wholeheartedly*"...

There were abundant other proposals...

followed in 1969, by hope in a one hundred station promise...

along with a firm pledge...

There were similar schemes from Ulster's future radio supremo, John Rosborough...

along with the BBC's, by Lord Hill of Luton in July 1969...

advocating local radio and making no claim for any BBC monopoly...

Hughie Green's group wanted 115 stations...

presenting this map of medium wave sites on television...

Next, 285 town stations were sought, including 12 for London...

by John Gorst's Local Radio Association...

based on a Marconi frequency plan...

There were more studies prepared for the government and detailed schemes...

yet just a few large area stations...

were permitted from 1973...

In 1977, a Local Broadcasting Authority was envisaged in the Annan Report...

as a means of: "*giving local services the chance to develop*"...

and duly ignored in the White Paper which followed...

A Radio Jackie booklet in 1979...

made perfectly sound proposals...

as did The Broadcast Bureau in 1982...

In 1985 the government announced...

a scheme of 21 licences for community stations. Yet one year later...

the Home Office reneged on its promise..

Free The Airwaves had become a new campaigning group...

as had CRADLE - the Community RADio Licence Experiment...

Jackie's submissions had foreseen how radio would develop...

and proved that governments' eternal "*no frequencies are available*" claims...

were completely and utterly untrue...

the BBC had agreed that frequencies did exist...

and engineers continued to agree. Still nothing changed... and there were hundreds of pirates...

the longest lasting being the amazing 57 years of Ken Lancaster's Radio Britannia in Yorkshire. In 1986...

realising the impracticality of raiding the station in Shetland, the government issued a Cable Authority licence, which legalised making programmes for the public. The fact its 'cable' ended with a transmitting aerial was quietly ignored for years... until the Radio Authority granted a licence...

Happily, 40 years later, Inga and Ian still run what Americans call a 'Mom and Pop' station. I took these photos in the summer...

Campaigns, journals and magazines continued...

Books were published putting forth the arguments...

Activists lobbied...

In 1986, the Peacock Committee wanted hundreds of stations...

In 1987, minister John Butcher supported freer access to the airwaves...

yet progress was blocked at every turn...

Finally, in 2002, a new tier of pilot AM and FM community radio was permitted...

Taking the short wave monopoly to the Competition Commission, to Judicial Review and to the European Court of Human Rights led to: the Office of Fair Trading revealing the Radiocommunications Agency was not covered by the Competition Act; a High Court judge commenting on failures of the authorities...

and the government apologising to the court in Strasbourg about their behaviour. The short wave monopoly still survives forty years on, illustrating the obstruction and disinformation, which everyone here...

has experienced. [Closing slide]