

# ***Radio Normandie and the IBC Challenge to the BBC Monopoly***

**DONALD R. BROWNE**, *The University of Minnesota*

When monopolies are created, their creators quickly acquire a vested interest in their perpetuation. Where monopolies in broadcasting are concerned, 'creators' would include not only the broadcasting organisation, but also the national government, which in almost every instance would have sanctioned and even promoted the monopoly in the first place. The monopoly may be justified in the name of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, national unity, equality of service and/or even, if the government is candid, reshaping people's behavioural patterns (e.g. Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union). In any case, once a broadcast monopoly is established, broadcaster and government alike will seek to maintain it, and only a major event, such as losing a war (Nazi Germany, Japan) or having a change in government after many years of leadership by one political party (France, Sweden, Norway) generally will lead to its alteration. Monopolies tend to attract challengers. If the national government is ardent in its defence of monopoly, and if a challenger is equally ardent in its attempts to break that monopoly, there is only one legal solution [1]: find a location outside the country from which to broadcast to it. That solution has been tried in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Europe, starting in the 1920s and continuing to the present. It can be a costly solution. Transmitters located outside a country may have to be considerably more powerful than those located within it if they are to reach effectively the majority of the national population. The country 'hosting' the challenging station almost certainly will demand some form of compensation for its hospitality. There may be additional costs associated with staffing such a station, since at least some of those staff members will probably come from the target country and will expect additional compensation (housing, meals, extra pay) for their service abroad.

The money to support those costs may come from a variety of sources, although individual receiver license fees - a common method of financing broadcast monopolies - will not be one of them. If a foreign government wishes to break what it considers to be an information monopoly, it may support a challenger, but in that case the government would wish to have a hand, and probably a large hand, in determining message content. But it is also possible for a challenger to approach the situation in more purely financial terms. Many broadcast monopolies carry little or no advertising, yet there are plenty of examples of broadcast systems in which advertising not only supports operational costs, but permits a number of individuals to earn considerable sums of money. If a challenger can interest advertisers in having their messages broadcast to a country where the domestic system allows few or none of them to be aired, the challenge may be worth mounting seriously.

Radio Normandie was the first broadcast station to be utilised in a major way by a challenger seeking to break a monopoly for financial reasons. There had been several instances of individuals purchasing air time on European stations (usually Belgian, Dutch or French) during the late 1920s in order to broadcast commercial messages to other European countries (chiefly Great Britain) where the domestic broadcast service did not permit them, but those efforts had no long-term continuity and usually took place for no more than an hour or two per week [2]. Normandie's English language broadcasts started in much the same fashion, but quickly grew to occupy several hours per day and ultimately all seven days of the week. The station was a forerunner to the more famous Radio Luxembourg, and over the nine years of its English language service demonstrated most of the characteristics of challengers to broadcast monopolies. In addition, the attempts of the BBC and the British government to bring an end to that service furnished a vivid picture of the tactics and limitations employed and faced by governments and broadcasters in coping with such a challenge.

### **Normandie's Early Years - 1924-1930**

Radio Normandie was typical of French radio stations in the 1920s, in that it was founded by a passionate amateur of broadcasting who wished to share his enthusiasm with others. Fernand Le Grand was an executive of Soci  t   B  n  dictine, the firm which manufactures the famous liqueur. While studying for his law degree in Paris, M. Le Grand had become interested in Branly's experiments with electromagnetic transmission. He carried out his own experiments from his home in F  camp, Normandy during the early 1920s, founded the Radio Club of F  camp in 1924, and contributed much of his own money and time to the development of a full-blown station over the next several years. By the late 1920s the station had taken the name Radio Normandie, was broadcasting commercial announcements, and operated at a power of 5 kW, sufficient to deliver a fairly clear signal to a 100 k radius. Its broadcasts were audible in southern England, and a few English newspapers began to carry its broadcast schedule [3]. At that time all broadcasts were in French.

Le Grand wanted to see the station expand still further, but there were limits to his own financial means, and the commercials did not bring in much money; nor were members of the Radio Club - by that time several thousand - in a position to contribute a great deal. (The 'Great Depression' affected France as severely as it affected most other industrialised nations.) Outside financing was not a very realistic possibility, the more so as the French government was beginning to discourage the formation or expansion of private radio stations. Yet it was outside financing, arriving somewhat by chance, that allowed him to realise his goal and that also introduced to British listeners the first broadcast service in English that would furnish ongoing competition with the BBC.

## Captain Plugge, the IBC and Radio Normandie

Fernand Le Grand was captivated by the prospect of television, which he saw as a natural extension of radio. In 1930, he travelled to London to witness a demonstration of Baird's television system. While there, he met some officials from the International Broadcasting Company, an organisation that had been officially registered early in 1930. The IBC was an outgrowth of the activities of several English businessmen, chief among them Captain L.F. Plugge, who had purchased time on various radio stations in France, Belgium and the Netherlands during the mid- to late 1920s for the broadcast of commercial announcements on behalf of businesses (e.g. department stores). The BBC did not carry commercial announcements, and a few British businesses were becoming interested in the possibilities of radio as a sales medium. Plugge was reported to have been very active during the late 1920s in driving around Europe looking for stations from which to purchase air time for that purpose [4]. Plugge had visited Fécamp [5], and already was aware of Normandie's ability to reach into southern England before Le Grand's journey to London, but the IBC wanted some test transmissions as verification. They commenced on 29 June 1930.

The test transmissions continued on and off over the next year and a half, during which time Plugge and his IBC associates were busily engaged in lining up other European stations and even Radio Algiers. Apparently the tests were proving satisfactory, because IBC invested in Normandie in March 1931, perhaps as much as 400,000 francs (c. s as of 1931) - a move which expanded Radio Normandie's working capital fourfold, and allowed Le Grand to consider the purchase of a more powerful transmitter [6]. By October 1931, the tests from Normandie included a programme sponsored by Philco, a US radio manufacturer with distribution in Great Britain [7]. That was enough to alarm a few BBC officials, one of whom wrote a memo on the station, concluding with these words:

*I am wondering whether it would not be possible to make representations through the Union [International Broadcasting Union] to stop this kind of thing. Failing that it seems almost a case for mild diplomatic representation. It seems to me that if we calmly allow this kind of thing to go on, sooner or later we shall be forced off the "no advertising" standard, which, to my mind, would be disastrous. [8]*

The note of alarm appears to have fallen on deaf ears within the BBC, perhaps because Normandie's English language broadcasts were still infrequent. But in February 1932 they began to appear every day of the week, for five hours on Saturdays and on Sundays (10 p m to 3 am) and for one hour per day for the remainder of the week (12-1 am). Transmitter power was approximately 8 kW, which was sufficient to cover much of southern England, and even brought the station to listeners in

southern France. Most of the broadcasts consisted of light popular music, were hosted by English announcers, and, thanks to an informal style of presentation and the sheer quantity of light music, were able to attract many listeners who found the BBC a bit heavy and formal in these respects (especially on Sundays, which were dubbed 'Reith Sundays' because of the sombre tone adopted by the BBC on that day, at BBC Director General John Reith's specific order).

### **The Battle Begins in Earnest**

By 1933, the International Broadcasting Company had purchased time on several European stations, ranging in location from Poland to Italy to France, and had plans to do so in Spain, Yugoslavia and Luxembourg. Furthermore, in 1933 the IBC had organised an 'IBC Club', for which members paid nothing at all. Club membership allowed individuals to have children's birthdays and special anniversaries announced for one shilling, but it also allowed IBC to present potential advertisers with some idea of the size, composition and geographical location of the audiences they would reach if they advertised over IBC outlets. Members could purchase IBC button hole badges, cuff links, etc., all with the IBC logo (which bore a strong resemblance to the BBC logo, causing the BBC to protest to IBC!). The Club included a reported (by IBC) 90,000 members by mid-1933, which caused Plugge to make an appeal over Radio Normandie for still more members if the Club, and indeed the English language services of IBC, were to survive [9]. He hinted at "attempts that had been made to hamper its [the Club's and perhaps IBC's] activities", but was not specific on that point.

What Plugge may have had in mind were the first concrete signs of opposition from the BBC. Early in 1933, Normandie's English service had begun to encourage cities and towns around Great Britain to prepare brief statements about themselves, which in turn would be read over the air. Working through its regional offices, the BBC attempted to discourage cities and towns from cooperating with IBC. IBC's activities were presented as the 'opening wedge' in a possible move to 'commercialised radio,' which was made out to be highly undesirable. Many communities responded to BBC pressures, but a few, e.g. Sheffield, did not, and heard their prose over Normandie.

There was a much more serious challenge mounted through the UIR (International Broadcasting Union), whose Secretary General, A. R. Burrows, once had been a BBC staff member. Burrows had written to Major C.F. Atkinson of the BBC in October 1932, complaining about the 'low' quality of the music played over a Radio Paris English language broadcast and wondering about its effect on "the good name of England". Burrows also wrote to John Reith in April 1933, reporting that a conversation with persons in the League of Nations Secretariat (the UIR was not part of the League, but often cooperated with it) had produced

the opinion that radio stations which broadcast advertising matter in languages other than those native to their countries and which by their power clearly were aiming to reach listeners in other countries could "become a source of international friction", and should be discouraged. Reith replied less than two weeks later, telling Burrows that what he was attempting was 'quite right'. Reith added that *"We can also, if necessary, ourselves draw the attention of the Foreign Office to the abuse"* [10].

In May 1933, the UIR passed a resolution basically along the line of what Burrows had set forth. There were no penalties attached, but governments were encouraged to cooperate with each other in removing 'offensive' stations or services from the air. The BBC then encouraged the Foreign Office and Postmaster General to bring pressure to bear on their French counterparts to call a halt to English language broadcasts from French private stations. Plugge in turn wrote to Reith (15 July 1933), protesting that the BBC had brought pressure to bear on British representatives to the UIR to approach the French government "with a view to obtaining the suppression of any publicity from French stations for British manufactured goods", which Plugge deplored because "In these times of unemployment and falling exports the advertising of British products abroad [*italics mine*] is of paramount importance." He added that IBC broadcasts were heard in "many parts of the world". In other words, Plugge sought to bypass the UIR resolution by claiming a greater physical reach for the stations utilised by IBC than would appear to have been warranted, since few of the stations could be heard outside of Europe [11].

The pressures themselves had no immediate effect. The French government was sympathetic, but unable, unwilling or unprepared to cooperate, at least for the time being. The stations were 'private enterprises'. They also produced tax revenues for the government. Nor did it seem that the British Foreign Office thought the matter worth pursuing doggedly.

But the BBC continued to create pressures of its own within Great Britain. When Plugge appealed for listener support over Normandie in July 1933, he added that IBC soon would introduce a 10 minute news bulletin. Apparently it attempted to do so, but as no major wire service or other news agency would supply it with material, the effort was short-lived, and that was the only time that IBC ever made such an attempt over Normandie. There is no direct evidence that the BBC discouraged news agency cooperation, but that would have been consistent with other BBC moves then, and the BBC did ask Reuters and British United Press in 1937 not to supply "their news services to such organizations as Radio Luxembourg" [12].

Reith had already attempted to work through the National Publisher's Association, which was unhappy about the possible diversion of adver-



tising money from the press to the radio; a 23 December 1931 memo from the BBC's Administrative Executive to the Assistant Controller noted that Reith wanted data on British sponsored programmes abroad "at the earliest possible moment..., in order that [the Assistant Controller (Information) ] may brief the NPA in assisting them in formulating their protest" [13]. Reith also sought to block the distribution of IBC's Weekly Programme Guide, which had been placed on sale in news agencies in late March 1933, by encouraging the National Federation of Retail Newsagents, Booksellers and Stationers to take such an action. Alexander MacLaren, General Secretary of the Federation, wrote to Reith on 26 January 1934, stating that the Federation had "succeeded in banning the sale" of the Guide "particularly because we are strongly against advertisers buying time on the ether in order to push their wares" [14].

One of the oddest moves in the BBC's attempts to force Normandie's English service off the air was directed through the Church of England. On 15 April 1934, a Mr Wall, who was the Bishop of Durham's Precentor, broadcast a talk over Radio Normandie. The following day, Charles Iremonger, Director of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC, wrote to the Dean of Durham Cathedral (a personal acquaintance), stating that Radio Normandie was "an entirely undesirable Radio Company, for which no priest of the Church of England should work, especially on a Sunday afternoon. It is an entirely unpleasant commercial affair, and it is trying to cut us out with its Sunday secularized programmes". Correspondence between the two men continued for about one month, with no specific resolution of the issue [15]. (One BBC staff member did caution Iremonger to beware of possibly libellous statements in his letters.)

The IBC was quite prepared to fight back. Plugge carried on extensive correspondence with BBC and Post Office officials from mid-1933 to early 1935 concerning the precise wording of the UIR resolution of May 1933. He stated (quite correctly) that no private radio stations had been in attendance at the UIR meeting, and that their viewpoint was not represented in the deliberations. He also questioned whether IBC broadcasts were against public policy, as the BBC claimed, or whether it was more a matter of BBC policy that was being 'violated'. And finally, Plugge doubted that the resolution had any legal force. (It did not.) The two parties stuck to their respective positions throughout the period [16].

Plugge also took steps to see to it that members of parliament would be aware of IBC's activities. Each was placed on the mailing list for the IBC Weekly Programme Guide. IBC sent out a letter to all MPs on 21 July 1933, explaining the Company's activities and position; Plugge signed the letter. Listeners were asked to contact their MPs to urge them to oppose any attempts to halt IBC broadcasts. (By that time IBC claimed a Club membership of 150,000, but that figure is undocumented.) [17]

Eventually, Plugge took an even more direct route to parliamentary influence: he ran in the October 1935 general election and was chosen as M P for Chatham. (He spoke over Radio Normandie at least once during the campaign, and hired men to walk around Chatham with sandwich boards advertising the station.) One of his campaign promises was that he would make broadcasting his "particular concern in the House of Commons", which prompted one BBC staff member to note wryly in an internal memo, "There will be some plugging!" [18].

Plugge also employed a tactic similar to the BBC's approach to the NPA. He worked through the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, which then sent a telegram on 1 November 1935 to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, stating that "A meeting has been held of over 500 firms of British manufacturers" collectively employing "many hundreds of thousands of work people", and adding that those attending "decided unanimously" that a rumoured Postmaster General action to prevent British firms from advertising over foreign stations would be prejudicial to trade. The telegram concluded by asking Baldwin's cooperation in halting such a move [19]. Follow-up telegrams and letters secured no promises, but there were expressions of recognition that a problem existed.

Also in November 1935, Plugge contracted for the services of a public relations group called the League of Freedom. The League was paid to conduct a mail campaign among IBC Club members, asking them to protest about any BBC attempts to get IBC programmes off the air and urging them to contact their MPs about this. Since the Ullswater Committee report was about to come before Parliament, and since the report urged the British government to bring an end to IBC and other advertiser-supported English language services coming from the continent (Reith and other BBC staff members had pressed the Committee to include such a statement), Plugge's action was most timely [20].

The period from 1935 to 1937 saw an intensification of the BBC's efforts to bring pressure to bear upon the French government. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs even made the seemingly unequivocal statement that all advertising in English on French stations would cease from 1 February 1935. Two months later, C. W. Graves, Director of the BBC's Empire Service, wrote to F. W. Phillips of the Post Office, reporting on a meeting that he [Graves] had had with Monsieur Pellenc, the Director of the French state broadcast service. Graves stated " . . . the situation appears to be as hopeless as ever", and went on to tell why: too many changes of ministers in charge of broadcasting, Pellenc's advice was not always followed, etc. Graves then reported Pellenc's reply to his "point blank question" as to why the French government had not brought a halt to English language advertising on 1 February. Pellenc "threw the responsibility on to his Minister and said that the stations had no other way of living than by publicity, and what could you expect?" Graves closed by stating "It seems hopeless to believe anything they say

in this respect", but he urged Phillips to continue to press the French authorities for action [21].

That note of frustration was to recur frequently over the next two years, but perhaps never so eloquently (and plaintively) as in this excerpt from a 4 November 1937 memo by I. D. Benzie, the BBC's Foreign Director.

*Somebody in France once said that something might happen about stopping English advertising on the 1st February, 1935 - but there is no use hoping to get satisfaction by harking back to that at this time of day!*

*To face facts: the Foreign Office won't get any change out of the Quai d'Orsay; this is all the less likely because the F.O. is consistently much gentler in its approach than the Post Office would like it to be. The French government made (I should say) its final gesture about discouraging English advertising by imposing the famous tax [on the profits of French private stations]. (a) I believe that this tax has recently been increased, and (b) we hear also that it is not impossible to evade it. (a) Only means that the French government has underlined its gesture, so to say, and (b) of course, that the gesture is worth precious little to us.*

Benzie went on to reinforce her statement about likely Foreign Office inaction (a sentiment widely shared among BBC administrators with respect to these European-based broadcast services):

*I predict that the F.O. will get gentler and gentler and eventually say the same thing as it has done about [Radio] Luxembourg, i.e., undignified to go on making useless protests, and they therefore propose to stop; and not only that, but they will take the same line as anybody does in big negotiations: viz., do not let us annoy the other party on a trivial issue (broadcasting) when we want their concurrence on a major issue (foreign affairs). In brief, we may be left as the only upholders of the British position, and thus we ought to go on upholding it so that the French cannot say later on that all protests ceased and the practice was presumably no longer found objectionable. [22]*

Benzie had prepared this memo because the BBC's Deputy Director General, Admiral C.D. Carpendale, was about to travel to Nice for a meeting of the UIR, and thought that it might be useful to speak with M. Jardillier, a former Minister of the French PTT (Posts, Telephone and Telegraph) and the new French member of the UIR Council. Carpendale proposed to brief Jardillier on the history of British government and BBC attempts to remove English language broadcasting from French private stations. Benzie had noted in her memo that she thought such an attempt would be useful, as noted above, and suggested that Carpendale employ a further argument: that the French stations occasionally had been used by British citizens (including Winston Churchill) to broadcast political messages to British audiences. What might that do to Anglo-



French diplomatic relations? And what if some other country permitted such broadcasts into France?

Carpendale raised the various arguments with Jardillier, and, in a 15 December 1937 letter to Phillips of the Post Office, reported that *"I could scarcely get them out, so anxious was he to agree to all I said!"* But Benzie's December 1937 Record of Conversation with Carpendale ended as follows:

*D.D.G. [Carpendale] had, I think, the impression that the question of the extent of M. Jardillier's sincerity was not an important one, because however sincere he was not likely to succeed.*

*It is perhaps worth noting (a) that he remains Mayor of Dijon and Député, and that his position in the Post Office seems of secondary importance to him; (b) that the Prefect of the Alpes-Maritimes indicated in a speech at the Nice meeting [of the UIR] that he was interested in the Juan-les-Pins station! [Jardillier had told Carpendale that the French government recently had restricted the power of the Juan-les-Pins station, but also had admitted that the Post Office seemed to have little control over what any given private station actually might do. Benzie clearly felt that, if a French politician were involved, there probably would be even less control!] [23]*

Reith himself echoed the pessimism expressed by Benzie and Carpendale. His letter of 27 October 1937 to Colonel E. F. Lawson of the Daily Telegraph stated:

*"We cannot understand why the French Government does not move more quickly than it does in the elimination of English advertising. Periodically they have promised to do so, but there is not a great deal of discipline in the country." He wondered, however, whether the elimination of the French stations "would merely bring all their work to Luxembourg" [24].*

By 1938, the BBC appears to have given up hope that the activities of Normandie and the other European stations could be curbed. There continued to be protests, but few direct actions against IBC broadcasts. (The BBC had discouraged Cunard Lines from accepting an IBC offer to provide free broadcasts about the Queen Mary just prior to its maiden voyage in 1936; its efforts were successful, as they were in a similar IBC attempt in 1936 *vis-à-vis* the British Air Ministry.) [25] BBC internal memos continued to indicate concern over the activities of IBC, which itself continued to attempt to purchase time on more and more European stations, but there were no strong attempts to get the Post Office or the Foreign Office to press the matter any further.

## Shifting Programme Strategies

The BBC had another weapon at its disposal: beat IBC at its own game by providing competitive programming. A 7 June 1933 internal circulating memo from the Director of Informational Programming to the Foreign Director and the Director General noted the growth of a "sponsored wireless ring around us" and went on to state:

*I presume the UIR is sure to prove ineffective. Our only other weapon appears to be that of studying all these programmes, both in hours and material, and manipulation of our programmes to compete with them, driving them out by our superior merit. This may mean a slight modification of our programme policy, but I think it is better to accept that and fight these advertisement programmes now rather than run the risk of them getting further into favour, as they will (short of UIR action), and undermining our programme policy to a greater extent. [26]*

A committee was established to consider alternative programme strategies, and came up with several recommendations for further consideration, most of which had to do with expanding the broadcast schedule and 'lightening' some of the programme fare on Sundays, when the commercial stations presumably could attract listeners bored by the relatively dull 'Reith Sundays'. One step already was in the works: adding broadcasts between 6.00 and 8.00 pm on Sundays, which heretofore had been a 'silent' period for the BBC. (Reith felt that radio should not intrude overmuch on what was supposed to be a day of rest and religious observance.) Over the next few years, there were other adjustments in BBC's programme schedule, most of them fairly modest: Reith refused to countenance widespread changes, especially in the Sunday schedule [27].

Reith's convictions regarding programme policy caused other difficulties. He was generally opposed to having divorced persons work for the Corporation, and eventually some of the better-known stars of British show business sought radio outlets over the stations on the continent because they were not allowed to appear on the BBC. Furthermore, the BBC was hampered by trade union restrictions in at least two important respects: it was sometimes difficult to make disc recordings of performers, and certain foreign popular music artists were not allowed to perform in London. Normandie took advantage of both restrictions by making disc recordings of live performances in England and scheduling them at strategic times, often just before the BBC had scheduled a live broadcast of some of the same artists, and by recording some of the more outstanding musical artists banned from playing in London, such as Duke Ellington and His Orchestra, when they performed on the continent [28].

In late 1937-early 1938, there were two developments which gave hope to the BBC that something might be done about the 'offending' stations. In late December 1937, reports came from Paris which indicated

that the French government was about to prohibit English advertising on French stations. British papers picked this up, there were protests against the policy in trade papers, The Times of London, etc., resolutions of protest by professional groups such as the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, and a statement in Parliament by Lord Boothby against this "unwarranted interference" [29]. It all came to nothing, anyway: the French government that had seriously considered such an action resigned on 27 January 1938 and its successor never went ahead with the plan, although the P T T Commission of the French Chamber of Deputies reported in favour of the plan in April 1938 (nothing came of that, either).

The British Post Office made an attempt at the World Telecommunications Conference in 1938 to obtain an international condemnation of advertising over stations broadcasting on long waves. That would not have affected Radio Normandie, but it would have affected Radio Luxembourg. The Technical Committee finally considered such a resolution on 3 March 1938. The vote was 15 in favour, 15 opposed, 23 absences and eight absentees. Significantly, it was the President of the French Delegation who led the opposition to the resolution [30].

Reith's resignation from the BBC in 1938 opened up the possibility of making a more direct challenge to the continental stations, and the commencement of World War II in 1939 led to further possibilities. In the name of aiding the morale of armed service personnel, the BBC created a new broadcast service in 1940: a General Forces Programme which featured a larger amount of lighter fare such as variety shows, dance music, etc. Of course, the general public could listen to the new service just as easily as could the service personnel, and presumably it then would listen less to the stations from the continent [31].

### **Radio Normandie's 'Ratings'**

When Radio Normandie's English language service first came on the air, there was no scientific measurement of broadcast audiences. Devices such as the rather crude yardstick of IBC Club membership, plus responses to giveaway offers, were about all that IBC had to offer its clients at first. Thus, the BBC's reactions to Normandie's 'threat' were based on very little evidence, and even that was of doubtful quality. IBC first was part of a telephone survey in March 1935 (the same year in which the BBC founded its Audience Research Department). The survey apparently was conducted by an advertising agency which wanted to assess the size of audiences listening to IBC programmes before signing up for air time on behalf of various clients [32]. Results were not made public.

In summer 1935, there was a far more elaborate survey, this time undertaken by IBC itself. It involved 9,209 in-person interviews in 13

British cities. Its results were encouraging for IBC: 61% of radio homes listened at least occasionally to English broadcasts from the continent, 16% listened to Normandie on Sunday mornings, 24% on Sunday afternoons and 21% on Sunday evenings, while weekday figures for those time periods were 9, 4 and 8%. (Radio Luxembourg attracted 41% on Sunday afternoons and 37% on Sunday evenings.) [33] IBC conducted a very similar survey in summer 1936, and stated that, according to its findings, occasional or more frequent listening to continental stations on Sundays now stood at over 69%, with 'considerable gains' for Normandie on Sunday afternoons [34].

The most ambitious survey undertaken on the 'reach' of the continental stations came in 1938, and was conducted by Professor Arnold Plant of the London School of Economics for the ISBA and the IIPA (Institute of Incorporated Practitioners of Advertising). It involved one survey of listening in February and March 1938 and another in November 1938; the former was done with over 25,000 households, the latter with about 10,000, all in the 34 most populous urban areas of Great Britain. Plant employed careful sampling techniques, and, rare for that period, reported margins of error for all data. The surveys, conducted nationwide and in radio and non-radio households, showed that the European-based commercial stations collectively outdrew the BBC every hour of the day in both periods, that Luxembourg frequently had higher figures than did the BBC (but not in the 4-11 pm period), and that Normandie generally trailed the BBC, often by wide margins in the evening hours (its morning figures were quite competitive, however). The BBC generally outdrew the continental stations during the weekdays, aside from those periods (e.g. the very late evening and early morning hours) when they were broadcasting and it was not [35].

IBC commissioned Crossley, a US-based survey research firm, to undertake a survey in October 1938, but it covered only London and the surrounding counties. It involved 5,785 individuals who were asked to recall the previous day's listening. Its results showed that some 30% of this particular audience listened before 11.30 am; nearly two-thirds were listening to the commercial stations from the continent. On Sunday mornings, sets in use increased to just over 50%, and over 80% of them were turned to the commercial stations. Luxembourg outdrew Normandie on Sundays, but Normandie was slightly ahead of Luxembourg on weekdays [36].

Finally, the BBC itself conducted two surveys, in November / December 1937 and in January 1939. It sent mail questionnaires to some 2,000 individuals who had been selected by the BBC from a list of 47,000 names of correspondents who had replied to an invitation to participate in such surveys. The invitation was delivered during the broadcast of a BBC variety show, and hardly constituted a random sample. Roughly one-fifth of the sample claimed to listen regularly to the conti-

mental stations on weekdays, and about two-thirds did so on Sundays. Normandie and Luxembourg were the two leading stations, and Normandie even did slightly better than Luxembourg on weekdays [37].

Clearly the various surveys revealed that Radio Normandie and Radio Luxembourg were able to challenge the BBC for listener loyalty on certain days of the week and at certain times of day. Clearly there was a little fluctuation in survey figures over time, as well. But rarely did those figures show that the BBC was threatened seriously during most of its broadcast hours at any time during the period when those surveys were taken. Nor does it appear that the survey data caused the Post Office, Parliament or any other agency of government to 'push' the BBC to accept the need for commercially supported broadcasts of its own, although such a point was raised during and after World War II. The data did seem to encourage British (and some US) firms to advertise over the IBC and other English language services on the continent, and ad revenues climbed sharply during the mid- to late 1930s, to the point where Plugge became an extremely wealthy man [38].

## **Reactions in France**

When Fernand Le Grand began to sell air time to Plugge and the IBC, he did so on a small scale at first, perhaps because he was not certain of its soundness as a business proposition, but perhaps also because he did not wish to antagonise his own Radio Normandie Club members (c. 20,000 as of the early 1930s). A number of French listeners, some Club members and some not, did write to the station to express their feelings, while others wrote to their local newspapers. None seemed happy that air time was being sold for English broadcasts. Some could not understand the need for this, while others saw it as a 'necessary evil' if the station were to be able to expand, as did a Monsieur R. Tertel, who stated that he did not enjoy the fact that the station broadcast in English, "but how else can they support themselves?" (translation mine) [39]. Enough criticism of the policy arose that the Board of Directors of the station made a statement, carried by some newspapers and radio magazines, that the station needed money and that it (the Board) still retained control over how much time would be sold and for which periods [40]. There were two IBC people, Plugge and Leonard, on the Board, as a result of IBC's subscription of capital in 1931, but the majority was French. However, Le Grand was careful to point out that the IBC, and not he, paid the English language staff [41].

The IBC attempted to curry favour in France, as well. One or more IBC staff from London would appear for important occasions, such as the laying of the cornerstone for the new Radio Normandie transmitter near Louvetot in 1935 and the dedication of further new facilities in 1939. As some of the IBC staff spoke good to excellent French, often they would make speeches on those occasions, and one French newspa-



per praised one of them, a Mr Shanks, for his gracious remarks and near-perfect accent [42]. The IBC even arranged for a special ferry trip to Fécamp in 1935, to allow Radio Normandie's English audience to see the place of origin of its broadcasts. Some 350 people made the journey [43].

But there may have been more than just money involved in Le Grand's decision to sell time to IBC. In a December 1932 interview by the French radio amateur magazine *L'Antenne*, Le Grand spoke of his desire to see a broader network of radio stations to serve as an "Entente Cordiale de la Radio" [44], and his son Bruno mentioned that aspect of his father's character in a 1984 interview [45]. Also, it appeared to please him to deal with businessmen who recognised, as he did, that radio could be an important aspect of modern merchandising--and he employed several techniques of modern merchandising in his promotion of the sales of Bénédictine liqueur.

By the late 1930s, controversy over the leasing of air time to a British business firm largely had disappeared. The list of advertisers was growing, and that brought more and more money to Radio Normandie, which was able to invest in a new transmitter, antenna, studios, etc., all of which pumped money into the local economy. The transmitter and antenna were placed in Louvetot (a better location for covering Normandy and for beaming a signal into England), and the studios were moved to Caudebec-en-Caux, which was near Louvetot and also situated on the main trunk line of a PTT cable from Paris. Some of the English language service staff recorded their material in London, from where it was sent to various IBC outlets, but a number of staff members actually lived and worked in Fécamp, and later Caudebec.

### **The Sudden Fall of Radio Normandie**

Shortly after Radio Normandie had moved its studios to Caudebec, and at the height of its prosperity, the station met a peculiar fate: it was nationalised by the French government as an emergency war measure, LeGrand ceased to have any control over it, and it now was used to transmit foreign language broadcasts into Eastern and Central Europe. This nationalisation, which took place in September 1939, was the only action of the kind with regard to a French private radio station, and Duval indicates that it was taken not out of necessity but because of a grudge on the part of a former associate of Le Grand's, Max Brusset, whom Le Grand had broken with because of some 'behind-the-back' business dealings that the former had had with the IBC. Brusset later became assistant to a cabinet minister and, according to Duval, persuaded the minister that the station should be nationalised [46]. English language broadcasts continued until January 1940 under the title 'Radio International', without commercial support (but with paid-for mentions of sponsors) and allegedly for British armed services personnel stationed in France.

Plugge "offered the Foreign Office the use of his continental broadcasting organization for emergency purposes", according to a BBC internal memo of 7 November 1939, but his offer was not accepted [47].

At the same time, Plugge was attempting to head off a reported French government move (undertaken with encouragement from the British government and perhaps from the BBC) to develop a centralised radio service. He worked through Leslie Hore-Belisha, Minister of War, and apparently was effective enough to provoke a memo from BBC Deputy Director General Graves to Director General Ogilvie, marked 'Secret', and emphasising Plugge's seeming success in getting Hore-Belisha to listen to his arguments as to why the French should not decentralise. Graves added that some Cabinet members also had been approached by Plugge, and that they may be "led up the garden path" through ignorance. Graves closed.

*There was, too, I said, the added point that we felt in the interests of British broadcasting that Plugge should be squelched because it was most undesirable that an uncontrolled body should be operating, whether for the troops in France or for listeners in this country - or for that matter for listeners anywhere - British programmes. [48]*

In other words, if others had slacked off in the battle against Plugge and the IBC, the BBC remained ever-vigilant. And, even though the war itself soon made it impossible for IBC to operate through any stations on the continent, the firm continued in business, partly through recording work. Plugge, for his part, continued to press the case for commercial radio throughout the war; for example, on 29 June 1944 he commented in Parliament on the advantages that British trade could enjoy if commercial radio were readily available as an advertising outlet for their wares [49].

### **The Post-War Period: hopes aroused, hopes dashed**

Shortly before the end of World War II, the French Parliament passed a legislative decree outlawing private radio in France. Some of the French private stations had been taken over by the Nazis (Radio Normandie's eventual fate), while others had continued to operate, albeit less independently, under the Vichy government. Now all were to be absorbed into the Radiodiffusion Française or abolished. Le Grand was imprisoned after the war on the charge of having collaborated with the enemy. The charge was never proved (his son Bruno indicates that it was without basis, and levelled as a grudge [50] ), and could not have applied to radio activities, anyway, since the station was out of his hands well before the Germans arrived to occupy Normandy. He was released within a year. His work at the Bénédictine factory occupied him, but he hoped that one day it might be possible to reopen the station. His hopes were kindled by two elements: Plugge still was enthusiastic over the

prospects of a revived Radio Normandie English service, and even went so far as to order a 10 kW transmitter from the United States for that purpose [51].

In fact, 1947 saw a flurry of reports and rumours about Plugge's attempts to recommence broadcasting from Radio Normandie, but the stumbling block remained the prohibition against private stations in France. However, governments were changing so rapidly that, as a letter from a Post Office official to BBC Director General William Haley put it, recent triumphs by the French political right could indeed lead to a restoration of private broadcasting [52]. A 14 January 1947 BBC memo proved to be more accurate in the long run, however; it stated that "The IBC people are finding negotiations with the French administration very difficult. It seems that they have no doubts as to the outcome, but they are continually having to start over owing to ministerial changes" [53]. The instability of the French government which had so frustrated the BBC and the Post Office in the mid-1930s now turned out to be one of the chief reasons why Radio Normandie was unable to return to the air: no government favourable to private radio was ever in office long enough to restore the practice.

There were other reasons. Le Grand had a heart attack in 1950; though he recovered from it, there was little enthusiasm left for a revival of Radio Normandie. The BBC's General Forces Service, carried on after the war as the Light Programme, made for effective competition to the sort of station exemplified by Radio Normandie. (A 1947 William Haley letter to a Post Office official stated "We now have a Light Programme to keep the foreigners at bay.") [54] Plugge had other business prospects to occupy him, and was by that time rather less wealthy than he had been before the war. In short, the confluence of personalities, governments and money, as well as the competitive situation for radio, that had existed during the 1930s, was no longer present.

## Conclusion

One fundamental question remains: why did the BBC expend so much energy in fighting Radio Normandie (and the other continental stations, although consideration of them lies outside the scope of this article)? The initial fear that such stations would threaten the tenability of the BBC's 'no advertising' position seemed to dissipate by the mid-1930s, as no one in a position of power seriously suggested such a move. Reith's feelings about maintaining a high quality broadcast service which would help to elevate public taste may have been a more compelling reason: many memos in the BBC Written Archives files contain references to the low moral, intellectual and cultural quality of some of Normandie's broadcasts. There is even a specifically 'anti-American radio' tone to some of those comments, as US popular music artists and even transcriptions of US network shows appeared on Normandie and were

criticised by BBC staff. Plugge's personality may have raised the hackles of Reith and other senior BBC officials: he was the personification of the aggressive entrepreneur. Such an upstart dare not be left untouched!

But there is also the argument that those who operate a monopoly get used to having a (relatively) free hand in their decision-making. The first small direct challenges to the BBC's monopoly did not come until the late 1920s, in the forms of occasional English language broadcasts from Europe and the founding of wireless relay systems in England. The BBC was fairly successful at beating back both. Normandie's regular (as opposed to test) transmissions in English did not commence until late 1931, about nine years after the first broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Company - enough time for a 'knee-jerk reaction' mentality to have set in and to have created an unwillingness to accept challenge as possibly containing any worthwhile example. There was reconsideration of the Sunday programming schedule by the BBC, but most of those who undertook it did so reluctantly (the memos in the Archives make this clear), and few changes arose from that reconsideration until Reith had departed and World War II had begun. That same pattern of behaviour recurred in the face of the challenge raised by the numerous pop music 'pirates' broadcasting from off Great Britain's coasts in the 1960s [55].

That it has not recurred in the face of the challenge of the pirates of the early 1980s (this time both land- and sea-based) is probably due to the disappearance of the BBC's monopoly of radio upon the creation of Independent Local Radio in 1971. But while monopoly lasted, as Captain Plugge, the IBC and Radio Normandie discovered, the BBC was its ardent, stubborn and (sometimes) resourceful defender, whether it had allies or not. Plugge and the IBC were just as ardent, stubborn and resourceful in attempting to break the monopoly, but circumstances in the final analysis failed to favour their cause.

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*Correspondence* : Professor Donald R. Browne,  
Department of Speech-Communication, 317 Folwell Hall,  
9 Pleasant Street SE, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities,  
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455, USA

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- [1] Illegal stations, usually known as 'pirates', also constitute a challenge to monopolies, and have been a serious challenge to broadcast systems in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden at various times.
- [2] BRIGGS,ASA (1970) *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Vol. 11: the Golden Age of Wireless, esp. pp. 351-352 (London, Oxford University Press).
- [3] For the early history of Radio Normandie, See DUVAL,RENE (1979) *L'Histoire de la*

- Radio en France, esp. pp. 202-205 (Paris, Alain Moreau).
- [4] NICHOLS, RICHARD (1983) *Radio Luxembourg: the Station of the Stars*, p. 192 (London, W. H. Allen)
  - [5] PLOMLEY, ROY (1980) *Days Seemed Longer*, p. 123 (London, Eyre Methuen). Plomley indicates that Plugge offered then and there to purchase air time on the station, and "promised to provide bigger and better technical equipment".
  - [6] DUVAL, op. cit., p. 206.
  - [7] BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham, Reading (hereinafter referred to as Archives), File E2/365/1 Foreign Gen.: International Broadcasting Company, File 1, 1930-1933. Internal Circulating Memo, 2 November 1931, Engineering (Tatsfield) to CE (Controller, Engineering).
  - [8] Ibid: Private memo, CE to Controller, 16 November 1931. A memo of 5 November 1928 from Foreign Director to Controller, BBC was almost identical, although the FD proposed working through the Postmaster General to put pressures on governments of the 'offending' countries (the Netherlands in particular). Ibid., File R34/960 Policy: Commercial Broadcasting: Foreign Competition with BBC, 1928, 1937-39.
  - [9] Ibid.
  - [10] Ibid., File E2/2/1, Foreign Gen.: Advertising in English by Foreign Stations, File 1, 1928-1936.
  - [11] Ibid., File E2/2/1, op. cit.
  - [12] Ibid., File R34/961, Policy: Commercial Broadcasting: History (Vinogradoff) 1945, pp. 29, 44. PLOMLEY, op. cit., p. 170, indicates that Normandie's successor, Radio International, carried news broadcasts for a few months in late 1939.
  - [13] Ibid., File R/34/83, Policy: Advertising in Programmes.
  - [14] Ibid., File E2/365/2, Foreign Gen: International Broadcasting Company, File 2, 1934-1946. The BBC did not list the commercial services in its program guide.
  - [15] Ibid.
  - [16] Ibid., File E2/365/1 Foreign Gen: International Broadcasting Company, File 1 1930-1933.
  - [17] Ibid.
  - [18] Ibid., File E2/365/2. The memo is dated 28 October 1935. Plugge was quite sensitive to this pejorative use of his name, and protested a programme broadcast in spring 1941 which contained a satirical sketch about an advertiser-supported station managed by an individual named (Plugge). Whether the BBC actually broadcast such a programme was uncertain. Archives, File R34/490/1, Policy: Nomenclature, File 1A (first part), 1935-1942.
  - [19] Ibid., File R34/959, Policy: Commercial Broadcasting: English Advertising on Foreign Commercial Stations, 1935-1939.
  - [20] Ibid., File R34/101, Policy: Advertising in Programmes: League of Freedom 1935. It should be noted that Plugge and the IBC occasionally offered to cooperate with the BBC, as in March 1933 when Mr Leonard of IBC wrote to Gladstone Murray of the BBC, stating that IBC would not make air time available to the National Union of Railway men and "should do its utmost to prevent the political or social difficulties of the nation being discussed over the ether from Continental Stations, particularly in the event of a Transport Workers' strike", Ibid., File E2/365/1.
  - [21] Ibid., File E2/2/2, Foreign Gen: Advertising in English by Foreign Stations, File 2, 1937-1938.
  - [22] Ibid. However, the British Embassy in Paris sent a letter to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 30 October 1936 taking note of a recent French government decision to raise the tax on English advertisements appearing on French stations; the Embassy called upon the French Government to "not merely limit the extent but effectively put a stop to the broadcasts of which HMG complain...". Ibid.
  - [23] Ibid., File E2/2/2.
  - [24] Ibid.
  - [25] Ibid., File E2/265/2.
  - [26] Ibid., File E2/365/1.
  - [27] See esp. BRIGGS (1961) op. cit., Vol. I, *The Birth of Broadcasting*, pp. 240-241 (London,



- Oxford University Press), REITH, J.C.W. (1924) *Broadcast Over Britain*, esp. p. 191 (London, Hodder & Stoughton) and BOYLE, ANDREW (1972) *Only the Wind Will Listen*, pp. 271-272 (London, Hutchinson), for indications of Reith's feelings about Sunday broadcasts.
- [28] PLOMLEY, op. cit., pp. 148, 153.
- [29] Boothby's statement is contained in Hansard, Vol. 331, cols 645-646.
- [30] Archives, R34/961 (Vinogradoff), pp. 46--47, summarises both incidents.
- [31] BRIGGS (1970) op. cit., Vol. III, *The War of Words*, pp. 587-588 (London, Oxford University Press).
- [32] Archives, File E2/365/2.
- [33] 'Continental radio popular in Britain', unidentified and undated (but probably late 1935-early 1936), contained in Archives, File E2/365/2.
- [34] Sponsored radio audiences rise by 8.3%, *WorM's Press News*, 15 October 1936.
- [35] Archives, File R34/961 (Vinogradoff), pp. 65-67, Appendix A.
- [36] PEGG, MARK (1983) *Broadcasting and Society, 1918-1939*, p. 141 (London, Croom-Helm).
- [37] Archives, File R34/961 (Vinogradoff), op. cir., pp. 65, 68. There is a copy of the survey form in BRIGGS, Op. cir., Vol. II, p. 276.
- [38] PLOMLEY, Op. cit., pp. 125-126.
- [39] *Mon Programme*, 27 Octobre 1932 (in Le Grand Archives at Fécamp, France).
- [40] *TSF Programme*, 20 Novembre 1932 (Le Grand Archives).
- [41] *Une visite à Radio Normandie*, L'Antenne No. 507, 11 Decembre 1932 (Le Grand Archives).
- [42] *L'Abeille Cauchoise*, 10 Juin 1939 (Le Grand Archives).
- [43] *Journal de Fécamp*, 26 Juillet 1935 (Le Grand Archives).
- [44] *Une visite à Radio Normandie*, op. cit.
- [45] Personal interview with Bruno Le Grand, Fécamp, France, 10 September 1984.
- [46] DUVAL, op. cit., pp. 309-310.
- [47] Archives, File R34/941: Policy, War: Secret Correspondence with Govt. Departments, 1938-1941.  
PLOMLEY, op. cir., pp. 166-173.
- 148] Ibid.
- [49] Hansard, Vol. 401, cols 906-909.
- [50] Interview, Bruno Le Grand, 10 September 1984. DUVAL, Op. cir., p. 360, seems to agree.
- [51] Archives, File E1/717, Countries: France, Radio Normandie, File I, 1937- 1947, Telegramme from UK delegation to Atlantic City ITU Conference to Foreign Office, 5 August 1947.
- [52] Ibid., letter from Townshend to Haley, 3 November 1947.
- [53] Ibid.
- [54] Ibid., letter from Haley to Townsbend, 4 November 1947.
- [55] See my article, *The BBC and the pirates: a phase in the life of a prolonged monopoly*, *Journalism Quarterly*, 48, spring 1971, pp. 85-99.