

The Connected Histories of the BBC

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BBC HISTORY - MICHAEL PEACOCK

17th July 1986

Producer: Philip Daly

Camera Roll 1. Sound Roll 1

Scene 1. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: Its the 17th July 1986 and for this contribution to the BBC History archive we've come to the home of Mr. Michael Peacock, at Richmond, and I'm going to begin by asking you to tell us, first of all, about your two spells in charge of PANORAMA. When you began at first, I think PANORAMA had been a kind of general interest magazine at fortnightly intervals and hadn't made a great mark for itself. You certainly made considerable changes in it. Lets start there.

Michael Peacock: We were all faced with the imminent arrival of competition from ITV. This, I think, had given Leonard Miall, my boss, and Grace Goldie, the clout to get sound camera, to get more money, to get the staffing needed, to get the minimum staffing needed to do a weekly Current Affairs programme. I was to be one of two co-producers. Dick Cawston was to be the other but he became ill and was unable to fulfil his role and I found myself, quite by accident, in sole charge at a very young age, of what was to become a very important programme. The first few months of the programme were pretty amateur. We didn't really know much about television journalism. I don't think anybody did in Britain at that time, and we had to work out the hard way, by learning - a few mistakes - how to tackle major stories abroad, domestic stories of a political nature within the terrible handcuffs of the 14-day rule. We had to work without any primary sources of information; there were no - there was a press cutting service and that was about the most we had to rely on. And, above all, we had to find reporters who could adapt from radio to television, or adapt from Fleet Street to television or as, in fact, was the case, to adapt from politics to television, and the first reporter to emerge as having the quality and the insight and the stamina and the sense of what the public looked for in television journalism, was Woodrow Wyatt, who had been a Fleet Street journalist, and a politician, so that there was a solid combination there; as well he'd been a Cabinet Minister under Labour and had, therefore, contacts and entrees which were very useful to us, and it was really with Woodrow that we worked out some of the basic techniques that we take for granted today but which were relatively new, certainly in Europe, in those days, many of them lifted from Ed Murrow's SEE IT NOW which I admired greatly and which I'd viewed every week. I'd got kinescopes across from the

CBS London office long before I found myself in charge of PANORAMA. Woodrow did a number of important stories for us abroad but the one that mattered most, I think, in the history of PANORAMA and, indeed, in the development of the BBC and of broadcasting as part of the fourth estate, was the extraordinary investigation of the ballot rigging in the ETU - the Electrical Trades Union - which eventually led to the removal of the President and the General Secretary and their replacement by Frank Chapple and other non-Communist and, indeed, right wing - Labour right wing - people in their place. This was very new ground for the BBC. It involved investigative detective work of a kind never contemplated before; it had to receive the approval of the then Director-General, Ian Jacob, but in that period, certainly, he had no qualms. I think, possibly, because it was - this was - we were on the side of the angels, so to speak, we were unearthing Communists in the wrong places and all that, but we had to go and do interviews with the witnesses we used in the film report which disguised their voice and shooting them in a way which disguised their voice and which didn't show their face and techniques which are now fairly common in this kind of thing but which hadn't been used before. The result of this, and I should, by the way, mention that the Daily Telegraph was also covering the same story and some of the information we had we got from them and vice versa - we shared quite a lot of information - but the cumulative effect of the Telegraph's reports and, more importantly, I think, of PANORAMA's major coverage of this situation, shocked the Nation. It woke everybody up in a way which probably, for the first time, forced a response from Government, forced a response from Whitehall. There was a Committee of Enquiry - a judicial enquiry into the whole matter and eventually, of course, as I mentioned earlier, Frank Phelps and the rest of them went. That certainly put PANORAMA on the map. Equally important, and in a way something which is more illustrative of the sort of problems we faced during that period, was the emerging crisis over the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by General Nasser. The Eden Government's response to that move which gradually escalated into a growing crisis of - international crisis - isolated from America and the rest of World opinion and eventually, of course, the decision taken to invade. And we, as the only weekly Current Affairs programme on television at that time, had to reflect this event; we

had to find out what was going on and we hadn't a clue; we had no direct primary sources of information, we had no reporters with our troops or in Egypt, we - the NEWS in fact was heavily censored by the Government. We were flying blind, editorially, and we were very limited in what we could say and, indeed, had we known more I'm not sure that we would have been allowed to say more and there was always hanging in the background the sense that this was a national crisis where really one mustn't rock the boat and we were therefore left with a role which turned out to be^a very important one, which was offering a point of reassurance for the Nation with the simplest of tools - a map, a relief map on a table, the irreplaceable indispensable Richard Dimpleby, representing the National sense of concern and a parade of Admirals and Generals who came in and told us roughly what was going on in terms which were very ABC. It was, looking back now, it was amateur, it was so far removed from anything that we would take for granted say over, that we took for granted over Vietnam, but in those days it made PANORAMA a National institution and, from that moment on, we were the most important Current Affairs programme in Britain.

cut

Camera Roll 2. Sound Roll 1

Scene 2. - No good

Scene 3. Take 1-

Michael Peacock: Of course, in the Autumn of 1956 it wasn't just Suez that we were trying to report; it was Hungary, and the Hungarian Uprising was in many ways a more important story, in human terms, than Suez. Suez was about troops and battles and Governments and Thunderbolts. Hungary was about a human tragedy and we were able to report it directly. We had people inside Hungary. We organised live outside broadcasts from the Refugee Camps. We did a whole PANORAMA from the border, just, because we had terrible problems getting the Eurovision links set up in time and, if we were handcuffed in our response to Suez that couldn't be said of anything we did in Hungary and it certainly.. a whole era which seems distant now but which at that time was still deep in the cold war and mattered a lot, not just to us but to everyone in the Country; and that also helped to reinforce PANORAMA's general position as a very important programme.

Frank Gillard: The rather unsettled state of affairs at the top of Television in the later fifties, and Cecil McGivern?

Michael Peacock: Cecil McGivern was an inspirational leader. He had shaped the hand, the Television Service, since the War. He had lived with it, gone to bed with it, woken up with it, nurtured it in every way. And when it was a village economy existing on craft skills, who better? He paid no attention to the broader problems of Management and logistics and running networks to time and the many other things we take for granted today, and as the operation got bigger and as the millions of pounds expended each year became tens of millions of pounds, and as the staff increased from a few hundred to thousands, and as the technical complications of the new equipment gave more and more to Engineers and to Planners and so on, Cecil became more and more out of his depth. This coincided with the departure of George Barnes to go off to Keble, as I recollect it, or Keele. And there were promotions and Cecil was moved up. He wasn't made a Director of Television, which disappointed him greatly, because there was a basic feeling he wasn't quite right for the job; he was made Deputy Director of Television and Kenneth Adam was brought in to be the New Controller of Programmes. Kenneth was a Radio man who had no real television background but at least it left the BBC - he'd worked for Hultons, had some idea of what the real work was about - and we were all prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt.. What we hadn't anticipated was that Cecil and Kenneth were never able to establish a satisfactory working relationship with each other, largely because the job of Deputy Managing Director turned out to be a non-job, didn't have any real power, no control of funds, or monies. He had power to be awkward, the power to be difficult, the power to make life extremely complicated for anybody working in areas which interested him, and as soon as Kenneth went off on to to a Conference, or on a holiday, immediately he would take over the powers of Controller of Programmes and send for people like me and I'd rather find that the programme plans agreed with Kenneth would be torn up and we had to go back to the drawing board and look at the World of Television and the programme possibilities the way Cecil wanted us to see them. Well, you can imagine how depressing this was and how difficult this was, especially since the Television Service was so concerned to find an effective response to the increasing dominance of ITV who were beginning not only to win over

a disconcertingly large proportion of the audience who could receive ITV, the audience share was going more and more in their direction, but they were also starting to introduce programme innovation across a range of areas which - where in theory we should have been as good as ITV. The fact was, we weren't. In NEWS this was particularly so but - and that's a full story which you must go into - but in Light Entertainment and in Drama just to take two examples, they were running circles round us and Sydney Newman was doing things at ABC which made BBC Drama look terribly old-fashioned and square and lacking a contemporary sense of the possible, and in entertainment the combined powers of the Parnells and the Grades were having a similar effect upon the BBC's entertainment. And all of us in the Television Service were looking for positive, concerted, leadership at the top, to find the best way forward in this situation. Instead, we got this divided, unbalanced, unsatisfactory situation right at the top which kept impinging upon all the efforts we were making to deliver programmes which would retrieve the situation.

Frank Gillard: And the inferiority of TV News?

Michael Peacock: The inferiority of Television News was beyond belief. It happened, it began, when Tahu Hole took over the News from the Television Service - the Television Newsreel was handed across to News Division to run - most of those who had built the Television Newsreel moved down into the Television Service to do other jobs, including joining PANORAMA, and the News Division put out a News Bulletin, followed by a Newsreel. The News Bulletin was a farce! It started off with no newsreaders in vision. Captions and stills photographs and little bits of film were the only things allowed to carry the News because of the iron rule imposed by the extraordinary figure who ran BBC News and that was Tahu Hole, who came from New Zealand and I think he eventually retired there but he did such damage to the BBC's News while he was in charge that I...you know..it makes a very unhappy story. The recognition that just because you see a Newsreader it doesn't mean that the BBC is taking, has a point of view about the Coal Board, it was finally taken on board, and Newsreaders were allowed to be seen, but they were only allowed to be seen on an absolutely equal basis rotating their way through Radio, Radio Bulletin, and up to Alexandra Palace to a Television Bulletin. The News values that were embodied in the News that they were offering were very outdated, and irrelevant to the general interests of the public in what - we are now talking

about '56, '57 - and we watched with horror, we in the Television Service, how effective ITN was from the very outset, where the idea of the Newscaster was built in to their presentation of the news from Day 1, with people like Christopher Chataway, Robin Day and Ludovic Kennedy being Newscasters. And where their reporting, where their sense of the public's interest, their sense of News was so markedly different and, one had to say, better, in every sense, than anything that the BBC was doing. We, who were not part of the News Division but were part of the Television Service which was carrying this News could only feel shame and were appalled and absolutely frustrated that this should be allowed to go on.

Frank Gillard: And how was the situation eventually grasped?

Michael Peacock: Hugh Greene was brought in to be Director of News and Current Affairs. Tahu Hole was kicked upstairs to be Director of Administration without responsibility for personnel and, one of the first things that Hugh Greene did was to turn to Cecil McGivern and to say to Cecil, "Could you give us some help? Could you get together some of your people and show us how to make a better Television News?"

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Camera Roll 3. Sound Roll 2.

Scene 4. Take 1.

Michael Peacock: This was December '58. Cecil turned to Donald Baverstock, who was Editor of TONIGHT, and made an outstanding success of that job, and asked him to become involved and he asked Ian Atkins, who was a chap who knew a lot about graphics and servicing problems, and who was an old television hand, and I think it was Donald who said, "I think Mike should be involved because you never can tell, Outside Broadcasts, which is where I was at the time, may be part of the problem; so we became the Three musketeers. And Baverstock, Peacock and Atkins were this Committee of Enquiry. Now, we had never done this thing, sort of thing before. We were all young, committed and frustrated as I said, and dying to have a go. We had to work out how to embark upon this enquiry. We went up to Alexandra Palace, we went around the various bits of the BBC's News Empire and asked obvious questions but this didn't in itself suggest answers and we quite early on concluded that the only thing to do was to view every single television News Bulletin broadcast by the News Division and to meet each day - the

following day to compare notes, and gradually to sort out the diagnosis and then to move towards the remedies that we could recommend. This turned out to be a far more arduous task than we'd anticipated. We did it for, to my recollection, for two and a half months, early in '59, from the early January to early March, and we had to shackle ourselves to our sets in the evening and we had to get up early in the morning to meet at half past eight before we started our normal day's work. But it proved to be an invaluable source for the diagnosis for all the things that we could not only assert were wrong but which we could back with evidence that were wrong. We could quote from bulletins, we could quote the incidents. No-one could deny the validity of, if you wish, if you like to use the term, indictments that we were offering. I haven't looked at that report for many years but you were kind enough to dig out a copy and the sort of things that we noted were the style - there was no coherent style, there was no proper sense of pace, there was no sense of order within a bulletin. Often the order reflected an outdated sense of News values; we were always leading with the Royal family that.. or with a very Establishment story. The film commentaries were woefully inept. The tadpole effect, as we called it, was all too prevalent - you give all the news there is, everything there is to say of relevance about a story before you run the film that you have to illustrate the story, which is kind of dumb. The over-deferential attitude towards authority generally, the Newsreaders, some of whom were all right, but many of whom were woefully miscast and should never really have been used regularly. No one in News seemed to understand the whole art of interviewing and, as we pointed out in the Report, there are at least six different kinds of interview and if you are embarking on an interview you've got to know what sort of interview it is that you're trying to do, and you've got to have been trained in how to achieve a successful interview of that type, and almost as sad professionally, there was the attempt to create News features, soft documentaries, in order to interrupt the News with something more interesting which left us in a bemused - was the only word that one could think of - we therefore had to arrive at recommendations which we did which.....

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Scene 5. Take 1.

Michael Peacock: Well, if that was the diagnosis, our recommendations had to go right to the heart of the problem. And there was no doubt that it was the iron control exercised by Egton House, the Headquarters of BBC Radio News and all of the Central Radio departments upon the Television News people up at Alexandra Palace which was the heart of the problem, and we made very forceful and clear recommendations which were organisational as well as editorial, which would lead to more effective delegation of authority and responsibility and combine them, combine the two within the office of Editor of Television News and then, under him, within an organisation of his Newsroom and his News Resources, which would ensure, once again, that there was a bringing together of authority and responsibility which, all too frequently throughout BBC News Division had been kept apart, with the people who commissioned the News Reporters covering an event not - having no responsibility - for the use made of that coverage when it was brought in, and our recommendations went in great detail into that aspect of things as well as into some matters of presentation and philosophy, but the report itself was eventually written, it was rough, reflecting our inexperience in these areas; Cecil McGivern, once again showing his wisdom in the ways of the World, brought in Colin Shaw, who at that time as a member of Secretariat was used to drafting submissions to Pilkington, or whoever, and he helped us lick our report into shape, made it better, made it more - made the argument more effective, made the pose and the style more felicitous and vain, and it went back to Cecil who was happy with it, and he sent it across to Donald Edwards, who was Editor of News under Hugh Greene, and we thought that would be that. I went back to my job in O.B.s Donald went back to running TONIGHT - we breathed a sigh of relief at not having to get up an hour earlier in the morning. To our surprise, we learned shortly after delivering the report that it had been circulated very widely within News Division to anyone with any seniority and, furthermore that as far as the Television side of News Division was concerned, they were very much in favour of everything we'd said. We hadn't offended. We had confirmed everything they had been saying. I have every reason to think that the reaction among the long servicing members of News Division down at Egton House was somewhat different but, certainly to the extent that the report was intended to be read and understood and offer some guide to how to improve things, to our surprise that was allowed to happen and despite the controversial

nature of many of the recommendations we made, it wasn't pigeon-holed.
Frank Gillard: And its fair to say that it really led to a fundamental change in BBC Television News, right?

Michael Peacock: Well, I - little did I realise that I was going to have to be the man who introduced that change because, a couple of years later, I was, suddenly found myself nudged into applying for the job of Editor of Television News when Stuart Hood, who had been the Chief Editor - he had a slightly different title - he was brought across to the Television Service to become a new Controller of Programmes and Stuart Hood had left Alexandra Palace and I found myself in his place because I was eventually appointed, and it was a great help to me to have the report and the knowledge that lay behind that report to guide my own instincts in how to reorganise and it was a great help to me also at the start of writing reports and it gave me a very good idea as to what I'd got to do. And to cut a long story short, we achieved a lot in Television News in two years. It was never perfect, but it was a lot better then, when I left than it was when I went up there and, certainly, than it was when we - with Baverstock and Aktins, we did this report.

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Camera Roll 4. Sound Roll 2.

Scene 6. Take 1.

Frank Gillard: In 1962 the Pilkington Committee brought out a report which was extremely favourable to the BBC and gave the go ahead for the development of a second television network and you got deeply involved in that?

Michael Peacock: Yes. It began with a Committee which was set up in the Television Service to start planning for the second Channel and I was part of that Committee because, as Editor of News, there, clearly I had something to say about the News that should be on the second Channel, but all the other major Heads of Group were there, Leonard Miall was the Secretary, Kenneth Adam was the Chairman, the Planners Joanna Spicer and so on were all there, and we gradually evolved some of the underlying concepts which would have to be adopted for the second Channel which, in turn, gave the people who had to build the studios and things some of the beginnings of the answers to the questions they were dying to have sorted out. It became very clear that someone was going to have to be put in charge of the new network sooner rather than later because

there were so many other questions which could only be determined, not by a Committee, but by the Controller or Chief of Programmes or whatever he was going to be, who would be building the Schedule and allocating monies against priorities which really only he could work out. There was much speculation as to who it was going to be and, curiously enough, the reason why I was appointed had as much to do with the fact that it was generally felt I was the only person who could work effectively with Donald Baverstock, who would by definition be in charge of BBC 1, as for any other particular reason, because just as I was in charge of News without any News background, I was going to be.. I was being considered as a candidate for running a Network when I'd never had any drama or entertainment or other types of general programme experience but for that reason, and possibly others, may...I'm sure I had certain abilities which commended themselves to Hugh Greene and Kenneth, who must have taken the decision, I found myself in charge, early in '63, at the age of 34, facing the rather daunting prospect of starting a new Channel with really very little preparation despite all the efforts of the Television

We had to recruit a thousand programme people. We had to do so rapidly. We had to do so effectively, making sure that the departments where they would work really wanted to have those people, so we had rather an unusual way of having interviewees spending a day in the department before they went before an Appointments Board, and which I would... on the last of which I would be sitting. We had to make sure that once they'd been appointed that their - the training they were given was appropriate to the sort of programme plans that were beginning to emerge for the Channel. Some of the Departments were full of ideas as to what BBC 2 ought to be about; sometimes they were ideas I thought were great, other times I was underwhelmed by them. Other Departments were extraordinarily passive, feeling that it was difficult enough to find good programmes for one network, and the prospect of having to do more programmes for a second network didn't automatically generate enthusiasm, and since you can't legislate for programmes the problem kept coming back to me as to how to find the right balance between trying to engineer the major programme initiatives myself from the Centre or how to nurture within a group of programme makers a sense of what might be, which in turn would lead to their coming to me with programme offers in which they had confidence, in

which they had belief, and which we could afford. The monies available were very limited. The Studio resources were even more limited, and about halfway through the planning period - and by this time we're into the Summer of '63,-it became very clear to me that even, no matter how I looked at it, we weren't going to be able to create more than about 15 or 16 hours of original television and yet I had a general commitment to offer at least 25 hours a week of television for BBC 2, because, and this is the second half of the major task that I faced, we not only ^{had} to create a new Television Network which would complement and extend the range of the BBC's programmes as they stood, but we also had to sell 625 lines and we had to sell UHF, which meant that any family that was going to receive BBC 2 had to buy a new television set and a new aerial at considerable cost and inconvenience and, never underestimate the inertia of the public in these matters, they - the trade - were pressuring the BBC all the time to advance the date of the start of BBC 2 because they were having a bit of a recession, not enough people were buying the existing sets - multi-standard but without the UHF aerial - and they saw the chance to get back some new business once the BBC had made a firm commitment as to when BBC 2 was going to start. Now, the way you persuade the general public to put up considerable sums of money in order to have 625 lines and UHF is clearly with a programme schedule that's full of entertainment goodies. It's not going to ... wouldn't be..have worked had we put a lot of emphasis on the minority programming on the complementary extension of various types of output which had formed such a large part of the BBC's Submissions to Pilkington. So we were caught in a rather false position which I don't think anyone had fully appreciated at the time, and I had to go up and persuade dealers that what we had coming down the road, and eventually would be launching with, was something which would be really attractive for the people whom they were trying to persuade to buy television sets, but at the same time I was having to go down - if you like - to the University of Sussex with Kenneth Adam to talk with Frank Fulton about - Sir John Fulton - about the beginnings of University of the Air and what became eventually TUESDAY TERM, so I had to reconcile the need to face in a number of directions at the same time and the fact that we had only half the resources necessary to even offer the semblance of a seven days a week, prime time, service, and eventually I concluded that, to start with, we should go for what

became known as the Seven Faces of the Week where each night of the week would be generic programming - programming of the same type which could be christened, like TUESDAY TERM or whatever - educational, minorities, long form entertainment, repeats, we had an evening of only repeats and, indeed, that's where the idea of repeating a classic serial within the week, which carries on to this day, was born and, with a bit of fudging we had seven different days available and we had a concept which we could talk about, "This is what BBC 2 is going to be - it was Seven Faces a Week". There was a lot of bemusement - which is perhaps the wrong word - there was a lot of curiosity as to what on earth this might be. There were many who said, "He's out of his mind", "It can't work" etc. etc. and of course it couldn't work in the long term, but in the short term it gave us a form of camouflage which disguised the fact that we hadn't really got a 7-day Schedule and, at the same time, it gave us something to sell, and in marketing terms, which would persuade people to buy their 625 UHF sets. A big mistake was made at that time. The BBC conceded at Board of Management or Governors level to the pressure from the Radio Trade - Radio/Television manufacturers, to start the new Channel in April '64 rather than in the Autumn of '64 which had been the strong feeling on my side as to being the sensible time to start. By then BBC 2 would have been in the Midlands as well as in London. By then there would have been another studio available. Just those two factors alone would have made the business of launching BBC 2 infinitely easier but, as it was, we launched in the Spring and, of course, launched right into the dull days of Summer and with a tiny audience in London, and it was extremely difficult to get the impact that we had been hoping for, and had we not gone off the air 20 seconds after we went on it, when the whole of West London's power supplies disappeared, it is conceivable that most of the people wouldn't have even noticed that BBC 2 had arrived because we had tremendous publicity from the fact that we were knocked off the air - it was a World News event - and although at the time it was desperately disappointing, within a couple of hours we all realised that it actually gave us a marvellous opportunity for capitalising on our bad luck.

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Camera Roll 5. Sound Roll 3.

Scene 7. Take 1.

Michael Peacock: Of course, once we were on the air and had been running for some months, all sorts of things became clear. We had a topography for

the Network. People understood the sort of programmes that were required and the flow of programme offers coming up immediately improved. Equally, it was obvious that, as new studios and resources became available, we could take away some of the camouflage and make adjustments in order to achieve more in the nature of common junctions with BBC 1 and to go nearer towards something we'd ignored almost totally, which was the commitment to offer a planned alternative to BBC 1, and by the time we were moving into - towards the Spring of 1965, BBC 2 was starting to settle down. It was still, I think, by then had only reached Manchester, we were therefore only covering a relatively small part of the total country and, of course, within each area only a relatively small proportion of people had bought UHF sets and therefore could receive BBC 2. But we were on the way. And then, a very surprising development changed a lot of lives! Stuart Hood, who had been my boss and from whom I had received almost nothing in the way of advice and support when we were thinking about the beginnings of BBC 2 and then launching it - only in the negative sense of the word, that he never ever criticised, he never ever said "NO". He never said anything other than "YES" when I made proposals to him and this is not supportive, this is unsupportive, one needs to have one's judgements challenged or checked, or to be cross examined Stuart never did this and I don't understand why, it must be something deep in the nature of the man. But he suddenly announced that he was leaving. He was going to Rediffusion. He turned up with a new haircut, I believe he had a new wife, and he disappeared. And immediately there had to be a major change in the Television Service because the office of Controller of Programmes, even if Stuart was not particularly effective in that office, was a very important one, not least because of the old association for Cecil McGivern. There was an ideal candidate available who up to then had not wished to become part of Management, and this was Huw Wheldon, and Huw responded and said, "Yes of course, but" - and this I believe to be the truth because he told it to me directly is that "I can't have Donald running BBC 1". One Welshman could say of another Welshman but Huw was the only one in the Corporation that could have said that. And this had immediate repercussions of a highly sensitive and political nature. So Donald was to move, and Huw said, "And I want Mike to run 1" So Mike - Peacock - me, in 1965, was suddenly confronted with the not so much the invitation but the very firm request to move across

to BBC 1 to work to Huw Wheldon as Controller of Programmes and, within a couple of days, Huw had produced his rabbit out of the hat - and when it became clear that Donald wouldn't accept BBC 2, as was entirely predictable, although in fact he would have been far better at running BBC 2 than BBC 1 because he had the ability to innovate but, he turned that whole thing down - Huw produced David Attenborough out of the hat and David was, within a week or two, was working as Controller BBC 2 and Donald Baverstock, who having then been offered what we could all see was a non-job of Controller Development whatever that might mean, left the Corporation. Now there was a very traumatic period. Donald's resignation was heavily covered and quite properly covered in Fleet Street. I mean, the attention that it attracted was deserved, a most unusual situation. The reasons that lay behind it were extremely difficult for everyone to work out because they were so deeply personal, and for a brief period, only a brief period, things were a bit shaky. For example, Alasdair Milne, resigned shortly afterwards out of loyalty to Donald for whom he'd worked in TONIGHT, so you had Donald going, you had Alasdair Milne, you had Stuart Hood going, all within three months, and you had a totally new team really working at the top. Huw, Mike Peacock, and David Attenborough, which was terrific!

I mean, Huw without any doubt, was by far the most able and impressive man I worked for in the BBC and most of the other people I'd worked for were under-impressive. They were, to a greater or lesser extent, inadequate in their jobs. But Huw was a man for whom I had great respect and he certainly put questions, he certainly wanted to know the underlying reasons for a move in one direction rather than the other. He was loyal to Kenneth Adam who was still there and Kenneth, unfortunately, by then was quite heavily into the sherry bottle and if you took a problem to Kenneth after half past eleven that, the probability was you would get a most unsatisfactory response, so we all had to accommodate ourselves to that fact of life, but with that small caveat, that next period from the Spring of '65 to the Spring of '67, when I eventually left the BBC, was an extremely happy one. Professionally, I was able to improve BBC 1's performance in various ways. I was able to restore morale. I was able to offer some sort of a coherent philosophy for scheduling of BBC1 which really hadn't been there before. I developed on the basis of Silvey's research the whole notion of audience flow, which

demonstrated that if you won the audience early in the evening, in those days at least, every programme that followed later in the evening would get a higher audience. So that if you were putting on a Symphony Concert at 10.15 you could only - it would get a much better audience if you had a high-pulling, audience programme at 8 o'clock or at 7.30 even more. We had therefore a strand of comedy at 7.30 - from 7.30 till 8 - right across the week, which went hard against the very successful serials like Coronation Street on ITV and this produced a very real increase in the BBC's total share of the audience which was - is always satisfying, and has always been the objective of any BBC Management, but much more important, it maximised the potential audience for all sorts of programmes which would have been far lower had there not been a strong audience base to build on. And that became a key point in my own programming philosophy, that the duty of a Channel Controller, among other things, is to maximise the potential audience for all types of programmes that he's placing in his Schedule. And that is the underlying duty of the Network Controller and the 'Broadcasters' Mandate, so to speak. I found, however, that my World was.....

cut

Camera Roll 6. Sound Roll 3.

Scene 8. Take 1

Michael Peacock: That Spring of '65, Huw Wheldon got everyone in the Television Service at Management level, or Programme Departments and Presentation, and so on, down to Evesham and, in the course of a weekend, we each of us had to do a piece, expressing our sense of what our job was about, and almost inevitably, because BBC 1 was still the most important part of the BBC, what I had to say about BBC 1 was seen to be an important keynote speech and I'm not particularly good at that sort of - on that sort of occasion but I did give an awful lot of thought to it and what I came up with certainly as far as I could judge and in terms of what others said afterwards, made quite an impact and I think I helped to contribute towards a restoration of morale and purpose and confidence within the leadership of the Television Service. Having David there offering an equally solid and informed and inspiring view of what BBC 2 was going to move towards as it shed many of the vestiges of the Seven Faces of the Week and move towards colour, which was now starting to come on the horizon, it must, I think, have made the

Departmental Heads feel pretty confident that both Channels were in good hands. I say that without false pride. Certainly, David was demonstrating, as he was always able to, a very very high degree of intellectual and administrative and organisational and verbal skill and he is, as we all know, a very likeable person, and this was a refreshing change after all the hassle that had attended so many of the discussions earlier in previous years and then, of course, Huw Wheldon had this gift of inspiring loyalty and - for its own sake, and I think he must have been proud to see that the choices he'd made appeared to be working out. And, I suppose, the only irritant in my - on my own horizon at that time was the fact that I was still lumbered with the final dove days of satire on BBC 1. It had begun, if you remember, with TW3 long before my time. It had continued with NOT SO MUCH A PROGRAMME which was on the air I think while, certainly while I was planning BBC 2 and probably when BBC 2 went on the air, and the final and third version of the BBC's satire succession was BBC 3, and by then the tradition of the Controller BBC 1 being firmly embedded in the editorial approval process for these types of programmes could ^{not} be put aside and I found myself very reluctantly involved on Saturday evenings in going in to the Centre and sitting in the Gallery and listening to the run through and offering the odd censorious comment if I thought we were moving into ground which would cause problems and I was having to keep, you know, Hugh Greene and others informed as to what we were doing and I heaved a great sigh of relief when we finally decided that BBC 3 would be the last of these efforts and, indeed, we'd only done it because Hugh Greene felt we shouldn't just stop without having had one more go. It wasn't a very successful programme. It had a very different texture, a very different feel from its predecessors, but there you are. At that time and with that one exception, I was pretty well satisfied professionally, and I suppose if I hadn't gone into hospital to have an elbow fixed, I wouldn't have had the time to listen, and think about - listen to people offering me position in groups applying for franchises for the ITV, all of which were due to come up for renewal in 1968 and were - applications had to go in in the Spring of '67 - and I wouldn't have had time to reflect on my own future within the BBC. By January '67, which is when I was in hospital, I was 36. I had only two jobs left to do with the BBC, really. I never saw myself as Director General, so I would be Huw's successor almost certainly - or probably, and then Managing Director or the Director of Television as it used to be called. That was my life. That was going to be my life. And, possibly, Sir Michael Peacock, KBE, on retirement. And I couldn't bear that thought. I was only 36 and I had - my life was still ahead

of me. So, when the chance came to be Managing Director designate in a group which involved David Frost and others, applying for the London Weekend franchise, this seemed to me a chance which I had to take, even though it meant, as I understood Hugh Greene's instructions, that I should resign from the BBC once my name had gone forward to the IBA. So I resigned. This apparently caused consternation at Broadcasting House and Hugh called me and said, "Oh, Mike, we never intended you to .. someone ^{like} you to resign," and anyway, although in the Notice it said 'And jobs won't be kept open' Hugh made it very clear (a) that he didn't think we'd get the franchise, but (b) if we didn't that.. and if we didn't he wasn't going to fill Controller BBC 1 job until the position was clear. But I went off, and I left the BBC at that point. I mean, I left it mentally in a way, as well as physically. The break - we were down in Cornwall when the news came through. We didn't even know we'd got the franchise. I'd worked extremely hard in the final period of preparing the Application document. I didn't have anything to do with matters where I thought there was a conflict of interests. I let other people say things about what London Weekend was going to do, and I regretted that later - I was too scrupulous because London Weekend was lumbered with a lot of things it could never do and, had I had more say in how it saw its programme opportunities, there might have been less problems for me in the future. But, having left the BBC, I found in a curious way there was a sense of relief. Looking back, I'd had an extraordinary career within the BBC. I'd changed jobs almost every two years. I had risen far too quickly. Looked at objectively, its wrong for the Corporation to promote people as quickly as they'd promoted me but, its almost inviting them to leave. If you can't arrange a career which will allow someone to mature in a job before they move on to the next one, so... and for the really able ensure that, by the time they are moving into their late forties, early fifties, they are then ready to do the highest jobs available, and can only arrange matters so that someon of 35 had got nowhere to go except OUT you almost deserve to have people leave the Corporation and an awful lot of able people did leave the Corporation between 1965, I'm sorry, 1967, and 1976. I mean, that period saw many good people leave for various reasons, and a lot of it is to do with the way BBC handles its senior appointments, but there may have been no alternative at that time but nevertheless, it is a pity, and looking back, I still say I shouldn't have been as young

as I was when I was put in charge of Television News. I shouldn't have been as inexperienced and as young as I was when I was put in charge of - started BBC 2. I survived, and the BBC probably benefitted, but it lost me almost inevitably in the process.

Frank Gillard: How do you view the BBC now?

Michael Peacock: Well, I think it is suffering from the fact that many of the people like myself, who would still be there had there not been all these other opportunities, are not available. Take another example, Paul Fox. An excellent person in every sense, recommended by me to succeed me as Controller BBC 1. A stalwart in all sorts of ways. He left for petty reasons. I mean, he wasn't allowed to have a car. He had to travel to work from North London in a black cab whereas S.G. Williams, who was Controller of Administration, had a hired car. And you know it was that sort of thing which broke the back as far as Paul was concerned and when he got the irresistible offer from Yorkshire, off he went. Although, if there was ever a BBC man, it was Paul. He should have been Director-General. I mean.. I feel today the BBC lacks people who stand tall, metaphorically not physically, but who have this charisma which is so necessary to get a large organisation to respond, and I think the Peter Principle is inevitably operating, and people are being promoted to the level of their incompetence.

CUT

Scene 9. Take 1.

2 SHOT - mute -

Scene 10. Take 1.

F/G NODDIES - mute -