



CRESC Working Paper Series

Working Paper No. 106

The Reith Mission. An episode in the development of global telecommunications and in the demise of the British Empire.

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August 2011

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Abstract

In 1945, the established British imperial communications system, based on the Cable and Wireless network, was re-structured. The imperial partners agreed to break up the hitherto integrated system and re-establish it as an interconnecting network of networks based on separate, nationalised, entities based in the partner countries: notably Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK. Co-ordination started to shift from a consensual system to one based on prices and the hitherto largely self-contained system began to interconnect with other global telecommunication networks, notably those of the USA. John, Lord, Reith played an important role in these transformations and his January 1945 “Mission” to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Southern Rhodesia epitomises both the consensuality and mutuality and the London dominance that had characterised the imperial system and which were to fall away following decisions made at the Commonwealth Telecommunications Conference held in London in mid 1945. Reith’s Mission had a controversial personal significance for him and also exemplified the swan song of a distinctive manner of imperial governance.

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6 capitals, 44,700 miles, 235 hours flying, 52 days”, an “epic performance, reflecting great credit on the captain and crew of the *Liberator*¹ “Commando” the ground organisation and meteorological services and the R.A.F. generally. Nothing like it had been done before; various records were established (HM Treasury 1945: 3).

Introduction

In January 1945 John, Lord, Reith led a small group of senior British officials (and two secretaries², one of whom, Miss Joyce Wilson³, attained some celebrity through her association with Reith)⁴ on an almost unprecedented journey⁵ by air to Canberra, Wellington, Delhi, Cape Town, Salisbury (now Harare) and Ottawa.

Reith’s mission came at a fulcrum point in both the history of global communications and in the history of the British Empire. In terms of global communications, the formerly integrated, largely British based and run, and quasi monopolistic global telecommunications system, centred on Cable and Wireless, had begun to give way to an interconnected, pluralistic network of networks increasingly dominated by the United States: the end of what Hills characterised as a thirty year process whereby “the commonwealth bloc was to thwart U.S. Empire-making enterprise” (Hills 2007: 224). The Reith mission preceded and began to lay the ground work for the co-ordination of the Commonwealth’s negotiating position at the “tipping point” Bermuda Conference, held in November 1945, where the Commonwealth and the United States agreed on the terms of a new post-war communications order.

The new order was one where the hitherto largely self-contained imperial system was to interconnect with US networks, where wireless technology developed a greater salience *vis a vis* cable and where the governance of global communications increasingly shifted, on one hand, towards bi-lateral commercial agreements between countries and ad hoc consortia, and on the other hand, large scale multi-party organisations such as the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) rather than the tight imperial/commonwealth partnership of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK which had run the dominant global system centred on the UK based Cable and Wireless company.

In terms of Imperial history and organisation, the Reith mission responded to the increasingly tetchy relationships between the imperial partners in the system which had, as Barty-King (1979) put it in his history of the Cable and Wireless⁶ company girdled the earth⁷ and was based on an agreement⁸ designed to favour Cable and Wireless (see Barty-King 1979: 249 and 290). It came at the point where the term “Empire” had largely, but not invariably, been supplanted by the term “Commonwealth” and the “family” like cohesion of what an Australian Prime Minister⁹ (Menzies 1956) had called the “British Nations” (ie Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK) was giving way both to a more widely defined Commonwealth, as decolonisation accelerated, and to a world in which the core British “family”¹⁰ (Menzies 1942) increasingly went their separate ways – leaving Menzies’ imperial pieties looking increasingly archaic and servile.

Reith’s mission followed the Commonwealth Telegraph Conference of 1942 in Canberra which, in recommending direct wireless links between Commonwealth countries and the USA, opened up the possibility of bypassing the established imperial system. The time honoured regime dominated by the shareholder owned¹¹ Cable and Wireless company, though nominally governed by the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee (ICAC), had

become unacceptable to the Partner governments (as the “British nations” stakeholders were called). Reith (1949: 510) summarised the position: “Dissatisfactions with the existing set-up were widespread and real; they could not, with impunity, be ignored. Modifications in the constitution of Cable and Wireless would not be sufficient”¹². Reith’s mission immediately preceded the Commonwealth Communications Conference, held in London in July 1945, at which a new Commonwealth, rather than imperial, communications order was shaken out. Indeed, the purpose of the Reith mission in early 1945 was to determine what sort of new order would be acceptable to the Commonwealth partner governments.

Following the 1942 Canberra Conference various schemes had been canvassed including Reith’s own proposal for an integrated imperial company established under Royal Charter and a rival “Anzac” scheme, based on publicly owned national firms formulated by Australia and New Zealand¹³ and described by Reith as “revolutionary” (Reith 1949: 498). The Anzac scheme was unacceptable to the UK, Reith (1949: 499) reported that he, Cable and Wireless, the UK Post Office and the Treasury all believed it unsatisfactory. However, the Commonwealth governments were equally opposed to the continued centralisation on London inherent in Reith’s scheme, their objective, as characterised accurately by Reith, was “elimination of the dominating position of this London commercial company; the substitution of public utility for commercial motive; the recognition of Dominion sovereign rights” (Reith 1949: 510). Accordingly, the Reith Mission was charged with playing a “leading part in investigations into the policy and constitutional framework of imperial communications” involving “delicate negotiations between the Governments of this country and the Dominions” (Reith 1949: 499).

In the event, the new order agreed at London in mid 1945 replaced the centralised, London managed system by one made up of a plurality of national, publicly owned (rather than shareholder owned) companies (notably the Australian Overseas Telecommunications Corporation, OTC; the Canadian Overseas Telecommunications Corporation, COTC, New Zealand’s and South Africa’s Post Offices and the UK’s, nationalised, Cable and Wireless) governed by a Commonwealth Communications Council¹⁴ (CCC). Reith’s Mission exemplified the established habits and practices of the imperial “family” at a fulcrum point both of imperial history and of the ordering of global telecommunications. The 1945 London Conference marked both the point at which the established imperial/Commonwealth telecommunications policy was rejected and the swan song of a governance system undertaken through dialogue, consensus building and habitual solidarity within a tightly knit imperial “family” made up of the “British Nations”. Later in 1945 the “family” (with surprising unity) engaged formally for the first time with the new, big, neighbour, the USA, with whom telecommunication policy and practice had subsequently to be negotiated. Not only had the USA become so salient geo-politically as to demand attention but the architecture of the global telecommunications infrastructure had also changed: it was no longer a quasi-monopolistic “all red” imperial system but one in which distinct networks interconnected. The “all red” imperial network became subsumed within a global network of networks.

Reith was well qualified to lead the mission. Although he was, and is, best known as the founding Director General of the publicly owned BBC (1927-1938) he had extensive imperial experience. On leaving the BBC he had become Chairman and Managing Director of Imperial Airways where he served until 1940 when he became Minister of Information in the wartime Cabinet (and MP for Southampton)¹⁵. He had established the BBC’s Empire Service in 1932 and had advised on establishment of BBC-like broadcasters in the Dominions. And he had an unusual sensitivity towards the aspirations and sentiments of the Dominions and their nationals. Moreover, he had briefly become a member of the Cable and Wireless Court of Directors in 1944 before resigning so as to meet the Government’s request that he lead the “mission” to the Commonwealth.¹⁶ He subsequently became, from 1946-1950, the Chairman of the co-ordinating body set up after the London conference: the Commonwealth

Communications Council (CCC), later the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board (CTB), and then was Chairman of the Colonial Development Board.

The imperial “legacy” system.

The imperial communications system had been established, under British Government sponsorship, by the companies (notably the Eastern Telegraph Company and the Marconi Company) which in 1929 merged to form the Cables and Wireless Company (a holding company) and Imperial and International Communications Limited (the operating company). In 1934 the company names were harmonised and the operating company came to be known as Cable and Wireless. Cable and Wireless was organised on “semi-public utility lines”¹⁷ (New Zealand 1946: 3) and was supervised by the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee (ICAC), a body which had been established in 1928, following the Imperial Wireless and Cable Conference (see Parliament 1928 and 1928a), as the successor to the Imperial Communications Committee (established in 1921 as a sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence). ICAC was the precursor of the Commonwealth Communications Council (CCC), established in 1944 and succeeded by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board in 1949, and had limited powers – essentially only to regulate Cable and Wireless’ rates and capital structure. Cable and Wireless enjoyed a guaranteed 4% return on capital (thus providing incentives to overinvest eg by prioritising its high capital cost cable infrastructure rather than low capital cost wireless networks) and company revenues exceeding £1,865,000pa were to be divided 50/50 between the company and users via rate reductions¹⁸. ICAC met, and had its secretariat, in London and comprised representatives of the UK, the Dominions (originally including the Irish Free State), India and the Colonies.

Although this brief description represents the system as unified, in fact an effective flow of traffic (ie telegrams, and later telexes and telephone calls) necessitated interconnection between what I shall call, for the sake of simplicity and economy, Cable and Wireless and national telecommunication carriers. Within the Empire these were the national telecommunication monopolies, in the UK the Post Office, in Australia the Postmaster General’s Department, later Australia Post, etc. (though in Canada there was no domestic monopoly - both private and public corporations interconnected with the imperial system as, of course, was the case in several other countries such as the USA). These domestic telcos played both originated traffic (receiving telegrams for onward transmission) and terminated it (delivering telegrams). Moreover, Cable and Wireless, though dominant within the imperial/Commonwealth communications system, did not enjoy a complete monopoly of imperial, still less global, telecommunications. For example, much traffic between the UK and Canada was routed over US owned cables; Australia retained its own wireless communication company, Amalgamated Wireless Australasia (AWA) Ltd¹⁹ Cable and Wireless did not provide telephone services and so on. However, joint purse arrangements (Canada) and minority shareholdings in competitors (Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India) gave Cable and Wireless a stake in the operations of otherwise competing operations and the 1937 Empire Rates Agreement confirmed Cable and Wireless’ precedence enjoining Partner Governments to “accord their fullest support and co-operation to the Company’s system” (Parliament 1938: 4).

Despite the arrangements put in place at the Imperial Wireless and Cable Conference 1928, multiple tensions had developed between the parties, the partners, who were stakeholders in the imperial communications system. Pricing was a perennial point of conflict. Cable and Wireless had been guaranteed a fixed return on capital by agreement with the partner governments. In 1938 this was reduced from the 6% agreed in 1928 to 4%, meaning that the company kept the first £1,200,000 in revenues and, additionally, all subsequent profitable revenue was to be split 50-50 between the company (for distribution to shareholders or

reserves) and benefits to telegraph users by a reduction of rates (or other purposes decided by the governments). Traffic had grown from 231m words in 1938 to 644m in 1943 and 705m words in 1944. By and large, therefore, the company had an interest in keeping prices high and investments low. Whereas for the Partner Governments the incentives were the reverse. These tensions had been managed through further conferences – notably the 1937 Rates Conference.

Tensions.

The Memorandum of Conclusions of the 1937 Empire Rates Conference (in NAC Department of Transport file RG12 v 2367 702-5. January 1942-October 1946 renumbered 4000-14) defined standard rates for different classes of telegraph traffic. But it also, in Conclusion 11, specified that Governments were “to accord to the Cable & Wireless Ltd. System their fullest support and co-operation as an Imperial organization. In particular Governments agree (a) to maintain the policy of concentrating overseas telegraph traffic on the system of Cable & Wireless Ltd. and its Associates; (b) to use their best endeavours to stop the circulation of traffic over foreign services..... ; (c) to continue the policy of resisting the authorization or opening of new circuits which would be detrimental to Cable & Wireless Ltd. or its Associates in the British Empire”. Australia had made reservations in respect of several provisions of the 1937 Rates Conference agreement (but not in respect of these provisions) reflecting its long standing difficulties with Cable and Wireless over rates. In the late 30s/early 40s (before Japan became a WWII combatant) Australia pressed for reduced telegraph rates between Australia and Japan only for Cable and Wireless to drag its feet. The issue was escalated to Prime Ministerial level and ICAC²⁰ pressed Cable and Wireless to yield to the Australian Prime Minister’s request. Further cost and revenue sharing tensions between the global company and interconnecting national carriers (notably the national postal and telecommunication administrations) abounded.

How should costs and revenues between the global system and the domestic systems, with which it connected, be apportioned? And how should costs and revenues of the global system itself be shared? These were not straightforward questions – indeed such questions continue to dog telecommunications policy and regulation to this day. How much, for example, of the costs of the Pacific cable (linking Australia and New Zealand to Canada) should be apportioned to the UK? What was a fair price for the supply of cable to Cable and Wireless by its subsidiary Telcon²¹? How much of the eastern cable, linking the UK to Egypt, India and Singapore and then to Australia and New Zealand should be apportioned to Australia? How should tariffing be arranged? What should be the price for press cables and what for commercial and private cables²²? None of these questions were new and few of them have gone away. They are endemic to telecommunication systems which tend to have high fixed and low marginal costs and also pose challenging problems of allocating costs and revenues between interconnecting carriers.

There was also a technology based tension, between rival proponents of cables and wireless systems which, in part, mapped onto a conflict between Australia, which strongly supported its domestic champion AWA. Australia was not the only proponent of wireless to find its aspirations frustrated by Cable and Wireless. Burma, for example, petitioned for a direct wireless circuit between Rangoon and Malaya (a distance of 250 miles) rather than have traffic routed over cable via Madras (a round trip mileage greater by a factor of approximately 10)²³. Cable and Wireless opposed Burma’s proposal on the grounds that it was established policy not to open new circuits which would be detrimental to Cable and Wireless. The Chairman of Cable and Wireless, Sir Edward Wilshaw,²⁴ subsequently wrote to the Chairman of ICAC, Sir Colin Campbell Stuart²⁵ stating that “it was not thought necessary..... to advance reasons against an action which appeared to be in direct contravention of a principle adopted by the Empire Rates Conference” (cited in ICAC paper 1121-A dated 7.7.1939. in BL.

B624/37; IOR/M/3/169 19 Mar 1937-2 Oct 1940. p 3). But, despite these awkward conflicts of interest, the main tensions were rooted in the growing perception of the Partner Governments that their interests were diverging from those of the “mother country”, the UK. When the integrity, security and prosperity of the Empire was seen as a shared interest such conflicts could be, and were, negotiated within the context of the imperial system and notably through the ICAC.

However, WWII meant that the communication policy consensus achieved in the 1920s and 30s, and the linked perception of a shared imperial interest and a shared imperial fate, eroded significantly. It rapidly became clear that the UK could not guarantee its own military security – let alone that of the rest of the Empire. Australia, again, felt these tensions particularly keenly. And in 1942 Australia hosted a Commonwealth Telegraph Conference²⁶, the first held outside the UK and though formally convened by the UK was actually inspired by Australia,²⁷ at which a radical restructuring of the system was agreed. Australia, had made clear (note from Glasgow²⁸ to unspecified Canadian addressee – but probably to the Canadian Secretary of State External Affairs, dated 17.9.1942 in NAC Department of Transport file RG12 v 2367 702-5. January 1942-October 1946 renumbered 4000-14) that it would no longer accept the agreed old order and would not continue to guarantee Cable and Wireless against loss arising from the opening of radio circuits.

The 1942 Canberra conference recommended that ICAC should be replaced by a new body (first called the Commonwealth Communications Council and later the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board) with participating governments’ representatives resident in their home countries rather than in London; that direct wireless links between Commonwealth countries and the USA be authorised (profoundly challenging Cable and Wireless’ established monopoly) and inclined strongly towards henceforth emphasising wireless systems rather than cable²⁹. Despite the UK’s concern that “opening of these circuits³⁰ would, as we see it, endanger policy in regard to Empire communications..... namely, to build up British Commonwealth communications through existing British Commonwealth routes and to allow Cable and Wireless, Limited, the instrument of British communications policy, such financial security tenure that company could earn a surplus which could be used for a reduction of rates, and that it could continue to maintain without cost to the British Commonwealth Governments essential strategic cables which might not be commercially warranted” (NAC UK Secretary of State, Dominion Affairs³¹ to Secretary of State External Affairs, Canada, 15.1.1942. in Department of Transport file RG12 v 2367 702-5. January 1942-October 1946 renumbered 4000-14) the 1942 Commonwealth Telegraph Conference recommended the changes which Australia had sought. As the Conference chairman, Sir Campbell Stuart, stated “the old ways have gone for ever” (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: Annex to first meeting p 3). The Reith mission was designed to try and secure partner governments’ agreement to a durable new order which, the UK believed, could not be secured on the basis set out at Canberra.

Imperial integration and dis-integration.

Reith’s mission, and the subsequent restructuring of the imperial communications system at a Commonwealth Telecommunications Conference held in London in July 1945, was quickly followed by a comprehensive assertion of independence and autonomy by the erstwhile imperial partners. In 1946, Canada promulgated its own Citizenship Act establishing a Canadian citizenship separate from Canadians’ status as British Subjects³². In 1947, the UK government convened a Commonwealth Conference on Nationality and Citizenship prior to the passing of the 1948 British Nationality Act³³. In the same year, India secured independence; New Zealand passed its Statute of Westminster Adoption Act (thus, for the first time, formally endowing the New Zealand Parliament with lawful control of its foreign policy and constitution³⁴); in South Africa the 1948 election of the first National Party (the

bearer of the Afrikaner interest) government was soon followed, in 1949, by the South African Citizenship Act). Such comprehensive centrifugal manifestations of imperial decoupling had been powerfully foreshadowed by John Curtin's, the Australian Prime Minister, celebrated statement on 26.12.1941 (19 days after Pearl Harbour, 16 days after the sinking of *HMS Prince of Wales* and *HMS Repulse* and less than two months before the surrender of Singapore) that "Without any inhibitions of any kind I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom"³⁵. In this context, it can readily be imagined how the continued existence of a UK based and UK controlled communications system was unacceptable to most of the partner governments which had hitherto fostered and supported it. Cable and Wireless' continued hegemony (if not downright monopoly) over the partner governments' international communications would have been problematic enough without a habitual condescension practiced by Wilshaw towards his imperial customers and governors. Wilshaw's formulation "British colony"³⁶ epitomises his attitude and it needs little imagination to realise how offensive such an outlook would have been to Australian and other Commonwealth readers accustomed to being referred to as "partners" and concerned to further augment their autonomy.

All this testified to a very different sentiment to that which obtained in the 1920s when the imperial communications system had been established around the twin poles of Imperial and International Communications Limited and the Imperial Communications Committee (later the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee - ICAC). Then, it was the doctrine defined in the Balfour Declaration agreed at the Imperial Conference in 1926 which stated:

They³⁷ are autonomous Communities within the British Empire, equal in status, in no way subordinate one to another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations (Imperial Conference 1926: Clause II)

Where, in an arrangement such as the Balfour Declaration defined, is "home" and where "abroad"?³⁸ Of course, working distinctions were made – distinctions which became firmer and deeper as time went on. They had been made more emphatic by the traumas of the First World War and would be further amplified by the global interwar economic depression and the Second World War. But whatever distinctions were made the Imperial partners, united and freely associated, were closer to each other than they were to other states. Of course there was a hierarchy within the Empire: London had (from 1925) a Dominions Office as well as a Colonial Office and an India Office but all these were separate from the Foreign Office for what they were concerned with was not "foreign" but, in varying degrees at different times, thought of as part of "us", part of the category "home" rather than the category "abroad". The chief partners³⁹ in the imperial communications system were what Menzies (1956), later called the "old Commonwealth" or the "Crown Commonwealth" and these states, (essentially the "self-governing communities" named in the Balfour Declaration⁴⁰) were the ones which shaped both the imperial system and the manner of its demise. Menzies' attachment to the "Crown Commonwealth" testifies to the tenacity of the integrative sentiments expressed in the Balfour Declaration though it was Curtin's re-orientation away from the Empire that proved more influential and enduring.

Drummond's (1972) compendium of selected official papers concerning intra-imperial negotiations over trade (and concerning the Imperial Conference in Ottawa in 1932 in particular) provides several good examples of the framework of assumptions within which His Majesty's Governments (notably those of the Dominions, Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK) negotiated their differing, and often mutually exclusive, interests. Whilst all parties readily identified contradictions between their and others' interests (contradictions which often concerned access to the UK market, the largest of the imperial markets, potentially pitting the interests of UK based firms, sectors and

workers against those of the Dominions, and – though these interests were given considerably less salience - the Colonies) they also, recurrently, asserted and enacted their recognition of the mutual allegiances, identities and fundamental unity of the Empire.

Whilst a UK Minister⁴¹ could, in 1924, state (of dried fruit import duties!) that “sooner or later” the UK must “take a firm stand and say ‘no’ to these Dominion and Colonial importunities and threats” he did so in the context of a simultaneous acknowledgement that the UK was the “Mother Country” and that if these divisive (dried fruit was the case in point) conflicts were not regulated, in this case by the UK taking “a firm stand”, then “the Empire is eventually to break up” (Drummond 1972: 177). Similarly, Mackenzie King, the Prime Minister of Canada⁴², though known to his critics as “the American” (Granatstein 1996: 82), wrote in 1930 hoping that his views “will commend themselves to those who, like yourself, are concerned in the development of the most friendly and profitable trade relations between Canada and the Motherland” (Drummond 1972: 182). To further exemplify the point, in 1934 the UK Dominions Secretary distinguished, routinely, between “the Dominions” and “the foreigners” (Drummond 1972: 222) and, in 1936, the UK Cabinet recorded explicitly the conceptual status quo to be “the principle (already accepted throughout the Commonwealth) that the United Kingdom was entitled to take the commodities it required in a descending order of preference (a) home produced goods (b) Dominion imports, and (c) foreign imports” (Drummond 1972: 232).

However, Drummond shows that the inter war period was one in which imperial trade had grown in importance to all parties: to the UK and the Dominions and Colonies. In 1938 47% of the UK’s exports went to the Empire whereas in 1913 only 22% had done so (Drummond 1972: 18). In terms of UK imports, a similar re-balancing favouring the Empire had taken place: in 1913 80% of UK imports came from foreign countries, by 1938 the Empire had almost doubled its share with foreign (ie non-Empire) imports falling to 61% (Drummond 1972: 21). Drummond summarised these trends thus: “the final effect.....is this: more and more of Empire exports to the United Kingdom and other Empire countries”.

These sentiments and relationships testify both to affiliation and to distantiating. It is the latter that’s latterly received most salience in heroic national and nationalist narratives recounting the emergence of subordinated entities, once shadowed by the British imperium, into the sunlight of national independence and autonomous statehood. That narrative, rightly, has foregrounded the traumas of two world wars, crowned in eventual victory but achieved through long periods of death, disaster and disillusionment; the change in the composition of the Dominions’ populations and immigrants (of course, the Colonies were never imagined as Britain abroad); and the rise in visibility, symbolic and actual political importance of indigenous peoples. In the UK version, it has (not wholly effectively) narrated the UK’s accession to the EU and its engagement in the European project of “ever closer union” as a (re)discovery of the UK’s essential European-ness. In other versions ample testimony has been given to the triumph of an essential Australian-ness, Canadian-ness, South African-ness and so on.

But testimony to dis-integration is incomplete testimony. Co-operation was habitual in the imperial communications system (though this is not to say that power was evenly distributed). The volume of paper exchanged between the Partner Governments was very high (as any researcher in the national archives soon discovers) in consequence of an embedded practice of extensive mutual consultation. The vast amounts of paper exchanged, and telegraph traffic capacity used in this process of consultation, led, once alternatives to telegraphy were established, to intermittent suggestions that the Commonwealth Communications Council (CCC) reduce costs by using airmail for some of its communications and later to the 1951 suggestion from Australia (CTB 437 discussed at the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board, CTB, on 13.12.1951) that the paper chase be reduced by ceasing to send all parties copies of terminating traffic reports (see Tudhope⁴³ to Browne⁴⁴ 14.12.1951 in NAC

Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367 702-13 pt 1). An exemplary case in point of the leaning-over-backwards-to-consult is a UK circular to Partner Governments, one sent after the Reith mission - (Circular from Secretary of State Dominion Affairs D 557, Southern Rhodesia 153 dated 31.5.1946 in NAC Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367, 702-10 pt 1), which earnestly informed other Governments that the UK, as the only Partner Government with membership of the International Telecommunications Union's CCIT⁴⁵ (later CCITT), had been invited by the Communications Committee of the International Chamber of Commerce to participate in their Paris Congress on 17.6.1946 and to ask whether other Commonwealth Governments were "agreeable" to the UK's participation. Further testimony to this habitual practice of consultation is provided by the United States agreement that the CCC be the body for post Bermuda Agreement information exchange because "All rate changes by British Commonwealth countries are subject of mutual consultation between the partner Governments" (Telegram n 89 from High Commissioner London to Secretary of State External Affairs 17.1.1947 in NAC Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367, 702-10 part 3).

Despite the operational difficulties posed by a practice of consultation by remote control, Australia's Prime Minister⁴⁶ Robert, later Sir Robert, Menzies saw such practices as distinctive and essential elements of the Commonwealth community. In a well known statement, published in *The Times*, he testified both to established general practice of imperial/Commonwealth consultation, stating "the future of the British Commonwealth.... will turn upon our means and spirit of contact and consultation" and claimed that even more was needed, stating: "I would courteously suggest that one text might be boldly printed in every Department in London, New Delhi, Canberra, and the other Seats of Government - 'Will any decision I am today contemplating affect some other nation of the Commonwealth? If so, have I informed or consulted it?'" (Menzies 1956). Reith's mission exemplified just such a practice of consultation and exchange of information – more powerfully so in that his recommendations did not actually prevail. Though the imperial/Commonwealth system was no longer one in which a plan hatched in London could be sold to partners after a satisfactory rhetorical display, nonetheless the old practices and sentiments retained much vigour and some persuasiveness. They continued to animate policy in the latter half of the 1940s as Reith's mission demonstrated. What more powerful rhetoric could there be than the human ordeal and technological and organisational triumph of a journey such as Reith's?

The Commonwealth Telegraph Conference 1942.

The arrangements, established in the 1920s, which had established Cable and Wireless as the dominant imperial telecommunications service provider and infrastructure operator, had integrated cable and wireless systems⁴⁷. However, this system begun to unravel under several pressures centred on Australia.⁴⁸ First, Australia's frustrations with what it perceived to be insufficient opportunity to advance the development and interests of its domestic manufacturing sector (notably AWA). Second, Australia's experience of the vulnerability of its global communications network – the combination of geography and history placing Australia (and New Zealand) at the end of long and vulnerable cable circuits. Third, the opacity of Cable and Wireless' tariffing (not least the opportunities which vertical integration from manufacturing to retailing telegraphy to customers) which, together with the its effective monopoly meant that countries served could never confidently ascertain whether the company's shareholder ownership was being unreasonably advantaged relative to customers and the imperial partners. Concerns over the rates charged, allocation of costs, how far high levels of traffic originated (as was the Australian case) and the length of time during which the (high) capital costs of cable infrastructure were amortised were exacerbated by the introduction of wireless systems which had comparatively low capital costs – a matter which was of particular concern to Australia which, because at the end of the imperial communications routes, was largely a price taker .And fourth, the implications for

communications of the rapid and intense growth of Australia's military dependence on the United States following the outbreak of war in the Pacific (and Australia's experience of both the vulnerability of the imperial military forces in North Africa and the reluctance of imperial, aka British, military planning to place sufficient emphasis on the defence of Australia).

The United States' rapid build up of a military presence in Australia was accompanied by construction of a communication system using direct wireless circuits (notably between Australia and the USA) which both bypassed and needed interconnection with the imperial cable and wireless system giving rise to all kinds of conflicts because these initiatives, though urgent military necessities, conflicted with the undertakings Cable and Wireless had received in the 1928 and 1937 imperial conferences. Again, Australia was the party most affected and the party most likely to benefit from change. All these tensions found explicit expression in the Commonwealth Telegraph Conference (CTC) of 1942 held in Melbourne and Canberra - a conference at which Sir Edward Wilshaw, the Chairman and Managing Director of Cable and Wireless, was conspicuous by his absence⁴⁹. The Conference Chair, Sir Campbell Stuart "looked forward to "a day when every part of the British Commonwealth will have a strong communications organisation..... and in the closest association with the other organisations of the Commonwealth" And in the context of "the best possible relations with the United States of America" (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: Annex to first meeting p 3). Stuart's comments both reflected change in sentiment among the imperial partners (and changed facts on the ground) and foreshadowed the dis-aggregation of the integrated imperial system, effectively synonymous with Cable and Wireless that took place over the following five years.

The Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, said to the second meeting (in Canberra) of the CTC "This global war has tested the Empire communication system as it has never been tested before. We have lost – but only temporarily – many cables and the Empire has consequently had to rely upon the use of wireless" (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 2.4). Indeed, the capsule history of Imperial co-ordination in communications which Curtin gave to the conference emphasised the role played by wireless. He observed that in 1926 Beam wireless⁵⁰ came into a situation where "The Empire... occupied a pre-eminent position in the international communication field" (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 2.3) and by 1927 wireless had become widely available at lower prices than cable. At the present time, Curtin claimed, both personal and press messages, both important for the war effort, had fallen in price: "Empire troops have been able to exchange messages with their loved ones at home at an extraordinarily cheap rate and this has lessened to some degree the anxieties which were inescapable in former wars. Cheap rate messages for the Forces represent over 60,000,000 words per annum..... Press traffic over the Empire system, which in 1928 totalled approximately 25,000,000 words, has reached 92,000,000 during 1942" (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 2.4).

Curtin's statement to the second session of the conference (the first to be held in Canberra) was echoed by Sir Ernest Fisk⁵¹ in the third session. Fisk said "Our friends in England believe in cables; others wholeheartedly believe in wireless" Though Fisk, himself an exemplar of the family links⁵² which had bound the Empire together, emphatically argued for wireless within a context of strong imperial links. He said. "If that can be resolved without restricting the freedom with which the Dominions must have in developing not only their countries but their communications..... we would have something stronger than the United States" (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 3. Annex p 4).

The fifth session of the conference, in Canberra on 18.12.1942, received a similar testimony (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 5. Annex p 1) from Ernest Bourne (Australia's Chief Inspector of Telegraphs) that "the present conflict has provided substantial evidence..... that... cables are now extremely vulnerable to destruction by enemy action..... we have lost vitally important cables in Mediterranean waters..... [and] the entire far eastern system

interconnecting Australia with Java, Sumatra, Singapore, Labuan, Penang, Madras, Colombo, the Philippines, Hong Kong and Shanghai..... On the other hand, a modern wireless service is exposed to possible destruction only within the countries employing this means of communication” (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 5. Annex p 1).

Australia’s rhetorical foregrounding of wireless reflected both its interest in promoting the Australian firm, Amalgamated Wireless Australasia (AWA), the importance of its ties to the USA and its recognition of the growing importance of wireless. Stuart reported to the conference that the USA had requested direct radio circuits with Australia. Such direct links, by-passing the integrated imperial Cable and Wireless network and fiercely resisted by the Cable and Wireless company, had been granted by ICAC but only “for the duration of the war” and on condition that tariffs should be same as over existing channels and that Cable and Wireless revenues should be protected (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: Annex to first meeting p 2). Stuart rightly acknowledged that the direct radio link issue raised, as a matter for the CTC, the “whole question of Government obligations to Cable and Wireless” (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: Annex to first meeting p 3).

Decisions taken at the conference marked the watershed in sentiment and organisational arrangements bearing on imperial communications. The conference decided to change the title of the ICAC from Imperial Communications Advisory Committee to Commonwealth Communications Council (CCC); it decided that representatives of partner Governments should be resident in the countries they represent, rather than in London (though the secretariat should remain in London); rates for traffic with the USA should be reduced to 45 cents per word (of which 5 cents go to US landline carriers and 5 cents to carrier in relevant Commonwealth country). And it decided, in its fourth session (in Canberra on 17.12.1942) to deprecate explicitly Wilshaw’s absence: “The Conference..... desired it to be recorded that it was much to be regretted that Sir Edward Wilshaw, Chairman of Cable and Wireless Ltd, had not accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister of Australia..... and that he had not found it possible to send a representative from England” (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 4.3). Wilshaw’s boycott of the 1942 CTC seems consistent with a “little Englander” mentality which Campbell Stuart found in Cable and Wireless (though perhaps his principle target was Wilshaw himself). In what was essentially his personal professional memoir, though formally a formal CCC paper, he observed that not only had Wilshaw not taken up the Australian Prime Minister’s invitation to participate in the Canberra Conference of 1942 but that “No Director or high officials of Cable and Wireless Limited has visited the U.S.A. during the whole of this war” (NAC. CCC paper n 159 dated 13.2.1945 in RG36 31 Vol 16 8-52-1. p 14). Campbell Stuart’s and Wilshaw’s working relationships were notoriously bad but in this, as in other respects, it is Campbell Stuart’s rather than Wilshaw’s judgements and behaviour that seems the best judged.

Commonwealth Telegraph Conference 1942 aftermath.

Wilshaw was shocked by the tone and decisions of the conference which promised to expose Cable and Wireless to serious competition for the first time. He wrote to the Permanent Secretary of the UK Treasury on 27.2.1942 (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 1)⁵³ testifying to his “profound shock” at learning that the Government has agreed “in principle to direct wireless circuits between the U.S.A. and any British colony being opened”. He claimed that “the seriousness of the position cannot be exaggerated” (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 1) and further stated that “it is with profound misgivings that the Company is now forced to look upon a future where foreign interests have been permitted to make inroads on the communications of the British Empire, with a possible disastrous result upon Empire communications as a whole and upon this Company in particular” (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 4). Wilshaw sought to mitigate, what he saw as damage to the Empire as well as to Cable and Wireless, by asking that such permissions be limited to military traffic

and for the duration of the war. He also urged that the rate decisions should be protested and Cable and Wireless indemnified against loss (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 6). Wilshaw's telegrams to Brooke (dated 2.3.1942 and 2.5.1942) are couched in similarly apocalyptic terms. He referred to US competition as "American aggression" and claimed that "American companies plans (sic) to invade Empire" (included in ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 21) as un-numbered pages).

Wilshaw's views, though now appearing overblown and symptomatic of a man who it is easy to see as Blimpishly out of touch⁵⁴ with the realities of the reconfiguration of global power which the second world war crystallised and accelerated, were not his alone. The formal Conference Report, dated December 1942, (the final paper bound in the CTC 1942 volume) attested to the Conference's view that "We subscribe to the views of Sir Edward Wilshaw regarding the dangers of American infiltration in the field of British communications (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) p 9). But in most other respects Wilshaw's assumption that Cable and Wireless could and should remain hegemonic were dangerously decoupled from reality. Rather than recognising that the company's existence depended on satisfying the partner governments Wilshaw seems to have thought that Cable and Wireless was, and ought to be, the dominant partner in the relationship. In a letter to Birchall⁵⁵ (who was to succeed Campbell Stuart⁵⁶ as Chairman of the CCC) Wilshaw asserted that "the Partner Governments..... will not have fulfilled their obligations to my Company" (Wilshaw to Birchall 28.8.1944. DOC/CW/1/210). Further, in evidence to the House of Lords' Select Committee on the Cable and Wireless Bill,⁵⁷ Wilshaw laid particular responsibility for what he saw as the upturning of the proper relationship between the company and its external governing/regulatory body, the CCC, at Australia's door stating "I think the whole of this difficulty has arisen from Australia" (HoL 1946 para 875). Both the political aspirations of the partners in the imperial project, sliding towards separation if not outright divorce, and the reconfiguration of global telecommunications, from an Empire integrated system based on cables and centrally controlled from London, to a decentralised and interconnected network of networks with significant non-British, non-imperial elements in which wireless became increasingly important, left Wilshaw, and Wilshawism, beached as a hollow relic of old style imperialism: an imperialism fossilised in unthinking usages like that designating Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa as colonies (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 1).

The trends evident in the 1942 conference were amplified in the ongoing discussions of the system's governing body, the Commonwealth Communications Council (CCC). During 1944, the CCC considered a variety of schemes for post-war communications: one put forward by Fisk based on expanded wireless communications, a Cable and Wireless scheme of a single Empire Corporation,⁵⁸ and the so called Anzac scheme of a system based on six publicly owned national companies interconnecting with each other. The Anzac scheme – as its name suggests strongly influenced by Australian concerns and perspectives - would eliminate Cable & Wireless' dominance of the imperial system, substitute public utility for commercial gain as the guiding principle animating the system and recognise Dominions' sovereign rights. It would do so through the nationalisation of overseas telecommunications companies in the Dominions; provide for mirror shareholdings in the resulting enterprises (the Dominions and India were each to have a 5% holding in the resulting firms and the UK 25%); and the CCC was to act as co-ordinating body.

The final report of the CCC's 1944 meetings (ICS 118/2/3/1. dated 10.4.1944) testified to Cable and Wireless' lost hegemony. The CCC essentially proposed adoption of the Anzac plan. This would mean that Cable and Wireless should be superseded by a series of public utility corporations in the UK, the Dominions and India with the resulting entities sharing the costs of the undersea cable infrastructure. The companies would be linked by an exchange of shares (5% of Cable and Wireless equity for each partner and, reciprocally, Cable and Wireless would hold 25% of the share capital of each of the other firms) and mutual board

representation (of the proposed eleven Directors of Cable and Wireless, the UK Government should appoint six and each of the partner governments – Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa – should appoint one). The CCC should act as a co-ordinating body and be responsible for negotiations with third party governments etc.

Genesis of the Reith mission.

Reith described the cleavage between the UK and imperial partner governments (following the 1942 CTC and 1944 CCC meetings) when he reported to Parliament after completion of his “mission” in 1946. He said: “the Governments of all the Dominions and India accepted the Commonwealth Communications Council plan of May, 1944, and there was some annoyance among them that they had to wait till December to be told that the United Kingdom Government did not accept the plan but would send an emissary to talk things over with them. I was given no instructions at all. I should not have liked to be told what I had to try to get the other Governments to agree to. My task was to evolve if possible, in consultation with them, a scheme which, while not interfering with their sovereign rights, would give that measure of central co-ordination which was essential”. (House of Lords Hansard *HL Deb 25 July 1946 vol 142 cc1000-20* at 1008. at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1946/jul/25/cable-and-wireless-bill#S5LV0142P0_19460725_HOL_212 accessed on 17.2.2010).

The UK had formally rejected the Anzac scheme at the conference of Dominion Prime Ministers in May 1944. It believed the Anzac scheme provided insufficient central co-ordination (though South Africa thought, even under the Anzac scheme, that the central body would have too much authority). The grounds for British rejection of the CCC proposals, without necessarily supporting Cable and Wireless’, were set out in a Cabinet Paper (NA. WP.44.657 of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7) from a Cabinet Committee chaired the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir John Anderson. The Committee⁵⁹, with the exception of Lord Beaverbrook, the Lord Privy Seal, agreed that Cable and Wireless should be nationalised (ie adhering to the CCC’s recommendation and one key element of the Anzac plan) but that, instead of mirror organisations being established in the Dominions and India, that a “a public utility organisation” be established “on an effective Empire basis providing for the maximum local autonomy consistent with the requisite unification of policy and control” (NA. WP. 44. 657. 2 ii of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7).

The UK Cabinet Committee acknowledged that “The present system with its responsibilities to private shareholders and faced with considerable financial problems cannot provide the cheap, wide and efficient public service which the Commonwealth requires” and argued that post-war prospects for the Company were not good (WP. 44. 657 3. b and c of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7). However, it also argued that direct wireless circuits took traffic and revenue from Cable and Wireless, breaching previous undertakings by partner governments to support Cable and Wireless (WP. 44. 657 3 a of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7). And further, and more fundamentally, objected to the CCC proposals on the grounds that “the Council’s scheme fails to provide unity of policy and control, and appropriate sharing of financial responsibilities, both of which are in our view essential to any Empire system. The measures proposed to secure co-ordination, such as a nominal exchange of shareholding, will in our view be largely ineffective, and the degree of unity achieved by the present system would appear to be very largely sacrificed to meet the demands of local autonomy. The result may well be an aggravation of the conditions which have led to economic and other friction in the past” (WP 44 657. 4 of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7).

In clause 5, the Committee proposed what would become the Reith Mission: “we consider that the promotion of a United Kingdom Government mission to explore the position with the Governments of the Dominions and India would offer the best prospects of success as a first approach. In view of the past history of this problem such a mission should be quite

independent of the Commonwealth Communications Council. It would be important to avoid creating the impression that we were attempting to impose on the Dominion Governments a centralised organisation since more harm than good might result. The object of this mission would be to explain the disadvantages of the Commonwealth Communications Council scheme and submit the advantages of an alternative scheme on an Empire basis” (WP 44.657. 8 of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7)

On a different matter, though one that would figure increasingly in UK and Commonwealth telecommunications policy, the UK recognised the importance of accommodating United States’ concerns. Foreshadowing the Bermuda Conference⁶⁰ of November 1945, the Committee argued for speed of execution on the grounds that “the United States Government asked for negotiations with the British Commonwealth on telecommunication matters” and argued, in consequence, that: “it was clearly desirable that the basic principles of the Commonwealth organisation in the post-war period should be settled before any discussions, the United States Government were informed that we would do our best to be in a position to open negotiations with them early in the new year. The fact that these negotiations are pending in the near future makes it all the more important to approach the Dominion and Indian Governments without delay” (WP 44.657. 9 of 16.11.1944 at NA cab 66/58/7).

Reith indicated that the Commonwealth partners anticipated the arrival of his mission with “surmise, apprehension, even resentment” (HM Treasury 1945: 3) - not surprisingly since their representatives had agreed proposals through the CCC which had been rejected by the UK. He defined his Mission’s objectives as:

- (1) To explain rejection of Anzac plan recommended by Commonwealth Communications Council⁶¹.
- (2) To explore alternatives including-
 - (a) Continuance of Cable & Wireless Ltd. System possibly modified.
 - (b) An Empire corporation scheme, or something like it, on public utility lines.
- (3) To make clear that the Dominions and India should carry their due proportion of obligations in any new set up”. (HM Treasury 1945: 3).

Reith found that it was precisely the “unity and control of policy”, which commended Cable & Wireless to the UK Government, that stuck in the Dominions’ and India’s throats. Their “objections to a London owned and based company, trading for profit, and dominating the Commonwealth scene” were found by Reith to be “real and unshakeable” with so deep a corresponding “desire and mind for local ownership and control” in the Commonwealth Governments that they “indicated that they were determined to secure this [ie local control RC] whatever the U.K. Government might do or not do” (HM Treasury 1945: 4). In sum, the Commonwealth Governments (albeit in varying degrees, led by Australia and New Zealand as the “Anzac” title of the plan suggests with Canada and South Africa somewhat less gung ho) sought:

- i. Elimination of dominating position of Cable and Wireless Ltd.
- ii. Substitution of public utility for commercial motive.
- iii. Recognition of Dominion sovereign rights. (HM Treasury 1945: 4).

Reith’s mission and findings.

Reith secured agreement to compromise proposals, mediating between the Anzac and UK schemes, through what he called “fearful travail”⁶² (HM Treasury 1945: 4): travail particularly notable in Canberra, which was the first capital visited by his Mission. The resulting “Canberra proposals”, which Reith referred to as an “anglo-anzacised” evolution of the Anzac plan (HM Treasury 1945: 19), were outlined in Annex 4 of his report and consisted of the nationalisation of Cable & Wireless and the “mirror companies” in the other partner countries by Governments under a “central body” made up of representatives of the “partner governments” and the Colonies and assuming the powers and responsibilities of the Commonwealth Communications Council (CCC).

Essentially, under the Reith post-mission plan (the “Canberra proposals”) the Imperial communications systems would become publicly owned by separate nationally based companies (pooling receipts after local costs had been defrayed) interconnecting with each other under the co-ordination of a central body made up of a single representative of each of the major imperial/commonwealth stakeholders: ie the Anzac plan without cross shareholdings. The Australian PM saw the Canberra proposals as a strengthening of the Anzac plan; the New Zealand PM⁶³ and the Government of India saw them as improving on Anzac (HM Treasury 1945: 13). India also proposed that the firms constituting the new arrangements should enjoy a monopoly of overseas telecommunications (including telephony) undertaken by the parties. Southern Rhodesia was also broadly supportive of the Canberra proposals as was Canada⁶⁴, (though with some significant reservations⁶⁵). Reith (1949: 507) had anticipated that securing agreement from Canada and South Africa would be particularly difficult. Canada had approached the prospect of Reith’s visit to Ottawa with caution as a telegram from the Canadian High Commissioner in Australia to External Affairs dated 7.2.1945 attested. It stated that “Reith’s mission is leaving Canada as last port of call – I have feeling that this is being done deliberately to present you with an accomplished fact” (NAC Department of Transport file RG12 v 2367 702-5. January 1942-October 1946 renumbered 4000-14).

However, the South African PM⁶⁶, though expressing South Africa’s wholehearted commitment to co-operation to secure a “sound Commonwealth telecommunication system”, sought greater national autonomy than the Canberra proposals envisaged – the central body should only be consultative, the national company and national Government should be able to act autonomously and the financial co-ordination and sharing that characterised the Canberra (but not the Anzac plan) proposals should be subject to further consideration – ie were not acceptable (HM Treasury 1945: 17). Canada concurred with the South African position (Reith 1949: 508) – a better result than Reith had anticipated and one, he believed, only made “a difference of form but not of substance” (Reith 1949: 510). And Canada, with its particular sensitivity to US concerns, did not wish to set in stone a scheme before American concerns were acknowledged⁶⁷.

The evolving manoeuvring to determine how imperial (albeit renominated as “Commonwealth”) communications were to be clearly displayed all parties’, including the UK’s, desire to maximise national advantage in any arrangements. Broadly, the UK wanted a status quo which had served it well and its Imperial/Commonwealth partners wanted greater devolution and “national” autonomy. However, the sentiments which had bound the parties together for centuries (or, in the case of Southern Rhodesia, for decades) and which had both been tested and consolidated through wartime (and neither victory in Europe nor over Japan had yet been declared at the time of Reith’s mission) received powerful testimony, as Reith found it worthwhile to report, from Australia’s Prime Minister who was reported to have said: “If everybody is to take a purely national view, then it’s goodnight to hopes of peace, leagues of nations, security, confraternity and all the rest of it. Nothing but bloody tanks and guns” (HM Treasury 1945: 19).

Curtin's view not only expressed an outward looking commitment to a polity and project beyond Australia but also an assertion of Australian entitlements which, he thought, had not been properly acknowledged in the conduct of the war and planning for the peace. Reith recorded that Curtin had "made pungent comment on the normal attitude of Whitehall. He had that day, for instance, received the agenda for the Yalta conference; there were several items which vitally affected Australia; apparently he was not to be consulted in advance. On this and similar happenings he remarked 'The time will come when someone sitting in this chair will say "I won't put up with it"' (Reith 1949: 505-6). Hearing such testimony at first hand persuaded Reith that "Dissatisfactions with the existing set-up were widespread and real: they could not with impunity be ignored. Modifications in the constitution of Cable and Wireless Limited would not be sufficient. The chief objectives of the original plan were the elimination of the dominating position of this London commercial company; the substitution of public utility for commercial motive; the recognition of Dominion sovereign rights" (Reith 1949: 510).

Reith's report and proposals represented a compromise between the positions expressed before his mission took place – between the UK's centralised model and the Anzac decentred model. Basically, he proposed a modified Anzac scheme with what he called the "Oceanic Assets" of Cable and Wireless, that is the undersea cables etc, which were both the residue left once each national entity (including the UK) took possession of the infrastructure and ran services on its territory and also the most significant asset in the whole imperial system, owned and administered by a central, commonly owned, body. Though, fatally, he had not canvassed the Oceanic Assets part of his scheme with the governments visited in the course of the Mission. Reith's report and proposals were presented to the War Cabinet on 16.2.1945 by the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Sir John Anderson) whose Memorandum (NA WP 45 (246) 13.4.1945. Cab/64/66/46) recommended adoption. Anderson's memo included a dissenting minority report from the Lord Privy Seal, Lord Beaverbrook,⁶⁸ – Beaverbrook's objections centred on the idea of nationalisation. The Cabinet discussion, recorded in the Cabinet Secretariat notes (CAB/195/3. WM 46.45) was extensive⁶⁹ (see also the formal record of the conclusions reached by the War Cabinet CAB/65/50/9 WM 46.45). The notes recorded that Reith secured considerable support and praise: the Postmaster General (Crookshank) stated Reith had "done much better than we expected", the Secretary of State for India and for Burma (Amery) he had "done well in getting so large a measure of inter-Dom agreement". The formal record stated "Lord Reith had been much more successful than the Ministerial Committee had expected in finding a common measure of agreement on this question among the Governments, of the Dominions and India" (CAB/65/50/9 WM 46.45).

Unsurprisingly, Cable and Wireless opposed Reith's proposals (Reith 1949: 513) but more important was the fact that the Oceanic Assets proposal had not been fully discussed with all the partner governments and least of all with proponents of the Anzac scheme. For, as Reith stated (ICS 118/ 2/1/1. Minutes of 18th July 1945, C.T.C. (45) 2nd Meeting p 2 in Proceedings of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Conference 1945), "The Oceanic Assets idea had occurred to him on the way to Salisbury", i.e. towards the end of his mission after his visits to Australia, New Zealand and India, and the idea had "not been mentioned in Southern Rhodesia and only provisionally in South Africa and Canada". The Oceanic Assets scheme made sense in that it dealt with a crucial infrastructure that had not been fully acknowledged in the Anzac scheme. It addressed the disparity in size between the UK company (which would have held the submarine cables, oceanic assets, under the Anzac scheme) and the other national operating companies. Perhaps this did not matter too much to Australia (and, presumably, New Zealand) for the Anzac scheme would have enabled Australia to more fully develop and use wireless systems. But for Reith, concerned to make an imperial system, rather than a series of interconnecting national systems, work the disparity in size between the UK and the other companies was untidy and ill balanced.

Reith himself later characterised his mission, and its preceding and succeeding contexts, thus: “a 1944 meeting of the Council recommended unanimously that the local companies should be nationalized in each country. I was presented with that when I was invited to go around the world in January, 1945, but the United Kingdom Government thought—and I entirely agreed with them—that the arrangements for the central co-ordination of all these separately nationalized bodies were not adequate; and I was asked whether I could devise something in consultation with the Dominions and India which would give a greater measure of central co-ordination with a view to greater efficiency. That is what I felt I brought back as a result of my conversations. I did not bring back nationalization; I was presented with nationalization before I went” (at 211 *HL Deb 15 October 1946 vol 143 cc204-15*. At http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1946/oct/15/cable-and-wireless-bill#S5LV0143P0_19461015_HOL_28 accessed on 17.2.2010).

Commonwealth Telecommunication Conference London 1945.

Despite the Cabinet’s recognition of Reith’s achievement, at least as represented in the Cabinet Secretariat’s notes – an account which is supported by the Cabinet’s adoption of Reith’s recommendations, Reith represented this period as one where he was not properly recognised and his achievements were not appropriately acknowledged. His diary entries are suffused with self-pity⁷⁰ and resentment (see those for 16th, 18th and 27th April 1945 at Stuart 1975: 346-7). He claimed that Anderson had “great difficulty in getting the Cabinet decision he did”, that Anderson had “no backing” from other Ministers and that “they left it all to him to argue with that devil Beaverbrook” (Stuart 1975: 347). And, despite Anderson having successfully represented his conclusions and recommendations to Cabinet, Reith referred to him as “the blighted Anderson..... his self-satisfaction, conceit and pomposity seem to increase” (Stuart 1975: 347). Reith’s judgement on the Cabinet’s reception of his proposals seems thoroughly in keeping with his (much quoted) self-identification with Napoleon: on 2.12.1945 he wrote “An unsatisfactory day as I did nothing whatever of any value or interest in it. Finished Napoleon’s Life. It upset me all through, of course, as there was so much in it reminiscent of myself. For I might have been of such power in the world. Feeling quite miserable” (Stuart 1975: 354).

Following its acceptance of Reith’s proposals, the UK Government sought to give them effect by hosting an Imperial Communications Conference in London in July/August 1945. Reith chaired the conference and referred to this appointment with his customary grudgingness. Referring to Anderson’s transmission of the Cabinet’s invitation. Reith wrote: “He hoped I would take charge of the preparations for the conference and take the chair thereat. I suppose I shall have to do the job” (Stuart 1975: 347). There was, however, substance to Reith’s sentiment that he may not have been the man for this job. Was it appropriate that so important a conference, at which the representatives of the Governments that had slogged through six years of war in support of the UK were present to agree on the shape of their post-war communications system, should be chaired by Reith rather than by a Minister? But Reith’s gargantuan sense of his own importance constructed the substantive issue, lack of UK Ministerial representation, as an instance of personal injustice: the Empire was being sold short because Reith himself do not hold Ministerial office. Reith’s diary for 31.5.1945 reads: “The postmaster general⁷¹ to see me. He is an unimpressive little man. I told him exactly what I thought about there being no proper ministerial head of the UK delegation. He tried to base his objection on the electoral preoccupations, but it is really my not being a minister which is monstrous. None of these people seem to be able to appreciate Dominion susceptibilities” (Stuart 1975: 349).

Reith was undoubtedly right to identify London as insufficiently respectful of Dominion identities and interests. He wrote in his autobiography that on his first visit to South Africa (in connection with South Africa’s wish to be advised on establishing a public broadcaster): “I

wanted to learn as much as possible about the Dutch⁷² mentality; being Scots I was the better able to do so..... I found that many native-born South Africans were won over to Republicanism simply because they could not feel that the British in South Africa could be relied on to put South Africa first..... it was a corrective to the English-England orientation” (Reith 1949: 198). And London’s habitual cavalier insensitivity to Dominion sensitivities is a recurrent theme in his diary (see, for example, the entry for 23.7.1947 – “The UK treatment of visitors from the Empire is absolutely shocking” Stuart 1975: 360). However, whilst sensitive to such differences Reith was not wholly immune to the contagion of British imperial hauteur. On May 9th 1945 J E Read, Acting Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, wrote to N A Robertson, a member of Canada’s Delegation to the United Nations’ Conference on International Organization in San Francisco⁷³, commenting on Reith’s suggestion as to who should constitute the Canadian delegation to the forthcoming London Conference. Reith had clearly caused hackles to rise in the East Block in Ottawa since, as Read⁷⁴ put it, he “took it upon himself to suggest the Canadian delegation might be Mr. Wrong⁷⁵, Mr. Sharp⁷⁶ and Mr. Rush”⁷⁷. In the event only Rush of Reith’s nominees were selected for the Canadian delegation (Read to Robertson 9.5.1945 in NAC file 7767-4C vol 1 at RG25 3771).

Canadian sensitivity to Reith’s stance was also evidenced by Gill’s⁷⁸ remark (in a memo for the chair, H. O. Moran⁷⁹, of the Interdepartmental Committee on Telecommunications Policy which Gill served on 27.5.1947 in NAC file 7767-40C vol 2 at RG25 3771) that “Lord Reith has somewhat grandiose ideas as to organization and functions of the C.T.B”. Gill offered assurance that Canada expected that study would “prove beyond any doubt that the C.C.C. or C.T.B. need not maintain elaborate records and a large staff”. And Canada thought that it had been left until last on Reith’s itinerary so it would be, as Canada’s High Commissioner to Australia wrote (to Secretary of State External Affairs 7.2.1945 in NAC Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367, 702-5) stating “I have feeling this is being done deliberately to present you with an accomplished fact and make it difficult to take exception to proposals”.

The Commonwealth Telecommunications Conference opened on 16.7.1945, was introduced by the UK Chancellor of Exchequer and then chaired by Reith (who had personal responsibility for preparing all the pre-conference papers, with the exception of that on attitude to the USA which was prepared by the UK Government). It took place during the preparations for the UK post-war General Election and, in consequence, the UK’s represented was dominated by officials, rather than Ministers, giving rise to some uncertainty about what the future UK government would be prepared to implement – was nationalisation on or off the agenda? Despite Reith’s claim in 1946 that his mission “was presented with nationalization before I went” (at 211 *HL Deb 15 October 1946 vol 143 cc204-15*. At http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1946/oct/15/cable-and-wireless-bill#S5LV0143PO_19461015_HOL_28 accessed on 17.2.2010) there was real uncertainty as to whether nationalisation of Cable and Wireless in the UK was a realistic possibility.

Reith’s introductory papers for the conference identified three major topics:

- the practicability of the Canberra proposals, as modified, of 1942.
- The acceptability of oceanic assets proposal.
- Whether or not to co-operate with USA. (ICS 118/2/1/1. Proceedings of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Conference 1945⁸⁰p 2).

Though the Canberra discussions had produced agreement on the need for a central co-ordinating body, the central UK concern, and for joint financial responsibility matched by revenue pooling. South Africa continued to express reservations about binding nature of centralised control. The companies associated with Cable and Wireless (including the UK

parent company) represented at the Conference rejected the need for change, though were prepared for Cable and Wireless holdings in overseas companies to be sold (permitting national ownership, whether state or private, of these assets) and for rate reduction, revised arrangements for revenue pooling and a possible opening of such pools to US companies. However, the Conference rejected the companies' pleading and argued for the acquisition of the UK Cable and Wireless operating (not holding) company as a going concern which would continue to control the submarine cables (Reith's Oceanic Assets proposal having been rejected by the Conference he chaired). Rejection of the Oceanic Assets model left a large Cable and Wireless intact and under UK control, perhaps ironic in view of the Dominions' aspirations to tame the UK based beast, whereas Reith had proposed a more "imperial", collective and collaborative solution. However, it was nationalism and the desire for local autonomy and authority, rather than a continuation of a shared imperial "family" practice, which was the dominant current of contemporary feeling. The Conference established Reith as the successor to Campbell Stuart as Chair of the Commonwealth Communications Council and determined that the CCC should be, unlike ICAC, work on the lines proposed at Canberra in 1942 – that is with members resident in their own countries rather than in London. The Conference also looked forward to the first engagement with the United States as a player in global communication at the Bermuda Conference, to be held later in 1945, and formulated the basis of the Commonwealth negotiating position for Bermuda. At Bermuda, the Commonwealth would seek rate reduction on the basis of flat (not distance related) rates with a continuing Commonwealth preference and, diverging from the Canberra proposals, authorisation of direct wireless circuits only on the basis that traffic demands justified new circuits and transit traffic was not to be permitted (ie, the core Commonwealth system was to remain "managed" and competition suppressed).

The 1945 Conference, convened on the basis of the Reith mission report and chaired by Reith, showed that partner governments increasingly recognised their differences and pursued their own interests. These were certainly rooted in well founded perceptions that the kind of commonwealth communication system each country wanted⁸¹ was not necessarily the same. Frederic Soward (a member of Canada's delegation to the Conference), for example, stated (Soward 1950: 237) that the decisions of the 1945 CTC "produced almost no comment or criticism in Canada because of the slight degree to which Canadian interests were affected" but that, nonetheless, the CTC's decision to break up Cable and Wireless was "of considerable importance in the field of world communications and contributed..... to a further improvement in relations with the United States". However, as well as its impact on specific arrangements for communications (which, as Soward's remarks suggest, may have had little effect in some Commonwealth countries) the Conference manifested a wider and deeper change in political sentiment – which manifested itself in, as stated earlier, Indian independence and symmetrical assertions of national distinctiveness and differentiation from a shared imperial identity – no less in Canada than elsewhere.

The Final Report of the London Conference was published, as a Secret document, on 3.8.1945. A Parliamentary Question (PQ) in the UK House of Commons on 13.12.1945 from Sir Arnold Gridley⁸² MP elicited a reply from Glenvil Hall MP⁸³ for the Government that publication was not in the public interest. A telegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to the Dominions (NAC. Circular D 1568 to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada) dated 28.8.1945 states, of Cable & Wireless, "it seems to us undesirable to show them the Conference Report as a whole". The main contentious matter inspiring secrecy was likely to have been the London Conference's unanimous conclusion (reached after a change of Government in the UK) that "private shareholder interest in the overseas telecommunication services..... should be eliminated" (New Zealand 1946: 7) – a finding with obvious implications for Cable and Wireless' share price. But there was also, doubtless, the need to keep confidential the imperial negotiating position, hammered out in anticipation of the forthcoming conference with the USA (though Hall's PQ post-dated the Bermuda Conference). The London Conference's other main findings, that a Commonwealth

Telecommunications Board should replace the Commonwealth Communications Council and that revenue sharing arrangements be put in place, were less controversial and less obviously needing of secrecy.⁸⁴

Nationalisation.

In October 1945 the new UK, Labour, Government accepted the conference proposals and proceeded to the nationalisation of Cable and Wireless. In May 1946, Hugh Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, opened the House of Commons debate on the second reading of the Cable and Wireless Bill, stating “Yesterday it was coal; today it is cables; the Socialist advance therefore continues”. Dalton continued, “This is not only a Measure of Socialist advance; it is also a practical measure of united Empire policy..... This Bill nationalises Cable and Wireless, Limited, and transfers from private to public control a great network of Imperial telecommunications.” (*HC Deb 21 May 1946 vol 423 cc201-88* at 201, at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1946/may/21/cable-and-wireless-bill#S5CV0423P0_19460521_HOC_302 accessed on 17.2.2010).

Dalton’s triumphalism may have been understandable but Labour’s focus on the UK led, in Reith’s judgement to a neglect of the Commonwealth interest: He stated: “It was unfortunate that the bill covered only the first recommendation of the conference—the acquisition by the State of Cable and Wireless; and that further legislation was necessary before the central board could be established.....at the end of 1947 the further legislation had not been introduced. The Commonwealth implications of what was achieved do not seem to have been appreciated” (Reith 1949: 519).

The Commonwealth Telegraphs Agreement (see Commonwealth Telegraphs Agreement 1949), which embodied the decisions of the London Conference, was signed on 11.5.1948. The Bill, to give effect to the agreement in the UK, was introduced in the House of Commons second reading debate by the Postmaster General, William Paling who described the Agreement as:

a part of Commonwealth business which is rather specialised and is not often discussed in this House, but a part which is of vital importance at all times to the Commonwealth's well being. What this Bill deals with is the co-ordination of the nervous system of the whole Commonwealth, of its system of communication not only within itself, but with the rest of the world—a complex network of cables and wireless links which binds together the countries of the Commonwealth in all the continents, and at the same time provides them with essential communications with many foreign countries (Commonwealth Telegraphs Bill 1949. Commons Second Reading *HC Deb 22 March 1949 vol 463 cc225-65* at http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1949/mar/22/commonwealth-telegraphs-bill#S5CV0463P0_19490322_HOC_327 para 225).

Paling’s testimony affirmed that the imperial sentiment and solidarity which Reith sought to foster was not, yet, (completely) dead.

Cable and Wireless’ response.

Despite Reith’s previous service as a member of the Cable and Wireless Court (as its governing body was quaintly known⁸⁵) of Directors, Cable & Wireless objected strongly to his appointment as Chairman of the Commonwealth Communications Council (later Commonwealth Telecommunications Board). This seemed a curious development – not least

because Reith had been a member of the Cable and Wireless party⁸⁶ which had made representations to the Commonwealth Communications Council (at its first meeting beginning on 18.4.1944) against the Australian inspired demarche seeking development of direct radio services and a reorganisation of the system on the lines put forward at the Canberra Conference⁸⁷.

However, Cable and Wireless' objection was neither to Reith in person nor to the appointment of an independent Chairman. Rather, as a telegram from London and the UK Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (SoSDA) to the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs (SoSExAC)⁸⁸, testifies it was an objection "to whole scheme recommended by Commonwealth Telecommunications Council 1945" (NAC. SoSDA to SoSExAC 13.4.1946 in NAC file RG25G2 vol 3771 f 7767-40 FP). Cable and Wireless resisted nationalisation strongly, as it had the restructuring of the imperial system, and Wilshaw's opposition continued even after Parliament had passed the two Acts⁸⁹ establishing the new post-imperial communications order. Wilshaw led the company's challenge to the Government's valuation of the company for nationalisation.

Valuation was, of course, not an exact science and the difficulty of valuing Cable and Wireless had been recognised earlier. A "Top Secret and Personal" letter from Reith to Massey⁹⁰, dated 3.8.1945, (accompanying a Top Secret paper on the valuation of Cable and Wireless) refers to the difficulties of valuing Cable and Wireless Ltd and to the undesirability (presumably because of their potential to prejudice negotiations over the price paid for the nationalisation of Cable and Wireless) of including information bearing on valuation in the formal report of the 1945 London Conference. The Top Secret paper referred to Sir William McLintock's⁹¹ July 1945 valuation of Cable and Wireless which emphasised both valuation difficulties (notably the absence of relevant data – given that wartime traffic patterns were unlikely to provide a basis for peacetime forecasts, that US competition would grow, as would that from airmail and telephony) and the consequential poor prospects of reaching an agreed valuation of the company and what were judged to be the relatively poor prospects for the company (which were not, McLintock judged, reflected in the share price). In McLintock's view, Cable & Wireless was worth between £16-21m as a going concern, ie valued on the basis of likely future earnings, (in file labelled "Commonwealth Telecommunications Conference". E.W.T.Gill. Finance Committee at NAC RG25 3771⁹²).

Eventually the valuation dispute related to the UK nationalisation was resolved through arbitration. In 1949 a compromise, which awarded the shareholders compensation of £35,250,000 (see *In the Matter of the Cable and Wireless Act 1946 and in the Matter of Arbitration. Transcript of shorthand note of the fourteenth day of proceedings 4.2.1949.* In un-numbered bound volume *Cable and Wireless Act 1946. v IV*. Held in Cable and Wireless Porthcurno Archive) was agreed. This represented a significant uplift on McLintock's valuation though not one which fully met the aspirations of Wilshaw and Cable and Wireless shareholders.

Elsewhere the long established "all red" imperial communications system was put to rest through a series of separate nationalisations. In Australia and Canada a new public sector body was established to take over the functions formerly fulfilled in those countries by Cable and Wireless. In 1947 Australia's Overseas Telecommunications Commission (OTC) was set up as part of the implementation of nationalisation of Cable and Wireless' Australian assets on 1.7.1947.⁹³ The New Zealand Post Office took over Cable and Wireless' New Zealand assets in 1948. Indian nationalisation took effect on 1.10.1947, first incorporating Cable and Wireless' Indian assets into the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs (subsequently Post, Telephones and Telegraphs under the authority of the Ministry of Communications and later Videsh Sanchar Nigam, India's publicly owned overseas carrier which was set up in 1986). South Africa effected nationalisation on 1.1.1948, integrating Cable and Wireless' South African assets into South African Posts and Telecommunications.- a state business enterprise.

Canada delayed nationalising Canadian Marconi and relevant cable operations of Cable and Wireless (forming the Canadian Overseas Telecommunications Corporation, COTC⁹⁴) until 1950, though a draft Bill was approved in Canada's Cabinet on November 10th 1948 so that developments in the UK could be studied⁹⁵ (Gill's Privy Council Office memorandum for Cabinet dated 23.6.1947 in NAC file 7767-4C vol 2 at RG25 3771). Indeed, as a memo⁹⁶ from Lester Pearson⁹⁷ (then Under Secretary of State for External Affairs) to Norman Robertson (Canada's High Commissioner in London)⁹⁸, shows "Canada did not seek nationalization but agreed reluctantly to participate" (Pearson to Robertson 17.3.1947 in NAC file 7767-4C vol 2 at RG25 3771). Canada paid \$3,250,000 for the Canadian assets of Cable and Wireless.

Conclusion.

Nationalisation of Cable and Wireless was both a decisive break in the history of the imperial/Commonwealth telecommunications system and a powerful metaphor signifying the changes in sentiment, and thus in policy, of the imperial/Commonwealth partners. Telecommunications ceased to be a matter for, and an emblem of, a supranational entity distinguished, as the Australian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, stated (Menzies 1956), by a common purpose and loyalty. He claimed "the whole design possessed an integral character. It was not envisaged as a loose and friendly but purely functional association. The notion of the Crown and a common allegiance ran through it like a rod of steel, creating unity out of diversity" and, drawing on formulations used in the Balfour Declaration, decisions were taken 'within the British Empire', with reference to 'a common allegiance to the Crown', and by the interdependent elements of the 'British Commonwealth of Nations'. Reith's mission exemplifies both the consultative character of the imperial/post-imperial partnership and its failure, for few of Reith's recommendations were adopted by the 1945 London Conference or subsequently implemented

The tensions which broke apart the "all red" imperial communications system signified both a more hard headed pursuit of national interests by members of the Commonwealth; the waning attractions of the imperial association when its dominant member, the UK, had been so much weakened by the Second World War; and foreshadowed the explicit future seeking out of separate destinies by the parties: the UK in the EEC (later EU), Canada in North America, India and South Africa in increasingly involuted and autarkic national projects and Australia and New Zealand in the Asia-Pacific region. Both the imperial/post-imperial telecommunications system and the Commonwealth changed dramatically. Both became parts of larger, interdependent global entities. The tight, trusting, collaborative and mutually respectful community of the imperial elite had begun to fragment and continued to do so and the telecommunications system which had, notionally, held the Empire together (as Wilshaw and Cable and Wireless liked to preen themselves for doing) morphed into one, albeit major, element in a globally interconnected network of networks increasingly dominated by the United States and its carriers (Hills 2002, 2007). Prices, rather than consensual agreement, started to become the principal form of co-ordination in global telecommunications.

Reith came out of the process with his reputation enhanced and with a significant role as the founding chairman of the new Commonwealth Telecommunications Council (later Commonwealth Telecommunications Board). However, this did not satisfy him (indeed, he abandoned the appointment in 1950 in favour of chairing the Colonial Development Corporation) and his testimony to a sense of lost and unfulfilled potential, expressed in his diary, seems emblematic of the wider imperial twilight which was drawing in fast. His self-pitying diary entry for 2.12.1945, already cited, is representative of his own sentiments: "An unsatisfactory day as I did nothing whatever of any value or interest in it. Finished Napoleon's Life. It upset me all through, of course, as there was so much in it reminiscent of myself. For I might have been of such power in the world. Feeling quite miserable" (Stuart

1975: 354). Not perhaps as miserable as the crew and passengers of “Commando” who died in the course of the aeroplane’s next flight which was taking them on another abortive project of imperial co-ordination but miserable enough – despite the enigmatic compensations which could be enjoyed with Miss Joyce Wilson, however trying such a connection might have been for Reith’s imperial minders.

Acknowledgements.

I owe many thanks to Professor Jock Given for piquing my interest in the imperial communications system and for formally including me as an investigator on his “Imperial Designs” enquiry (supported by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project 1095061). “Imperial Designs” and Swinburne University, Melbourne, which flatteringly appointed me as a Visiting Professor in 2010, jointly funded and made it possible my meeting Professor Given face to face in Melbourne to further advance our joint and complementary enquiries on “Imperial Designs”. I also owe thanks to CRESC and the Open University’s research funds for having made it possible for me to undertake primary research in the Cable and Wireless archive at Porthcurno and the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. I owe thanks to the staff of these archives, and the University of London Special Collections (which holds the Institute of Commonwealth Studies’ collection of the records of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation) and to Michael Tiger and Peter Harcourt who gave me generous hospitality in Ottawa (including the involuntary, but pleasant and productive, days I spent with Michael when he expected me to be gone but couldn’t get rid of me because of the delays caused by the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano) and to my Open University colleagues who saw merit enough in my research to authorise the funding which made possible my archival visits.

¹ A four engined bomber, designed and built in the USA, and widely used by the RAF in WWII. The Liberator was notable for its long range and some were built as transport aircraft – including “Commando” which had been used as Churchill’s personal aircraft. “Commando” was lost, with no survivors, on 26.3.1945 between the Azores and its destination, Ottawa, on the journey immediately following the Reith mission. “Commando” had inaugurated the British Military Air Service route between the UK and Australia via Canada and New Zealand in November 1944 (see *Evening Post*, Volume CXXXVIII, Issue 110, 6 November 1944, Page 3 at <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=EP19441106.2.17&e=-----10--1----0--> accessed on 15.2.2011). Curiously, Barty-King claims that the Reith mission included a “Commando crew as body-guard” (1979: 304). There is no evidence that the crew of “Commando” were Commandos and it seems likely that Barty-King simply assumed, wrongly, that the name of the aircraft denoted the nature of its crew.

² Sir Edwin Herbert., Director-General, Postal and Telegraph Censorship Department; Colonel Sir A Stanley Angwin, Assistant Director-General and Engineer-in-Chief, Post Office (subsequently Angwin became the first Chairman of the nationalised Cable and Wireless company); J M Buckley, War Cabinet Secretariat; Mr L V Lewis, Post Office. (credited by Reith in HM Treasury 1945: para 2 p 3 with “efficient handling” of the mission’s business affairs); Miss J E Wilson, Reith’s personal secretary; and Miss E W Hayes. (HM Treasury 1945: Annex 1 p 9).

³ Later Mrs McFerran of West Barton, The Green, Tetbury (d 21.4.2009). Intriguingly, Reith’s London home from 1924-30 was in Barton Street, Westminster – close to the block of flats, Marsham Court, in Marsham Street where, after WWII, Reith and Miss Wilson had separate flats. See her obituary: “Joyce McFerran 1913 – 2009. Joyce McFerran (née Wilson) came to Packwood [a preparatory school in Shrewsbury. RC] in 1954 to be Headmaster’s Secretary. Prior to this she had held a most important position as Personal Secretary to Lord Reith, Director of the BBC during some of the most critical war years. Lord Reith, as we heard at her Thanksgiving Service at Tetbury church on 5th May, had also played a vitally important part in the planning of the D-Day invasion of Europe, and for her part in this task Joyce McFerran was awarded an MBE. She was also presented by the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, with one of only three plaques made up of coloured window glass fragments from the

bombed House of Commons, which was her proudest possession. It was soon after her arrival at Packwood Haugh that she became engaged to the Headmaster, George McFerran, who had then been at Packwood for some 33 years. As a result of his marriage he decided to retire at the end of the summer term of 1955 and they left for a beautiful house where they followed the great interest of their lives, rearing and keeping a number of racehorses and attending the local meetings at Bangor, Ludlow and Cheltenham. After George's death Joyce continued to live at her house in Tetbury leading an interesting and active life and retaining her racehorses right up until her own death earlier this year. She and George McFerran were above all, supportive of Packwood Haugh to the highest degree and were responsible for arranging the sale of the farm and 156 acres next door at a very reasonable price to the school; land which now accommodates the sports hall, changing rooms, squash courts and all of the Wykey playing fields. They were a wonderfully happy couple to whom the school owes a very great debt". At <http://www.packwood-haugh.co.uk/content/%20oldpackwoodiansnews/118> accessed on 16.2.2011,

⁴ During the latter part of WWII, Reith served in the Royal Navy as a Lieutenant Commander, later Captain and Rear-Admiral. Officers of his rank usually had a personal, navy, driver. However, Reith petitioned for Joyce Wilson to be transferred from the ATS to act as his driver. The BBC comments, "Reith took as protégées a number of younger women. One was a girl called Joyce Wilson serving in the women's branch of the Army, the ATS, not the Navy and the Army didn't want to release her. Reith fired off a series of memos that eventually went all the way to the Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg. He wrote a blunt note on the file: "I will not have my officers, ATS, shunted about to suit the convenience of John Reith, who somewhat late in life has discovered the art of fucking." From "The BBC Story. Reith in wartime" at http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/in-depth/reith_7.shtml accessed on 15.2.2010. McIntyre (1993: 274) states that Grigg himself was Boyle's (the source of the BBC comment) informant but that Grigg's manuscript comment has been expunged from Joyce Wilson's service record file (McIntyre 1993: 425). The same BBC source ("Reith postwar" http://www.bbc.co.uk/historyofthebbc/resources/in-depth/reith_8.shtml accessed on 15.2.2010) states "While Reith feared for the moral well-being of the nation, he was immune to questions about his own morality. When he took a flat in Westminster after the war, he got Joyce Wilson, his wartime secretary, another flat in the same block. He also tried to get her a job with the BBC". Malcolm MacDonald (when UK High Commissioner in Ottawa) observed to Boyle that Joyce Wilson's presence in the "mission" party, which, Boyle stated, monopolised Reith's "available time, attention and affectionate interest", made for a "trying interlude" and "gave rise to some awkwardness" (Boyle 1972: 332). Boyle also refers to the divergence from "normal domestic arrangements for receiving the head of an important visiting mission" (ibid) which Miss Wilson's presence occasioned in Ottawa. Reith, however, refers to a letter from MacDonald testifying to Reith's "tactful handling", creation of an "extremely cordial atmosphere" and "excellent impression" (Reith 1949: 512). And Reith's daughter gives, somewhat equivocal, testimony reporting that "The relationship was almost certainly in a limited sense innocent" (Leishman 2006: 246).

⁵ Reith's claim that "Nothing like it had been done before" was, perhaps, hyperbolic. The first trans-Pacific flight from North America to Australia was in 1929 and in 1939 Pan-Am inaugurated passenger services across the North Atlantic (though German airships earlier had, until the *Hindenburg* fire in 1937, carried passengers across the North Atlantic). However, a passenger carrying flight over such long distances and in so short a time was undoubtedly highly unusual in the mid-1940s. Doubtless the period when an engine stopped when flying over the Pacific made the journey seem rather longer for passengers and crew of "Commando".

⁶ In 1935 Cable and Wireless Ltd., the investment company, became Cable and Wireless (Holding) Ltd and the operating company, Imperial and International Communications Ltd., became Cable and Wireless Limited. For simplicity and convenience I use the term "Cable and Wireless" throughout.

⁷ Echoing Puck in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Act II Scene i.

⁸ That of the Empire Rates Conference (sometimes Empire Rates Committee) of 1937. See BL. B624/37; IOR/M/3/169 19 Mar 1937-2 Oct 1940.

⁹ Menzies (1894-1978) was Prime Minister of Australia from 1939-1941 and 1949-1966.

¹⁰ Needless to say, Menzies vision was blind to the non-English speaking residents of South Africa and Canada and to native peoples in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.

¹¹ The UK Government was among the shareholders – in 1938 it took possession of 2.6m shares.

¹² Reith's daughter testified that her father was "aware of how cordially this commercially owned company was disliked in the Commonwealth" (Leishman 2006: 247).

¹³ Notably by the countries' representatives on the ICAC, D McVey (Director General Posts and Telegraphs Australia) and J G Young (Director General Post and Telegraph Department New Zealand).

¹⁴ Later Commonwealth Telecommunications Board (CTB). Reith referred to the CCC as "utterly specious" (Stuart 1975: 339).

¹⁵ After a few months Reith became Minister of Transport and, also after a few months in autumn 1940, Minister of Works (and a peer, necessitating resignation of his seat in the House of Commons). Reith ceased to hold Ministerial office in early 1942 (and took on the job of managing the commissioning and repair of Coastal Forces shipping as a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Navy).

¹⁶ After completion of his "mission" Reith became chairman of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board on its formation in 1949 from which he resigned in 1950 when becoming chairman of the British Colonial Development Corporation. He returned to Cable and Wireless when he opened the new Cable & Wireless building, Mercury House, in Theobalds Road London on 20.12.1955.

¹⁷ Sir Basil Blackett, Chairman of Imperial and International Communications (ie the predecessor of the Cable and Wireless operating company), had told the Imperial Communications Inquiry Committee [The Greene Committee] in 1931 "our objective should be the setting up of an Imperial Public Utility Company" (ICS 118/1/3/2/2: 10.i). However, though Cable and Wireless and its predecessors were always strongly influenced by government concerns, and security concerns in particular, the UK government formally took a share in ownership of the company in 1938. The global inter-war recession had led to declining traffic and revenues and to an agreement to reduce Cable and Wireless' costs (notably by transferring ownership of the UK beam wireless stations, formerly owned by the UK Post Office and leased by Cable and Wireless) in exchange for the UK Government taking ownership of 2,600,000 shares (of a total of 30,000,000 shares issued). Empire telegraph rates were also reduced to a flat rate of 1/3d per word.

¹⁸ Rate reductions would be likely to have the effect of increasing traffic, as long as no additional infrastructure was required to carry increased traffic, and so providing the company with additional earnings and profits.

¹⁹ 50% of AWA was owned by Marconi one of the constituent companies of Cable and Wireless.

²⁰ See minutes of the 109th meeting of ICAC in BL. B624/37; IOR/M/3/169 19 Mar 1937-2 Oct 1940.

²¹ Later, after a merger with Siemens Brothers, Submarine Cables Ltd.

²² The press rate was considerably less than the ordinary rate – advantaging places (notably the UK) which originated press traffic and the converse for other places.

²³ See extensive correspondence, including ICAC paper 1121-A dated 7.7.1939. Note from Secretary (Warren Zambra) to ICAC concerning possible opening of direct wireless link between Burma and Malaya (ie The Federated Malay States and the Straits Settlements), in BL. B624/37; IOR/M/3/169 19 Mar 1937-2 Oct 1940.

²⁴ Wilshaw (1879-1968) joined the Eastern Telegraph Company in 1894, became Chairman and Managing Director of Cable and Wireless in 1936, was knighted in 1939 and resigned on nationalisation of the company in 1946.

²⁵ Campbell Stuart (1885-1972) was a Canadian who, during WWI, worked for Northcliffe in the “Crewe House” allied propaganda operation. He became managing director of *The Times* (retaining a longterm interest in the paper resigning from the Board only in 1960) and in 1923 he became Canada’s representative on the Pacific Cable Board, in 1928 was a delegate to the Imperial Cable Conference which set up the ICAC, he joined the ICAC as Canada’s representative and was appointed by the UK as ICAC Chairman in 1933 representing both Canada and the UK. He served as ICAC Chair (and, when renamed, the Commonwealth Communications Council - CCC) until his retirement in 1945. During WWII, he headed the “Electra House” propaganda division (which, among other activities, produced pamphlets to be dropped over Germany). The propaganda organisation was named “Electra House” because first accommodated in the Cable and Wireless building of that name – it merged with the Political Intelligence Department (of the Political Warfare Executive under Robert Bruce Lockhart) and moved to Woburn Abbey in 1939. See *Telling the Secrets of Crewe House* in New York Times 21.11.1920 at <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=FB0910F6345910738DDDA80A94D9415B808EF1D3> and also http://clutch.open.ac.uk/schools/emerson00/pid_campbell_stuart.html

²⁶ South Africa and Southern Rhodesia were not represented at the Conference, Canadian participation was via an observer (the Canadian High Commissioner in Canberra) and Cable and Wireless had declined to send a representative from its London headquarters. Cable and Wireless’ decision was formally deprecated by the Conference which stated “The Conference..... desired it to be recorded that it was much to be regretted that Sir Edward Wilshaw, Chairman of Cable and Wireless Ltd, had not accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister of Australia..... and that he had not found it possible to send a representative from England” (ICS 118/1/1/5. CTC 1942: 4.3).

²⁷ It was innovatory for a government to bear the costs of a conference. At the 1937 Empire Rates Conference Cable and Wireless to pay for any further conferences held in London in the next five years. For Australia to bear the costs of the 1942 Conference indicates the importance to Australia of securing agreement on the authorisation of new wireless circuits and restructuring the ICAC.

²⁸ Australia’s High Commissioner in Ottawa.

²⁹ A letter from Sir Edward Wilshaw, President of Cable and Wireless, to the Permanent Secretary UK Treasury, Sir Richard Hopkins, dated 27.2.1942 was attached to the official report of the Conference as Appendix II. Wilshaw expressed his “profound shock” at learning that the Government has agreed “in principle to direct wireless circuits between the U.S.A. and any British colony being opened”. He claimed that “the seriousness of the position cannot be exaggerated” (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 1). And that “it is with profound misgivings that the Company is now forced to look upon a future where foreign interests have been permitted to make inroads on the communications of the British Empire, with a possible disastrous result upon Empire communications as a whole and upon this Company in particular” (ICS 118/1/1/5. C.T.C. (Aust.) (42) 20 page 4).

³⁰ That is the wireless circuits for which Australia and the USA were pressing.

³¹ Clement Attlee.

³² The Canadian Citizenship Act came into effect on 1.1.1947. Before, “a Canadian could not describe himself as a Canadian citizen; the term was ‘British subject’. This was one of the principal reasons why the Act was passed, viz. to permit a Canadian to call himself a *Canadian*”. The locution “himself” is appropriate: formerly, Canadian women who married foreigners lost their status as Canadians (ie their British subject status). However, the explanation continues, “this does not mean that a Canadian loses the status of a British subject..... the new Act reads that a Canadian citizen is a British subject” (Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1949: 1179-1180).

³³ *British Nationality Act*, 1948. 11 & 12 Geo. 6 c. 56.

³⁴ See *New Zealand Sovereignty: 1857, 1907, 1947, or 1987?* at

<http://www.parliament.nz/en-NZ/ParlSupport/ResearchPapers/9/1/8/00PLLawRP07041-New-Zealand-sovereignty-1857-1907-1947-or-1987.htm> accessed on 16.2.2011.

³⁵ Cited in the *Melbourne Herald* of 26.12.1941. For sources, see *inter alia* <http://www.anzacday.org.au/history/ww2/homefront/independence.html>, <http://john.curtin.edu.au/manofpeace/crisis.html> and <http://john.curtin.edu.au/legacyex/foreign.html> all accessed on 24.4.2010.

³⁶ In a letter to the Permanent Secretary UK Treasury dated 27.2.1942 – see note 12 above.

³⁷ The parties represented at the Conference, Australia, Canada, Irish Free State, Newfoundland, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

³⁸ For an account of the constructive ambiguity of the Balfour formula see Marshall 2001.

³⁹ But not the only ones – both India, which on independence became a republic, and Southern Rhodesia had come into the picture as the Reith mission's stops in Delhi and Salisbury testified.

⁴⁰ Newfoundland became part of Canada in 1949 and the Irish Free State left the Commonwealth in 1937.

⁴¹ Lord Arnold, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies.

⁴² King was Prime Minister for most of the three decades from the 1920s to the 1950s.

⁴³ J.H.Tudhope was Canada's representative on the Commonwealth Telecommunications Board and later served as its Vice-Chairman.

⁴⁴ G.C.W. Browne was Controller of Telecommunications in Canada's Department of Transport.

⁴⁵ The International Telegraph Consultative Committee

⁴⁶ From 1939-41 and 1949-1966.

⁴⁷ Cemented in the Imperial Telegraphs Act 1938 provided for the integration of the UK Post Office's "beam" wireless stations into Cable and Wireless.

⁴⁸ A file note by F.H. Soward, dated 20.6.1946, titled "Commonwealth Telecommunications Matters" attributed to McVey (Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs, Australia and leader of the Australian delegation to the London Conference) the role of "chief promoter of the plan for the re-organization of Cable and Wireless Limited" (in Department of External Affairs file 7767-40C volume one from 28.4.1945 to 24.9.1946 at NAC file RG25 3771). Soward was a notable member of Canada's wartime civil service. From 1943 until 1946, he was Special Assistant in the Department of External Affairs and became Acting Chairman of the Interdepartmental Committee on Telecommunications Policy. After leaving public service he returned to the History Department of the University of British Columbia where he became Professor of History and a senior Dean. Soward was, effectively though not formally, the leader of Canada's delegation to the Bermuda Conference of 1945 and had participated in the London Conference of the same year as a senior member of the Canadian delegation).

⁴⁹ Canada was sceptical about the usefulness of the conference. Commander C.P.Edwards, Canada's Deputy Minister of Transport (Charles Peter Edwards OBE was born in England and began his career as a wireless engineer under Marconi later moving to Canadian Marconi and the Canadian public service), wrote to H. H. Wrong (Office of Canada's Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs) on 15.10.1942 stating "Insofar as Canada is concerned, I do not consider that a situation of sufficient urgency has arisen to warrant any general Conference dealing with the whole of the Empire communication structure and..... I would be opposed to sending any Key man away for several months at the present time" (Edwards to Wrong 15.10.1942 in NAC Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367, 702-5). Moreover, Lester Pearson (later Canada's Prime Minister) wrote to Edwards On 11.2.1942 stating that the Canadian representative to the ICAC stated that "both he and his

South African colleague were dubious as to the timeliness of such a conference and its possible usefulness” in NAC Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367, 702-5).

⁵⁰ Beam wireless was a technique developed by the Marconi company and adopted by the Australian company AWA in which Marconi, and thus Cable and Wireless after the merger of the Eastern Cable company and the Marconi company to form Cable and Wireless, shared ownership with the Australian Government.

⁵¹ Ernest, later Sir Ernest, Fisk (1886-1965) became managing director of AWA in 1916 and Chairman in 1932, he was knighted in 1937. See <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A080531b.htm> for a brief biography.

⁵² Fisk was born and brought up in England and had been a Post Office telegraphist before joining the Marconi company and went to Australia in 1911 as a Marconi employee. He became managing director of the successor company to Marconi Australia, Amalgamated Wireless Australasia (AWA), in 1916 and in 1932 became Chairman. He was an active participant in imperial communications conferences from the 1920s and promoted wireless as a means of consolidating the Empire (see Given 2007).

⁵³ Wilshaw’s letter was also attached as Appendix II to the Conference Report.

⁵⁴ Wilshaw travelled through wartime London in a horse drawn cab – at a time when the ICAC had an office car (evidenced in the ICAC accounts for the year ending 30.6.1944 as “War transport, including purchase of Motor Car £541.16.5” in NAC Department of Transport file 4000-14 at RG12 2367, 702-5). Barty-King claims that, once Wilshaw had been persuaded to abandon horse powered personal transportation, he “had the company buy him a new Rolls-Royce each year” (Barty-King 1979: 296-7).

⁵⁵ Sir Raymond Birchall was Director General of the UK Post Office from 1946 to 1949.

⁵⁶ Sir Colin Campbell Stuart (1885-1972) joined the Pacific Cable Board in 1923 and was a member of the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee from its foundation in 1928, Chairman from 1933, and Chairman of the Commonwealth Communications Council, from 1944 until 1945. In 1944 the Cable and Wireless directors petitioned for Campbell Stuart to be removed from his Chairmanship of the CCC (Reith 1949: 499).

⁵⁷ *Special Report from the Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Cable and Wireless Bill.* 31.7.1946. House of Lords. 128. London. HMSO.

⁵⁸ Sometimes known as the Reith Plan which was to be financed by loans (referred to as shares) which would pay a fixed interest rate annually. Directors would be appointed by the UK Government following recommendations of the partner governments and the new firm should expand its reach by taking responsibility for overseas telephony.

⁵⁹ The Committee comprised the obvious UK Government stakeholders: the Secretaries of State for the Dominions, for India and for the Colonies, the Postmaster General, the Lord President of the Council (then Clement Attlee) as well as Anderson and Beaverbrook.

⁶⁰ Held to negotiate the terms of post-war telecommunications policy with the USA and the Commonwealth partners participating.

⁶¹ Formerly the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee (ICAC).

⁶² Reith claimed that 110 hours were spent in negotiation resulting in an agreement whereby each country would have its own corporation with a central co-ordinating organisation as a holding company (Reith 1949: 505).

⁶³ Peter Fraser.

⁶⁴ In the Prime Minister's absence in Washington, the main Canadian negotiator was C D Howe (the Minister of Munitions and Supply).

⁶⁵ The Canadian Prime Minister, whilst prepared to establish a publicly owned company (though with Canada undertaking "full financial responsibility") and to co-operate with relevant Commonwealth bodies, reasonably pointed out the difference between Canada's and other Commonwealth Governments' situation: Canada's telecommunications were interdependent with (or perhaps dependent on) the USA's. Accordingly, he reserved Canada's position until the implications, particularly the financial implications, of Canada's telecommunications relationship with the USA had been considered and urged that policy be formulated in the context of "securing satisfactory measures of co-operation with the United States (HM Treasury 1945: 18). Reith acknowledged this stating "Canadian external communications link with those of the United States; they are not dependent on the Commonwealth system. Moreover, the Canadians are more internationally than imperially minded. They are set against anything which might even appear to be 'ganging up against America'. And they have no complaints about the present set-up." Reith concluded that Canada's position was effectively "notwithstanding their peculiar position and particular attitude, to co-operate on the same basis as South Africa" (HM Treasury 1945: 21).

⁶⁶ Field-Marshal Jan Smuts.

⁶⁷ Reith said of the Canadians: "their position was peculiar in that their external communications linked up with those of the United States and they were less dependent on the Commonwealth system" (Reith 1949: 508).

⁶⁸ The antagonism between Reith and Beaverbrook, which led to Reith referring to Beaverbrook as "that devil" (Stuart 1975: 347), may have arisen from the mismatch between Reith's sense of vocation, expressed in his shaping of the BBC, and Beaverbrook's editorial style, embodied in the "Daily Express". It was given a further twist by the both men having served as wartime Ministers of Information – Beaverbrook in WWI and Reith in the early part of WWII.

⁶⁹ Discussion of another agenda item, military government in Germany, was recorded in little more than a page of typescript notes whereas the record of discussion of the Reith plan occupied more than two and a half pages.

⁷⁰ On May 4th 1945, four days before VE Day, Reith wrote "I am dreading the victory celebrations and have no heart for them. I am feeling absolutely rotten and utterly soured of everything even religion if an essential is loving one's neighbour and feeling kindly to them – for I hate and loathe them. It seems to me that anyone who has decency, unselfishness, kindness, public spirit and the like is a fool. He is put on. It is the opposite qualities which bring success and contentment. Everything is upside down. The undesirable are subsidized from birth to grave at our expense; they are given everything and nothing is expected of them. We who pay for it all are pushed about, insulted and soon will be driven out of existence" (Stuart 1975: 347-8).

⁷¹ H.F.C. (Harry) Crookshank, a Conservative MP and Minister, was Postmaster General from 1942 until the Labour electoral victory in 1945.

⁷² Ie Afrikaans.

⁷³ Norman Alexander Robertson succeeded Vincent Massey as Canada's High Commissioner in London. He had been Clerk to the Privy Council, had accompanied Mackenzie King to the 1944 meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers in London and was Secretary to the Cabinet from March 1949.

⁷⁴ John Erskine Read was Legal Advisor to the Department of External Affairs and subsequently became a Judge of the International Court of Justice after having served as a member of Canada's delegation to the first General Assembly of the United Nations.

⁷⁵ Humphrey Hume Wrong was Canadian Ambassador to the USA.

⁷⁶ Mitchell Sharp served in the Department of Finance, became Associate Deputy Minister in the Department of Trade and Commerce and subsequently, after election to Parliament, became Secretary of State for External Affairs.

⁷⁷ Walter A Rush was Controller, and subsequently Director, of Radio in the Department of Transport.

⁷⁸ Gill was Secretary to Canada's Interdepartmental Committee on Telecommunication Policy and a member of the Canadian delegation to the London Conference of 1945. Evan William Thistle Gill had a very distinguished career which included serving in the Privy Council Secretariat and later as High Commissioner in South Africa (1954-57), Ghana (1957-59) and Australia (1962-64). He held commissioned rank as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1945.

⁷⁹ Herbert Owen Moran joined the Department of External Affairs in 1946 and subsequently became Ambassador to Turkey (1953-57) and High Commissioner to Pakistan (1957-?), Ambassador to Japan 1960-1972).

⁸⁰ The Proceedings were initially classified "Secret" and later as "Confidential".

⁸¹ Canada, for example, entered a reservation in respect of the final agreement to the effect that it wanted involvement only to the extent of cables of direct concern to it. However, Canadian delegates did agree to seek Government support for the overall Conference position.

⁸² Conservative MP for Stockport, and subsequently Stockport South, from 1935 to 1955.

⁸³ Hall was Labour MP for Colne Valley from 1939 to 1962 and Financial Secretary to the Treasury from 1945 to 1950.

⁸⁴ In these arrangements the UK was to act on behalf of its colonies and territories (including Newfoundland – until its assimilation into Canada in 1949 - and Burma) though the four Dominions, India and Southern Rhodesia had the status of separate contracting parties.

⁸⁵ Use of an archaism such as "Court" (rather than the more usual "Board", to signify the collectivity of Company Directors) seems characteristic of Cable and Wireless's idiolect: the calling notices for Court meetings stated that a meeting "will be holden" rather than the more usual "will be held".

⁸⁶ With the Chairman, Lord Inverforth and Sir Edward Wilshaw. Inverforth had joined the Cable & Wireless Court (Board of Directors) following the formation of the company, as Imperial and International Communications Ltd, with the Eastern/Marconi merger in 1929. He was a shipping magnate (Bank Line) and had been a cabinet minister, as Minister of Munitions after the end of WWI (1919-1921, appointed to close down operations and dispose of surplus materials). Inverforth retained an interest in Marconi and became Chairman of the Marconi-EMI Television Company (participating in that capacity in the BBC's first television transmission in 1936).

⁸⁷ Inverforth, Reith and Wilshaw had proposed formation of "an Imperial or Commonwealth Communications Corporation, established by Royal Charter at the request of the Prime Ministers of the United Kingdom, the Dominions, S. Rhodesia, the Viceroy of India, the President of Eire on behalf of their Governments and the Secretary of State for the Colonies" (Verbatim note of part II of the twelfth session of the first meeting of the Commonwealth Communications Council p 3 DOC/CW/1/209).

⁸⁸ The Canadian Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, additionally served as Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs from 23.10.1935 to 3.9.1946 and as President of the Privy Council from 23.10.1935 to 15.11.1948.

⁸⁹ The Cable and Wireless Act 1946 and the Commonwealth Telegraphs Act 1949.

⁹⁰ Charles Vincent Massey had been a member of the Canadian delegation to the Imperial Conference in 1926 at which the Balfour Declaration was drafted and, in the same year, became Canada's Minister to the USA from 1927-30 (Canada did not formally name an Ambassador to the USA until 1943). He became High Commissioner in London in 1935 and Governor General of Canada in 1952.

⁹¹ McLintock's firm, Thomson McLintock, had been the auditor of the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee.

⁹² Copies were also included in Soward's files of conference papers also at NAC file RG25 3771.

⁹³ In 1992 it was merged with Australia's public sector monopoly domestic telecommunications carrier to become the privatised Telstra.

⁹⁴ COTC later became Teleglobe Canada in 1967 and was privatised in 1987 and is currently owned by the Tata group.

⁹⁵ This was a particular concern of C D Howe who wanted to ensure that any issues arising out of the reorganisation of imperial/commonwealth communications, of which nationalisation was one part, would be addressed government to government rather than involving a still privately owned Cable and Wireless. Doubtless Howe did not relish a Canadian version of the UK conflict, between Government and shareholders' representatives, over the valuation of Cable and Wireless's assets for nationalisation.

⁹⁶ Concerning Canada's possible liability to pay down a deficit arising from the restructuring of Cable and Wireless.

⁹⁷ Lester Bowles Pearson, usually known as "Mike", was first a career diplomat (as Under Secretary of State for External Affairs he was head of Canada's foreign service) and appointed Secretary of State for External Affairs in 1948. He had been Canada's representative on ICAC and became Prime Minister of Canada from 1963 to 1968.

⁹⁸ Pearson signed his letter "Mike".

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BL, British Library.

CW, Cable and Wireless Archive, Porthcurno.

ICS, Institute of Commonwealth Studies collection held in University of London Special Collections at Senate House, University of London.

NA, UK National Archives.

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