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PRODUCER: JOHN H. THOMAS

"WORKING THE SYSTEM"

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Speakers:	Douglas Lowndes John Morton Martin Rosen Hughie Green Don Wightman John Gorst, MP Philip Whitehead, MP Christopher Chataway, MP
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DUNKLEY: In the first two programmes I described the way in which various groups wanting commercial radio in Britain built up their campaigns between 1964 and the end of 1968. At the beginning there were the off-shore pirate stations which introduced the whole idea to the public. The opening of Manx Radio, the legal station on the Isle of Man, also helped; and the Local Radio Association was the first formal lobby to emerge.

Then the Labour Government took a hand in 1966 by opting for a series of experimental local stations run on a non commercial basis by the BBC. As these went into operation in 1967 and '68 the pirate stations were being driven off the air by Government legislation contained in the Marine Offences Act of August 1967.

The disappearance of the pirates helped to boost the membership of various listeners' organisations such as the Free Radio Association and the Campaign for Indpendent Broadcasting; and just when these groups were at their strongest, a number of commercial bodies, such as Hughie Green's Commercial Broadcasting Consultants also began to make their voices heard.

So at the beginning of 1969 the situation was as follows: as Labour administration was in power, governing with a paper-thin majority of three, and by their recommendation, the only local radio stations operating on the British mainland were run by the BBC. Pressing for an odd, but sizeable, conglomeration of pop music fans, radio equipment manufacturers, such as Pye and Marconi, and hopeful business men who looked forward to the day when they would be free to open stations of their own. Since the Labour Government had set its face so clearly against commercial radio, these groups had turned instead to the Conservative Opposition, which had been persuaded to declare in favour of the principle of commercial radio at their party conference in 1966. From then, until the beginning of 1969, lobbying continued in a pretty desultory fashion, with the Conservative shadow minister responsible for broadcasting - Paul Bryan - playing a central role as recipient of the various ideas produced by different groups of enthusiasts.

The next milestone on the road to a commercial radio system came on March the 3rd, 1969. That was the day when Paul Bryan, later Sir Paul Bryan, made his first announcement about the details of a radio system which could be set up when and if the Conservative Party was returned to power. He made his plans public at a meeting of the Monday Club, and looking back now, five years later, with the system going into operation, it's noticeable that in spite of all the lobbying and arguing which took place in the interim, most of the basic intentions made clear in that first detailed commitment have been carried through to reality.

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Only on the question of the number of stations did that initial plan differ radically from the outcome: Paul Bryan told the Monday Club that there could be a 100 or more stations - a figure which had been put to him convincingly by his friends Richard Mayer and Harry McGee who worked for Manx Radio and the Pye Company. In the final plan that figure came down to 60. But Paul Bryan's announcement that the stations would come under the general supervision of the Independent Television Authority, which had been renamed the Independent Broadcasting Authority, came true. His announcement that this new IBA would co-operate with the local authorities in selecting contractors to run the stations came true. And his announcment that local newspapers would be allowed a financial interest in the stations - though not a controlling interest - also came true.

Each one of these seeds, sown in 1969, came to fruition with the passing of the Sound Broadcasting Act in 1972, although every single one was opposed by at least one organisation or group, and most were contested by several groups,- starting with the fundamental idea of a commercial radio of any sort. Those in the forefront of the opposition included the BBC; the Musicians' Union; and many people in newspapers, both union workers and owners. Local newspapers, represented by the Newspaper Society, were seen as one of the most powerful bodies participating in the struggle over commercial radio. I asked Douglas Lowndes, the Director of the Newspaper Society, why so many members of his organisation were opposed to the establishment of commercial radio.

INSERT 1: Douglas Lowndes

LOWNDES: They saw it as a form of unfair competition in the sense that it seemed clear that a number of local commercial radio stations would be established, each one exclusively licensed in a given town or area. In other words, if a newspaper wanted to start its own radio station in competition with the franchised one it would not be able to. And since the independent local radio stations are in fact going to draw their revenue almost entirely from advertising, it looked to us as though there was a commercial threat with an exclusive power as it were on the part of the radio station which couldn't set up in competition with in the same way.

DUNKLEY: So what did you do about this, who did you talk to, who did you see?

LOWNDES: Well the first thing we did was to get ourselves equipped with some facts. We had in 1969.. we commissioned a very extensive research study among advertisers and agencies in the provinces and discovered for example that three-quarters of the local advertisers said that, yes, they would try commercial radio if it did land up in their town, and that they would not find extra money to go into radio

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with. Which meant immediately that there was a strong possibility that the revenue that we were enjoying in those towns would be diminished. So that looked like something of a threat. That piece of research was formed into a paper in January, 1970, which we started to discuss with, then, Paul Bryan, when he was shadow Minister of Posts, and which incidentally put a positive side as well as a protedtive side into the argument, in the sense that local newspapers, as partners in local commercial radio, really had something to offer.

DUNKLEY: How influential did you feel as an organisation when you were talking to him?

LOWNDES: I think we felt from the start that we were getting a reasonable hearing and that we had a chance of being quite influential, probably because politicians are, though sometimes quite critical of newspapers, I think, generally speaking, they're conscious of the value to their constituents and them of a good local newspaper in the area where they have the votes. And even though the newspaper may not always agree with their views they seem or many of them have told us anyway, that they see real value in having a well managed local newspaper in the constituency.

DUNKLEY: Another vitally important pressure group consisted of the musicians who make the gramaphone records which are such an essential element of any radio service. They were represented by the Musicians' Union, which from the very beginning had fought against the whole idea of commercial radio. As early as 1966, the union's Assistant Secretary said that they were "violently opposed to the idea which was then being discussed in terms of a commercial pop music channel. I asked the General Secretary of the Musicians' Union, John Morton, to explain their attitude.

INSERT 2: John Morton

MORTON: Our attitude was one of opposition - not because we were opposed to commercialism as such but because all world wide experience showed that commercial radio was driven down to the cheapest source of input, and that this ran quite contrary to the tradition that had been built up in this country, the Reithian concept of having some sort of social obligation in broadcasting. Although that has been caricatured, and perhaps sometimes rightly so, and sometimes could have been prevented, it did have this effect as far as musicians were concerned: that broadcasting accepted an obligation to employ musicians. And so there was built up a considerable volume of musical employment in Britain and we didn't want that jeopardised by the introduction of commercial radio without that obligation

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DUNKLEY: So the fear really was that that stations would be record playing stations, I mean, either pop, or middle-of-the-road or whatever, but that they would be playing gramaphone records.

MORTON: Well this was fairly clear, not only because it is the cheapest form of input to radio, but also because the commercial ethic dictates that the audience should be as wide as possible and that the cost of the programme should be as low as possible. And all the discussion that preceded the introduction of commercial radio was on the basis that a staple component would be gramaphone records.

DUNKLEY: How powerful was the Musicians' Union in this instance. It is suggested that they could have stopped the whole thing. Could you have stopped the whole thing?

MORTON: Certainly, we could exert a very strong influence on the use of gramaphone records for instance in commercial radio. Our members make the records, we have an industrial relationship with the record makers. The record makers have a right under British law to control the use of records and therefore we have an influence in the matter. But of course this right does depend upon the law. And since it was the intention of the Government, which makes the law, to introduce commercial radio, clearly the right is susceptible to the pressures of government. And in the case of commercial radio, it was made clear to us that the Government would not hesitate to amend the law so as to diminish our right, not to remove it altogether, because that would be impossible, because part of it was industrial as I've said, but certainly diminish substantially if we opposed absolutely the introduction of commercial radio. So we contented ourselves with trying to shape the commercial radio system into a pattern that would impose the least harm on British broadcasting.

DUNKLEY: But in spite of opposition from powerful organisations as the Newspaper Society and the Musicians' Union, when the Labour Government went to the country in May, 1970, the Conservatives issued an election manifesto which stated,(among other things); "We believe that people are as entitled to an alternative radio service as to an alternative television service. We will permit local private enterprise radio under the general supervision of an independent broadcasting authority. Local institutions, particularly local newspapers, will have the opportunity of a stake in local radio, which we want to see closely associated with the local community."

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In the following month - June 1970 - the Conservatives took office; Christopher Chataway was appointed Minister of Posts and Telecommunications; and the establishment of commercial radio in Britain was part of Government policy. Of course, there'd never been very much chance of those who opposed commercial radio actually managing to alter Conservative Party policy about the basic idea.. and in any case, for every organisation which was against there were at least half a dozen in favour.

However, each of the groups in favour had their own ideas, and their own carefully prepared plan - which they were now keen to press on Mr Chataway; because it quickly became clear that the radio commitment was one election promise which could be kept, and could be seen to be kept, without too much trouble - in contrast to the planned legislation on Industrial Relations, and Britain's entry into the Common Market, which were going to be much more difficult. So it looked as though the commercial radio scheme would go through fairly quickly, and the lobbyists began their approaches to the new Minister. One of the first to do so was one of the listener groups, the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, as Martin Rosen explained:

INSERT 3: Martin Rosen

ROSEN: Soon after the Minister was appointed we went along to see the Minister and outlined the views we had made to date plus our recently up-dated views, because at that time, he was taking in various people and group's ideas for commercial radio to produce his White Paper on broadcasting.

DUNKLEY: What was the original plan as the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting saw it?

ROSEN: Well, I would say that we saw it as many stations - in fact it's still.. we still believe that there should be as many stations as there are technical frequencies forand the natural self-imposed limits of commercial viability.

DUNKLEY: So in what sense was your plan or your attitude updated at the time when you went and saw Chataway?

ROSEN: We'd obviously gained a bit more experience in talking to MPs and Ministers and we sort of got the impression that the Conservative Party's view at that time was that they wanted to set up an Independent Broadcasting Authority, which they did, in fact, but we felt that something should be set up more on the lines of the FCC in America, whereby the licenses are issued by the FCC, and the group continues with the license unless they come into breach of various rules.

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DUNKLEY: Let's go to the question of Chataway as Minister. How many times did you see him?

ROSEN: I think we saw Chataway twice, but we went into the Ministry to see his officials several times after that.

DUNKLEY: Shortly after meeting the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, Mr Chataway was visited by Hughie Green, head of Commercial Broadcasting Consultants - an organisation which was convinced that commercial radio should operate on medium wave. But Hughie Green and Chris Chataway didn't see eye to eye, as Mr Green explained:

INSERT 4: Hughie Green

GREEN: When we went to see Chataway, and we told him medium frequencies, he said, under no circumstances. He said the whole thing is going to be VHF. And he said, it's totally useless talking to me about that because, he said, we can't have medium frequency. So I said, well we can have it and I said, here is all the evidence. However the meeting broke up and I said, well, Mr Chataway, I don't think you're going to find that the advertising agencies will go for VHF. So we immediately came home and I wrote to about ten of the agencies, and I said, now look, if we, Commercial Broadcasting Consultants are fortunate enough to get a license, would you be interested in buying time on our station if it is on VHF only. To which the answer was no. And indeed one advertising agency wrote back, and said, my dear Green, if you've got any money in this VHF, grab it, and get it out quickly. So we sent photostatic copies of all of those letters to Mr Chataway and also to a number of other interested Members of Parliament.

DUNKLEY: Can you tell me how you felt at that stage you were being received?

GREEN: I felt at that stage, well, there's no question, I felt at that stage, I knew at that stage, that Mr Chataway greatly resented being told he couldn't have his VHF. So if you say, what do we think Chataway thought about us, I think that Chataway thought that we were an annoyance. We were however an annoyance that put him right over the VHF, because the letters that we were able to give Chataway from the top advertising agencies in this country certainly must have changed his mind or changed somebody's mind about having only VHF for commercial radio.

DUNKLEY: The Minister's mind was certainly changed because, as history shows, the system finally went into operation broadcasting on both VHF and medium wave. But Hughie Green's letters from the advertising agencies represented just one factor among many which combined to force the change in Mr Chataway's thinking. The advertising men naturally went and saw the Minister themselves. And for this operation, as for their lobbying to get commercial television in the fifties, they forgot their main professional organisations and presented a unified front. The advertisers who belong the the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, and the agency men in the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, worked independently early on, but quickly found that their views coincided, and from then on their representations to politicians were made jointly. In spetember 1970 they put forward a plan containing their own proposals regarding commercial radio. One of the members of the commercial radio committee, set up by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, was Don Wightman, media director of the Lintas advertising agency, and I asked him what were the main points that they put to the Minister.

INSERT 5: Don Wightman

WIGHTMAN: Well, in fact there were quite a number, but just listing a few of the major ones, I think we put forward views on whether there might be a national station as well as a series of local stations. We put forward our own views that the Minister was interested in on the revenue that these might bring. We were very anxious, and of course not alone, in in being very keen to see that medium wave transmissions were used as well as VHF. We were concerned about who the controlling authority would be. We were also concerned with the ownership question, naturally, with whether sponsorship would be allowed, and we were concerned about a number of other matters, but I think those are probably the major ones that were put forward at the time, in a fairly comprehensive, I think, paper, that was sent to the Minister and we offered to enlarge upon that and he very rapidly, and I think it's fair to say, very enthusiastically, took up that offer to draw upon what views and indeed what experience we could offer from the advertising side, bearing in mind our experience with commercial radio in other countries. As a group we met with Chris Chataway and his officials, usually both on perhaps four or five occasions. Naturally one one personally had some other conversations because we were thrown together talking perhaps at various functions and conferences and so on and there were obviously informal discussions and telephone discussions as well. But there were a series of more formal meetings that went through a whole number of points, based on the views and the points we had put in our proposals to him.

DUNKLEY: In the same month that the advertisers started having their meetings with Mr Chataway, October 1970, the Local Radio Association came up with a revision of their plans - plans which were naturally enough framed in such a way as to suit the particular requirements of the businessmen who had formed the Association. They were just as strongly opposed to a national commercial station as the advertisers were in favour. I asked the former secretary of the Association, John Gorst, MP, to describe the new plans which they took to Mr Chataway in that autumn of 1970.

INSERT 6: John Gorst, MP

GORST: Well, the first plan had shown that 276 medium wave stations looked like bing possible, but we had to revise this down to a 150 stations in a 116 different places. We also raised the minimum population for a station from a theoretical 50,000 to 75,000.

DUNKLEY: What impression did you get at that time of the Government's thinking about commercial radio?

GORST: I think Chris Chataway came with a completely open mind. But there were moments throughout that period when we were very alarmed at what we thought was going to crop up. At one moment I recall we were alarmed that they were going to create a national commercial radio station, which would act as a sort of patron to all the stations. We alarmed at the idea of an all news station, using up valuable frequencies. We were also alarmed that they didn't believe that the economics of commercial radio would permit of very small stations and we had an inkling that maybe they were considering a series of sort of satellite stations working to a parent station. Whilst there were variations of that that we would have found acceptable, we didn't like that particular idea.

DUNKLEY: In addition to the Local Radio Association, the advertising men, Hughie Green and the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, Mr Chataway also met dozens of other groups anxious to press on him their particular schemes for commercial radio. But of course there were others who wanted to meet him who were either firmly against the idea or who took a personal or professional interest without being sure whether they were for or against. Late in 1970, he met delegations from a number of unions, such as the Association of Broadcasting Staff, and from the Greater London Council, and the Music Publishers Association. Among those he met who were opposed to the whole idea, were representatives of the 76 Group, a lobby which had been formed originally by a number of professional broadcasters to act on a variety of broadcasting problems. The 76 Group was in favour of local or community radio

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but opposed to the idea of it being run commercially. Philip Whitehead, a Labour MP, and television producer, was one of the founder members of the 76 Group, and he told me about a campaign document called "Sound Choice" which was their main publication in the battle against commercial radio.

INSERT 7: Philip Whitehead

WHITEHEAD: The date of that booklet was 1970, just after the Conservative Government came in and it was intended as advice for Mr Chataway. It was written by a number of people of all persuasions. The central point we were trying to make in the booklet, and I wrote the editorial for it, so I remember it well, was that the then Minister, Mr Chataway, could have commercial radio or he could have local radio, but he couldn't have both.

DUNKLEY: Did you actually go and see the Minister yourself. Were you part of the delegation which went to see him?

WHITEHEAD: Yes, I was, and we had a series of meetings also which were addressed by, and which addressed themselves to, the Director General of the ITA as it then was, Brian Young, and a number of other people. Now none of this I'm afraid had had very very much effect. And from that I draw the conclusion that the Cabinet, whatever Mr Chataway wanted, and there were strong suggestions at the time that Mr Chataway realised that the system of many stations could not be viable, and himself was pushing for the notion of a single, national station, which would have been very different. But he was over-ruled in the Cabinet. The Cabinet in those days were sticking very much to their manifesto proposals and they forced him to go ahead with the scheme which was introduced.

DUNKLEY: I went finally to the man who had actually had to decide which of the many ideas thrown up could be accepted as socially, economically, and politically practical - minister himself, Christopher Chataway, and I asked him first to what extent he felt bound, when he took office, by decisions previously made when his party was in opposition.

INSERT 8: Christopher Chataway

CHATAWAY: Well, only the decision to have commercial radio, I mean that that had been taken and that was a commitment, but there were no firm commitments entered into, you know, as to the number of stations or the type. I mean it had been suggested that a hundred might be possible, but I wasn't really bound in any way except to the fact that there was going to be commercial radio.

DUNKLEY: Do you remember how many, I mean in broad terms, how many people you saw and heard in the run-up to the drafting of the White Paper?

CHATAWAY: Oh, I did see hundreds. I saw all the various sort of lobbies and there were two organisations mainly made up of of youngsters who'd listened to the pirate stations and much regretted their demise. And there was an association made up of those who hoped to run commercial stations and they had a wide variety of views. And then there were individuals who were outside their association, but equally wanted to run it. I saw a good deal of the advertising agencies because they were the only real source of expertise about what would be commercially viable or not, and I did see a lot the advertising agencies. And then of course I saw a great deal of the BBC and of the ITA, as it then was.

DUNKLEY: Do you remember any particular group or groups as being more, either persuasive or insistent, than others?

CHATAWAY: Well the BBC itself stood out, of course, head and shoulders above everybody else that was involved, I mean, both for the quality of what they had to say, both on on the content and on the technical side, and for their powers as a lobby.

DUNKLEY: There was a stage when somehow you managed to persuade the BBC engineers who represent really the only home grown body of expertese on these kinds of things in this country, to discover medium wave length frequency available for use by commercial radio whereas previously they had pretty well insisted that there was no such thing available. How did this come about?

CHATAWAY: Well, I think to be fair, that there had been technical advances in the ten years before, so, you know, it's it's not right to say as some of the BBC's critics do that they were not telling the truth when there wasn't any space then years before, there probably wasn't. With the development of directional ariels and so on you can get more stations into the same amount of air space. But they were naturally, the BBC, anxious to ensure that a Government which was rightly or wrongly committed to the introduction of commercial radio, didn't take away their stations. And therefore they did have a very strong incentive to use their substantial expertise to find

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room for more stations when it became clear that the only alternative would actually be some reduction of BBC services.

DUNKLEY: When the Sound Broadcasting Bill was published on the 3rd November, 1971, it turned out to be drafted mainly in the form of amendments to the Television Act of 1964, which laid down provisions for the structure of the ITA - the Independent Television Authority and the running of commercial television. Just as Paul Bryan had forecast two years earlier, in order to deal with commercial radio, the ITA was to be re-named the IBA - the Independent Broadcasting Authority. There was to be no national commercial radio channel, advertising would be strictly limited to a specific number of minutes each hour. There was no provision for sponsored broadcasting, the IBA would provide, own and operate the transmitters. It would also choose the contractors, and the chosen license holders would pay rent to the Authority. Following its Second Reading, the bill went through an unusually long Committee stage - long, because the Labour Members of the Committee decided to drag out the Committee stage as an additional way of frustrating and slowing up other parts of the Government's programme, which at that particular point included legislation for Britain's entry into the Common Market. And although certain amendments were passed in Committee, they were reversed at the Report stage. So in the end the bill went through virtually unamended, and became law as the Sound Broadcasting Act on June the 12th, 1972. In the final analysis the newspaper owners had no reason to be particularly unhappy. Though initially opposed to commercial radio, they'd ensured that when it did come their advertising revenue would be protected to some extent. The radio equipment manufacturers who'd had a lot to do with the early formulation of the Conservative Party's ideas, had no grounds for being unhappy either. Whatever the details of the system, new transmitters would be needed, more VHF wireless sets would be sold and the stations would be buying plenty of studio equipment. But every other pressure group was disappointed to some extent - many of them very disappointed. Among those who opposed the whole idea, the BBC say, or the 76 Group, the reasons are obvious. For others the reasons for frustration varied. The advertisers failed to get their national channel, Hughie Green's system of patronage was ignored, the 'pirate' listeners weren't given their 24 hour commercial pop service, and the believers in free enterprise saw a system of exclusive licensed imposed. In other words, a great many of thepeople who worked and lobbied hardest to bring about commercial radio in Britain, though they certainly saw a system of commercial radio introduced were very far from satisfied with the particular form in which the system finally emerged.
