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THE ROYAL TELEVISION SOCIETY : BANQUET

28th February 1967: Reply to toast

Broadcasting, and particularly television broadcasting, has been the sociological revolution of the century. It has had an impact on the thinking and lives of people in general comparable with that of the printing press, but with the difference that what it has accomplished in decades, took the printing press centuries. The printing press came of course in the Dark Ages, and by some historians was said to have brought about the end of those Dark Ages. Actually of course we now know that the Dark Ages lasted until the invention of television, and it was the flickering light of the television screen that brought about the end of the Dark Ages. This light does not have the selective effect of the printed word but appeals to the literate and the illiterate. Nobody in the Royal Television Society would wish to claim that they started this revolution but they certainly helped it along; they were in at the beginning, and they take a very active part in all of its activities and developments today. Of course whether this participation is looked on as useful or as helping to sow dragon's teeth or opening Pandora's box must depend not on technical performance but upon the estimation of the value of television programme. Television is a most unique combination of skills and expertise both in the technical and in the programme and human relationship fields. It calls not only for technical competence but a knowledge of and sympathy with human interests and psychology (~~psychological story~~)

Back in 1927 when the Television Society was started, the views of many good sound people with their feet on the ground, were , that television was a scientific possibility, probably an impractical pipe dream, and certainly an uneconomic venture. Nineyears later, the world's first public television service^{was} started by people who had courage, and now, just thirty years later, there are already two hundred million receivers in the world, and the time is fast approaching when there will be hardly a country without a televsion service.

Learned societies, such as ours, have two basic roles to play. Firstly, to lead the public by showing them things that they may not have dreamt of, or had not realised the feasibility of, and thus mould public opinion. This applies not only in the provision of stimulation of demands for new equipment but also in bringing to the knowledge of the public the realisation of what can be done, and what uses can be made of facilities already developed.

The other role is trying to devise means of fulfilling the needs expressed by the public for an extension of the services they have.

In doing all this, the economic aspects must be clearly kept in view. This has particularly been done in the design and production of television receivers where, in a world where most things cost two and three times as much as they did twenty years ago, the television receiver actually costs less, while giving a bigger and a better picture. Almost as important as the economic use of money is the economic use of spectrum space. Spectrum saving devices, such as enable us to pack a colour signal into a black-and-white channel, will become of increasing importance.

The Royal Television Society and its members have contributed in all these roles in the past, but will have even more to do in the future. In carrying out these assignments, the technical and cultural interests are almost equally important. If the service given and the quality and reliability of the pictures are not adequate, then television will not flourish no matter what the quality or interest of the programme. Perhaps even more so, if the programmes are not good, then no matter how excellent and reliable is the picture quality, people will not bother to look at it, and again public interest is lost. If the public interest is lost for either reason, the supply of money dries up and further advances become impossible.

The dual encouragement of both technical and cultural excellence, which is basic to the philosophy of the Royal Television Society, is therefore essential to the success of television and to the many developments which stem from television.

As far as work is concerned, on the technical side, we have an enormous programme in hand, not only judged from the point of view of what is important to the United Kingdom, but also of what is of interest to the rest of the world. The Postmaster-General announced recently decisions on the future line ^{standards} ~~standards~~ and colour, and we know we are to produce colour television on 625 lines only for all programmes, and we are to put in hand plans to enable us ~~to~~ eventually to drop 405-line transmissions. This decision affects everybody in television, as it affects every single piece of equipment, and much of the operating procedure, right from the studio to the receiver. It will take many years before the operation is completed, but we now have a definition of what to do, and everybody concerned is getting on with it. The improvements in techniques which are now being worked out will be of value and interest to television all over the world.

A world-wide problem exists, because it has not been possible to agree a world-wide system for colour television, and systems converters will be necessary for international programme exchange. This becomes every day more and more necessary with the increase in exchange by satellite and by video tape recording. The problems are however being solved, but of course at the cost of some loss of quality and added complexity to the exchange arrangements.

Television is also developing in the widest sense and going well beyond what for a long time seemed to be its bounds as a means of home entertainment, instruction and enlightenment. Television is becoming increasingly active outside these bounds; we find television in closed circuit use in Industry, in transport, and, most important, it is coming into increasing use in education and medicine. It would seem to have the very greatest future application in education, possibly by radiation over the air, but certainly in the form of closed-circuit television distributed over centralised groups in recorded form for playback when required. There is an enormous field of development here. Television is important for education at every level from the simplest teaching of reading and writing all the way to advanced physics. Every country will need educational television, no matter what are its existing educational standards.

In medicine too, particularly now that the colour television problem is solved, in both its direct and its recorded form, there are enormous applications available which must lead to an improvement in medical knowledge and teaching, even in the most developed countries, but particularly in the less-developed countries.

Developments in television have lead, and will lead, to developments in other fields. The investment in research, development and production facilities, made possible by the large amounts of public money attracted by television, produce devices and methods that have applications all over the fields of telecommunication and computers.

~~STORY~~

Both directly and through its members, the Royal Television Society is well placed and is anxious to play a full part in all technical and programme developments, and the programme of expansion approved by the Society will help us to do this. The spirit of its members will ensure the maximum value of the provisions made in all the fields in which television will be active.

After 40 years we have a lot to show, but after 50 years I am sure very much more.