

THE  
ANGLO-CATALAN  
SOCIETY

1.

20th June, 1956.

Controller European Services,  
The B.B.C.,  
Bush House,  
Strand,  
London. W.C.2.

Dear Sir,

The Committee of the Anglo-Catalan Society view with increasing disquiet a situation which has been for some months apparent to them, and to which their attention has been drawn both by members of the Society and by many friends in Spain. We refer to an apparent cessation in the B.B.C's fortnightly transmissions in the Catalan language.

These programmes have been broadcast, we believe without a break of any significant length, for the past nine years. They have never been other than purely cultural, and cannot by any stretch of the imagination have been construed as supporting any separatist tendency. They have been greatly appreciated by an intelligent listening-public, a public unlikely to find anything to interest them in the material broadcast by local transmitters in Catalan-speaking areas of the Peninsula. There would appear to be no valid reason why the monopoly in regional-language broadcasts to Spain should be held by the transmitters of Prague, Moscow and Belgrade - particularly in view of the highly controversial nature and presentation of the programme material emanating from these capitals. The sudden and unexplained discontinuance some three months ago of the Corporation's regional-language transmissions to Spain cannot but be regarded by our friends in Catalonia with great regret; and a complete cessation of these programmes might well harm the Corporation's reputation for objective treatment of controversial matters.

This Committee would welcome an assurance from the B.B.C. that an explanation of the reasons for this apparent discontinuance of transmissions in Catalan will be broadcast to listeners in Catalonia, exactly as listeners to the Home services are kept reasonably well-informed of the reasons for any divergence from precedent.

Yours faithfully,

Prof. Frank Pierce (President)  
P. Russell-Gebbett (Honorary  
Secretary)  
G.W. Ribbans (Honorary Treasurer)  
Helen F. Grant (Member of Committee)

2nd July, 1956.

Professor Frank Pierce,  
President, Anglo-Catalan Society,  
The University of Nottingham,  
University Park,  
Nottingham.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter of June 20th about our Spanish Service's broadcasts in Catalan. I should explain, first of all, that the responsibility for deciding in what languages (and how much in the chosen languages) the BBC broadcasts to Europe lies not with the BBC but with the Foreign Office.

In the year July 1954 - July 1955 the number of our broadcasts in Catalan was 16 - considerably less, in other words, than average of one a fortnight. We make a practice of not explaining why programmes are being given up but of 'trailing' and explaining new programmes: that more positive procedure was followed in this instance too. Broadcasts of Spanish regional interest (including Catalan) do continue, though in Castilian.

About your reference to broadcasts from Prague, Moscow and Belgrade in Catalan I can, I fear, make no useful comment. I can only repeat that the decision over our own Catalan broadcasts was and is one for the Foreign Office.

I should like to end (and, if possible, slightly to redeem) this somewhat bleak answer to your letter by saying that we here do sincerely appreciate your interest in the subject.

Yours faithfully,

(James Monahan)  
Controller European Services.

24th July, 1956.

H.M. Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs,  
Foreign Office,  
Downing Street,  
London, S.W.1.

Sir,

The Committee of the Anglo-Catalan Society, concerned by an apparent cessation in the BBC's broadcasts in the Catalan language, on June 20th of this year approached the Corporation with a request for information about this seeming change in policy.

In his reply to our letter, the Controller European Services prefaced his remarks with the statement that the responsibility for deciding in what languages (and how much in the chosen languages) the BBC broadcasts to Europe lies not with the BBC but with the Foreign Office. He then gave us to understand that BBC broadcasts in Catalan have been discontinued, that Spanish regional-interest programmes will now be broadcast in Castilian, and that no reasons have been given to listeners in the Catalan-speaking areas of Europe for the cessation of BBC broadcasts in their language. Indeed, it would appear that this fundamental change in policy has been treated as no more than a change in programme material.

The Committee of this Society have been asked by many friends in Catalonia why these Catalan-language transmissions, of an essentially non-controversial nature (as more than one of the undersigned can testify from participation in them), have been discontinued; why the transmitters of Prague, Belgrade and Moscow should be permitted a monopoly in Catalan-language broadcasts - particularly in view of the highly controversial nature of their programme material and its presentation; and why the BBC has said nothing about this change in policy. The Committee have been unable to find any satisfactory answer to these queries; a request that the BBC inform listeners to the Catalan regional programmes why these have been discontinued has been met with the statement that this is not customary.

We the undersigned wish, therefore, to draw your attention to the unfortunate results of the cessation of Catalan broadcasts and to urge upon you the desirability of beginning them again together with the other programmes in regional Peninsular languages. Since, as has been said, these broadcasts are cultural and academic, we feel sure that the BBC would again be performing an important task in international goodwill.

We remain, Sir, your obedient servants,

Prof. Frank Pierce (President)  
P. Russell-Gebbett (Honorary Secretary)  
G.W. Ribbans (Honorary Treasurer)  
Helen F. Grant (Member of Committee)