

British Political Advisers to the High Commissioner of Aden

Ashraf Girgrah

The author vividly records his impressions of employment at Aden Radio and Television during the period of 1959 – 1969.

During the tenure, I was first recruited as a Radio Program Assistant to read the news bulletins in Arabic and prepared and produced Arabic programs for transmission during the broadcasting hours. Our main source for news was the recorded BBC Arabic Section, Reuters teleprinter agency and of-course Government House.

"At the time when the British were struggling with how best to plan, control, and execute decolonization in line with their stated aims, the Cold War moved into full swing and Arab nationalism took over much of the Middle East."¹ North Yemen witnessed a revolution in 1962 against its ruler and South Arabia became a victim.

Vicious commentaries in Arabic began to flow from the Government House to Aden Radio to be read after every news bulletin. The main source of these commentaries were by Hobson, Anthony (Tony) Clayton Ashworth and his subordinates David Ledger and Derek Rose.

"Throughout British and Federal propaganda had been brilliantly orchestrated by Tony Ashworth, a former colonel turned civil servant."²

My first encounter was with Mr. Hobson who used to frequently drop in from Government House to Aden Radio building. All the British advisers spoke fluent Arabic. A hand written commentary by Mohamed Ahmed Barakat in Arabic was schedule to be read after the news bulletin at 4:00PM, 6:00pm and 8:00pm. At the time I skipped reading it after 8:00pm because it contained only insults and abuses against Nasser and the presence of Egyptian troops in North Yemen after the 1962 revolution. As a result I was reprimanded and was told by the Federal Minister of Information, Sharif Behan at the time not to do it again.

Although I used to recognize Mr. Hobson's face but I never talked in person to Mr. Tony Ashworth. They used to see the Director of Aden Radio Hussein Al Safi or the Public Relations Director Ahmed Zokari.

In 1965 I was appointed as Head Film Unit at Aden Television. I changed offices and moved to the Television building on the Hill above the Sailors Club overlooking the port of Steamer Point (Tawahi).

During the year I used to see Derek Rose from Government House trying to influence the path of the follow of Arabic news bulletins.

"Derek Rose, the youngest political officer still serving with the High Commission, was the first victim. A brilliant Arabist, Rose was one of the last Englishmen still in contact with the Adenis."³

I wonder if it was an irony that I heard the name of Ashworth again when I was in Doha, Qatar in the late 80s. I was seeking a job in Oman at the invitation of my previous boss in Qatar Michael Niff, a US citizen. I was accepted but the news came from the CID of Oman that I was refused employment because of my background as a South Arabian. Here the name Ashworth popped up!!!!

"Tony Ashworth is another who has gone on to greater things. British Information chief in Hong Kong at the time of Vietnam he is now personal adviser on information affairs to the Sultan of Oman."⁴

Sources

1. Scott Smitson, Centre for Complex Operations Case Studies, Case Study 10, The Road to Good Intentions: British Nation- Building in Aden, https://cco.ndu.edu/Portals/96/Documents/case-studies/10_the_road_to_good_intentions_student_edition.pdf
2. David Ledger, Shifting Sands: The British in South Arabia, pg 155 Peninsular Publishing, 1983.
3. Ibid pg 202.
4. Ibid pg 226.