

**Jason Briggs 'Sell-Out'.  
Selling off the BBC World Service.**

My appointment today is with the mysterious Hogan Camero from the Cultural Resourcing Foundation. At four o'clock prompt, Security call up to say he is here. "And he has a lady with him, a Miss Effie Miramine." I say to send them both up and button the screen for a Net Worth Analysis on the so-called Cultural Resourcing Foundation. It reads "NIA" No Information Available. This usually indicates no net worth, or too much, or, they say, high level protection. I guess we'll soon see.

The door is opened and a big guy, presumably Hogan, stands aside for Miss Effie, who is not quite what I was expecting. She is a very old and extremely elegant lady, beautifully coiffed and wearing an very expensive fur coat, unusual for these times. It is easy to see, as they say in those flowery romantic novels from Virago Faber, that when she was younger she must have been a beauty. Naturally, I jump to my feet and show her to a chair.

"Thank you, my dear," she says, "I see you've grown into quite a nice-looking young man." My astonishment must have been obvious, as she continues, "You don't remember when your father brought you to the Museum? No, of course not, it was a long time ago. The young have such short memories. Let me see, it was when Stonehenge was moved there, to protect it from pollution and tourists - such a silly idea. And your father had just joined. It was the annual Staff Christmas Party, you know. Such jolly times!"

For the life of me, I cannot figure out why this extraordinary lady should have been at the Staff Christmas Party at the British Museum, so I mumble something about my poor memory and she should please forgive me.

"And now you work with dear Lucius," adds Miss Effie, with a look that indicates that she knows she is full of surprises, "please remember me to him."

"Yes. Of course. I will." I respond. The next thing she'll be telling me is that Buddy-Jo is a dear gel. But she doesn't. She says, "I shall take off my coat and drink some coffee, if you please." The Hogan helps her with the coat, revealing that she is wearing a very British two piece costume by Trevelyan, I think, and a selection of Amies gold and diamond jewellery. I order up the coffee, which is delivered so fast that I can only assume she advised Security of her needs before coming up. "Hogan," she says, "tell Dr. Briggs why we are here at his fascinating ... asset sale." I try to discern her accent. It is definitely not Australian, perhaps a trace of South African in amongst the upper-class English. Hogan's accent is pure strine.

"Miss Ephigina," he begins, "is a great admirer of anything English - especially yer culture." The look on his face says that he personally is not so inclined but knows who pays his wages.

"Ah yes," I say, "you did mention the BBC World Service and the British Council when you telephoned."

"Too right," says he, "and both in need of a bit of chivvying-up."

"I don't see that, Mr. Camero," say I, "they do pretty well, thank you. In fact there isn't

anything quite like them and never has been.”

“Matter of opinion,” he says, “the Yanks have theirs and the Frogs do a great job with their Institewts.”

“Instituts, Hogan,” interjects Miss Ephigenia, with a perfect French accent.

“Yeah, arnstitew,” says Hogan.

“Now then,” says Miss Effie emphatically, “let’s get down to business. Dr. Briggs. No, I shall call you Jason. Are they, as it were, available?” I refrain from telling her that just about everything is available, so long as instant money is also available, but before I can respond more discreetly, Miss E. is off again.

“I know, dear boy,” she says, “you have to discuss the propriety of such a disposal with Lucius, is it not so? But, on the other hand, you have - dear Lucius explained it to me - almost carte blanche. I congratulate you. It is quite unusual to have the confidence of that awful man, the Prime Minister.” Now, I wouldn’t say that I had the P.M.’s total confidence - on the contrary - if I put a foot wrong, I think I would have to leave for the Continent with all despatch and in a damn great hurry, but it doesn’t hurt if the customer believes the P.M. and I are jolly chums and like nothing better than to sit and chew the cud about the way things were in the good old days, before the National Borrowing became the number one thought in the dark hours of the night.

“Miss Ephigenia,” I say, “the only real consideration is what might happen to these excellent cultural services - what the potential buyer has in mind to change.”

“What I have in mind,” murmurs Miss Ephigenia, “should not be a problem for anybody. Let us start with the World Service. Do you watch it, at all?” I confess that I do not - on a regular basis, that is, I add.

“Well, I shall describe it to you, Jason dear. It reports on the political scene in almost all the countries of the world. So different from your own domestic reporting which is largely take up with the sexual peccadilloes of nonentities and the internicine sound-bite battles of your frightful politicians.” Well, nobody can argue with that succinct description, so I stay silent.

“The World Service gives us a very full, and some might say, harrowing description of the national wars, border wars, street wars around the globe and the various atrocities which accompany such activities, day in and day out. Extremely depressing. Extremely depressing - and of no, shall we say, moral encouragement to its audience.” As she had emphasised the word ‘moral’, I begin to figure out that Miss Ephigenia’s changes are going to focus on propogating optimism, or some such old-fashioned means of encouraging the worse-off to believe that things might get better, as they lie in a charity hospital bed or stand in a charity food queue.

“Even worse,” she says, “from a professional point of view, the World Service leaves much to be desired. Their programmes seem mostly to be reporters interviewing reporters with the last reporter in the chain standing at the site of the latest atrocity, attempting to paint as bad a picture as he, or indeed she, can. Without, of course, risking the local war-lord’s anger and being escorted to the border by the local militia - who are all out-of-work young hoodlums, striking macho poses whenever they can. Such a bad example to the young in other countries.” I can see that Miss Effie is going to be very firm on the issue of moral encouragement so I nod wisely. But she does have a point, I suppose. The media is full of shots of these “young hoodlums” standing on top of a

small tank, in some far-off wasteland, with a Kalashnikov III resting on the thigh and an early Portapad swinging from the shoulder, dressed in fatigues, earrings and face tattoos. There was even a fashion show in Paris recently, that featured tasteful unisex arrangements of such combat dress to huge applause and many kisses and hugs for the designer, a Welshman of monosyllabic vocabulary who wore, of all things, a 90's three piece suit.

"Imagine, Jason," says Miss Ipheginia, smiling at me and nodding at Hogan encouragingly, "Imagine that this kind of reportage were modified so as to project a less depressing imagery. And changed so as to give us all hope in a brighter future. Instead of reporters bringing us an unvaried diet of bad news, they were encouraged to show us the good things that are being done in our difficult world. Instead of the almost heroic portrayal of members of the militia murderers and their bandit leaders, the World Service were to concentrate on the truly heroic work of 'Medecins Globaux', of the Council for the Protection of a Peaceful World, of the Red Cross and the World Salvation Army, showing the unflagging care provided by such altruistic organisations, from their tireless volunteers at home to their fearless organisers and workers in the field. Saving lives and bringing food to the innocent children. There are your true heroes and heroines!" I must admit that she had a point and Hogan's leathery face registered a smile at my apparent reaction.

"The first step in changing the world, sport," he said, "every bugger, sorry Miss Ephigina, everybody will tike to it like water." He may well be right, I thought. At least, the P.M. couldn't find fault with it - if the price was high enough. But what she said next was a different matter. Definitely problematical from the P.M.'s point of view. "And, dear Jason," she says, "we shall have a special daily programme on work opportunities around the world - to encourage all those people who are out of work to think about the possibilities of improving their lot, if they were prepared to move to where the jobs are." Now, it's true that many Brits were very happy to move to places like Australia and New Zealand in the old days, and even France had a huge influx of English and Scots at one stage, but now the out-of-work are curiously apathetic and presumably happy to live on State benefits, even though they had been cut back - so I don't see this idea of Miss Effie's taking off. Worse, if it were successful, the P.M. would not like it, because it would show up that the unemployment figures published by the Government were seriously flawed - deliberately, of course. If the EU were able to establish what the real figures were, they would jump at the opportunity to beat up on the Government's social policies and insist on changes. A possibility which the P.M. has taken all steps to avoid, naturally. "A very laudable idea," I say, "but are you sure it would work? How would you persuade people to tear up their roots and move to somewhere foreign and possibly not too welcoming? Also, there are 55 million unemployed in the West alone," I add, rather ungenerously.

"Firstly," says Miss E., undeterred, "the home government would have to encourage them by paying their passage - instead of those demeaning benefits - and secondly the receiving country, who after all need the workers, would advance them a sum of money to set up home, against future earnings. It's all very simple." All very idealistic, I am thinking, and I can see that Hogan is watching me closely. Does he really believe in this stuff?

“You see,” he says, “Miss Ephiginia would be very happy to kick-start the whole process, by using some of her own personal funds to show that it can be made to work. And then other bennyfactors will come in.”

“Precisely,” says Miss E., “I am an old woman, with, alas, no family to worry about when I’m gone. I don’t like cats or dogs, and I have an awful lot of money - from computer development, you know.” I hadn’t, up until then, but now I began to fit the pieces together and realised that she must be connected with E-phi, the huge corporation that had, virtually alone, moved the microchip up to warp speed and made billions out of carefully protected patents. I guess she must be related to the reclusive genius with an unpronounceable name I couldn’t now remember, who had devoted his every working minute to one invention after another, before he was killed in the first supersonic aircraft failure. This whole scenario was like something from a fanciful piece of fiction and I wondered if it was going to turn out to be a serious piece of business or if I would be left with the Prime Ministerial sneer when Miss Effie disappeared over the horizon. As everybody knows, in a situation like this, you have to keep on playing the cards, so I did. “I shall certainly be happy to explain your wishes to Sir Lucius and the P.M.,” I say. “Oh, I’m sure you will,” she says, “I knew the idea would appeal to you and, of course, if the transaction is consummated, it will provide you with a nice little nest-egg for the future, will it not? The future is never certain, is it, even for successful young high-fliers like yourself.” This, with a charming smile. Hogan is grinning, too, damn him. “True about the nest-egg, Miss Ephiginia,” I riposte, “it’s one of the rewards of my work.” Hogan, whose build suggests he has led a non-sedentary life, looks as though he considers the rewards of my work as totally unwarranted. But it’s the bit about an uncertain future that makes me think a little. After all, this lady seems to be very much up to the mark. I drop the thought and say, “And what would you propose in respect of the British Council?”

**To be continued in our New Year Issue.**