

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 9CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR  
20 August 1985

# BBC in uproar over issue of security checks

## Image of independence marred by report in press

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London

Questions about the British Broadcasting Corporation's ability to operate independent of government interference, raised only a few weeks ago over the contentious issue of Northern Ireland, have surfaced again.

The latest row involves disclosure by the Sunday Observer that Britain's secret service, MI5, has for years secretly screened BBC staff appointments.



Brittan faces flak on  
MI5's alleged role

The newspaper detailed eight cases where individuals were either denied jobs or promotions because of alleged MI5 objections to their politics. In each case the Observer produced information to show that these claims were either inaccurate or unfounded.

This storm threatens a new blackout of BBC programs. Broadcast unions are threatening strikes unless management puts a stop to such security checks.

The allegations have outraged opposition politicians who are demanding an explanation from Home Secretary Leon Brittan. Some of them see the screening of BBC staffers as an insidious trend that could infringe upon the independence of other institutions. Other critics charge that if the allegations are true then it negates the claim that the BBC is not an instrument of the government.

Earlier this month all BBC news programs went off the air as broadcasters struck to protest the board of governors' cancellation of a documentary on Northern Ireland because it featured political extremists. Most of the BBC staff and a majority of the general public were opposed to the board's intervention.

As with the Northern Ireland program, the issue of national security also features prominently in the defense of the apologists for MI5 screening. Defenders of the policy say that some form of screening is needed to keep political extremists from gaining access to such a sensitive communication outlet. Some of those who were victims of the security check are outraged at having been blacklisted in this way.

Isabel Hilton, for instance, a China specialist, was barred from working for the BBC in 1976 after MI5 charged she was working for a Maoist organization. It was later discovered that MI5 had thought that the academic, nonpolitical Scottish-China Association, of which she was secretary, was subversive.

Ms. Hilton, who now works with the London's Sunday Times, was quoted as saying that she is furious "some grubby little secret policemen blackened my personal reputation, slandered me, and finally stopped me from getting the job, without my ever knowing anything about it and without my having the chance to defend myself."