

Confidential Filing

Proposed LWT Television Series
on the Civil Service and the
British system of Government.

GOVERNMENT

MACHINERY

March 1985

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
3-4-85				5 3001			
1-5-85							
3-5-85							
7-5-85							
28-1-86							
28-1-87							
28-4-87							
15-4-88							

PREM 19/2195



file

SL2AOS

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBIN BUTLER

THE LWT SERIES ON THE CIVIL SERVICE

When you saw the Prime Minister this morning, you recalled your predecessor's minute to me of 27 April 1987 and my reply of 28 April about this proposed TV programme. You told the Prime Minister that, after discussions with LWT about the programme, which was being produced by Peter Hennessey, you had decided not to agree to their request to appear in it in view of its bias and lack of balance. The Prime Minister indicated that she entirely agreed with your decision.

I am copying this minute to Bernard Ingham.

N. L. WICKS

15 April 1988

NLW



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

LWT SERIES ON THE CIVIL SERVICE

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 27 April about the request from London Weekend Television to interview you for their proposed series on the Civil Service.

The Prime Minister agrees that you should proceed as you propose in your minute and that you should reply to LWT in the terms of the draft you suggest. She thinks it important that you take particular care to avoid answering questions on security matters, as she knows you will.

I am copying this minute to Bernard Ingham.

N.L.W.

(N.L. WICKS)
28 April 1987

FILE
BM

dg



1. Mr Ingham to see BI agrees.
 2. Prime Minister Agree RTA to reply to h.w.t's request for an interview as he suggests?

Ref. A087/1160

MR WICKS

c: Mr Ingham

Yes - see note at end

N.C.U

LWT Series on the Civil Service

27.4

at 11.15

Your minute of 28 January recorded that the Prime Minister was content for discussions to proceed with London Weekend Television about their proposed series on the Civil Service, as outlined in my minute to you of 27 January and with full Press Officer involvement.

2. LWT have now completed the bulk of the filming for the first three programmes in their series and are turning to the final programme. They envisage that this will pull together themes from earlier programmes and discuss ideas for possible reforms. The producer of the series has now asked me to give an interview for that programme (his letter is at Annex A).

3. There is always some element of risk in such interviews, and to minimise this it would be important to establish clearly beforehand the basis on which I would be able to give an interview. In particular, any interview should occur after rather than before a General Election; the Prime Minister's final approval should be sought at that time; the questions to be put to me should be confined to "Head of the Home Civil Service" matters and notified in advance; and any contribution from me should be clearly distinct from the interviews with Government and Opposition politicians, which may also be included in the programme.

4. But no precautions can entirely eliminate the risks. I have made it a general rule not to give interviews since I became Secretary of the Cabinet (nobody asked me to do so before



that), and have broken the rule only twice: once for a Sunday afternoon personal interview and once for a World in Action programme on the Civil Service (which I subsequently regretted). But I have agreed with Mr Ingham that, as Head of the Home Civil Service, I should not entirely exclude the possibility of doing interviews as Head of the Civil Service about Civil Service matters, if the programmes are serious and the ground rules acceptable. I think that this is such a case: the approach of the producer to this series has been serious and thorough, and, if he is prepared to accept the basis for the interview which I propose, I believe that it would be right to accept the invitation. As to the precedent, I can only say that the number of serious programmes of this kind between now and my retirement from the public service is unlikely to be very great.

5. So, subject to agreement with London Weekend Television on the lines indicated in paragraph 3 above, I hope that the Prime Minister will be agreeable in principle to me giving such an interview after the election, on the understanding that I would seek confirmation of her agreement after the election before finally agreeing to go ahead. As I say, the producers of the series appear to be aiming for a serious and balanced set of programmes and it could appear needlessly defensive if I were to refuse to contribute at all when we have already extended considerable co-operation with the producers at the centre and from individual departments.

6. If the Prime Minister is content, I propose to reply to LWT in terms of the draft at Annex B, which sets out in full the conditions for any interview and which has been prepared in consultation with the Cabinet Office Press Office.

Yes - we do NOT

REA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

27 April 1987 *answer questions on security matters*



LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION LIMITED
SOUTH BANK TELEVISION CENTRE LONDON SE1 9LT
TELEPHONE: 01-261 3434 TELEX: 918123

CABINET OFFICE	
A	426
21 APR 1987	
FILING INSTRUCTIONS	
FILE No.

15th April, 1987

Sir Robert Armstrong GCB CVO,
Secretary to the Cabinet and
Head of the Home Civil Service,
70 Whitehall,
LONDON SW1A 2AS.

Dear Sir Robert,

Now that we have completed the bulk of the filming for our series on the Civil Service, it seems an appropriate time to ask you formally for a filmed interview for our final programme. We now have a reasonably clear idea of the areas we wish to cover in that programme - though I ought to say that they can still change because we are still learning - so we can give you a good indication of the issues we would like to discuss with you.

As you may already know, our aim in the final programme is to pull together some of the important themes which will have emerged in the first three programmes and examine ideas for possible reforms. We would then like to discuss with you the implications of these for the Civil Service. Finally, we hope to put the ideas for change to the Prime Minister or Minister responsible for the Civil Service, and possibly representatives of the opposition parties. Our intention is to get a sense of how the Civil Service is likely to develop in the future.

We are of course aware that you are under certain constraints as to what you can discuss. We will naturally be guided by you on this, but the kind of areas which seem to us appropriate are these:

- a) We would like to give you the chance to question the validity of some of the criticisms of the Service which have led people to propose reforms.
- b) We would like to ask you about the effects some ideas for reform, particularly those which relate to personnel matters and career structures, might have on the nature of the Service.
- c) We would like to ask you about some of the trends we see within the Service and where they are likely to lead in the future.

This is very broad, but the specifics of what we have in mind will be clearer to you once you're familiar with the themes of the first three programmes, so let me outline what these are:

DIRECTORS: BRIAN TESLER (CHAIRMAN AND MANAGING DIRECTOR) JOHN BIRT (DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMMES) PETER CAZALY (DIRECTOR OF PRODUCTION)
VIC GARDINER (GENERAL MANAGER) PETER McNALLY (FINANCIAL DIRECTOR) RON MILLER (SALES DIRECTOR)
CHRISTOPHER BLAND HEATHER BRIGSTOCKE ROLAND FREEMAN ROGER HARRISON THE HON. DAVID MONTAGU JEREMY POTTER ROBIN SCOTT SECRETARY: JUDITH T. THOMAS

PROGRAMME ONE

The first programme poses one of the key questions which the series as a whole seeks to address. The fundamental nature of the modern civil service was established more than 100 years ago. Since then the functions of the State have changed dramatically. Does this mean the Civil Service is unsuited to the tasks it is now asked to perform? The programme looks at the history of the Civil Service since the Northcote-Trevelyan Report and at the way the role of the State has changed since then from being largely regulatory to being much more interventionist. It also looks at the 'life-cycle' of a modern fast stream civil servant, from recruitment through training to career structure. All these elements, together with the nature of the political system being served, help to make up the 'culture' of the civil service, which inevitably has strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are that senior civil servants are politically neutral, highly intelligent, excellent analysts and draftsmen, virtually incorruptible and committed to public service. The weaknesses, the critics suggest, are that the system and the nature of the organisation make civil servants inherently conservative, anxious to avoid making mistakes and hence averse to taking risks, poor at innovation and more interested in analysis than action and process rather than product. Emphasis is on serving the political master rather than delivering the best service to the citizen, who is the customer.

PROGRAMME TWO

This programme looks at policy advice and formation, both short term and long term. To show the role of senior civil servants on day to day matters of politics, we have mounted an exercise in crisis management which involved former civil servants and former ministers. We will also describe how legislation is developed and guided through Parliament. We will examine how the pressures of the political system tend to concentrate both Ministers' and consequently civil servants' attention on these relatively short term matters. Does this mean not enough time is given to long term strategic thinking?

To examine this question further we look at how strategy is developed. We look at how opposition parties work out their long term policy aims and ask whether they need more help from government both in terms of resources and information. We look at how a new Minister is likely to encounter a 'departmental view' when he takes office and ask whether he or she needs more help, perhaps in the form of a 'cabinet', to enable him or her to have a balanced dialogue with the department's officials. And we examine the suggestion that there is a "hole in the centre" of Government and look at various options, such as a revived CPRS, which have been put forward to fill it. Many suggestions for reform in this area involve the greater use of outside policy advisers and we examine whether our current structures produce enough good people of this kind to meet possible demand.

PROGRAMME THREE

This programme looks at the broad question of policy implementation and the delivery of public services. It is thus largely about management. It looks at how, throughout this century, the state has played a bigger and bigger part in the life of the ordinary citizen. This inevitably has involved increasingly complex management, but until quite recently management was not seen as a major priority for senior civil servants. We examine how this situation has changed since 1979, first through the activities of Lord Rayner and then through the introduction of the FMI and associated managerial reforms. We examine how these work in practice in an operational division (the Vehicle Inspectorate) and look at how they are also meant to work in theory in policy areas. We

look at how similar ideas have been pushed rather further in some local authorities and we try to assess the rate of progress being achieved within the civil service - and where these reforms are likely to lead.

PROGRAMME FOUR

In the eyes of the critics, the picture which emerges from the first three programmes is of a service which is still predominantly geared to the political system it is meant to serve (which in essence has not changed since Northcote-Trevelyan) rather than the function it is now called upon to perform. The focus is still upwards to the political masters rather than downwards to the customers. The question is: can this be changed without threatening the nature of our democracy?

Those who call for reform believe it can. We have identified four broad strands of reform, all of which involve exposing the civil service more to outside forces and influences.

1. Opening up the Civil Service career structure. Proposals here range from greatly expanding the secondment programme through taking civil servants who left back into the service at a higher level to advertising all senior posts.
2. Opening up policy making to outsiders. This strand includes help for opposition parties, 'cabinets', more special advisers and central strategic bodies along the lines of the CPRS.
3. Opening up government information. This would involve publishing more factual and analytical material - the only reason for holding it back to be on legitimate security grounds. The idea here would be to improve the level of public debate and make government more openly accountable to its customers.
4. Pushing management reforms much further. Ideas here range from breaking up the bulk of the Civil Service (except the policy making elite) into discrete and accountable units, which might or might not then be privatised, to having a much more open and vigorous policy evaluation system.

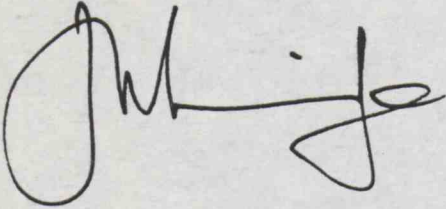
These are, in outline, the areas we think we'd like to discuss with you. 1, 3 and 4 all seem to us to have direct implications for the Civil Service, whereas you may feel that 2 is more political in nature and therefore harder for you to talk about. We would also obviously be interested in your comments on the first three programmes in the series. What I would like to do is to let you have the scripts of the first three programmes, and the introduction to Programme Four, before we interview you.

The question I am least able to be specific about at the moment is timing. The transmission of the series will depend very much on the date of the General Election. If the election is in June, I think we would like to interview you in July ready for transmission in the autumn. If it's in October, we would want to interview you shortly afterwards for transmission in November or December. Our latest information is that Channel Four would not want to transmit the series before an October election.

I apologise for the length of this letter, but I thought it sensible to give you as much information as possible.

if you would like any further clarification, or if you would like to discuss the matter further, we would obviously be very happy to help.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Norridge', with a large loop on the left and a stylized 'N' and 'R'.

JULIAN NORRIDGE

JN/MGAR

DRAFT LETTER FROM SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG TO
JULIAN NORRIDGE ESQ, LONDON WEEKEND TELEVISION,
SOUTH BANK TELEVISION CENTRE, LONDON SE1 9LT

Thank you for your letter of 15 April asking me to give an interview for the final programme of your series on the Civil Service. Taking the question of timing first, I agree that this must depend on the date of a General Election and that any interview should occur after an Election has been held: I should not be prepared to give an interview shortly before an Election or which might be transmitted in a pre-election period. Following an Election, I should need to confirm at the time that the Prime Minister was content that I give an interview. Subject to that, I should be ready to participate in the series, if we can reach agreement on the basis on which this might be arranged.

While I would be able to deal with factual matters concerning Government policy on the Civil Service and the reasons for these policies, I should not of course be able to address political issues such as the relative merits of current and alternative policies. I should want the questions

to be limited to such questions as I could answer as Head of the Home Civil Service; I should not be prepared to answer questions relating to my position as Secretary of the Cabinet. I should like to take up your offer of seeing the scripts for the first three programmes, and the introduction for the final programme. I should also like to see in advance the questions that it was proposed to put to me. I should want to be assured that the interviewer would stick to those questions which I had indicated I was prepared to deal with.

I note that your final programme will also include interviews with politicians. My own contribution would need to be clearly separated from such political discussion, and I should need to be satisfied that the structure of the programme achieved that. I imagine this means that my contribution would come after any factual introduction but before and distinct from political contributions. In particular, I should not wish the programme to intersperse parts of my interview with any other interview.

So long as we can agree on this basis for an interview, I should not expect there to be any need to ask for parts of the interview to be omitted from the programme: you would be free to make use of the whole interview for transmission. If you decided, however, that you would like to cut out parts of the interview for editorial reasons, I should want the opportunity to agree the exclusions, to avoid any danger that an edited version might give a misleading impression of the totality of my comments.

Turning to the specific topics listed in page 3 of your letter, I see no difficulty in covering items 1 (Civil Service career structure) and 4 (management reforms). As you recognise, item 2 (opening up policy making to outsiders) is rather more political. I would be able to explain the Government's position on "cabinets" and special advisers, but could not go further on these topics, nor do I think I could properly comment on proposals for assistance to opposition parties. Item 3 (Government information) similarly raises political issues, for example on the Official Secrets Act and "freedom of information": I could explain current Government policy, but could not

discuss options or arguments for alternative policies.

I am grateful to you for setting out your plans fully in your letter. If you find the above an acceptable basis for an interview, I suggest you send me the programme scripts and questions you envisage putting to me when these are ready, and get in touch again following an Election. Subject then to confirming the arrangement with the Prime Minister, we should be able to fix a suitable date.

GOVT MACH: LWT TV Sene Mar 85



N. Wicks



10 DOWNING STREET

This looks OK
So far as it goes
and there are
potential advantages.
But MPO must

have a good
press officer working
with it; we need
someone to take it
through and liaise
with Departments

~~Mr Taylor,~~

My regards
Yours
27
1

before I put
this to P.A.

looks sensible to

me.

N. L. W.

26.1.



10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Principal Private Secretary

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

I have shown the Prime Minister your minute of 27 January about the London Weekend Television (LWT) proposal for a series of television programmes on the Civil Service and the British system of Government.

The Prime Minister is content for you to proceed as you outlined in your minute. She thinks it important that the Cabinet Office should ensure that they have a good Press Officer to oversee the arrangements and to liaise with Departments.

N. L. Wicks

28 January 1987

JB



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

The arrangements in Sir Robert's minute below look sensible. But it is important that the Cabinet Office should ensure that they have a good Press Officer to oversee the arrangements and to liaise with Departments.

Agree to proceed on this basis?

N. L. W.

N. L. Wicks

27 January 1987

Ref. A087/214

MR WICKS

On 29 March 1985 I sent your predecessor a minute (A085/989) about the proposal by London Weekend Television (LWT) for a series of television programmes on the Civil Service and the British system of Government. The Prime Minister agreed that we should proceed with discussions with LWT about such a series, subject to certain conditions which were set out in Mr Butler's minute of 3 April 1985.

2. All this has slipped by about a year; but discussions have continued and the broad outline of the series remains as before. I attach at Annex A a note describing the outline of the four programmes as now proposed.

3. LWT hope to interview staff of the Management and Personnel Office on various aspects of Civil Service management; Department of Trade and Industry staff on interchange of staff with the private sector and the career progression of a "fast streamer"; Department of Transport on how the FMI operates in practice; and the Department of Energy on how a Private Office works.

4. A provisional agreement has been reached with LWT on the terms and conditions on which filming is to take place. They are as set out in Annex B to this minute. The aim of this agreement is to ensure that interviews are conducted on a basis which is understood in advance and acceptable to the interviewees, and to make it possible to exercise some influence over how the Civil Service contribution is used in the final product.

Departments will be given an opportunity of seeing and commenting on the programmes before the series is shown.

5. Those who have been in touch with the producers believe that they are aiming to produce a serious and balanced series of



programmes. They will of course explore issues where criticisms and suggestions have been made but they stress that they are not out to produce a series which knocks the Service. We will of course report back to the Prime Minister if it appears that the series might be developing in a way which is not now expected.

6. I hope that the Prime Minister will be content that discussions should proceed accordingly.

ms

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

27 January 1987

Programme 1

Scene setting - who civil servants are, where they come from and what they do.

Historical development of Civil Service from Northcote/Trevelyan to the present day (involving interviews with ex-Permanent Secretaries, politicians and "Whitehall watchers").

Recruitment - extracts from BBC film on CSSB plus interviews with civil servants and others.

Training - interviews and film extracts from fast-stream training course.

Career progression - interviews with DTI staff from AT to Permanent Secretary.

"Culture" - interviews with ex-civil servants and others.

Programme 2

Policy development - tension between short term policy decisions and long term strategic policy thinking.

Handling of Fictional Policy Issue - as no Department was able to offer an issue that could be filmed for this purpose, a fictional issue (probably based on DHSS) is to be worked up and acted out by a team of ex-civil servants (from Treasury and DHSS) now working in the private sector.

How a Private Office Works - (Peter Walker has been approached by LWT).

Strategic Thinking - policy making in Opposition - funding of Opposition Parties - briefing of incoming Ministers - the role of special advisers - "Cabinets" - CPRS - interchange with the private sector (possibly including filming of DTI secondees) - funding of external think-tanks.

Programme 3

Management Reform

Operations at the coal face (eg an operation such as DVLC)

Growth of Government business and staff postwar.

Development of managerial systems - PESC/PAR/Rayner/FMI

The role of training - TMP, SMDP, MDP

The FMI at work - based on filming at D/Transport - (Vehicle inspection)

Hiving-off, contracting out etc

Programme 4

Ideas for reform - drawing together from earlier programmes and interviews eg with representatives from political parties.

Draft Agreement between LWT and Cabinet Office (MPO)

- (1) Actual filming days, time and locations will be agreed between LWT and MG in the MPO or nominated staff in other Government Departments.
- (2) LWT will ensure, as far as possible, that normal Departmental business is not impeded by the presence of its production team or their equipment, including vehicles.
- (3) LWT will be responsible for personal injury and damage to property to the extent that such injury and damage is caused by LWT's negligence (or that of its servants or agents) arising directly out of the activities in connection with the Recording.
- (4) LWT will make good or pay the reasonable cost of making good any damage which LWT is satisfied it has caused to the Property or to the contents thereof as a direct result of the Recording.
- * (5) LWT will respect the wish of the Cabinet Office (MPO) and other Departments that the film to be made should provide an unbiased and balanced illustration of the civil service at work, without imposing demands that might affect the way that work is carried out.
- * (6) LWT agreed to avoid undue concentration during the filming/ recording on any individual civil servant or group of civil servants to the extent that they themselves become a theme of any particular programme rather than an illustration of a wider theme.
- (7) LWT agrees that no member of staff shall be filmed without his or her prior consent.
- (8) LWT agrees not to include confidential information concerning individuals or organisations derived during attendance at Departmental premises.
- (9) LWT does not intend to include material that would be prejudicial to the future career prospects of any individual.

- (10) The Cabinet Office (MPO) and other Departments whose activities are shown in the film shall have the right to view the complete programme prior to its transmission. LWT agrees to correct any questions of fact that are pointed out to it by any of the Departments concerned.
- (11) Bearing in mind that it is LWT's intention to make a balanced and informative programme about the Civil Service at work, LWT agrees to take into account any views and comments that the Cabinet Office (MPO) make about the complete programme or any part of it.
- * (12) LWT agrees that it will not use, or make available to any third party, for any purpose other than the making of a documentary film about the Civil Service (or for the promotion of this documentary), any of the material which is filmed or recorded for the programme without the prior consent of the Cabinet Office (MPO).
- * (13) LWT agrees that sound recordings will only be used in synchronisation with recorded picture (except for normal editing purposes and promotional purposes); and that stills taken from the recording will only be used for graphic illustration within the programme or for promotional purposes.
- * (14) LWT agrees that, if a programme is shown, it will have no objection in principle to the making of edited recordings of the programme for use by Government Departments in publicity work and in the training of staff. The Civil Service would be responsible for clearing any copyright on non-civil service contributions and would bear any additional costs including clearances on music, stills, library film, etc.

GOVT MACH
LWT PROG.

3/85



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

7 May 1985

GRANADA TV DOCUMENTARY

Thank you for your letter of 29 April, seeking the Prime Minister's endorsement of a proposal for Mr Trippier to participate in a Granada TV programme about the role of Ministers and Parliament.

The Prime Minister is generally sceptical about this kind of exercise. She believes that the kind of "fly on the wall" technique proposed inevitably has a somewhat artificial flavour to it. She also believes that the guidelines set out in your letter may render the end result rather pointless.

If Mr Trippier wishes to proceed with the proposal, the Prime Minister has asked that the constraints set out in your letter should be rigorously adhered to, and the Civil Servants taking part should not be seen to comment or criticise on policy matters.

I am copying this letter to Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

(Mark Addison)

Paul Madden Esq
Department of Trade and Industry

ECW

PRIME MINISTER

GRANADA TV DOCUMENTARY

David Trippier is seeking your agreement to participate in a Granada TV programme about the role of Ministers and Parliament (letter attached).

You will recall you expressed doubts about a similar proposal for an LWT programme on the civil service. Bernard Ingham, too, is inclined to be opposed to the kind of "fly on the wall" technique proposed, which inevitably has an artificial flavour to it. The advice from Sir Robert Armstrong's office is that, while they see no reason to veto the proposal, they are lukewarm about it. In particular, they think, if the constraints set out in Mr. Trippier's letter are adhered to, the end result will be rather pointless.

Agree that I should respond indicating that you are sceptical about the exercise? If it goes ahead, you would wish the guidelines suggested by Mr. Trippier to be rigorously adhered to, and the civil servants taking part should not be seen to comment or criticise on policy matters?

Yes ms

Mark Addison

MARK ADDISON

3 May 1985

VC3ADD

Ref. A085/1255

MR ADDISON

Granada TV Documentary

We spoke on the telephone this morning about your minute of 1 May concerning the proposal that Mr Trippier should participate in a forthcoming Granada documentary about the role of Ministers and Parliament.

2. I think that we would generally share the scepticism about the value of the "fly on the wall" technique for a serious documentary. Nevertheless, provided that the Department of Trade and Industry observe the constraints described in the third paragraph of Paul Madden's letter to you, I see no reason to object very strongly. I think, however, that the constraints that will need to be imposed will only add to the artificiality of the exercise and make it rather pointless - but I suppose that that is really a problem for the TV company rather than for us.



R P HATFIELD

3 May 1985

file MJ2AJY



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

MR HATFIELD

I attach a letter from the DTI seeking the Prime Minister's agreement that Mr. Trippier should participate in a forthcoming Grenada documentary about the role of Ministers and Parliament. Mr. Ingham's inclination is to be opposed to this kind of "fly on the wall" technique, which inevitably has an artificial flavour to it. You will recall too that the Prime Minister expressed scepticism about a similar proposal in Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 29 March about the LWT programme on the Civil Service.

BF //

In the light of this, I should be grateful for Sir Robert Armstrong's advice.

Mark Addison

1 May 1985

886

We have agreed with
a proposal from Sir Robert
Armstrong for a programme
on the Civil Service.

But expressing
scepticism about a
suggestion of a dummy

exercise, if I
remember rightly. Pl.
will you look at those
papers. PERB

Mark

I suggest that
we advise the
express
scepticism, as in
the case of
10 DOWNING STREET
Robert Armstrong's proposal
Robin PERB

Benedict is unhappy about this. He 1.5

date we should maintain a firm

stand against "fly-a-the-wall"

filming. We have done so in recent years

and this would set an unhelpful
precedent.

We need to remember what we

are asking the BBC to do for

the 250th anniversary, by the way

there is an house and not

Government. We might perhaps suggest

a bit of conditions which Dil should
impose a Corona, just?

Mark 1/5



From the Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State for Industry

DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY
1-19 VICTORIA STREET
LONDON SW1H 0ET

Telephone (Direct dialling) 01-215) 3781

GTN 215)

(Switchboard) 215 7877

Mark Addison Esq
Private Secretary to the
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

Min-Cas
As we have a meeting
11.6.85

29 April 1985

Dear Mark

GRANADA TV DOCUMENTARY

I am writing to seek the Prime Minister's endorsement of a proposal for Mr Trippier to participate in a forthcoming Granada TV documentary about the role of Ministers and Parliament.

The six part series, provisionally entitled "Westminster" will feature members of both Houses, from different parties, and will be screened in the North West during the Autumn. Mr Trippier would be the only Minister taking part.

It is proposed that in addition to a standard interview, Granada would film the Minister in the Department in a number of typical work situations with Private Office and officials. Clearly care will be necessary to avoid breaching the confidential basis on which officials advise Ministers. Similarly references to specific policy matters and named persons or organisations will need to be avoided. However, within these constraints, which Granada TV recognise, we believe that there is sufficient latitude to proceed as envisaged.

The Secretary of State and Sir Brian Hayes are content with the proposal, subject to the approval of the Prime Minister.

Yours ever

Paul

PAUL MADDEN
Private Secretary

AAAAOZ

GOVT MACHINERY!

LWT TV series Civil Service!
March 1985.

6 5 4 3 2 1
M 12 1
J. PR 1985

8 9 0
11 12 1
2 3 4 5 6 7

30 APR 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

Sir Robert Armstrong

The Prime Minister has considered your minute of 29 March about the approach by Mr. Julian Norridge of London Weekend Television about a series of television programmes on the Civil Service and the British system of Government.

The Prime Minister is content that you should proceed with discussion with Mr. Norridge about such a series on the lines you suggest, subject to the following points:

- (i) Civil servants should take part only to answer factual questions about the working of the system, as you suggest, and should not have to answer criticisms or comment on policy matters, including proposals for institutional or other change; and these constraints should be defined clearly at the outset.
- (ii) If the series goes ahead, a senior person, backed up by an information officer, should be nominated to be responsible for liaison and arrangements within the limits you have set down.
- (iii) The Prime Minister is sceptical about the portrayal of the handling of a fictional policy issue because of the degree of "play acting" which this would involve.
- (iv) The Prime Minister would want any involvement of No.10 to be kept to a minimum. *I hope we could avoid it altogether!*

F.R.B.

3 April, 1985.

Lo

MR BUTLER

CIVIL SERVICE TELEVISION SERIES

You asked for my comments on this.

There are attractions in a serious exposition of the way in which the Civil Service works, and the atmosphere, environment and conventions within which it operates. Moreover, LWT's "Weekend World" is the medium most likely to do a serious job.

We however know how television's ambitions grow, and how mesmerised it is by pictures. It would therefore be necessary, if any programme were to go ahead to:

- define clearly at the outset what is and what is not on - and more especially the limits to interviews with serving civil servants
- put in charge of the project a senior civil servant, backed up by an information officer who would be responsible for liaison and arrangements - effectively for producing the programmes on the Government's side.

I would fully expect No 10 to be involved because LWT will find filming in No 10 irresistible and because of their interest in freedom of information, which could be tricky, especially for me.

Overall, I see advantages, subject to effective control at the outset. But the most serious minded television producer is always under pressure to take his cameras where others have not yet penetrated and to go for conflict rather than reason. For that reason the choice of policy topic for the illustrative policy making programme will be crucial. We

should also minimise "play acting" or "fly on the wall"; it is so artificial. And any programme which serves up artificial situations will do the Civil Service no good.

BN

BERNARD INGHAM

2 April 1985

010

1

Subject to effective control at output

Prime Minister

Pl. see Bernard Ingham's comments (flag A).

Ref. A085/989

Agree that:

MR BUTLER

and minimum joining in No 10

i. Civil Servants may take part to answer factual questions about working of the system but not argue about criticism or comment on proposals for change?

ii. Express scepticism about portrayal of fictional issue, without ruling it out?

I have been approached by Mr Julian Norridge, of London Weekend Television, about his proposals for a series of television programmes on the Civil Service and the British system of Government, to be recorded for transmission in September 1986 in the "Weekend World" slot, currently occupied by Brian Walden, as part of the LWT quota of adult education programmes.

FE R 2.4

2. Mr Norridge's first tentative approach to me was for a series of programmes on the Civil Service. I came to the conclusion that his intentions were serious, and not unfriendly - though that would not of course stop him being critical - and I was ready to think that he should be given the same sort of co-operation as was given to Mr Hugo Young and Mrs Anne Sloman for the purpose of "No, Minister" "But, Chancellor" and "With Respect, Ambassador".

3. Mr Norridge has now written to me with a more detailed preliminary outline of the series he has in mind. I attach the outline herewith. As you will see, Mr Norridge has broadened the canvas, and now proposes to extend the series to cover questions not only about the Civil Service but also about its relationship with politicians, and also about the way the Cabinet system works and the accountability of the Government to Parliament and the public. The series would be partly factual and descriptive, partly analytical and critical.

4. No doubt we could not stop Mr Norridge from doing this series even if we wanted to. The question is how much, if any, co-operation we should give. Mr Norridge makes it clear that he would want to interview not only politicians (past and present)



but also civil servants (serving as well as retired); and that he would want to give them a chance not only to explain the way the system works and its advantages but also to defend it against criticism where appropriate. He would also like to find some way of showing the Civil Service in action. He suggests taking a fictional policy issue and following it all the way through the process of government to draft legislation. He would like real serving civil servants to do the exercise, rather as people do for the new Top Management course. The purpose of the exercise would be to show how the process works and how the Civil Service operates, not to discuss questions of policy.

No

5. Mr Norridge has also made it clear that he would want to consider not only how Cabinet Government works but also whether there needs to be some further reorganisation or expansion at the centre (including the arguments for and against a Prime Minister's Department). He will also want to deal with the relationship of the Government and Parliament (Select Committees and all that), and the relationship between the Government and the public (freedom of information).

6. In further discussions with Mr Norridge I am minded to say that we should be willing to co-operate by enabling the programme organisers to seek interviews with civil servants for the purpose of understanding how the system works, in a factual sense. We should be ready to steer them towards the civil servants whom they should interview, and agree with them limitations within which those interviewed would be expected to co-operate in answering a question.

7. I think that we could also co-operate in finding a fictional issue and providing a suitable team of civil servants to be portrayed carrying it through the governmental process.



8. I should have thought that we would have to say that serving civil servants would have to be precluded from expressing views and judgments in such matters as relations with Ministers and Parliament and relations with the public (including freedom of information). But there would not doubt be no shortage of retired civil servants who could be asked about that.

9. I should be grateful if you could let me know whether the Prime Minister is content with me to proceed with discussion with Mr Norridge on this basis.

RIA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

29 March 1985

HOW BRITAIN IS GOVERNED

This document explains the thinking behind London Weekend Television's proposed series on the Civil Service and the British system of government and outlines the co-operation and access we are seeking from the Government and the Civil Service to make the series.

HOW BRITAIN IS GOVERNED

In recent years, there has been a growing debate about the way the British system of government works - and whether it works as well as it could. Much of the discussion has concerned the Civil Service, both the way it operates and the way it is treated by its masters, the elected politicians of the day. Criticism and calls for reform have come from the ranks of retired senior civil servants, as well as from politicians, former special advisers and outside observers. Concern has also been expressed about some of the structures of government - particularly the way the cabinet system works - and the accountability of the government both to Parliament and the country at large.

For this reason, London Weekend Television thinks this is an opportune time to propose a documentary series which would take a wide ranging look at the workings of the Civil Service and the government as a whole. The series would consist of four one-hour programmes and would be made as part of the quota of Adult Education programmes LWT is called upon to make by the IBA. Our intention would be to transmit the series in the Weekend World slot early in the autumn of 1986. Initial research would start 15 months before, in April 1985.

The aim of the series would be twofold. First, to explain and show how the British system of government works. Most people have some understanding of party politics and the way Parliament works. But they know much less about the way Government operates and the role of the Civil Service within it. What knowledge they do have is likely to have been derived from Yes, Minister rather than any real understanding of the system. The series would hope to dispel some of the illusions and clear up some of the mysteries which surround the subject. The second aim is to ask whether the system operates as effectively as it could. Are there any alternative systems which we should consider adopting or adapting? Are there improvements which could be made within the present system? The series would report on and analyse the continuing debate.

It is too early at this stage to say how the series might be structured or how the subject matter might be divided between the programmes. But it is possible to give an indication of the areas we think we should consider.

The Civil Service

The Civil Service as we know it was formed in the 1850s in the aftermath of the Crimean War and confirmed in its new form by Gladstone a few years later. For 80 years or so thereafter it presided quietly and efficiently over what has been called the "nightwatchman state", with just a brief flurry of interventionist activity during World War One. But all that began to change after 1940.

During World War Two, the Civil Service played a large part in running the country. It was responsible for the allocation of manpower and controlled everything else from food supplies to the railways. And it worked. As a result, in the words of one senior civil servant talking of his fellows, there grew up "a generation for whom anything was possible". And in the new post-war world, with the introduction of the welfare state and much greater government involvement in economic management, such men (and they were largely men) were much needed. But they were still working within the old system. By 1959, even though the post-war boom still raged, questions were already being asked about whether the traditional civil service model was appropriate for the new role of the state. And from the beginning of the '70s, as Britain's economy went further and further into decline, these questions have grown ever louder.

The series will trace the history and development of the Civil Service and will examine the kind of people who become civil servants, the way they are recruited and the career structure they have ahead of them. It will then look at the way the Civil Service works and at the relationship between it and the elected politicians it serves. The theory, of course, is

that civil servants give unswerving loyalty to each new Minister they serve; their job is to take his or her political objectives as given and advise on the best possible ways of securing them. But is this always what happens in practice? The manipulating mandarin personified by Sir Humphrey Appleby is obviously an exaggeration. But to what extent do civil servants consciously or unconsciously attempt to impose a collective 'departmental' view on their political masters? To what extent should they? Is there any argument for introducing a number of political appointees into the upper echelons of the Civil Service, as happens in the United States?

Finally, the series would have to consider the claim made by some that the whole culture of the Civil Service militates against necessary innovation and reform.

The Departments of State, the Cabinet and the Prime Minister

There are now getting on for 30 Departments of State within the Government, each of them theoretically forming a homogenous unit. But inevitably and increasingly their activities inter-relate; and frequently their interests do not coincide - the most important disputes arise over the annual allocation of public spending. The body whose job it is to resolve disputes, decide priorities and co-ordinate between the departments is the Cabinet (and of course, its increasingly numerous committees). The series will seek to explain how Cabinet government works and ask whether this system, which was developed when governing was a rather more leisurely affair than it is today, is still as effective as it needs to be.

In order to establish priorities, the Cabinet has to exercise a clear and continuing strategic oversight over Government policy. But some would argue that the development of a coherent strategy is an extremely difficult task for a body which is made up of Ministers who are inevitably preoccupied with departmental work, and who consequently don't have the time to concern themselves with the problems of other Ministers. It has also been pointed out that Ministers tend to be judged on their success within their departments rather than their ability within Cabinet.

This, it has been argued, has two main consequences: firstly, it means that the general strategic thrust of government policy is seldom if ever reviewed; secondly, Cabinet can be too easily swayed by a strong departmental Minister. As Sir Douglas Wass put it in one of his Reith Lectures "An issue which comes to Cabinet is presented by the Minister whose interests and reputation are involved, and he is bound to be partisan. No mechanism exists to enable the Cabinet to challenge his view unless the interests of another Minister are involved, and even then the challenge itself may be partisan. Cabinet can too easily be railroaded". The series will consider whether the provision of a larger staff to serve the Cabinet as a whole, in effect a Cabinet department, would go some way towards resolving this problem.

The other way that has been suggested for filling the "hole in the centre" of Government, as Lord Hunt has called it, is by expanding the role of the Prime Minister. There is no doubt that with the increasing complexity of Government, the Prime Minister's role as the guardian of Government strategy has been enhanced. But the machinery he or she has to work with has not. No other Prime Minister has as heavy a workload as ours. No other Head of Government has such a small staff. The series will have to consider whether we are moving closer towards a Presidential style of government on American lines and whether this is desirable. It will also examine the arguments for and against a Prime Minister's Department.

The Government and Parliament

In theory, the centre of power in Britain is Parliament. It is to Parliament, and in particular the House of Commons, that the government of the day has to account for its actions. Yet it is widely accepted that Parliament's ability to curb and control executive power has diminished considerably over the last century or so. "When I joined the Civil Service," Sir Douglas Wass has said, "I was forcibly struck by the difference between the formal respect I was taught to pay to the parliamentary system and the cavalier way in which Whitehall, for the most part, took the House of Commons for granted".

There are many reasons for Parliament's diminishing effectiveness, not least the strength of the party system and the growing complexity of government. It is now impossible for Parliament as a whole to maintain any detailed oversight of government policy. But in recent years an attempt has been made to rectify this situation through the establishment of select committees which watch over the activities of particular departments. The series will explain how these committees work, examine the effect they have had in Whitehall and ask whether they really work as a check on the exercise of executive power.

Another problem that Parliament has in exercising its powers is that often it is not well enough informed. MPs, who have extremely limited research resources of their own, have to rely on Ministers for much of their basic information. At the moment they also have very limited staff support to help them develop their criticism and questioning. For this reason some people have suggested that the official opposition should have a Department of Opposition at its disposal, to help it both to question government policy and to develop alternative policies of its own. The series will examine this idea and look at both the advantages and the difficulties which would arise from it.

The Government and the Public

Ultimately, of course, both Parliament and the government are accountable to the public. But for the public to exercise its collective judgement sensibly, it must be given access to the relevant information. Without the knowledge that this information provides, the argument goes, public debate will not reach the level which democracy requires.

Much of this information can only be provided by the Government. And in the past governments - and their civil servants - have not always been as willing to provide information as they might be. The situation has improved over the last few years but the series will still have to ask whether government today is as open as it should be. What information should be revealed as a matter of course? Who should decide what information should not be revealed? To what extent should the privacy of

government decision-taking be protected? Do we need a Freedom of Information Act along the lines of those in operation in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Scandinavian countries.

Request for Co-operation and Access

As has been said before, it is too early to say definitely how the series might cover the areas outlined above or how the subject matter could be divided between the four programmes. It is also possible that we may want to cover other topics which are not mentioned here. But what becomes clear from looking at the possible areas to be covered is that to do so effectively, we will need the active co-operation of the government and the Civil Service. Hence this request.

The kind of help we are requesting can be divided into two categories

- 1) Interviews: In the course of the series we will be seeking the views of a wide range of people including academics, journalists, retired civil servants and politicians (both past and present) from all parties. But we are also very anxious that we should hear from present day Civil servants at all levels of the Whitehall machine (it should be made clear at this point that we are primarily interested in the 3000 or so senior civil servants in the higher echelons of government). We would want to give them the chance both to explain the way the system works and its advantages, and to defend it against criticisms where appropriate. Naturally we accept that these interviews would be subject to certain constraints for reasons of security and political sensitivity. This should not cause any problems because we are not interested in the specifics of any policies so much as in the process of policy-making.

- 2) Access for Filming: It is clear that, to be effective, the series will need to find some way of showing the civil service in action. In preliminary discussions it was agreed that for political and security reasons, fly-on-the-wall filming would be difficult - not least because civil servants themselves would feel inhibited and would not behave naturally. But an alternative approach was suggested which we feel could work extremely well.

It would involve taking a fictional policy issue, perhaps a manifesto commitment, and following it all the way through the processes of government to draft legislation. Much thought would have to be given to making the issue as "real" as possible and as illustrative as possible of the way the system works. For instance, it should probably have implications for public expenditure and involve some negotiations between departments; ideally, for televisual purposes, it should also involve an element of controversy. Naturally we would be guided by the Civil Service as to what particular issue would be appropriate.

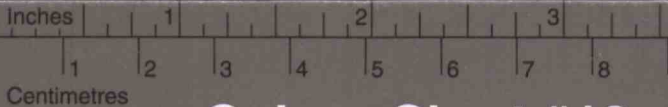
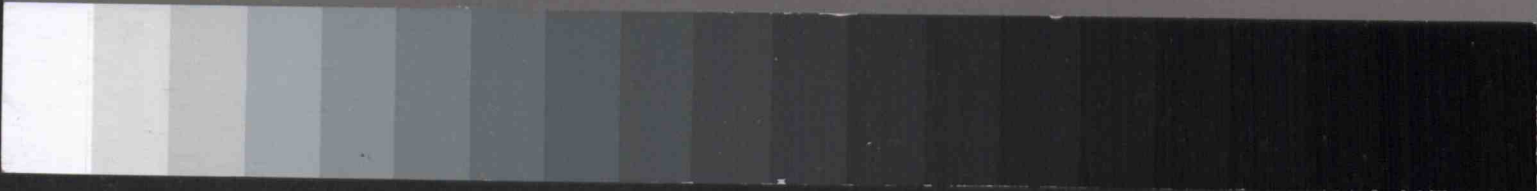
The civil servants who "processed" the policy would be real civil servants behaving as they would if it were a real issue. Any politicians who might be involved would be provided by us - we would probably ask retired former ministers to help us out. Once again we should stress that the purpose of the exercise would be to show how the Civil Service operates and perhaps to introduce some of the questions which have been raised about the mode of operation. We would not be interested in discussing any specific real policy areas. We would obviously have to work very closely with the Civil Service to set up such filming and we would be happy to keep them fully informed of how the resulting footage was going to be used in the final programmes.

If our requests in these two areas are granted, we believe the resulting series will perform a valuable service in explaining to the television audience how the British system of government works and casting fresh light on the debate which currently surrounds its operation. This can only be to the good of democracy.

Grey Scale #13



A 1 2 3 4 5 6 M 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 B 17 18 19



Colour Chart #13

Blue Cyan Green Yellow

