

*Just reply?*

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*From The Secretary of State for Wales*

*PSatt*  
*23/1*

29 July 1980

CONFIDENTIAL

*Dear Nick*

Thank you for your letter of 14 July enclosing one from Dafydd Wigley in which he seeks a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss Gwynfor Evans' threat.

... As you know, this is a matter of great concern to my Secretary of State. Indeed, he has taken the initiative and had a private meeting with Mr Evans. I enclose a note of the meeting. Mr Evans showed little interest in compromise. He reiterated his demands and argued that the blame for the present situation lay with the Government rather than with him.

From other discussions my Secretary of State has had, it has become apparent that neither Mr Wigley nor Mr Thomas has much influence over Mr Evans in this matter. He seems not to have consulted them in taking his decision to go on hunger strike, nor does he appear susceptible to pressure from them now. In the circumstances, my Secretary of State doubts whether a meeting between the Prime Minister and Messrs Wigley and Thomas would be desirable or useful. The 2 MPs know that the matter is of concern to the Government (although, as far as we know, they have no inkling of my Secretary of State's private meeting with Mr Evans). My Secretary of State has no reason to doubt the genuineness of their concern, but equally he has no doubt that a meeting with the Prime Minister would be exploited to give Plaid Cymru the maximum political advantage. He therefore advises against the Prime Minister meeting the Plaid Cymru MPs at this time.

/ I am copying this letter to John Halliday.

*John Craig*  
J F CRAIG  
Private Secretary

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FOURTH CHANNEL: NOTE OF A MEETING HELD AT COED YR IARLL, ST FAGANS,  
SOUTH GLAMORGAN, AT 4 PM ON MONDAY 21 JULY 1980

PRESENT: Rt Hon Nicholas Edwards MP, Secretary of State for Wales.  
Mr Gwynfor Evans, President, Raid Cymru.  
Sir Hywel Evans, Permanent Secretary, Welsh Office.

The Secretary of State opened by thanking Mr Evans for agreeing to this meeting. He felt it would be valuable to have a private exchange of views on the question of the 4th Channel instead of conducting the debate in public through newspaper articles. Mr Edwards explained that he had approached the question of the 4th Channel with no very set views, just as he had had no very strong views on the order of billing signs, a matter on which a pragmatic solution had now been reached. The Party Manifesto had indeed promised that Welsh language programmes would come on to the 4th Channel but when he had taken office he had become persuaded that there was a powerful case for a different solution on the lines now proposed. There was no ideal solution to this problem but he noted that there had been distinguished Welshmen who had favoured a two-channel solution and until recently the announcement of the Government's intentions had aroused few objections in Wales. The Secretary of State referred to Mr Elis Thomas's speech in the Debate on the Broadcasting Bill and said that following that and as a matter of compromise, the Government had put forward the idea of a Joint Committee. He invited Mr Evans to give his views.

Mr Evans said that he and his associates had been campaigning for a Welsh Channel for a decade. The case had been looked at by several committees, all of whom had advocated that solution. He himself had always thought it essential to have 25 hours a week (notwithstanding what was said in the previous Government's White Paper) which meant 3 1/2 hours at peak viewing time. The 4th Channel was essential to ensure continuity. Separate services did not give a continuous block of programmes or a flow of viewing time. A single Channel was the only way of building up an audience. No solution was perfect but his was the one which offered most.

The Secretary of State pointed out that this solution meant there would be no non-peak hour programmes in Welsh, including programmes for children and stressed that the new arrangements would start in Wales at the same time as the English 4th Channel. He raised the question of finance which was one of the factors that had led to his change of mind. The only way to bring about Mr Evans's solution was by substantial Government subsidy, at least in the early years. He believed that this would be stultifying and would effectively prevent Welsh language TV growth beyond the 25 hours a week wanted by Mr Evans.

Mr Evans said that he was living in the heart of the problem. He could personally testify to the damaging effect of English television particularly on Welsh speaking children. It was vital to get a guarantee of 25 hours a week peak time from the very outset so that listeners were guaranteed Welsh programmes at those hours. This would not arise in the Government's solution - there would be, for example, problems of fitting the time into BBC2's other schedules quite apart from the unwillingness of BBC2 viewers in Wales to give up peak hours to Welsh language programmes. He noted that Iceland, a small country, could afford 25 hours a week and that the Government were prepared to spend substantial sums of money for TV for the Rhine Army.

A Government which had no hesitation in spending £5,000 million on dreadful Trident missiles could surely find £5 million for a 4th Channel for Wales. Mr Evans repeated that only a 4th Channel could give viewers the certainty that when they switched on at a given hour there would be a Welsh language programme.

The Permanent Secretary asked whether Mr Evans' doubts would be eased if some arrangement could be worked out whereby ITV Welsh programmes followed consecutively on BBC Welsh programmes with no break or intervention by other programmes. Was Mr Evans saying that Welsh viewers could not be bothered to switch channels? Mr Evans said that an arrangement such as that described would be a big step forward. Later in the discussion he reverted to this point and said that it was something which could be considered. However he doubted whether the BBC and IBA could be trusted to honour such an arrangement. The question of guarantees was fundamental.

The discussion turned to Mr Evans's personal position. The Secretary of State observed that there were different views about the 4th Channel amongst Welsh speakers themselves. Was the issue then of such importance to justify Mr Evans risking his own life with all the consequences that would mean? He admired Mr Evans as a person and he found it difficult to believe that he would contemplate a destructive and violent act which would stir emotion and violence in Wales. Mr Edwards had within the last 2 or 3 days experienced such violence directed at his own family. He appealed to Mr Evans to reconsider his position.

Mr Evans said that this was the last fight he could make and it was the Government who were being perverse. It was they who had changed tack. Until the Home Secretary's Cambridge speech, Welsh people in Wales genuinely believed that the long sought for goal of a Welsh channel had been achieved. The 4th Channel had widespread support out of Wales also; he referred to a number of National newspapers which had backed the idea. His own fast was not intended to stir up violence. His movement had always opposed violence. If there were people who were bent on violence they would behave that way anyhow whether he fasted or not. He would be making a peaceful demonstration. Was the Secretary of State saying that one was not now to demonstrate against the Government in a non-violent way?

The Secretary of State said that he still hoped that some compromise could be found. But even if Mr Evans's demands could be met in full, would the same technique of fasting then be adopted to bring pressure on the Government over other issues in Wales? Mr Evans said it was ridiculous to suppose that this would happen. But on the 4th Channel there could be no compromise on the broad principles. There was deep feeling in Wales as was testified by the number of people who were refusing to pay for their television licences. His family and friends had gone to prison in the past for the language. If compromise was what the Secretary of State wanted this could easily be achieved through his new committee. All Mr Edwards had to do was to convene the Committee as soon as the Broadcasting Bill was passed and instruct it to plan a 4th Channel of 25 hours a week and 3½ hours peak viewing time every night.

The Secretary of State said that that was a strange concept of compromise. He referred to the complaints there would be from non-Welsh speakers in Wales if they were deprived of all peak viewing time on ITV 2. He believed these would be much stronger than Mr Evans envisaged, although he doubted if anyone would actually fast to death over them. He appealed to Mr Evans again to think of the consequences of his proposed action. He, (Mr Edwards), did not feel the differing parties stood all that far apart in their ideas - certainly the gap was not such as to warrant such grave action as Mr Evans now contemplated. He emphasised his own personal desire as Secretary of State for Wales to help the language and to avoid social disharmony.

Mr Evans said he had taken full account of the likely consequences before he decided on his action - he had discussed it at length with friends and his family. He did not believe that violence would ensue.

The Secretary of State concluded by saying that it had been right to exchange views. He would reflect on the discussion. He hoped that Mr Evans would do likewise and that channels of communication between the two of them could be kept open.

The meeting ended at 5.25 pm.

cc Secretary of State

FUSS(W)

FUSS(M)

Mr O H Morris

Mr R H Jones

Mr T P Hughes

Mr Hosegood

} off Mufax