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Prime Minister. **6**
We await Sir Ian

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Trethowan's considered
response. **111**
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MR. WHITMORE

Thank you - the matter has been put to the D.C. in no uncertain terms. M.A.

BBC Panorama: Proposed Programme on Intelligence Services

I saw Sir Ian Trethowan this morning.

2. I said that I was speaking to him with the knowledge and approval of the Prime Minister.

3. I spoke on the lines of paragraph 13(a) of my minute of 21st July. I said that the activities of Duncan Campbell and those associated with him were doing the effectiveness of the intelligence services no good. The damage was containable so long as the activities were confined to the columns of the New Statesman, Time Out and other papers of that kind; but a BBC Panorama programme would reach a very large audience, and could run the risk of very much greater damage to the effectiveness of the services. That of course was what Campbell and his associates were aiming at. I said that I recognised that there would be some aspects of the matter - particularly accountability - which could be regarded as matters of legitimate public interest; but, even if the programme was confined to that, it would not be possible for any present or former member of the intelligence services or of the public service to take any part, and I doubted whether present Ministers could do so either. It seemed to me that in the circumstances it would be very difficult to produce a balanced programme. I said that all that I had heard about the activities of the Panorama team preparing the programme suggested that they were aiming for something going much wider than accountability, and looking at the functions and operation of the intelligence services, and I instanced a number of examples of the activities of Tom Mangold and his team to illustrate this point. I felt bound to draw Sir Ian Trethowan's attention to this, and to the risks it entailed for the work of the intelligence services.

4. Sir Ian Trethowan said that the BBC would produce nothing that was not authoritative and balanced. He recognised, and the Panorama team now recognised, that there was no possibility of co-operation from within the services


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or within the public service on the functions and operations of the intelligence services, and that it would not therefore be possible to produce a programme on that subject which would be authoritative and balanced. I should rest assured that nothing on those lines would be shown. It was already clear and accepted that there would not be two programmes. There remained the question of accountability. This was a matter which was being pursued by a Member of Parliament (Mr. Robert Cook), who was proposing to introduce a Bill. It was difficult to argue that this was not a matter of public interest which could be presented on the BBC. He recognised the difficulties which prevented anybody from inside the services or Government from taking part, but he hoped that it would be possible to provide a measure of balance by inviting former Ministers to take part: he referred to Mr. Merlyn Rees, Lord Carr, Lord Butler and "former Prime Ministers, but not Sir Harold Wilson".

5. I reiterated that the activities of the team, as I was hearing of them from a number of sources, were by no means consistent with a programme confined to the question of accountability, and were not merely disagreeable but in some cases positively discreditable. My fear was that the preparation of the programmes would go forward, that the Director General would find himself, near the time for broadcasting, with programmes on which there had been a considerable investment and which it would be difficult then to cancel and replace. Sir Ian Trethowan assured me that considerations of cost would not prevent him from disallowing a programme which in his view ought not to be shown, as he had done on previous occasions. I said that this seemed a cavalier approach to costs from an institution which was complaining of being very short of money.

6. I then reverted to the question of accountability. I said that I could understand why he might think that it was difficult to object to a programme confined to that issue. But he should have regard to the motives of those who were promoting the interest in this subject. It was not a matter of widespread public interest, and the arrangements for accountability, both on expenditure and on activities, were good. Parliament had always accepted that

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parliamentary control in these areas was entrusted to Ministers, and there were no indications of general dissatisfaction with that position. Mr. Cook was exploiting this issue as a vehicle for promoting the campaign, in which he was associated with Duncan Campbell, to discredit the intelligence services and damage their effectiveness. The BBC had to consider very seriously whether it should lend its authority to this campaign. The BBC should guard against the possibility that it was being exploited by Mr. Campbell and others. This did not mean that I regarded Tom Mangold as anything other than an over-enthusiastic investigative journalist, though there were contacts between Tom Mangold and Campbell and his associates which were worrying, and it was possible that Mangold might be being unconsciously exploited. But that was not the point: the point for the Director General was whether the BBC should lend its authority, even by putting out a programme on accountability, to a campaign whose motivation was to discredit and damage the intelligence services.

7. Sir Ian Trethowan promised to reflect on what I had said and to be in touch again later.

8. Sir Ian Trethowan said that he had informed the new Chairman of the BBC about the preparation of this programme, and Mr. Howard had discussed the matter with the Panorama team in the course of a visit to Lime Grove. Sir Ian Trethowan did not tell me what Mr. Howard's view was.

9. I am sending copies of this minute to Mr. Halliday (Home Office), Mr. Walden (FCO), Mr. Norbury (MOD) and Mr. Harrington (NIO).



(Robert Armstrong)

29th July, 1980

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