

Confidential

Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Board of Governors

to discuss "Real Lives: At the Edge of the Union"

in the Board Room, B.H., on 30th July 1985

Present: Stuart Young (in the Chair)
Sir William Rees-Mogg
Lady Faulkner
Alwyn Roberts
Watson Peat
Sir John Johnston
Jocelyn Barrow
Daphne Park
Malcolm McAlpine
Lady Parkes
Lord Harewood
Dr. James Kincade (as observer: appointed National
Governor for Northern Ireland
1st August 1985)

Michael Checkland	Deputy Director-General
Richard Francis	Managing Director, Radio
Bill Cotton	Managing Director, Television
Alan Protheroe	Assistant Director-General
John Wilkinson	Director of Public Affairs
Brian Wenham	Director of Programmes, Television
James Hawthorne	Controller, Northern Ireland

David Holmes	The Secretary
Andrew Joynes	Head of Secretariat

The Chairman apologised for calling a special meeting of the Board of Governors at short notice. This had meant that a number of his colleagues had been called back from holiday. He was particularly grateful to Lady Faulkner, who was making what he described as a "return visit", and said he would particularly value her advice and counsel on this occasion. The Chairman welcomed Dr. James Kincade, National Governor-Designate for Northern Ireland, and said that, since Dr. Kincade would have taken up his responsibilities by the projected transmission date of this programme, he thought it would be useful for him to witness that day's discussions. The Chairman then invited the representatives of Board of Management to give their views of the programme "Real Lives: At the Edge of the Union".

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Michael Checkland said the programme had been produced by the Documentary Features Department, and was scheduled to be transmitted the following Wednesday (7th August). The production team had remained in contact with senior management in Northern Ireland throughout the preparation and the filming of the programme, but had not adhered, in the strictest sense, to the prescribed referral procedures - they had not referred the project either to A.D.G. or D.G., on the grounds that it had already been fully cleared by B.H. Belfast. In this sense, there had been what Mr. Checkland described as a "technical foul", and he asked Governors to accept that management would ensure that proper referral procedures applied in future. Mr. Checkland said that, if the project had been referred to A.D.G., it would almost certainly have been cleared for production once he had ascertained that his senior colleagues in Northern Ireland had been consulted. The programme included a certain amount of news footage, and any filming that had been carried out in Northern Ireland had been cleared at all points with security officials in the province. Mr. Checkland said that, if the production team had observed the strict referral procedures, it was unlikely that quite so much space would have been devoted to the programme in the "Radio Times". There had been a press showing of the programme the previous Friday and - following a front page article in the "Sunday Times" - another press showing on Sunday afternoon.

Alan Protheroe said that "At the Edge of the Union" was one of a number of programmes produced for a distinguished documentary series, "Real Lives". It contrasted two men, Martin McGuinness and Gregory Campbell, who embodied the political extremes in Northern Ireland. The programme had

been produced by Paul Hamann, whose experience of Northern Ireland was extensive, and it showed the apparent irreconcilability of political extremists in the province. In Mr. Protheroe's view, the programme clearly demonstrated the polarisation of political attitudes in Northern Ireland during the last decade and half. The two protagonists in the film were in many ways similar: they were young family men, teetotallers, church-goers, and both were elected members of the Northern Ireland Assembly - although Martin McGuinness, who was widely believed to be Chief of Staff of the IRA, had not taken his seat. McGuinness had been convicted in the Republic of a number of security offences, but had received no major conviction in Northern Ireland itself; in strictly political terms, he had played a role in the recent local government elections as a legitimate member of an active political party, Sinn Fein. In the course of the film, McGuinness was clearly challenged on the question of his rumoured role as IRA Chief of Staff, and in reply he had rehearsed the traditional "Provo" argument that an answer to this question would help British Intelligence. He had also made clear that he did not see the ballot box as a substitute for the Armalite rifle - that is, for terrorist activity.

Alan Protheroe said that Gregory Campbell's hard-line Loyalist views were clearly shown in the film, which included scenes of the police escort which accompanied him and his family everywhere. The programme conveyed the intrinsic tension of the social and political situation in Londonderry, and Campbell's warning that a British withdrawal from Ulster would be followed by a civil war was underlined by his remark that "the only good IRA man is a dead one". Alan Protheroe said he believed the film illustrated the deep divide between extremists in both communities in Northern Ireland, and he did not doubt that it had been made with great care and in accordance with BBC journalistic practice. It had to be said, however, that if the proper referral procedures had been observed, the BBC Governors would probably not be discussing the programme in this special session: mischievous action by the "Sunday Times" had in a sense taken the BBC by surprise, and this was regrettable.

Michael Checkland then drew attention to the resolution of the Board of Governors dated 8th January 1981, in which they undertook, in what was now an Annex to the Licence and Agreement, "to ensure that programmes maintain a high general standard in all respects (and in particular in respect of content and quality), and to provide a properly balanced service which displays a wide range of subject matter." He said that in the same resolution the Board "recall that it

has always been their object to treat controversial subjects with due impartiality, and they intend to continue this policy in the Corporation's news services and in the more general field of programmes dealing with matters of public policy". In addition, the Board accepted that "so far as possible the programmes for which they are responsible should not offend against good taste or decency or be likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder, or be offensive to public feeling." These were the constitutional obligations which the Governors observed in respect of programme standards, and by which they maintained the editorial independence of the BBC. Mr. Checkland said that Board of Management had viewed the programme the previous day and discussed it in the light of the undertakings contained in the 1981 resolution. Their general conclusion had been that the programme would not evoke sympathy for those advocating terrorist action, and was more likely to leave the audience with an impression of sadness at the difficulty of bringing about reconciliation between communities in which such extremists were active. Mr. Checkland pointed out that the current press coverage of the programme had originated with an article in a newspaper owned by Rupert Murdoch; this had been followed by the Prime Minister's answer to a hypothetical question about terrorist interviews, and then by a letter from the Home Secretary to the BBC Chairman which contained an unprecedented request that the BBC should not show the film. The Home Secretary had not seen the film himself, and an early version of his letter had been released to the press. Mr. Checkland said that if - in these circumstances - the BBC did not transmit the film, Governors should ask themselves what the effect would be on the media's future ability to transmit material relating to terrorism; what the effect would be on the BBC's actual and perceived independence; and what the effect would be on the morale of staff working in editorial areas.

Brian Wenham pointed out that the context in which the programme was now being discussed would undoubtedly change the context in which it was viewed on air: even before the Home Secretary's letter had arrived the previous day, Board of Management had concluded that it would be seen as "the programme of the row". Therefore, said Mr. Wenham, the Television Service were considering whether, if the programme were transmitted, it should be prefaced by an introduction pointing out its documentary nature, and followed by a debate on the general issue of television's coverage of terrorism - an issue which had been given particular relevance by recent government statements. An experienced studio broadcaster, John Tusa, had been (provisionally) invited to chair a discussion between a number of responsible representatives of the political parties, the legal profession, the police and security forces, and the broadcasters themselves. Mr. Wenham said he believed this issue was now an essential subject for television debate.

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The Chairman thanked management representatives for their views, and pointed out that, since the Home Office had indicated that Mr. Brittan would want to see the programme, if its transmission was agreed to, he had said there would be no objection to this by the BBC. Given the urgency of the matter, he had asked the Home Secretary to write to him before he viewed the programme. The Chairman said the first question to which Governors should address themselves was whether it was "right and proper" for them, as a Board, to view the programme ahead of transmission. He reminded colleagues of the convention that Governors do not view programmes before they are transmitted; he described this as a wise convention, and one which it would be foolhardy to dismiss lightly, since this would establish a precedent for the future. He pointed out, however, that the Home Secretary was writing in the light of his responsibility for law and order rather than broadcasting; Governors might feel that, given the tone of his letter, it would justify their viewing the programme - on an exceptional basis. The Chairman said he personally would find it difficult to give management his wholehearted support if he had not seen the film ahead of transmission. Sir John Johnston noted that, in the standard letter to new BBC Governors, the explanation for the "non-viewing" convention was that Governors did not want to become involved in editorial decisions; the letter made clear, however, that Governors retained the right to view programmes in advance. Sir John Johnston went on to ask whether the Home Secretary was in effect transferring his own undoubted right to ban a programme to the BBC Board of Governors themselves.

Lady Faulkner said that, on a previous occasion, she had advocated viewing a programme in advance, but the majority of Governors had taken the opposite view at that time. This time, however, she felt she could not support a viewing ahead of transmission. She said the Home Secretary had taken his stand on the question of the threat to security posed by the programme, and on security matters he was a great deal more knowledgeable than BBC Governors: since the Board could not claim to share his knowledge of security, there was little point in viewing the programme in advance.

Alwyn Roberts said he had no strong feelings about viewing the programme in advance. He felt, however, that the Chairman's statement that matters of law and order might justify breaking the "non-viewing" convention was rather too wide. If the Board were to view the programme, said

Mr. Roberts, it should be on the grounds that the Home Secretary's letter represented an unprecedented intervention in the BBC's editorial process.

Jocelyn Barrow said that, if the Governors were to take responsibility for the content of BBC programmes, they should have the right to decide when the "non-viewing" convention should be suspended. In reply to the Chairman, she said the convention could be protected in future by a clear statement that the Board had not lightly abandoned it on this occasion. Mr. Francis drew attention to a previous Board's experience of "Yesterday's Men", parts of which had been viewed in advance. Governors at that time had found it impossible to dissociate themselves from the row which had followed that programme's transmission.

The Vice-Chairman said he believed the present situation was exceptional, and they had no choice whatsoever about viewing the programme in advance. He could not support rejecting the Home Secretary's request - which had been made on the grounds of the programme's supposed threat to security - without seeing the programme for himself.

Watson Peat noted that the Home Secretary had not seen the programme before he wrote his letter, and he wondered whether he would have written in such terms after seeing it. The Chairman pointed out that Mr. Brittan's letter suggested that, whatever material the programme contained, security was threatened by the fact of an interview in which an individual expressed support for terrorism. Lady Faulkner observed that their deliberations would affect the way television handled the subject of terrorism in future: with Sinn Fein a legitimate and active political party, this debate was of vital importance. James Hawthorne said the argument that security was threatened by a programme was commonly used in Belfast, and the BBC usually replied that it did not accept there was a direct connection between the transmission of objective, responsible programmes and the security situation in the province. The fact, however, that it was the Home Secretary who was now deploying the security argument was new and without precedent. Lady Faulkner added that she had always believed there was a connection between transmitted programmes and the security situation.

Malcolm McAlpine said that, if the Board did indeed reserve its right to view programmes in advance, that right should be actual rather than imagined. However, he admitted he was

worried that the argument about becoming "a little bit pregnant" might apply in these circumstances. Traditionally, said Mr. McAlpine, Governors had delegated their editorial responsibility to management, and he supported the view that, since the Board had no knowledge of security matters, they were not competent to judge whether the programme threatened security.

Daphne Park felt the credibility of the Board was at stake, and that it would be irresponsible in the highest degree not to view the programme in advance. She believed it would be "mad" to decide the matter on secondhand evidence, and would make nonsense of the Governors' constitutional claim to have ultimate editorial responsibility for BBC output.

Lady Parkes shared some of her colleagues' reservations about their expertise in the matter of security, and admitted to "grave anxiety" about crossing the boundaries of editorial responsibility. There were many programmes, and many items in news bulletins, which it could be argued had life and death implications: to view in advance on this occasion might permit pressure to be applied in future. Jocelyn Barrow said it had been announced that the Governors were meeting to take a decision about "Real Lives"; they could not take that decision without seeing the programme, and she pointed out that, although their secondhand information was better than the Home Secretary's, it was still secondhand.

The Chairman reiterated that he had called a special meeting because of the unprecedented nature of the Home Secretary's letter. Richard Francis pointed out that it was the terminology of the letter which was unprecedented, and that pressure had been put on the BBC by government on a number of occasions during the previous decade - usually, however, in private rather than in public. It was the vehemence of the language used by Mr. Brittan in a letter parts of which had now been published which was without precedent. The Chairman reminded colleagues that "Newsnight" was due to interview the Prime Minister that evening.

Bill Cotton said he did not believe that Governors should view the programme in advance, since this would establish a precedent which could have a serious effect on the morale of producers. He said the editorial nature of this particular documentary was contained in the title of the series, "Real Lives": the programme portrayed actual individuals who held extremist views, and in that sense it conformed to the BBC's duty to educate and inform its public. If the Home

Secretary genuinely believed the programme constituted a security risk, said Bill Cotton, he had the power to ban it.

Lady Faulkner reminded her colleagues that they were discussing the basic issue of whether the advocates of terrorism should appear on television. The Chairman agreed that their discussion could have implications for the future freedom of the media, and that it might be the beginning of censorship if the terms of the Home Secretary's letter were accepted without question. Jocelyn Barrow said the fact that the Home Secretary had the power to ban a programme should not obscure the fact that Governors had the responsibility for deciding what should be broadcast.

Lord Harewood said he had listened with great interest to a discussion which had concentrated on principles and issues. He said he was wholeheartedly in agreement with the Vice Chairman, and could not support taking a decision about the way to reply to the Home Secretary's request without seeing the programme. In Lord Harewood's view the gravity of the present circumstances justified suspending the "non-viewing" convention on this occasion. He thought the terms of the Home Secretary's letter were unfortunate, in that they might have provoked the BBC's programme makers and its senior editors into an over-defensive attitude, but he believed the credibility of the Board of Governors depended on their viewing the programme in advance.

Alwyn Roberts said that, while his natural instinct would be to agree with those Governors who argued against viewing the programme, on this occasion he felt they should see the programme before transmission. If the Board then decided to show the film on the grounds that it was the BBC's duty to help the public make up its mind about complex political and social issues, that decision by the Board would carry greater weight if they had seen the film. The justification for breaking with precedent was that an unprecedented and gravely-couched letter had been sent by the Home Secretary to the Chairman of the BBC.

Watson Peat pointed out that a BBC news bulletin the previous evening had made clear the Home Secretary's right to ban the programme if he felt it threatened security, and he asked whether there was any point in the BBC Governors trying to judge the programme in the light of the security argument. Malcolm McAlpine supported this view.

Sir John Johnston said he respected management's view that the programme was responsible and objective. However, in terms of the public's perception of the Governors' role, it would be indefensible if they did not see the film: the Home Secretary had made the decision about the programme's transmission the entire responsibility of the Governors, and this would justify breaking the "non-viewing" convention on this rare occasion.

The Chairman said the consensus of the discussion seemed to be firmly in favour of seeing the film in advance. Bill Cotton reminded them that the programme had already been seen by very senior BBC executives, who felt it was in order to transmit it. He warned that, if precedent were broken on this occasion, it might well lead to the Board having to view other such programmes in future. James Hawthorne reminded Governors that "At the Edge of the Union" was not in any sense unique in the fact that it interviewed an individual who supported political violence: Sinn Fein had more than fifty elected representatives who were active at all levels of Ulster politics, and all of them maintained the views that Martin McGuinness had expressed in the programme.

The Chairman then established that a majority of the Board were in favour of watching the programme before transmission. Lady Faulkner reminded them that their discussion that morning had concentrated on the responsibilities of the broadcasters as against the responsibilities of the Home Secretary. She asked colleagues, when viewing the film, to remember their responsibilities towards the people of Northern Ireland, and to envisage how the programme might be viewed in the province. Alan Protheroe asked Governors to read the Home Secretary's letter again, and to judge whether the film would in fact give the publicity and succour to terrorists that Mr. Brittan claimed.

The Chairman said it should be clearly recorded that the Board were viewing the film under exceptional circumstances; they were not rejecting the principle that Governors did not normally view programmes ahead of transmission. The programme was then shown to Governors.

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After lunch, the Chairman invited Governors to give their views of the programme. The Vice-Chairman said he had watched the programme with an open mind, believing it was his duty to do so. He admitted that he had been worried earlier that morning that a serious failure had occurred in the referral procedure: he could not accept that this failure was just a "technical foul", and he regretted the absence of that considered advice from the Director-General which Governors would have been given if the referral had gone through. He regretted also that the Northern Ireland Governor had not been asked for her advice at an earlier stage, and felt sure she would have been consulted if the strict referral procedures had been observed. The Vice-Chairman said he believed the programme was "totally unacceptable", showing itself to be sympathetic to the IRA, and misleading as to the nature of that organisation. He believed the programme would be misleading for the mainland audience - in that the views of the moderate majority of Ulster's Catholic community had been ignored - and disruptive to community relations in the province itself.

Lady Faulkner said she had been "frightened" before viewing the film, and had feared she might be put in the position of saying that a network programme which might not have been acceptable to the Northern Ireland audience should in fact be shown as scheduled. As it was, said Lady Faulkner, she had been "utterly horrified" by the film, which she described as "inflammatory", and which might well lead individuals in Northern Ireland into adopting "defensive measures in violent form". Lady Faulkner did not accept that this was a balanced film, and believed it was slanted sympathetically to the IRA point of view. As an example, she indicated the newsreel footage of the RUC breaking up a Catholic demonstration in 1968: in the interests of balance, the programme should have included news film of the aftermath of 1970 and the stoning of the police in the Bogside.

Sir John Johnston said he was extremely worried by the film, and he referred to Alan Protheroe's suggestion that they should look again at the Home Secretary's letter as they viewed the film. Sir John said he had done so, and he had to say that as a result of seeing the programme he would find it very difficult to reply to the fourth and fifth paragraphs of the Home Secretary's letter. Sir John said that, while the programme might have portrayed the truth about Martin McGuinness and Gregory Campbell, he was worried at its overall suggestion that society in Northern Ireland consisted of two embattled camps, each prepared to shoot at the other.

Alwyn Roberts said the film scared him - as the reality of Northern Ireland scared him. The programme had not set out to give a comprehensive picture of society in Northern Ireland. It had set out to show the reality of political extremism, and in that it had succeeded. Mr. Roberts agreed that some of the newsreel footage could be adjusted, but he felt the programme would indeed educate and inform a mainland audience about the intractable nature of the Ulster problem, and would not lead anybody to believe there were easy solutions in Northern Ireland. "At the Edge of the Union" portrayed the tragedy of Northern Ireland, and Mr. Roberts believed broadcasters would be distorting the truth if they ignored extremism. He said the programme should be shown as scheduled, with some amendments.

Malcolm McAlpine said his reaction was simple: "No show!" He could not accept that the BBC should give publicity to those who advocated violence to achieve political ends.

Watson Peat said he also believed the programme should not be shown. He felt the "soft" questioning of Martin McGuinness had enabled him to adopt what Mr. Peat described as a "Scargillite" demeanour, blaming others for the deaths caused by the IRA. In Mr. Peat's opinion, modifying the programme would not solve the problem of its implicit imbalance.

Lady Parkes said she could not add to what had already been said by the Vice-Chairman and Lady Faulkner. She believed, however, that the programme had been made in good faith, and said she was worried about any "No Show" decision because of the implications for the BBC's future editorial independence. She said that the programme "probably ought not to be shown".

Daphne Park strongly supported the Vice-Chairman and Lady Faulkner, and felt the programme was provocative to both communities in Northern Ireland. She said she was particularly offended by the "domestication of the IRA", showing them as "lovable people with babies". The programme should not be shown.

Jocelyn Barrow agreed with this view. She felt the programme was "sinister" and should not be shown.

Lord Harewood said he was a "passionate no-show-er". In his view, this was an irresponsible programme, "smooth and odious....hateful".

Invited by the Chairman to express a view, Dr. James Kincade said it was sometimes difficult for citizens of Northern Ireland, who were "inside the frame", to see the entire picture when it came to programmes for the networks. He had no such difficulty on this occasion, and believed this was an inflammatory programme. If it were shown as scheduled, he felt he would have to consider his position as a BBC Governor.

The Chairman said he would not comment on the programme, but felt he had to express his surprise and consternation at that stage of the discussion. If the Board were to go against the advice of management and decide not to show the film, they would be perceived as acting for the wrong reasons, and succumbing to government pressure. The consequences for the BBC would be "immeasurable". Daphne Park said the Board should not be deterred from doing what was right because of the interpretation which might be put upon their decision; they should not be "blackmailed by their wish to be solid with management". The Chairman repeated that he was concerned about the implications for the future of the BBC.

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Michael Checkland reminded Governors that the programme had taken as its theme the irreconcilable differences between extremists in Northern Ireland. It certainly contained facts which were unpalatable and - to use Lord Harewood's word - "odious". Nonetheless, these were facts. Mr. Checkland repeated his belief that, if the programme were shown, the audience would feel an "extreme sadness" about the polarity between the extremes in Northern Ireland. The Chairman observed that Governors were virtually unanimous in their own belief about the programme's likely effect.

Alan Protheroe reminded the Board that this programme did not set out to give the total picture of the situation in Northern Ireland. The programme's subject was the polarisation of attitudes in Ulster, which was an undeniable political fact. It did, indeed, portray two odious and frightening individuals. That one appeared to be charismatic was in the nature of the terrorist - and in the mould of such men as Grivas and Makarios. Mr. Protheroe asked Governors to bear in mind the BBC's careful and detailed coverage of Northern Ireland throughout a decade and a half, and pointed out that the production team had operated with the full knowledge of the security forces during the preparation of the programme. Mr. Protheroe

admitted there were sections of the programme which could be improved, but maintained that it made clear the true nature of the relationship between Sinn Fein and the IRA. With all due respect to Lady Faulkner, Mr. Alan Protheroe, there was nothing in the film which would come as a surprise to viewers in Northern Ireland. Mr. Protheroe reminded Governors that the national interest lay in the citizen's freedom to express views, however shocking, and the media's freedom to report those views in an honourable and careful manner. There would, without doubt, be international repercussions damaging to the BBC's reputation.

John Wilkinson urged Governors to listen to the considered advice of the two men in the room who had occupied the "hot seat" of Controller Northern Ireland: James Hawthorne and Richard Francis. James Hawthorne said he saw his job as giving advice and counsel to producers from London who might be preparing programmes about the province. He did not monitor the progress of productions in close detail, but acted as a point of responsible reference. Paul Hamann's approach to this programme had been "impeccable", and Mr. Hawthorne had supported his intention of making a "Real Lives" documentary about extremists in Northern Ireland. "At the Edge of the Union" was, in Mr. Hawthorne's view, a programme which would help the mainland audience understand some of the "darker passions" in Northern Ireland. It was, said Mr. Hawthorne, a real programme about real people. The Chairman replied that, while its approach might be entirely consistent with the "Real Lives" series, the context in which the programme would be seen had been changed utterly by the events of the past few days. Mr. Hawthorne said any decision not to show the programme would have implications for the BBC and for other broadcasting organisations, since it might affect editors' decisions about the way to report terrorism in Northern Ireland.

Richard Francis reminded Governors that during the previous decade he had been involved with coverage of Northern Ireland as a producer, as C.N.I., and as D.N.C.A. Throughout that time, he had sought to establish a responsible editorial framework against which interviews with members, and supporters, of terrorist organisations might be conducted on occasion. Any decision not to show the programme would change the criteria against which James Hawthorne and his senior colleagues in Belfast took their decisions. Mr. Francis reminded Governors that in the Republic of Ireland, under Section 31 of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the broadcasters were prevented from carrying any interviews with members of terrorist organisations: it might well be that the Home Secretary was asking the BBC to implement an equivalent

ban in Britain. The Chairman said that, in their discussions that day, Governors had not shown themselves to be opposed to any of the journalistic principles established by the BBC during the previous decade: the reality was, however, that Governors did not like this particular programme. Bill Cotton reminded the Board that the press coverage of the previous two days had derived from a "press stunt" in which the Prime Minister had been persuaded to reply to a hypothetical question; a number of extremely responsible Fleet Street journalists had seen the programme at the previews, and none of them had said it should not be shown. Mr. Cotton said he was most worried by the apparent confrontation between Board of Management and Board of Governors, both of whom had taken near-unanimous views of the programme. He warned once again of the likely effect on the morale of the BBC's journalists and producers if there were a decision not to show the programme.

Sir John Johnston said he had been most worried by the implications of the Home Secretary's letter, and added that he could be persuaded to take the view that the programme should be shown with amendments. The Chairman said he could detect support for that view among some Governors. The Vice Chairman said he believed they had to take a decision "one way or the other": this was not a matter which could be fudged, since the programme was not truthful, and gave a misleading account of the IRA. Mr. Cotton said Governors should ask themselves whether it was the programme which was untruthful or Martin McGuinness as one of the film's protagonists: he felt the Board were in danger of confusing the message with the messenger. The Vice Chairman replied that he would make a comparison between the way McGuinness was treated in the film and a programme, say, which showed the commandant of a concentration camp as a decent family man. Jocelyn Barrow said she detected other sinister messages in the programme; she was concerned that it showed the British Army in a bad light, and that one sequence showed a black soldier at the head of an army patrol. Miss Barrow went on to say she did not believe that changing the context of the programme's transmission would have any effect on the way the audience viewed the film: an introduction and associated debate such as that described earlier by Brian Wenham would not change the audience's perception of the film itself.

The Chairman then established who among the Governors were "implacably opposed" to showing the film, and who felt it might be shown after amendment. He concluded that the majority of the Board were against the programme's transmission. Alwyn Roberts asked, with great regret, that his dissent from this decision should be recorded. He said he believed it would be a "grievous error" not to show the programme.

Sir John Johnston, Michael Checkland and The Secretary were then asked by the Chairman to draft a letter of reply to the Home Secretary which would convey the Board's decision as well as making it clear that Governors took a grave view of the terms in which Mr. Brittan's own letter had been couched. A copy of the Chairman's reply to the Home Secretary is attached to these minutes.

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AJ/AJP
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Released by the BBC under the Freedom of Information Act.



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

29 July 1985

Dear Stuart,

I was very glad to learn that you and your colleagues are considering whether or not to proceed with the broadcast of the proposed "Real Lives" programme involving Martin McGuinness and Gregory Campbell. This letter confirms the views which I asked Wilfred Hyde to convey on my behalf to the Corporation this morning.

May I first make it quite clear that I unhesitatingly accept that the decision to broadcast or refrain from broadcasting this programme must rest exclusively with the Corporation. It is no part of my task as the Minister with responsibility for broadcasting policy generally to attempt to impose an act of censorship on what should be broadcast in particular programmes. To do so would rightly be inconsistent with the constitutional independence of the BBC, which is a crucial part of our broadcasting arrangements.

I do, on the other hand, ^{also} have a Ministerial responsibility for the fight against the ever present threat of terrorism, and I would be failing in my duty if I did not let you and your colleagues have my considered views on the impact of this programme in that context.

It is clear that the "Real Lives" programme and the Radio Times article associated with it will enable McGuinness to advocate or justify the use of violence for political ends, and thus the murder and maiming of innocent people, before a huge public audience. He will, moreover, be doing so not in the course of a theoretical debate about terrorism, but as a prominent apologist of an organisation that is proud to have carried out such murders and such maimings and expresses its readiness and intention to carry out more. The BBC would be giving an immensely valuable platform to those who have evinced an ability, readiness and intention to murder indiscriminately its own viewers.

Quite apart from the deep offence that this would give to the overwhelming majority of the population and the profound distress that it would cause to families of the victims of terrorism, it would also in my considered judgment materially assist the terrorist cause. Recent events elsewhere in the world have confirmed only too clearly what has long been understood in this country: that terrorism thrives on the oxygen of publicity. That publicity derives either from the successful carrying out of terrorist acts or, as a second best, from the intimidation of the innocent public and the bolstering of faltering supporters by the well publicised espousal of violence as a justifiable means of securing political ends.

What is at issue is not the overall balance of the programme, or whether its impact on reasonable people is to make such people more hostile to terrorism than they are already. Even if the programme and any surrounding material were, as a whole, to present terrorist organisations in a wholly unfavourable light, I would still ask you not to permit it to be broadcast. For the gain that the terrorists would

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Stuart Young, Esq

secure by the broadcast would not be the conversion of large numbers of people to their cause, but the opportunity to boost the morale of their supporters and to alarm the innocent majority who have every reason to fear their intentions.

It must be damaging to security and therefore wholly contrary to the public interest to provide a boost to the morale of the terrorists and their apologists in this way. I cannot believe that the BBC would wish to give succour to terrorist organisations and it is for this reason that I hope that you and your colleagues will agree on reflection that the "Real Lives" programme should not be broadcast.

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British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

from the Chairman, Stuart Young

30th July 1985

In the light of your letter of 29th July, in which you outlined your reservations concerning the BBC programme "Real Lives: On the Edge of the Union", the Board of Governors met today in special session.

Because of the circumstances arising from your letter, the Governors - quite exceptionally - decided to view the programme before transmission.

We would now wish to discuss with you the profound issues raised in your letter to me. We are anxious that those discussions be conducted in a neutral and dispassionate climate.

Having seen the programme, the Board of Governors believe it would be unwise for this programme in the series "Real Lives" to be transmitted in its present form: the programme's intention would continue to be misread and misinterpreted.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

STUART YOUNG

The Rt. Hon. Leon Brittan, Q.C., M.P.,
Secretary of State for the Home
Department,

Home Office,
50 Queen Anne's Gate,
London, SW1H 9AT.

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