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293. "REAL LIVES: AT THE EDGE OF THE UNION"

The Chairman read out the following statement, which had been drawn up before the Board's meeting that morning and which it was proposed to issue, over his and D.G.'s signatures, at 1.00 p.m. that day:

"The Board of Governors met today and considered the 'Real Lives' programme. The Board of Governors and Board of Management confirmed that the full system of reference up to the Director-General did not operate during its making. Both Boards considered this a serious failing and the Director-General has reinforced to all staff the vital importance of these procedures being strictly observed at all times. The Director-General informed the Board of Governors that the amendments originally required to the

programme by the Board of Management had been dealt with and the programme had been revised in accordance with his instructions and that the programme was now ready for transmission. The Board of Governors now believe that the general climate is such that an early showing of the programme is acceptable. They have, therefore, agreed with the Director-General that it should be transmitted during the second half of October. The new date will be announced by the Director-General at a later date."

The Chairman said it was felt the statement said all that needed to be said and he made an earnest request that neither Governors nor members of management and staff should make any public comment on it. If it became necessary for any comment to be made he believed it was for himself alone to make it. It was to be hoped that the Corporation could now put the episode behind it.

There was a brief discussion about the use of the word "amendments", after D.G. had pointed out that in his statements on the matter he had spoken of "additions". D.G., however, accepted the Chairman's point that the terms were not contradictory.

The statement was agreed.

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Released by the BBC under the Freedom of Information Act.

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302.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

(a) Meeting of the GAC: The "Real Lives" Controversy

The Chairman said he had received a letter from Lord Caldecote, Chairman of the GAC, concerning the "Real Lives" controversy. Lord Caldecote had apparently received a number of requests to call a special meeting of the GAC after the decision in August to suspend the screening of "Real Lives: At the Edge of the Union". Following discussions with the Secretary, Lord Caldecote had called a meeting of the GAC steering committee. The steering committee had pinpointed three aspects of the controversy: whether the film should be shown; the apparent difficulties between the Board and the Board of Management; and the problems between the Board and the Government.

The steering committee had concluded it would not help the BBC if a special meeting of the GAC was called, but had asked that the next scheduled meeting on 30th October be devoted to the issue. It had also asked to view the film whether or not it had been screened. Lord Caldecote's letter went on to ask that as many Governors as possible be present on 30th October.

The Chairman noted that the programme would have been screened by the 30th. To that extent, the core of the problem was resolved. If there was no constitutional objection, he would like to attend the next meeting of the steering committee, scheduled for 9th October, to let members know some of the background to the matter. He was concerned that the meeting on 30th would turn into a "kangeroo" court and re-open the entire controversy. The Secretary said he thought Lord Caldecote's letter was perhaps less well expressed than his summing up had been at the steering group itself. The intention was to help the BBC, not to harm it. The GAC had the constitutional role of proffering advice to the Board. The Secretary did not believe the next meeting need be too difficult.

The Chairman said a good deal of thought would need to be given before 30th as to how the meeting should be handled. Mr. Roberts said it would be reasonable for both the Chairman and D.G. to make statements at the beginning of the meeting, admitting there was disagreement but stressing the areas of agreement. It would be important to avoid any criticism of the Board by management or any suggestion that the Board gave in to Government pressure. It was true that some members of the GAC would speak with an eye to their reputations outside, but he believed the overall ethos of the meeting would prevent it becoming too bloody.

Sir William Rees-Mogg objected to the request in Lord Caldecote's letter that the Chairman issue a three-line whip to Governors. The Secretary felt the expression had not been fully intended. One of the members of the steering committee had simply asked whether the GAC could be sure that Governors would be present. The Secretary had explained that, in constitutional terms, the secretariat reported proceedings to the Board. Lord Caldecote had then said he would ask the Chairman to ensure that those Governors who were able to attend did so. The Chairman agreed that was a reasonable request. He did not, however, believe it would be constitutionally proper for members of the GAC or of Broadcasting Councils to set a precedent by viewing the programme before transmission.

Mr. Peat said he faced a difficult meeting of the Broadcasting Council for Scotland that evening. Two of its members had political interests to consider and would be concerned to make some public statement on the affair.