

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Prime Minister (2)

You may be interested to see
the text of these letters.

HOME OFFICE

MBA 30/7

QUEEN ANNE'S GATE

LONDON SW1H 9AT

30 July 1985



Dear Mark,

PROPOSED BBC PROGRAMME "REAL LIVES"

... I attach a copy of a letter which the Home Secretary has received this evening from the Chairman of the BBC. Notwithstanding the slightly ambiguous formulation of the penultimate paragraph we have been told off the record by the BBC that the "Real Lives" programme has been put on the shelf. The BBC are publishing this letter this evening together with the Home Secretary's letter of 29 July to the Chairman.

... I also attach a copy of the reply which the Home Secretary is sending to the Chairman. I am informing the media this evening that the Home Secretary is writing on these lines. The Home Secretary intends to make no further public comment, at least for the present.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Jim Daniell (Northern Ireland Office).

Yours ever
Hugh

H H TAYLOR

Mark Addison, Esq



QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT

July 1985

2 Stuart,

Thank you for your letter. I am most grateful to you for letting me know of the Governors' decision, which I naturally welcome. I shall of course be happy to discuss with you the issues relating to terrorism, and the way it is handled on television, which were raised in my letter. My office will be in touch with yours to make the arrangements for the meeting.

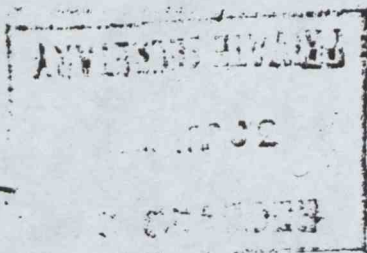
Yours,
Len

Stuart Young, Esq



British Broadcasting Corporation, Broadcasting House, London W1A 1AA

from the Chairman, Stuart Young



30th July 1985

Dear Leon,

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.

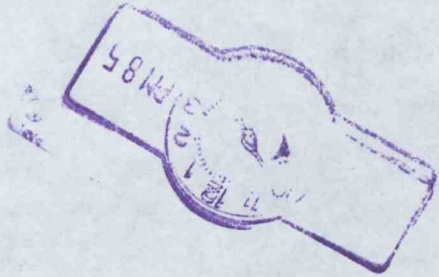
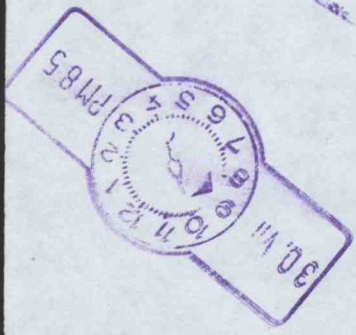
Having seen the programme, the Board of Governors believe it would be unwise for this programme in the series "Real Lives" to be transmitted in its present form: the programme's intention would continue to be misread and misinterpreted.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

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.





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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The Home Secretary welcomed the news that the BBC was looking again at the decision to show the film in view of press comment. He has made clear that he fully recognises the freedom of the BBC in these matters: the Government does not wish to exercise powers of censorship. However, as Minister responsible for law and order, spearheading the campaign against terrorism, he has conveyed to the BBC in the strongest terms that, if the press reports were correct, the programme appeared to be giving succour to terrorist organisations by the opportunity for public advocacy of terrorist methods by a prominent member of the IRA. This gives spurious legitimacy to the use of violence for political ends. It was contrary to the national interest that a programme of the kind apparently envisaged should be broadcast and he has asked the BBC not to do so.

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Prime Minister ^(C)

HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT

29 July 1985



The BBC Governors are
meeting tomorrow morning. We
may therefore know have a
decision from them by lunchtime.
MEA 29/7

Dear Mark,

PROPOSED BBC PROGRAMME "REAL LIVES"

... I attach a letter which the Home Secretary has this evening sent to the Chairman of the BBC about the proposed Real Lives programme involving Martin McGuinness and Gregory Campbell. The BBC have been told that the Home Secretary does not intend to publish this letter at present but will reconsider this in the light of the BBC's final decision about whether the programme should go out. I am sending a copy of this letter to Jim Daniell (Northern Ireland Office).

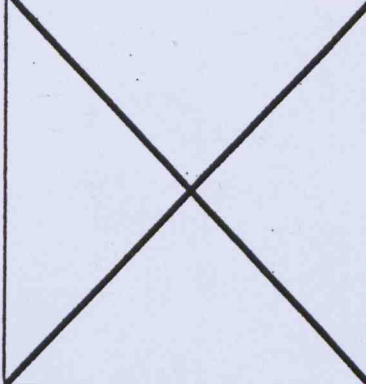
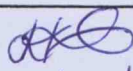
Yours ever,

Hugh Taylor

H H TAYLOR

Mark Addison, Esq

A The National Archives

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