

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 6th August 1985

Present: Stuart Young (in the Chair)

Sir William Rees-Mogg

Alwyn Roberts

Watson Peat

Dr. James Kincade

Jocelyn Barrow

Daphne Park

Sir John Boyd

Malcolm McAlpine

Lady Parkes

Lord Harewood

Alasdair Milne Director-General

David Holmes The Secretary

Patricia Hodgson Deputy Secretary (for part of the meeting)

Andrew Joynes Head of Secretariat

Released by the BBC under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Chairman thanked his colleagues for reassembling for a second special meeting to discuss "Real Lives", and said that it was clear - perhaps due to excessive press interest - that the BBC was "in turmoil". He had therefore taken the decision to invite the Director-General to talk to the Board following a lengthy meeting of Board of Management the previous day. The Chairman regretted, incidentally, that rather too much had been said to the press the previous week: this had contributed to the public impression of confusion, an impression which would be reinforced by the tendency of cuttings to become fact.

The Chairman said he felt it was necessary to produce a detailed statement (see Appendix) which would be agreed by all concerned, and which would have the effect of "clearing the slate". He felt it was important to get the truth told and to establish that the Governors were not, as they had been accused of being, puppets of government. He was sure that everyone in the room agreed that the editorial independence of the Corporation was sacrosanct, and that, having endured "the penance of tomorrow's strike", the BBC's Governors and Board of Management, represented by the Director-General, would have to discuss ways of going forward.

D.G. said he did not disagree with the draft statement which was being distributed to Governors. Lady Parkes pointed out that D.G. had not been at the Board meeting the previous Tuesday, and asked whether his Board of Management colleagues were likely to agree the statement as established fact. D.G. said that, having seen a draft copy of the minutes of that meeting, he was sure they would. The Chairman said Board members had read the statement before the Board convened, and that, by and large, there was no major disagreement with its wording: the Secretary had a number of emendations to make, but the Chairman would like to avoid, if possible, the sort of lengthy analysis of the statement which would result in a long meeting, and so increase press speculation. He said he hoped to finish the meeting before lunch, and he repeated that, in his opinion, the statement was needed "to get the record straight and to establish the facts of what happened" the previous Tuesday. The Chairman then invited D.G., who had arranged for members of Board of Management to be available to speak to Governors if necessary, to give his views on the situation.

D.G. thanked the Board for reassembling so swiftly and apologised for not being present the previous week: he had actually been on board ship when the attempt was first made

to contact him, and by the time he reached land it was impossible to get to England before the Board meeting had begun. D.G. said the question of referral of the "Real Lives" project had been raised the previous week, and he cited Section 3 of the Standing Instructions and Guidance for producers on the Coverage of Matters Affecting Northern Ireland..... "Interviews with individuals who are deemed by A.D.G. to be closely associated with a terrorist organisation may not be sought or transmitted - two separate stages - without the prior permission of D.G.". While A.D.G. had not been informed by the producing department about the programme until a very late stage, and D.G. himself did not know of it until the crisis broke, D.G. pointed out that the production team had been meticulous in their reference to James Hawthorne as C.N.I.

D.G. said that, during the week since the previous Board meeting, the reaction of staff to the Board decision had been "truly horrendous": D.G. drew particular attention to the staff reaction at Bush House, and said that, abroad, the reaction had ranged from glee in the Communist world to regret and dismay in the United States. D.G. said the current situation was that the BBC was "out of control in many respects". D.G. said he had seen the programme immediately he had returned, and his considered advice was that it was transmittable, with some amendments. That was also the opinion of Board of Management, who had spent the previous day trying to find some formula which would enable them all - Governors and managers - to prove to the outside world that the BBC was intrinsically unchanged, and also to reassure the staff about the Corporation's editorial independence.

At Board of Management, said D.G., a draft statement had been agreed, and he proceeded to read it to Governors (as he had read it to most of them individually on the telephone the previous day):

"The Chairman and the Director-General, together with the Board of Governors and the Board of Management believe there are additions which can be made to "Real Lives: At the Edge of the Union" before its transmission which do not affect the integrity of the programme. The Director-General is asking the Television Service to mount a major debate that will discuss the problems faced by the media when dealing with terrorism - not least the issues raised by the Home Secretary in his letter to the Chiarman. This debate will be transmitted in the first week of September 1985. "Real

Lives: At the Edge of the Union" will be shown during the autumn when the heat of the present controversy has diminished."

D.G. said it was his firm belief that a statement of this kind should be issued that day, or the trouble would get worse. The Chairman established that D.G. would have no objection to its being issued in conjunction with the longer statement of record to which he had already referred. D.G. pointed out that the Chairman's own letter of reply to the Home Secretary the previous week was also important in that it made clear the Board did not take lightly the implications of Mr. Brittan's original letter.

The Chairman then turned to the question of the four interviews he had given to BBC reporters after the Board meeting the previous Tuesday. He felt the television interviews had been cut and distorted, so that the importance of the Board's reaction to the Home Secretary's letter had been lost. The Secretary pointed out that the radio interview for "World Tonight" had been played in full, and that the transcripts of the uncut interviews were to be published in "Ariel" that week. The Chairman said he was very concerned that his fellow-Governors, and BBC staff, should know exactly what he did say in the full interviews.

Miss Park asked D.G. why those members of Board of Management who were present at the Board meeting the previous week had not taken the opportunity to correct some of the damaging beliefs which had become current in the previous few days. She also asked him what he had meant when he said earlier that the BBC was "out of control". D.G. replied that, while staff might be working, their morale was extremely low, and the portents were not good, particularly with a protest strike the next day. As to Miss Park's first question, D.G. pointed out that the Board of Management representatives had made it clear at the Board meeting that they disagreed fundamentally with the Governors' decision: on the other hand, none of them had sought to minimise the gravity and the painstaking nature of the Board's discussion the previous week. The Chairman said Board of Management's viewing of "Real Lives" had been during "a storm"; the Board's viewing had been during "a tornado". He regretted that press and media coverage had not reflected the true weight given to the Board's decision to react strongly to the Home Secretary's letter, or to the public atmosphere in which the Board had met the week before. The Chairman believed that the constitutional responsibility of the Board to take major

decisions about the BBC's output had not been adequately put across. Lord Harewood observed that such information was indeed difficult to put across if bits were cut out of interviews.

Miss Barrow said she took a very grave view of the whole matter. There seemed to be a resentment by producers - who, as editorial employees of the BBC, ought to be aware of the true constitutional position - at the fact that the Board has exercised its responsibilities.

Mr. Roberts took issue with Miss Barrow, and said producers resented the fact that the Board had acted wrongly, in their view, and in a way that damaged the reputation of the BBC. He said he had spent a lot of time with BBC production staff the previous week, and not one of them had objected to the Board exercising its responsibility: they did, however believe the Board had "got it badly and damagingly wrong".

The Chairman replied that "we do not profess only to get things right". In his opinion, the principal issue was whether the Board had exercised its constitutional rights in viewing the programme and deciding, by a vote of 10 to 1, that it should not be transmitted. He believed the only important question was whether, in the light of the Home Secretary's letter, the editorial independence of the Corporation had been at risk. The Chairman said he believed in collective responsibility, and he resented the myth that had been generated that the Board was only there "to sit on management at the behest of the government".

Mr. Roberts repeated his impression that staff were not challenging the constitutional position of the Board, but harboured a deep resentment that the Board had got it wrong. D.G. said he had met no member of staff who felt the Governors had acted unconstitutionally.

The Chairman observed that if the referral procedures had been observed properly, the Board would not have been faced with the problem the previous week, and the BBC would not have been taken by surprise by the article in "Radio Times". The Chairman repeated that it was important to get over to staff that the Board were "appointed to take decisions", and he went on to point out that a staff petition which he had received was not correct in its statement that Board of Management had been unanimous in their approval of the programme as made: if staff had been given the true facts,

they would not believe that the Board had gone diametrically against management. The Chairman also said the letter in "The Times" from staff in Documentary Features was "only half-true" in its assertion that the proper referral procedures had been followed; the proper procedures as they applied to producers might have been followed, but, overall, the referral system had not worked. The Chairman said this "half-truth" had been fostered by James Hawthorne (C.N.I.) in a number of press and media interviews. D.G. pointed out that Mr. Hawthorne had also clearly set out the Board's constitutional right to have taken their decision.

The Chairman said that, given the confusion about the true situation, he hoped the detailed statement would disseminate the facts to the public, and help to allay some of the staff misconceptions that were current. D.G. said that, when it came to discussing the way forward, it would be helpful to keep consideration of the Home Secretary's letter separate from discussion of the possible transmission of the "Real Lives" programme. The Chairman said the proposed meeting with the Home Secretary, who had said he was prepared to meet BBC representatives at any time, would be crucial to the whole debate, since it would give him an opportunity to refute the letter's implications of censorship. The Home Secretary, said the Chairman, had requested that the meeting should be with Governors: the Chairman had replied that he would be accompanied by D.G. and another management representative, probably A.D.G. After further discussion, it was agreed that the Vice-Chairman should also accompany the Chairman.

D.G. then referred to the draft statement which contained the formula which had been agreed by Board of Management the previous day, and which had been discussed with Governors on the telephone. Mr. McAlpine said this formula envisaged a transmission of the programme, and observed that "what we do with the programme depends on what we do with the BBC". He believed the distortion of the Chairman's television interviews had been "outrageous", and said that one of the fundamental questions that the BBC should answer was how it controlled its journalists, who had, after all, presented the Board with an ultimatum. Mr. McAlpine said his personal view was that no decisions should be taken until after the strike, and he observed that "the listeners won't miss a day's news - they might even be pleased".

There was further discussion about which statement - the detailed one or the shorter one which contained the management formula - should be considered. The Chairman

said he had invited the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to lunch and would have to leave the meeting shortly to go and greet him.

Miss Park asked D.G. to reply to Mr. McAlpine's question about controlling BBC journalists. D.G. said staff in any organisation could, and did, take the decision to go on strike. Mr. Peat said his concern was about the journalists' lack of professionalism; he was extremely disturbed at what he called the "distortion by editing" of the Chairman's interviews. D.G. said he would be going through the transcripts of these interviews, and agreed with Mr. Roberts, who intervened to point out that the proper place for discussion of the way the Board decision was handled in BBC output was A.D.G.'s News and Current Affairs meeting.

The Secretary then distributed draft copies of the detailed statement. Board members read the draft and suggested a number of amendments which were noted and incorporated into the draft. There was then discussion about how the statement should be released to the public, and whether it should be issued before or after the strike the following day. There was wide support for the suggestion that the BBC should book advertising space in a broad range of newspapers - to include those at the popular end of the range as well as the serious press - and in this way prevent the statement from being "eviscerated" by unfair editing. Mr. Peat asked whether there should be some attempt to link the BBC's position (of opposition to the censorship implications in the Home Secretary's letter) to that of the journalists, many of whom were making it clear that the strike was a protest at what the Home Secretary had done. The Chairman said the Board could not be expected to form any link with "errant" journalists, many of whom, again, had called for his own resignation as Chairman of the BBC.

The Chairman then asked his colleagues to turn their attention to D.G.'s draft statement, which contained the formula which management considered could smooth the way forward. The Chairman said they should discuss, first, the wording of the statement and, then, the timing of its release.

Sir John Boyd said he felt very worried that this draft statement envisaged the transmission of "Real Lives" in the autumn. Given the unscrupulous nature of the press, said Sir John, the Board would be "massacred" if a decision were

taken to show the film. This was a moment for strong leadership and authority said Sir John, and he added that, if the Board decided to show the film, "we would deserve to be murdered". The Chairman said he detected among his colleagues both support for, and disagreement with, such sentiments.

Lady Parkes said her anxiety was that the management statement was a hostage to fortune, and she pointed out that the climate in which the programme would be seen was as important as ever. She drew attention to the reference in the statement to a major debate on terrorism and the media, and asked what would happen if the Home Secretary, at his meeting with the Chairman and his colleagues, intimated that he did not want such a debate to be transmitted. Lady Parkes said she would not want to see the BBC's future options closed-off by this statement, and pointed out that it was still not certain that the programme's producers would agree to any amendments, while D.G. might not feel the amended programme was transmittable. D.G. said he was sure the proposed additions to the programme would be accepted by the producers, and he was confident that the programme as eventually prepared would be suitable for transmission.

At this point the Board adjourned for lunch.

* * * * *

When discussion resumed, consideration was given to transcripts of the Chairman's television interviews the previous week, and to a general assessment of the way news of the Board decision had been presented. The Secretary pointed out that the Press Office had taken care to ensure that the salient points in all the Chairman's interviews were communicated to newspapers. The Chairman said he believed BBC Television News had done "a great disservice" to the BBC by failing to run his interview in full. D.G. said all of these matters would be assessed in detail by the BBC's senior editors.

The Secretary reported to the Board that it had been ascertained by the Press Office that advertisements in the press, as envisaged before lunch, would cost some £7,000, but could only be placed with 48 hours' notice. He pointed out that the full, detailed statement was due to be carried in "Ariel" the following day, and said that Press Office had advised that if the statement appeared as an advertisement in

the national press, it might well be answered in similar fashion by the unions the following day. Mr. McAlpine said he was all for discovering whose side the unions were on. The Chairman thought it would be reasonable to request newspapers who might carry the statement - as a statement - the following day to run it in full. Mr. McAlpine said it might still be placed - as an advertisement - in full in those newspapers which had carried extracts from it the following day.

Lord Harewood urged once again that the Board should turn its attention to D.G.'s statement and to "the way forward" that it might represent. D.G. said he had already made clear his view that the formula he had described represented the way "to get the Board back on course"; it was his view that such a statement, or one very like it, should go out that afternoon. Lord Harewood observed that it was "not the Board which (was) off course, but the BBC which (was) shipping water".

Mr. McAlpine said he now had a different view of the management formula from that which he had held the previous day, when he had discussed it with D.G. on the telephone. He said he had less sympathy for the attempt at compromise, having heard how the Chairman's remarks had been distorted in BBC television interviews. Mr. McAlpine suggested the Board should do "absolutely nothing", and urged that no decision should be taken until the situation had settled. Mr. Peat added that, in the meantime, discussions could be held with the Home Secretary.

Miss Park referred to the major debate on the way television dealt with terrorism - envisaged in the management statement - and said the producers of such a debate would probably argue that they would need to include supporters of terrorist activity in their programme. She said that anything that met the Director-General's position would appear like capitulation on the Board's part. Miss Park advised waiting before any decision was taken. D.G. said, with regard to the debate, that it would not necessarily have to include the supporters of terrorism.

The Vice-Chairman felt the Board should leave to D.G. the question of such a televised debate. He would not feel happy, however, about putting out a statement which said the BBC would transmit "Real Lives" in the autumn. The climate in which transmission took place, said the Vice-Chairman, was as important as ever, and he agreed with Sir John Boyd that

any such statement would be misconstrued, and would plunge the BBC into new difficulties.

D.G. explained that what he had been seeking from the Board was some understanding that an assertion that the programme would be shown - it did not have to be in the autumn - would help resolve the present situation. Mr. Peat referred to the invitation which had been extended to Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein to appear on a BBC programme in Scotland (D.G. intervened to say that this invitation had been withdrawn) and supposed that, if it were indicated in any BBC statement that "Real Lives" would, after all, be broadcast, the conclusion might be drawn by irresponsible producers that other "flawed" programmes made without approval might eventually be transmitted. D.G. reminded Board that they were discussing what was to happen with reference to "Real Lives."

Mr. Roberts said he would like to make an observation in terms of general principle. What the Board should consider was whether a "soft focus" programme, which showed those extremists whose very existence demonstrated the intractable nature of Northern Ireland, was valid or not. The BBC's commitment, in the words of a former Director-General, was to parliamentary democracy; this assumed the existence of a politically mature electorate, and the BBC should feel bound to have confidence in that electorate's - that audience's - ability to discern the roots of hatred and moral inconsistency. Mr. Roberts proposed that any statement should make clear the BBC's intention, first, to hold discussions with the Home Secretary about the "cardinal issues" arising from his letter, and then to mount a major debate (not necessarily involving interviews with terrorists or their supporters) about the media and terrorism. In this way the BBC would not only fulfil its manifest duty towards the audience, but would go a long way towards reassuring staff that the previous week's Board decision had not been taken under any kind of political pressure. Mr. Roberts said the "Real Lives" programme could then be shown in a form which finally dispelled any doubts about its editorial balance. In this way, said Mr. Roberts, the two Boards - of Governors and Management - could be brought back together and the BBC would have been able to prove it was nobody's poodle.

In reply to Sir John Boyd, Mr. Roberts confirmed that he believed that, at a suitable time, the programme should be shown. To Lady Parkes, who had enquired whether any BBC statement that evening should indicate that the programme would go out, Mr. Roberts stated that it was not for them, as

"careful pragmatists", to choose the symbols of public debate: like it or not, public attention was focussed on the "Real Lives" programme, and it should be shown so as to restore the confidence of staff and to re-establish the perceived independence of the BBC.

Lord Harewood referred to the lengthy discussion which had already gone on about a detailed statement giving the facts of their decision the previous Tuesday. That statement reaffirmed the Board's belief in the editorial independence of the BBC, and since that - rather than the "Real Lives" programme - was, in his view, the ultimate question, he felt the detailed statement subsumed the necessity (which had been envisaged in the telephone conversations the previous day) of agreeing some sort of formula which would resolve matters. Lady Parkes said the detailed statement from the Chairman required maximum publicity, and any "lesser" statement might divert attention from it.

The Chairman said he hoped the detailed statement would bring about some much-needed calm, and asked D.G. whether control of the general situation could be re-established. D.G. replied that, in the end, the "Real Lives" programme remained at the very heart of the issue. All the public judgements - confused as they might have been - related to the question of the transmission of the programme. The Chairman felt there was a danger that the BBC would be landed with another "War Game" if it pinned its statements too closely to the fate of "Real Lives". D.G. said "Real Lives" had become the central symbol of the public debate about the BBC, and he asked the Board once again to accept his advice that it could be made into a transmittable film.

Miss Barrow reminded her colleagues that the Chairman's reply to the Home Secretary the previous week had spoken of the programme "in its present form", and she asked whether D.G. might go on television that evening, make full use of the detailed statement they had earlier agreed, and use the occasion to indicate that the programme would be transmitted at some time in the future. Sir John Boyd reminded colleagues that the Board had taken the firm decision the previous week not to transmit the programme, and he asserted that it would not be right for D.G. to go on television to say it would be broadcast. The Chairman judged that the credibility of the detailed statement depended on its having a clear run that evening, and he proposed that D.G. should not make any comment until after the strike, and should use the following Thursday to make his position clear.

At this stage, The Secretary asked Board to approve the introduction to the detailed statement, which he had just drafted. A note was handed to D.G. which indicated that BETA had voted overwhelmingly in favour of supporting strike action.

D.G. said he needed to ascertain the full feeling of the Board about any public indication as to whether or not the programme would ever be shown. The Vice-Chairman felt it was important for the Board not to seem to be trying to get out of the position adopted the previous week. He said he would favour a "not now" indication as to the programme's transmission, and would resist the formula of "not now but sometime". The Vice-Chairman went on to say that, if the proper referral procedures had been adopted, the Board might have had the opportunity of discussing whether the "soft" documentary approach to terrorism was editorially valid. He felt that some substantial discussions needed to take place before any attempt was made to amend the programme. D.G. said he agreed that discussions about documentary technique would be useful, and he ascertained once again from the Vice-Chairman that he was urging a "not now" indication as to the eventual transmission of "Real Lives", but not proposing a "never" indication.

D.G. summarised the position thus: he thought the programme ought to be transmitted and the majority of the Board did not. The Chairman said that, if the D.G. wanted to state publicly that he believed "Real Lives" should be broadcast, that would be "a resignation statement or a firing statement". The Chairman reminded D.G. that the detailed statement they had discussed earlier reaffirmed D.G.'s position as Editor-in-Chief, but that the Board's position as to the programme was what it had always been. D.G. replied that when the meeting started he had been hoping the Board would give him the authority to handle the programme and to decide, with his professional experience, when to transmit. Clearly, said D.G., he was wrong to have assumed that permission would be given.

Sir John Boyd said the situation was too dangerous to compromise the authority of the Board, and said that what was needed, in the face of "manufactured indignation" by a number of people with too much time on their hands, was strength of leadership.

The Chairman said the future of the BBC was a far bigger issue than the question of any programme or the future of any

individual, and he asked colleagues to "enable" D.G. to make a categorical statement about his own position as Editor-in-Chief. The Chairman said D.G. was being asked by Board to ignore the "peripheral issue" of the programme.

The Chairman then went on to make clear that he personally would not resign "whatever hits the fan". He said the Board had inherited the "Real Lives" problem because of poor management, and said that, nevertheless, he hoped D.G. was not thinking of resigning. He hoped also that none of his Board colleagues were thinking of going.

Mr. Roberts said his reply to the Chairman could only be "I hear you", and added that he could not give any assurances about his own position. If he did decide to resign, it would be done in a manner which caused the least possible embarrassment to those remaining on the Board.

Dr. Kincade said he regretted that his predecessor as National Governor for Northern Ireland had not been present to hear that day's discussion, and wondered whether sufficient attention had been paid to D.G.'s comment that the programme was a symbol to staff. The Chairman asked what alternative conclusions could have been reached by Board, placed as they were in a "Catch 22" situation created entirely by the mismanagement of BBC management. The Chairman reminded Dr. Kincade of his own threat to resign the previous week if the programme were transmitted as scheduled.

Miss Barrow said she felt it was important, at the end of the meeting, for the Chairman to say on behalf of the Board what had been agreed. The Chairman said the most important thing was that the detailed statement they had earlier discussed had been approved for release. There remained the question of when the D.G. would speak and what he would say. D.G. declared that he would decide this for himself: "I will make up my own mind what I say, and when".

At this stage, the Chairman was informed that members of Board of Management wished to meet the Board. D.G. said he would brief his management colleagues on what had transpired. The Chairman asked that it should be recorded that the Board would have been prepared to meet Board of Management, and that the facts contained in the detailed statement had been agreed by Board of Management. D.G. pointed out that some members of Board of Management, while

they did not dispute the facts, doubted whether that statement by itself would have the impact or the "public acclaim" that the Board intended, and might seem to be an act of self-justification. Lady Parkes said "We do not expect public acclaim."

The Chairman then made clear to his colleagues that he would be seeking an early meeting with the Home Secretary, and said he wanted Mr. Brittan to retract those statements which carried the implicit threat of censorship, so that they might be firmly and publicly refuted.

AJ/AJP
9.8.85

Released by the BBC under the Freedom of Information Act.

A STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BBC

The Board of Governors met today and further discussed the serious issues raised since last week in the case of "Real Lives: At The Edge of the Union". The Board believes that the reasons for their decision to stop the transmission of this film have been, to a great extent, misinterpreted and misunderstood. I am therefore issuing this account of what has passed. I hope it will lead to a clarifying of the Board's position as a firm defender of the BBC's independence from Government and all other interests.

The constitutional position is that the Board of Governors are the BBC and are therefore responsible for the editorial policy of the Corporation. They devolve the day-to-day management of the Corporation to a Director-General, whom they appoint, who is the editor-in-chief, and through him a Board of Management and other senior members of staff. Governors are appointed by the Queen in Privy Council on the recommendation of the Government of the day.

The Board of Governors have the right to view programmes before transmission, but, by custom, do so only in most exceptional circumstances. There is a very well tried and tested set of standing instructions for coverage of matters affecting Northern Ireland. Proposals to interview members of terrorist organisations and those who are, or may be, associated with such organisations can only be executed after complying with the regulations set out on page 52 of the News and Current Affairs Index. Such proposals must be made first to the relevant Head of Department "who will refer to Assistant Director-General and notify the Network Controller and Controller Northern Ireland. Interviews with individuals who are deemed by ADG to be closely associated with a terrorist organisation may not be sought or transmitted - two separate stages - without the prior permission of DG."

REAL LIVES : AT THE EDGE OF THE UNION

Contrary to what has been written in the press and spoken on the air, there has been a failure to observe the detailed guidelines at the highest level. The Assistant Director-General had the programme casually referred to him on one occasion; permission was not sought from him for transmission. The Director-General had no knowledge whatsoever of the programme. He first heard of it when he was on his holiday, after the subject had been raised by the press. The Board of Governors at no stage were informed of the existence of the programme.

After the programme had been shown to the press and raised in the headlines of the front page of the Sunday Times on 28th July, the Board of Management and the Board of Governors became deeply concerned about this matter.

On Monday, 29th July, the Board of Management collectively viewed the programme. In the absence of the Director-General on leave, the meeting was taken by the Deputy Director-General. He reported to the Chairman that the view of the Board of Management was that the programme required emendation, together with a suitable foreword describing its purpose. At the end of its transmission a programme should be shown discussing the issue of television and terrorism. With these three matters being dealt with, Board of Management wished the programme to be transmitted.

On the same day the Home Secretary conveyed a formal message to the Corporation, requesting the Board to stop the programme, releasing it simultaneously to the press. This was subsequently followed by his letter. He also indicated, to the Secretary, via Wilfred Hyde, Deputy Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, that if the Corporation were to show the programme he would like to see it before transmission. The Chairman telephoned the Home Secretary, requesting clarification and asking for the formal letter to be submitted as soon as possible, as such grave issues had been raised that a special meeting of the Board of Governors was being convened. The Home Secretary concurred, although the letter was not received until 7.10 p.m. that evening. The Board meeting took place the next day, Tuesday 30th July.

At the Board meeting the Deputy Director-General, Mr. Checkland, together with Mr. Protheroe (ADG) and Mr. Wenham (D.P.Tel.) explained the Management's position which was, as previously stated in this statement; subject to emendation, with a positive preface and the concluding debate, Management wished the programme to be transmitted. The Governors discussed for a considerable time the propriety of taking the exceptional stance of viewing the programme before transmission. This was ultimately agreed upon, as an extraordinary step, only because the Governors felt that it was important to see a programme when the Home Secretary was writing in unprecedented terms which questioned the security of the State, law and order, and the giving of succour to terrorists.

Speaking for myself, and for most members of the Board, the view before seeing the programme was that it would enable the Governors to support Management in its desire for transmission to take place. The Board is not competent to pronounce on matters of national security but believed that only on the basis of viewing the programme could it defend it if necessary and refer any issue of security back to the Home Secretary. The decision to view was agreed unanimously.

In the event, the Governors viewed the programme and were unanimous in expressing their concern that the programme could not be transmitted without emendation. This, of course, was also the Board of Management's view. However, there were differing views, extending from "no transmission at any price" down to one member of the Board who was prepared for transmission subject to the proposed amendments taking place. All Governors were concerned about lack of balance in the programme. The majority were equally concerned, in the present climate of high feeling, about its soft treatment of the extremist case. In the event, after many hours of discussion, the Board exercised its constitutional right in taking the editorial decision not to transmit the programme on a vote of 10 : 1.

Since that major discussion the Board's position has been misrepresented. The major issue is one of censorship. The Board objects most strongly to certain of the contents of the Home Secretary's letter of 29th July. It is most disturbed that the decision of the previous week has been seen as a yielding to Government pressure. The Chairman, together with the Director-General and responsible Management, are seeking a meeting with the Home Secretary, the intention being, when the atmosphere is calm and neutral, to debate these serious matters relating to the total unacceptability of censorship and the Board's commitment to the full independence of the Corporation.

The decision not to transmit the programme at the present time was because the Board considered the programme to be flawed in its present state and, even if amended, unsuitable for viewing in the prevailing atmosphere. The Board, therefore, had no alternative but to exercise its constitutional right and responsibility.

(Stuart Young)

6th August 1985