



CONFIDENTIAL

NOTE OF A MEETING

FOURTH CHANNEL/WELSH LANGUAGE - BROADCASTING BILL

2 + OFFICIALS PRESENT

The Secretary of State and PUSS(W), accompanied by [redacted] and me, attended a meeting at the Home Office on 10 July 1980. Also present were the Home Secretary and Mr Leon Brittan with Home Office officials. In addition Sir Michael Swann, Sir Ian Trethowan, Lady Plowden, Mr Pragnell, Dr Tegai Hughes and Mr Alwyn Roberts were present.

The Home Secretary said that he was grateful to Sir Michael and Lady Plowden and their colleagues for attending the meeting at such short notice. He explained that the burden of advice which was being received by the Government suggested that Mr Gwynfor Evans was absolutely serious about his intention to fast. His gesture at Report stage of the Broadcasting Bill had been repudiated. It was possible that another gesture would receive similar treatment; but he was clear that another gesture should be made. He thought it right to discuss this with the broadcasting organisations and to take their advice. There was considerable urgency because it was intended that the Secretary of State for Wales should indicate the Government's view at the Welsh Grand Committee debate on the Welsh language on 16 July.

The Secretary of State said that in Wales many people had changed their view on the question of Welsh language broadcasting over the years. Many would say in private that the Government's decision not to isolate Welsh language programmes on the fourth channel was the right decision but few would say so in public. He did not believe that that decision should be reversed and indeed there were sound practical reasons against doing so. However common ground seemed to be emerging not least with Mr Dafydd Elis Thomas who had made a thoughtful speech at Report stage. It seemed to him to be possible to take steps to make Mr Gwynfor Evans' position isolated and perverse. Many of the views being expressed in Wales suggested that the main complaint was the absence of a body which would ensure the provision of a comprehensive Welsh language service. People feared that there would be a casual scatter of programmes. He proposed the establishment of a new body - a Welsh language television committee - consisting of representatives from the BBC and IBA with perhaps 2 independent members and an independent chairman. It would be an advisory body but its recommendations would clearly carry considerable weight. It would be required to submit reports to Ministers and those reports would be laid before Parliament. He did not propose that the scheduling arrangements provided for already in the Bill should be changed but it would be logical if the scheduling arbitrator and the independent chairman were one and the same man. He appreciated that this proposition might cause practical problems, but the establishment of such a body would go a long way to defuse the situation.

/Dr Hughes



Dr Hughes said that although it would be a move in the right direction he doubted whether it would be sufficient to dissuade Mr Gwynfor Evans from his intended fast. Mr Evans had written to him after his recent appointment and had reiterated his demands. These included 25 hours of Welsh programmes per week on one channel; broadcasting of Welsh programmes under Welsh control; adequate financing; and a start to the fourth channel in Wales before the rest of the UK. Mr Roberts said that he too doubted if it would be sufficient. The body being proposed would have advisory responsibilities only. The Secretary of State agreed that it might not succeed in dissuading Mr Gwynfor Evans. However it seemed to him to be the only possible route that the Government could take. There was alarm about Mr Gwynfor Evans' intentions even within his own party. The Secretary of State also suggested that the committee would have a degree of "authority" in that it would make its report to the Government who had already indicated that it would be bound to accept its recommendations.

Sir Ian Trethowan said that it was not in anyone's interests for Mr Gwynfor Evans to pursue his intended course. He thought that the proposal should be given a try. He would however like to be given a little time to think further. The Secretary of State reiterated the urgency and said that this did not simply relate to the WGC speech; the timing was becoming very difficult. On the one hand Mr Gwynfor Evans' campaign was gaining momentum daily while on the other there was need to have regard to the forthcoming recess and to the timing of the passage of the Broadcasting Bill. He considered it to be of the first importance that the Government was in a position to take the initiative in next week's WGC debate.

Lady Plowden said that the proposal appeared to be the only possible solution although she too was not persuaded that it would dissuade Mr Gwynfor Evans. Sir Michael Swann said that he agreed with Sir Ian Trethowan. The proposal should be given a try. But he too doubted if it would succeed. Dr Hughes said that he had spoken to Mr Dafydd Elis Thomas on 4 July and he doubted if the proposal would be sufficient to persuade him to make representations to Mr Gwynfor Evans. The Secretary of State expressed some surprise at this as the proposal came very close to meeting the intention of Mr Dafydd Elis Thomas' amendment. Mr Roberts said that Mr Dafydd Elis Thomas' influence with Mr Gwynfor Evans should not be over-estimated. In his view the proposal would be interpreted as a cosmetic exercise. PUSS(W) said that it would show that the Government had taken all reasonable steps that it could to meet the arguments which were being put forward.

Mr Leon Brittan said that the presentation of the proposal was of considerable importance. It should be possible to present it as substantially a single Welsh language television service which was being achieved by agreement between the 2 broadcasting organisations.

/Sir Michael



Sir Michael Swann agreed that it was important to get the positive advantages across: it should in fact lead to a more coordinated and better service. He wondered whether there might be a unitary title for broadcasting in Welsh eg a single sign appearing before each programme titled Broadcasting Cymru with BBC and ITV in brackets after it. Sir Ian Trethowan agreed that the positive side should be stressed.

The Home Secretary said that he was very grateful for the constructive response and thanked Dr Swann and Lady Plowden and their colleagues for being so helpful. It was agreed that the broadcasting organisations would put forward their final views on the proposal by Monday 14 July. The Secretary of State added that he would very much welcome any suggestions on presentation.

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[REDACTED]
11 July 1980

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