

18/10 PT 14/6/93

Mr. McAuley (O/R)

cc: PS/Mr Atkins,
(DED, B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram
(DENI, B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Loughran
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Gibson
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Wood - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Taggart
Ms McAlister

J 14/6/93

From: Mr S Quinn
Central Secretariat

11 June 1993

To: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

"UNFINISHED BUSINESS": CHANNEL 4, MONDAY 7 JUNE 1993

1. The Secretary of State is aware that this programme was broadcast on Monday. The programme majored on discrimination against the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. It concentrated on:

- . promotion of the MacBride Principles, with excerpts from proponents' testimony at legislative hearings in the USA and interviews with Mr Oliver Kearney (Secretary of Equality) in Belfast;
- . criticism by two academics of the structures of Government in Northern Ireland;
- . criticism of the propaganda efforts of HMG and the resources dedicated to them;
- . Mr Needham "talking up" Northern Ireland;

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- the security forces, explosions and bomb damage (often without any obvious contextual relevance) without any reference to the perpetrators of the violence;
- an example of difficulties faced by a community group on the New Lodge Road in its efforts to develop a co-operative Community Centre (Ashton Development Centre).
2. The programme was unbalanced in its tone and content and contained a number of misrepresentations and inaccuracies. On those grounds, it is for consideration whether Government might issue some statement to the public and/or to Channel 4.
3. However, before endorsing such a course, Ministers should be aware that the Cultural Traditions Group (a sub group of the Community Relations Council, which CCRU funds) provided grant assistance in September 1991 for the making of the film. It did so having examined an outline from which it was clear that the tone of the film was likely to be critical of Government policy in some respects. I have spoken to the Chairman of the CRC (Dr Jimmy Hawthorne, and coincidentally a former Controller of BBC Northern Ireland) who has made the point that:
- (a) the Cultural Traditions Group expected the film to provide a platform for the long term unemployed;
- (b) he is personally extremely disappointed that, as it turned out, the film instead provided a platform for sophisticated pressure groups. He has not been able to canvass the CTG as a whole, but doubts if a unanimous view on the film would emerge;

- 24-11-20
- (c) he does not believe that the film was so different from the outline that the CRC/CTG would have a winnable case for recovery of grant; and
 - (d) since 1992, CTG's policy on grant-aiding film projects has been based not on the consideration of unsolicited proposals (as in this case), but on seeking proposals referenced to specific themes which are relevant to the CRC's aims and objectives. He says that this results in much closer liaison with film makers and thus reduces the risk that projects will disappoint.

Action, reaction and public presentation

- 4. I understand that consideration is being given to Mr Atkins writing to Channel 4 about the programme. I have consulted with Mr Wood and DED about this and there is general agreement that we should advise against this on the grounds:
 - (a) the programme went out late on C4, and probably did not attract a large audience;
 - (b) it was self-evidently unbalanced in tone and content;
 - (c) a formal complaint of this nature might give it a prominence it does not deserve; and
 - (d) the fact that the Cultural Traditions Group grant-aided the making of the film (with taxpayers' money) could prove an embarrassment if quoted in response to us.
- 5. However Mr Wood has advised that two steps should be taken:

- 24-12
- (a) we should register our concern with the Independent Television Commission, without going public; and
 - (b) we should make a strong representation in person to Michael Grade, who will be visiting NI on 6 September, about C4's less than professional approach to coverage of NI affairs (this is not the first C4 programme which has fallen below acceptable journalistic standards).

6. Ministers may, however, receive immediate media requests for comment, and our advice is that this should take the form:

- . The Government is fully committed to eliminating all forms of unlawful discrimination in employment in Northern Ireland and to promoting fair participation in the workforce by both the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities.
- . The programme made no reference whatever to the way in which the new fair employment law introduced in 1990 is working. The strength of this law - regarded as the strongest piece of anti-discrimination legislation anywhere in Europe - is now clearly acknowledged by most who have taken the trouble to look at how the Government is addressing the problem of discrimination in Northern Ireland.
- . The MacBride campaign has done nothing to encourage American companies to place much needed job creating investment in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, its effect has been to discourage investors through the threat and use of shareholder resolutions, product boycotts and contract compliance measures.

Understand that the Chairman of the Community Relations Council has expressed his personal disappointment with the film. (Dr Hawthorne has indicated that he would be content for this to be said, though he expects he might get some flak from some CTG members.)

Further action with the CRC/CTG

7. The CTG's revised media policy (paragraph 3(d) above) provides some reassurance, though support of cultural traditions activities can never be entirely risk-free for Government, because tolerance of diversity is central to our policy in this area.
8. However it would be appropriate for CCRU to write to the CRC; to ask for a formal report on this case and for its comments on whether it is satisfied that the final product was sufficiently compatible with the outline (and if not, whether recovery action could be taken) and whether its aims and objectives were advanced by the broadcasting of this particular film; and to ask for advice on how their policies and procedures seek to ensure that grant-aided projects are consistent with CRC's aims and objectives. Such a request would need to be formulated carefully, to avoid the risk that Government was seeking to apply a narrow and self-serving censorship, in contradiction to our stated policy on cultural traditions.

Summary

9. The Secretary of State is invited:
 - (a) to note the deficiencies in the film;
 - (b) to note the involvement of the Cultural Traditions Group in its financing;

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- (c) to agree that it would be inappropriate for Government to write to Channel 4;
 - (d) to agree to the action recommended in relation to the ITC and C4 in paragraph 5;
 - (e) to agree the responsive line set out in para 6; and
 - (f) to agree to the follow up action proposed with the Community Relations Council/Cultural Traditions Group

[Signed SQ]

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