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NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE AND
LADY PLOWDEN (CHAIRMAN, INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING AUTHORITY)
HELD AT GWYDYR HOUSE ON MONDAY 30 JULY 1979

Present: Secretary of State

[REDACTED]

| OFFICIAL PRESENT

Lady Plowden

Sir Bryan Young (Director
General)

Mr Tony Pragnell (Deputy
Director General)

1 The Secretary of State said that the question of Welsh Language television and the Fourth Channel was a major political issue in the Principality. English speakers were just as concerned as Welsh speakers about it since the arrangements made would clearly influence both their viewing patterns. Over recent years a consensus had emerged which favoured Welsh language broadcasting being concentrated on the Fourth Channel. The Government were firmly committed to such an arrangement. The Election Manifesto, the Queen's Speech and his own subsequent speech to the Conservative Party Conference in Wales had endorsed this approach. While therefore it was by no means out of the question to move away from that solution, it was absolutely essential to do so on a basis which preserved as far as possible the consensus and provided a real answer to those who would allege that a change represented a shift away from support for the language in broadcasting.

2 Once the new Channel was operating there was clearly a likelihood that some people's opinions would change. No-one questioned for a moment that increased Welsh language broadcasting would deprive people in Wales of programmes available in England. The objective, however, should be to ensure that people knew exactly where and when they could find (and avoid) Welsh programmes. Unless this was done the very significant problem of people in Wales turning their aerials to English stations would continue. Welsh broadcasting had to be removed from the main channels in his view, but he suspected that if people discovered that it remained on two rather than one channel there would be resentment.

3 He had three personal targets:

1 That the timescale for introducing the new programmes should be the same as that to which the previous Government had been committed;

2 that there should be the same amount of broadcasting as they had aimed for;

3 that the broadcasting should go out at peak hours.



4 He saw two main questions. The first was whether it would be technically possible to cover Wales adequately on both channels within the timetable to which the Government were committed. The second and far more significant point was that of scheduling. There would clearly be problems with a single service. Two complementary services seemed likely to him to be much more difficult to organise without overlap (which would also reduce the amount of programmes in Welsh which any individual viewer could see in a week).

5 If the public were to be persuaded to accept any solution, but particularly a new solution, they had to be convinced about the practical arrangements for scheduling. In his view whatever arrangements were come to there had to be some kind of co-ordinating body which would tackle overlap problems between the IBA and the BBC. Public acceptance of this committee, and possibly the standing of its Chairman, could be the key to the whole issue. With two channels broadcasting Welsh its role would be both more difficult and even more important.

6 Clearly there was going to be a good deal of discussion from now on. His other anxiety was to ensure that, in view of the political significance of the issue in Wales, the Welsh Office were fully involved in all these future discussions.

7 Lady Plowden and her colleagues made the following points in reply:-

The Littler Report had said that "in the interests of all viewers" Welsh should be shown on two channels (if there was to be an ITV2) in order to spread the "deprivation" around. Concentrating Welsh on one channel deprived people in Wales of about 20 hours of whatever the Fourth Channel would have elsewhere. BBC2 at present had a good deal of time available at peak hours into which Welsh programmes could be slotted without too much deprivation to most viewers and it was certainly their hope that ITV2 would be in the same position. Concentrating Welsh programmes on a single channel could, they suggested, in fact increase the number of people tuned in to English stations.

There were financial arguments too. A second ITV channel having to carry only 11 or 12 hours of Welsh programmes could carry more of its own financial burden. It would be much easier in that situation to subvent Welsh programmes from general revenues. If all Welsh language were concentrated on the new Fourth Channel there would almost certainly be a need for Government subsidy.

/They



They fully recognised the significance of the need to schedule properly. There were already arrangements for co-ordination between ITV and BBC - particularly on education programmes - and clearly for the purposes of operating a service more flexible and frequent meetings would be necessary. There should be no difficulty about, for example, putting together a sub-committee of the committee/council meeting serviced by officials.

Whatever happened, co-ordinating machinery would be essential to deal with news coverage. A single newsroom covering Welsh language reporting raised major difficulties of principle.

On the technical issue of providing coverage they hoped by the end of 1982 to have some 75% of Wales covered. They accepted, however, that small areas not covered were the more remote Welsh speaking areas where coverage was most crucial. It would still be possible to provide an acceptable level of cover by the beginning of 1983, but this would require some juggling of priorities in favour of the relatively small numbers of people in remote Wales and at the expense of English viewers.

As to reassuring the public that the IBA would play the game, the Government could make it a requirement that the IBA should produce the right kind of programmes at the right times.

As to their target audience, the IBA were aiming for 15-20% for their second channel and 40% on their first. That would certainly be their target for commercial success. They did see ITV2 as being a minority channel although they hoped to put one or two popular programmes on it to induce viewers to switch over from time to time.



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30 July 1979

Distribution:

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