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THIS TRANSCRIPT WAS TYPED FROM A RECORDING AND NOT COPIED FROM AN ORIGINAL SCRIPT. BECAUSE OF THE RISK OF MISHEARING AND THE DIFFICULTY IN SOME CASES OF IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL SPEAKERS THE BBC CANNOT VOUCH FOR ITS COMPLETE ACCURACY.

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THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC  
Interview with Richard Francis

CASSETTE SUPPLIED: February 1986

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IDENTIFICATION:

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC. This is a recording by Mr Richard Francis, the Managing Director of Radio made in his office in Broadcasting House in London on the 23rd January 1986.

TAPE ONE

INT: Mr Francis, perhaps as a matter of background, you'd care to tell us at the outset about your own experience of Northern Ireland and of BBC Current Affairs programming?

FRANCIS: Well, I was Assistant Head of Current Affairs group in the early 70s when we had a major problem over a programme called QUESTION OF ULSTER, and I was the Executive Producer of that. In 1973, in the September, I became the Controller of Northern Ireland, and I was there for 4 years before becoming Director, News and Current Affairs in the autumn of 1977, and I held that office until April 1982. So that, in effect, for about 8½ years I was directly responsible for programme matters concerning Northern Ireland.

INT: So you really had a unique perspective. When did you first see this film?

FRANCIS: I didn't see it until the Board of Management meeting on the Monday. <sup>(29<sup>th</sup> July)</sup> Unusually, what happened was this; ~~that~~ I in the absence of the DG, the Editor in Chief, and there being already the concern conveyed to us by Wilfred Hyde from the Home Secretary about this programme, which of course had been alluded to in the public prints over the weekend, ~~The~~ rest of us on the Board of Management, chaired by DDG, Mike Checkland, determined to see the programme at lunchtime. And that we did. We saw it so that we were in a position to take a view as Board of Management and to advise the Chairman of our view, which was unanimous - that notwithstanding some warts as a programme, it should go forward; it should be transmitted.

INT: Did you feel at that stage that the DG's absence was a factor, and were there efforts to get him back?

FRANCIS: Well, I certainly think the DG's absence was a factor, but if you say at that stage, I think the better answer is no. What happened was this, ~~that we~~ we were made aware at the pre-meeting before Board of Management at 11 o'clock that there was a problem, and of course we'd read it for ourselves in the press, and to that end we met in Board of Management knowing that we would have to come up with a recommendation, but that didn't seem to be particularly difficult. I mean the Director General's out of town quite frequently, and certainly in terms of the editorial experience around the table we had plenty to go on; ~~And to that end,~~ one didn't see it as a big problem. Simultaneously the Chairman and the Secretary had obviously been discussing how to respond and whether or not it might require a special meeting of the Board. Well, as I recall it, what happened quite simply was that there were two things going on in parallel, and ~~Even~~ during the course of the Board of Management meeting I recall the Secretary

departing<sup>and</sup> coming back to report that the Chairman was determined that there should be a special meeting of the Board of Governors the following morning, the Tuesday. We knew that before we started our viewing. Equally, it's true to say that by the end of our viewing, the Board of Management's unanimous view was conveyed to the Chairman, but the decision had already been taken to recall the Board. During the course of the afternoon therefore, not only were Governors summoned, but also a call was put through to DG, who was ~~at~~ at the time at sea, and as I understand it, it was the early evening before he could be contacted, about 6.30 or so. And he wasn't due to put into port, I believe it was Stockholm but others might know better, until..first thing the following morning. ~~To that end~~ there was no way that he could be back in London by 10am, unless possibly you're about to hire a jet. And he certainly gave the impression that he was alerted of the problem but not necessarily of the gravity of the situation, because the Chairman through the Secretary made it fairly plain to Board of Management that he felt that the BBC could not accept the representation by the Home Secretary and would need to resist it and that the programme should go out. To that extent the absence of the DG was crucial, because I believe that the Chairman, backed by the.. the Editor in Chief, would have taken that decision upon themselves not least, because oddly enough they had the reason <sup>why</sup> ~~that~~ they could do so. The Board had gone off on its summer holidays and in those circumstances it is assumed that the Chairman, together with those Governors he might wish to take advice from, will act on behalf of the Board. And he had that position which he could of used.

INT: It must have been a very tense day, that Monday, for the BBC. Were you involved, apart from Board of Management,

in other things which were going on?

FRANCIS: Well, actually I believe that Monday wasn't a tense day, and that's one of the reasons why Tuesday turned out to be one. Because the alarm bells weren't ringing very loud and indeed that's perhaps the story, ~~that one... that~~ <sup>whole</sup> That is if you like the theme of the <sup>whole</sup> story, because certainly the alarm bells hadn't rung very loud in Northern Ireland while the programme was being made. Neither <sup>did</sup> ~~were~~ they on that Monday really. The question was how to respond to the Home Secretary. First of all we got verbal reports of <sup>two</sup> conversation <sup>(with Wilfred Hyde)</sup>. Then we had the letter which the Home Secretary was going to send to the Chairman, read over. Copies of that. And then finally, <sup>but</sup> not until the early evening did the full letter come. It's interesting to note, incidentally, that there were one or two small but significant differences. And so we didn't actually have the "full" until the evening, and that therefore meant that the full impact of the letter wasn't going to sink in until later on. It was apparent though, once we got the.. the draft read over, <sup>2</sup> (and I believe that was about 11 o'clock, so we were probably made aware of it at say lunchtime, when we'd dealt with other business at Board of Management) that this was indeed <sup>an</sup> and unprecedented letter. And it was unprecedented in two senses. First of all we've had many such representations in the past prior to transmission, and always in the past either the Home Secretary <sup>or</sup> the Minister ~~Responsible~~ for Broadcasting or the Home Secretary, <sup>(in his other capacities)</sup> or indeed the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, had ended their letter with some such remark as "...and so I hope the Board will consider carefully all these points before taking their decisions as to whether or not to transmit." This on the other hand was seen to be ending (and indeed when we saw the full did end) with the direct request that the BBC should not

transmit. The second point, which emerged when I said that, in the light of my experience in handling similar cases over the years, I would say about a dozen <sup>(such cases)</sup>, that it would be worthwhile actually looking at the letter ~~of the...~~ the detail of the letter, and carefully so. It immediately became apparent that there was in the letter the very reason why the Governors would not need to see the programme the following morning, and I had offered this analysis for consideration the following morning, though it wasn't actually taken up, and it was of course the paragraph in which the Home Secretary says, ~~(RUSTLING)~~ and if I pause to find it - and I quote "...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." Unquote. And that was the basis on which the following morning, when asked to comment, I said that I believed that the letter ~~was~~ meant that the Governors were not required to see the programme. Because the question of seeing the programme or not was indeed the first question taken by the Board, rather in isolation from the intrinsic merits of the programme or other circumstances. And given that he <sup>(the Home Secretary) had</sup> said it didn't matter in what way the programme was made, he would still ask us not to transmit it, there was a principle <sup>(involved)</sup> by which I felt no Board of Governors could possibly be constrained.

INT: Very interesting. How .. what did you feel about the atmosphere of that Board Meeting on the 30th? I mean was... was there a sense of intimidation in the air? Were they looking over their shoulders at the Peacock Committee? Anything like that?

FRANCIS: No not so, I didn't feel it that way. Much more a sort of lemming-like rush at the end of the day. So it

started off I thought in very reasonable vein, The Chairman fairly confident that the decision would be to continue to go ahead with the programme. And really it was a question of getting a quorum, so that he wasn't exposed to taking that decision on his own. And to start with we had a perfectly ~~er.~~ sound, indeed articulate ~~and er...~~ and detailed description of what had happened so far from the DDG. We also had other views expressed by members of Board of Management. I recall Bill Cotton being particular strong on the point of not seeing the programme in advance of transmission. I gave evidence of similar programmes in the past, and also took the view that one had to look at the ~~obverse~~ side - the problem of not transmitting being a greater problem on the whole in my experience than transmitting. And the Board would wish to consider that.

INT: Did the Board at any point consider inviting the Home Secretary to use his powers?

FRANCIS: Yes, that was mooted actually at that point, but in fact the Chairman in the first stage was keen to get to the first decision, which he saw as being (to transmit or not transmit.

INT: To view or not to view?

FRANCIS: I'm sorry, to view or not to view. (I beg your pardon.) The Chairman felt it was important to take the decision to view or not to view first, and when once or twice we strayed into discussing such issues as inviting the Home Secretary to use his powers under <sup>Section (of the licence)</sup> 13.4 [we were rather <sup>smartly</sup> brought back to the question in hand. I myself think that was difficult because certainly quite a few of the reasons which were to be adduced for not seeing the programme actually did require some discussion of the intrinsic merits of the programme. ~~The merit.~~ The programme itself of

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course was a very soft programme. And it was the softness of the programme which turned out in the end to be the thing which the Governors felt was objectionable. So it was that we got to a position at about twenty to one when we split into two halves, half <sup>of</sup> each of the Boards being in the sitting room, half left in the Board Room. We were looking at two or three monitors, I can't quite remember which, (we certainly <sup>were</sup> ~~were~~ all looking at one) but nonetheless it was a collective viewing, and it ran of course from about twenty to one to about twenty past. And one was very conscious during the course of the viewing of a certain amount of tutting, a certain amount of glancing, and even explicit comment at one point from one Governor, sort of "Ss...outrageous, you can't possibly run that!" So one was keenly aware by the end of the viewing that what we, the Board of Management, had feared was happening. - That there was a collective emotion which was sort of stoking up. And further <sup>more</sup>, ~~that~~ when you ask a Board of Governors, however wise, to act in an editorial fashion, they're not well-equipped to do so, **B**ecause it's not about wisdom, it's actually about context, and editors against years of experience have to weigh programmes not as to whether they like them or not, not as to whether there are details which they would prefer to see changed, but whether <sup>they are</sup> ~~it's~~ a go or ~~a~~ no go. And now we had a situation which was becoming tense, because we all knew that Board of Management were unanimously in favour of running it, and one could feel the tide of hostility in the Board. Twenty past one the viewing ended. Would we want to discuss it now? Would the Board want to discuss it now or would they wish to have some lunch, which had been laid out in buffet form in the next room? Well at ~~twenty n.~~ twenty past one, stomachs were gnawing and so it was decided to have the lunch first. In retrospect

almost fatal, because it allowed people to clump together while queuing for the food, or after they'd got it and gone off into corners, and gradually work up a ~~an~~ a feeling about the programme. So, by the end of lunch, clearly the next session when we reconvened round the table was going to be crucial, if indeed the day was not lost...I use that parlance from Board of Management's point of view,...because I have a feeling it was lost before we <sup>re-</sup> started. And it was certainly lost when the Chairman for a reason I don't know did not take evidence from Board of Management, from the executives, before listening to what the Governors had to say. I feel had he done so, and had he enabled Board of Management to reiterate, not only the reasons why it felt the programme should be transmitted, but what the dangers were of not transmitting, and however much we protested it would be perceived as giving way to Home Secretary's pressure,...<sup>but</sup> the executives were not invited to comment. And I remember it well, ~~I mean~~ the Chairman who had the Vice Chairman on his right, turned to him and said would you like, "Your Honour, ~~would you.~~ would you like to speak first or last?" And the Vice Chairman elected to speak first, and I think it would be true to say that his opinion then really led a body of feeling in the Board.

END OF REEL

## IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC - 'Real Lives' - the contribution by Mr Richard Francis.

## TAPE TWO

INT: So the Board decided the programme should not be shown. Is it possible for you to summarise, because you were at the meeting and you can read their minds better than anybody probably, why they took that decision?

FRANCIS: Well frankly I thought at the time it was largely an emotive decision. I recall the last of the Governors to speak, Lord Harwood, saying, "I hate it, I hate it, I hate it." Now it wasn't really about whether he thought the BBC should transmit it, but clearly he had found in it... it had hit a nerve, and what of course had hit a nerve was somebody who was closely associated with terrorism being made to appear as an ordinary person with a family, walking on the beach, etc. I must say I wondered at the time whether it didn't hit <sup>with</sup> him a Mountbatten nerve, but emotive seemed to be the response. And also, as I said, lemming-like. It became a collective decision. Actually, what was interesting was that the way in which the Chairman took that decision. Bearing in mind that the Board doesn't normally vote, what effectively we had was a position after Lord Harwood had spoken, who was the last to be taken, as they were taken in sequence around the table, the executives were not.. of course didn't have a vote as such. The Chairman sought to..to enumerate where we'd got to, and he asked... he suggested that there was indeed general agreement that the programme should not proceed. And to that Alwyn Roberts said that he would demur, and so did two other Governors. Jack Johnson demurred, from being quite so absolute, as did I believe Lady Parks. When the Chairman pressed

the point as to whether that really was a 'yes' vote, though he didn't quite use those words, Alwyn Roberts said, "Yes..." he would formally wish to dissociate himself from any decision of the Board not to transmit. The ~~others too~~ <sup>(voted to transmit)</sup> the other two did not, they had demurred, but they hadn't. The Chairman who had not to that point declared himself then put himself with the majority, and as Geoff Buck, the Director of Finance, subsequently was to remark, that was very much a City Chairman's attitude, that he would feel in honour bound by the numerical vote taken by the Board. And so it was that, although I'm sure Stuart Young started the day, and even at that point might have felt that he would wish to cast his vote with the executive, in loyalty to his Board he threw his vote in with the Board.

INT: Did you feel that the reference-up argument much used by the Board and talk about management failure and that sort of thing - was that really a fair comment on the part of the Chairman of the Board?

FRANCIS: Well, <sup>Board of</sup> Management didn't believe it to be so. Actually it was first raised by the Vice Chairman who went quite strong on that, that palpably there had been a failure in the reference-up system. And Lady Faulkner joined him in that view, and subsequently she was of course to say that she felt that that was the real reason why the Board of Governors had to assume the editorial command. That I'm afraid is certainly not my view, or that of my colleagues on Board of Management; ~~but~~ explicitly when we saw the programme on the Monday lunchtime we said to ourselves, "New look" notwithstanding the fact it arrives with us as it were without warning; that the Director General himself has not been pre-warned, we have to deal with the situation as

we find it, and that situation is in the public domain. It's in the public domain because we've got three colour pages in the RADIO TIMES, we've had the public prints over the weekend, and we've got the Home Secretary going public with his objection. Therefore we must dismiss this.. the technicality that the procedures were not followed, and ~~that~~ we'll have to look to that afterwards and see whether that is a cause for disciplinary action or what have you." And which of course we subsequently did. But it couldn't be in our view a reason for changing or indeed sort of taking ~~the hands..~~ taking the decision out of the hands of the executive. As to the ~~... as to the~~ technicality of the reference-up, yes I think there are important lessons to be learnt, but I've never felt that that should have conditioned the editorial decision as to whether to transmit or not. Not least of course because the Controller in Northern Ireland had been kept fully informed all the time, and I believed (and subsequently I think as was manifest when he<sup>2</sup> offered his resignation) ~~he...~~ he deserved ~~the~~ support, which I don't think at every stage he was getting. // The fact is I know what it's like. I've been the commander in that field. And you have to have the utmost trust of all your troops, and your superiors in London, because you have to take day to day, minute to minute decisions, which are in certain senses, I mean in broadcasting terms, life and death ones - putting it bluntly. Under those circumstances, the effect of the Board's saying "This programme shall not proceed, notwithstanding the fact the Controller in Northern Ireland, the Head of Programmes, the News Editor and all those who actually live in the patch affected had said that it was OK, no different from the kind of programme they do quite

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regularly. Suddenly a shudder went through the system, and it ~~was if there...~~ it was as if their compass had lost its calibration, ~~It was...~~ that ~~actually~~ their value judgements were suddenly knocked off course. And it was of course the reason why I jumped on a plane later on to have a chat with Jimmy. After he had put his resignation on the table, saying that he effectively wanted the endorsement of Board of Management and the Board, and given that actually <sup>Alistair</sup> ~~Alistair~~ was away, Mike Checkland, the DDG had left on his long awaited holiday and it was important that he went on it, Bill Cotton was out of town and Alan Protheroe was manning the fort, there weren't too many people around. Quite apart from the fact that I felt I had a contribution to make, knowing the patch. So I jumped on the Shuttle and went and had a long talk with Jimmy, and also of course had a talk with the Northern Ireland staff, a few in the Club, a few in the News Room and so on, and made it quite plain that Jimmy had the full support of Board of Management.

INT: Well I have it on tape from the people in Northern Ireland how important your visit to them at that juncture was, and they'll never forget it.

FRANCIS: Well I think something else was important and that is this, that the following day Jimmy clearly wanted the endorsement of Board of Governors in the person of the Chairman, and the Chairman had in the normal course of events gone to attend one of our OBs which was ~~at~~... I forget which golf course it was now, <sup>Carnoustie</sup> ~~Carnistee~~ (PH) was it? I can't remember ~~one of~~ ~~one~~ of the courses in Scotland ~~and~~ and time was running out. The Belfast Press were gathering, the 24 hours were running out for Jimmy's resignation, so we really had to get through to the Chairman quite fast. And I rang through to the main scanner and they said, "Well

actually the Chairman's going round the course and we think he's sort of somewhere on the second half." And I said, "Well where have you got your subscanners?" And they said, "Well there's one on the 17th green." And I said, "Well who have you got there?" "We've got the Engineering Manager." I said, "Right get him a message, when the Chairman hoves into view ask him to come to the 'phone." And Stuart did indeed come off the golf course, and observing wryly that he had to be dragged off the course, "What was all this about?" I explained it and asked him to have a word with Jimmy which he did, and that was a most important moment because the Chairman's endorsement of Jimmy was certainly what he needed and what his troops in Northern Ireland needed. (YES) But that is in a sense to run on a bit, but that was kind of the ~~the~~ trauma which was set in train by the Board's decision. I have to say that ~~I~~ in looking back at it and trying to sort of construe it, I have a feeling that there was going to be an eruption at some point. That in editorial matters, tensions had been building up between the two Boards, between really the Editor in Chief perhaps and the Board of Governors, but not only the Editor in Chief, and I think there were one or two pre-eruptions. ~~I mean~~ I think the affair of the ~~... of the~~ Princess Michael interview demonstrated a certain strain on editorial matters between the two Boards. I'm not arguing the merits of the case, I'm just saying that there was manifest strain. And also I think the same thing happened a bit later on in the summer, about a couple of months before 'Real Lives' and that was over the Doctor Gee case, where there was tensions there. What we had was on the executive side, the Director General, the Managing Director of Television and the Legal Advisor, advising that we should resist the case brought by Doctor Gee in defamation against the programme THAT'S

LIFE! (THAT'S LIFE!) Notwithstanding the fact that the expenses were running up quite fast and indeed were ~~sort of~~ reaching another tier whereby we would have to go back to the Board of Governors for financial consent. And part of the reason for fighting the case, win or lose, was actually to protect the editorial interests of the BBC and our ability, where appropriate, to do programmes which exposed would-be wrong-doers or institutions, and the fact is in this day and age you've got to back that kind of journalism with rather a lot of money. ~~And there had been...~~ The Board had overruled the executive view on that occasion. I'd call that a pre-eruption.

INT: Had you still been Controller Northern Ireland would you have referred this programme to the National Governor? There's some suggestion that the failure to do that upset her and that this was communicated to the rest of the Board.

FRANCIS: I think there's a very easy assumption that it only needed that link in the chain and all would have been hunky-dory. I don't actually think it's as easy as that. In the actual circumstances what happened was that the programme was born while Jimmy Hawthorne was Controller, I mean he was Controller of course throughout. But he had just had one operation and it hadn't been too successful, and he was going back in for a second, and was a bit run down and in pain, and anyway the proposition rang no bells in Northern Ireland, that's the kind of thing they do with some regularity, and indeed when you get election programmes and so on, you get these two characters who were in the programme appearing on election programming. So there were no great bells ringing. And then of course during the period of the building of the programme and the early filming, Cecil Taylor, was Acting Head of Programmes, ~~Acting~~ Controller, and Cecil

is an old hand. ~~I mean~~ He's been there right through the 70s, seen it all, and I relied upon him very much for his judgement. But he's a bullish liberal in these matters and wouldn't therefore see too much of a problem. By the time Jimmy came back in the summer, much of the filming had occurred, and so we were now getting into a phase where it was coming up for scheduling, and it wasn't scheduled, and actually wasn't. ~~certainly wasn't~~ scheduled <sup>(for transmission)</sup> during Lady Faulkner's tenure as National Governor. Now you could say "Well why didn't the Controller mention it to her?" But that is actually not the route by which a Governor or the Governor should find out. The proper route is through line management to the Editor in Chief who then informs the Board as a whole. If the Controller, Northern Ireland, has a quiet word with the National Governor, she then brings it to the attention of the rest of the Board, the Board quite rightly can say to the Director General "What the Hell's going on?" So that's the wrong way round.

INT: And he probably doesn't know.

FRANCIS: And he didn't know. So I mean it... the easy answer, yes if Jimmy had told Lucy, actually ~~doesn't~~ isn't quite as simple as that.

INT: No, I understand that. Um...Then you had obviously an uneasy week following the special Board Meeting, and at some point the decision was taken to call a further meeting of the Board. Can you tell us about that?

FRANCIS: Well, the real point was getting the Director General back in his seat as the Editor in Chief. It ~~was~~ certainly was our view in Board of Management, and it was plainly apparent from the rumpus which erupted as soon as the decision of the Board at the first special meeting on the first Tuesday was made public, that we needed to reconvene the Board pretty quick, and whatever

else we had to have a determination by the Board that there would be a transmission of this programme in some form acceptable to the producer, etc., etc., at some date, and we felt it would be important to define that date. The missing agent the first time round had been the Editor in Chief, in any event the Deputy Director General had gone off on leave himself. So it was felt that it would be crucially important to reconvene the Board, for there was no question but ~~they~~ you would have to have a special Board Meeting <sup>(for the Board)</sup> to reverse itself, the Chairman couldn't take that upon himself.

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## IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC 'Real Lives' Mr Richard Francis.

THIS IS TAPE THREE.

FRANCIS: So we came to the position on the second Monday, the Director General's come back from holiday, he's seen the programme. I'm ~~also~~ certain he had by that stage. And this certainly changed the scene, so much so that our assumption that it would need a reconvening of the Board was itself questioned. He, having as it were taken the same view as the rest of Board of Management, and the Chairman having realised that something had to be done, we were in something of a pass. What happened was that during the course of the normal Board of Management there was a certain amount of toing and froing, not without a certain tension as I recall. But we said, "Look we've got to get hold of the Chairman and we've got to do something about this." He was feeling rather the same, and at one point on one of his several trips out of the <sup>boardroom</sup> office, the Secretary, David Holmes, came back with the message that the Chairman wished to lunch with the Board of Management. Now that actually is a fairly unusual thing and it's certainly done normally speaking by invitation of the Director General. That is a perfectly sensible propriety. But this was in some parts of Board of Management I think resented a little bit, it was seen as a request. I must say I didn't share that point of view, but I do remember that that was the kind of tension<sup>s</sup> that there <sup>was</sup> ~~were~~ around the table that day. Anyway, after a bit more discussion and toing and froing it was determined that the Chairman would indeed join some of us for lunch, being the Director General, the Assistant Director General, Alan Protheroe, and the three

Managing Directors. MDTel, MDR, MDXB. And the rest were kicked out and told to go and buy themselves a lunch elsewhere. I think they had quite a good lunch actually, so they said anyway. So when we'd got through the rest of our business, we met the Chairman for lunch and, after niceties, got round the table, this rather small group of one plus five, and started to hammer it out. And the feeling grew and it was certainly endorsed by the Chairman, that in fact ~~a~~ the Chairman as he put it could 'deliver them,' and he could deliver them on the 'phone, though whether he would make all the 'phone calls himself was subsequently to be discussed. And I remember him being challenged, "Are you sure you can deliver them?" And he said, "Yes I can deliver them with three words." Implicitly, "I will resign." And so it was that it was generally felt that it might be a good idea, the Editor in Chief now having returned to the scene, that he should make as many of the 'phone calls as possible, and leave the Chairman in reserve for the moment. And the ring round during the course of that Monday afternoon went really quite well. Ten Governors were contacted, I remember that Daphne Park responded to <sup>Alistair</sup> ~~Alistair~~ that ~~she~~... "How did the Vice Chairman feel?" "I've not yet discussed it with him," said <sup>Alistair</sup> ~~Alistair~~. "Well I would like to wait and see what he thinks," said Daphne. Well when <sup>Alistair</sup> ~~Alistair~~ did get hold of William, the Vice-Chairman, it was plainly apparent that he was not willing to change his view, and certainly not willing to change his view without reconvening. And so it was that, although at that stage I presume Daphne was rung back with that news, there was as it were a nominal count of the ten Governors who'd been contacted (though that wasn't necessarily the extent of those who could turn up the following morning) that eight out of the ten would indeed back the notion that the programme should go forward in some form, acceptable to all the parties and all that, - actually acceptable

to the Director General was the crucial point, and within a given time period. That being a public posture which the BBC could certainly stand over, not least because one of the reasons why it had been felt that this programme should not be run was to do with the fact that we were in August, end of the Marching Season, etc. - Never a reason which I... I must say I was too willing to accept, because I think that timing and timeliness is a very dangerous path upon which to tread. Anyway, the fact is that because two would not certainly agree to a change in policy without a reconvening of the Board, there was a reconvening of the Board the following morning, Tuesday, exactly seven days after the first. And we were all summoned to be ready, but to start with - I'm not sure whether the Board met on their own to start with, I think they made have done, but then fairly shortly after that the Director General went in, the first time that he had met the Board, the Secretary was also in attendance, but the rest of us were not required. We were left on call and we all went to the Assistant Director General's office and fortunately there was a Test Match on because we were on call for rather a long time. I can't remember the details, but I certainly remember there was a diversion available. But we were never called. And actually that's quite interesting because here accounts I think do differ a bit. <sup>Alistair</sup>~~Alistair~~ certainly gave the impression on the day that we were not invited. I did hear Stuart say subsequently that he had said to the Director General, "Do you wish to have your colleagues with you?" And the Director General had said, "No, I'm, happy to discuss this with the Board alone." Therefore ~~in my...~~ to my knowledge there's a certain difference of interpretation and a ~~different...~~ a difference on that. The fact is we never got in. The fact is that we stayed there on through lunchtime. They broke at lunchtime, a fairly

shattered Director General came and briefly reported to us that things were pretty bad, and that we were further apart than ever. That of course was the first solid news that we had that this eight to two majority as we had thought after the 'phone round the day before had been reversed. And then we got into the early afternoon, and without any calling of the other members of the Board of Management, and therefore incidentally no continuity on the management side as between the two meetings, save in the person of the Secretary, who by definition is rather disbarred from doing other than correct people on matters of fact - there was no continuity on the management side between the two Board Meetings.

INT: And of course the Board did in fact reaffirm its previous decision.

FRANCIS: It did indeed, and given that it was against a very hostile background, you could say "with knobs on," because it was hostility squared after that, and all the battlelines so to speak were drawn up, and all the editorial lines in the Press were drawn up, and added impetus was given to each side, for indeed there was divided opinion.

INT: And the next day you had the strike.

FRANCIS: That was one of the oddest days in my life in the BBC, because first and foremost it was not a strike against the management. Indeed what it was a strike against is again not quite as simple as all that, and I dare say that amongst the people who went on strike, for indeed it wasn't all NUJ by any means, there were BETA members but there were also non-union members. I mean there were people here in radio who had no part in this, not even production staff, who actually withdrew their labour en principe, and the presenters of some of the radio sequence

programmes came in rather apologetically the night before and said to me, "Look I'm sorry, I am or I am not a member of the NUJ..." - there were some in either category<sup>2</sup> - "...under these circumstances I am not prepared to break ranks." And that I have to say was true in the News Room too, I mean right up to a very senior level, ~~the~~ the Chief Subs and Assistant Editors were not prepared to do the usual thing, which is to keep a rudimentary news service going. Whether or not we took the right decisions in management faced with that, I'm not entirely convinced. // One of the things the NUJ did was to mount a picket in the shape of a shift immediately outside Broadcasting House during the strike, such that had there been a major news story, they were in a position to march inside and man the News Room. Think about it, that actually meant that the initiative was well out of management's hands. And actually there was a kind of deal implicit in what happened, because what happened was this: during the course of the previous afternoon when the strike was threatened, there was the possibility that something could be said, either by the Chairman or the Director General which could avert the strike; whatever was being said didn't avert the strike. And apart from this notion which the NUJ came up with, which was sort of shift shape pickets, we had another decision to take in management and I'm not sure that we took the right one. And that was this: we prepared for a single network to be run by management, basically music and a rudimentary news service, and that to run on all transmitters. That would be a our normal response to a strike threat of such proportions. Then during the course of the day it became plainly apparent that all the people who were due to do the disc shows, the Radio One, Radio Two, the non-journalistic programmes and including those operational staff who were going to put on recordings of factual

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spoken word programmes etc., were all quite prepared to come to work and do that, it was actually the News operation, the News and Current Affairs operation, the sequences which was going on strike, with a certain amount of support from elsewhere, but undoubtedly we could put all four services on without News and Current Affairs, and they would all run throughout the day, together with this back up which was essentially a concession by the NUJ of news service if there was a real crisis. And rightly or wrongly we decided to do that and that's why we kept four services on here in domestic Radio, without any news in them. One or two people rather preferred the music to the TODAY programme and wrote and said <sup>so</sup> say, but the serious point was that first of all there would have been literally on two or three people of Controller rank to run the news, and secondly there was no will in the management and the senior management to as it were break the strike. So it led to this rather peculiar management decision. Frankly, I rather prefer ~~the~~ the position as it was in Bush House, potentially damaging <sup>in</sup> the short term world wide undoubtedly, but an absolutely clear statement, and I think in the long run a more explicit statement about the BBC's independence, rightly or wrongly. And I'm perfectly prepared to say that as a Managing Director certainly I had real problems about the nature of the strike and its purpose, and what it was a strike against. Having got to that position, oddly enough I think the Bush House statement was clearer, and in the long run was less damaging than the compromise of music without news that we ended up with in Radio, because indeed there was quite a lot of confusion as to what the strike was about. Was it in fact a strike against the government leaning? Was it in fact a strike against the Board of Governors? Was it a rather refined view about backing Board of Management against

the Board of Governors? It was all those things as I walked round here, and therefore there was quite a lot of confusion as to what the objectives of the strike were.

INT: Have you anything to say about how the Board was brought to reverse, to do a U-turn, to reverse its decision, because the programme was in fact transmitted quite soon and with virtually no alterations, or little anyway?

FRANCIS: Well I think the sun worked its trick quite well on the backs of several Governors and time worked its way, and upon quieter reflection without the sort of emotive circumstances of the first Board Meeting or frankly the heightened tensions when everybody got into drawn up battlelines over the fortnight, I think commonsense began to prevail. I think crucially Jim Kincade who I think was not compromised but certainly put in a very awkward position by being invited to attend the first meeting even though he was National Governor elect for Northern Ireland and he was a day or two off taking office, on the basis that he was going to be in situ by the time the programme was transmitted. And in the event first of all <sup>he</sup> was asked to observe, but in the end was asked to give a verdict, and rather I think without any context in which to set his view, and ~~I think~~ I believe to his regret subsequently, he cast his vote with Lady Faulkner against the showing of the programme. Subsequently and quite swiftly, and I think again this was a question of dialogue between Jimmy Hawthorne and his National Governor, Jim Kincade realised that that wasn't a tenable posture, and I think his switch had much to do with it, and certainly that was one of the bases, one of the reasons on which ~~there~~ there was a swing of opinion between the first and second Board Meeting. I mean that was already working, so that when ~~Alistair~~ <sup>Alistair</sup> did his ring round on the Monday afternoon

before the second Board Meeting he was telling people that Jim Kincade had already come to a somewhat different view. That wasn't enough to swing them then but during the weeks of August I think it began to weigh.

END OF REEL

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## IDENTIFICATION

THE ORAL HISTORY OF THE BBC, 'Real Lives' Mr Richard Francis.

## TAPE FOUR

INT: Just to wind it up then, what.. what do you think are the lessons of all this unhappy episode?

FRANCIS: Well I would put them in three categories. I think terms of the relationship between the two Boards it had cleared the air, paradoxically, and relationships although you might have thought they would be tense, were fairly quickly back to a rather better tenor than they had been for some months previous. But that's in a sense a practical point. In the circumstances, there's another practical point, I think we learnt some lessons about referral. Undoubtedly this whole fussation could have been avoided had the referral procedure been more adequately carried out. So indeed you get revised guidelines and so indeed you get a more rigid procedure, not good enough just to say, "Yes I had a word with him the other day in a corridor..." we're moving towards a more rigid procedure. But that's mechanistic. No, I think the really big thing is this, that first and foremost not only the present Board but I would suggest successive Boards will realise that not only in the Editor in Chief but also in the whole editorial structure of the BBC, the very system of delegated responsibility, (and I put a bit of emphasis on the word 'responsibility') means that they cannot lightly overturn the collective editorial view as taken by this executive structure. That in itself prima facia may appear to be very frustrating to a Board, on the other hand it is a massive safeguard. We all know that who work in the BBC,

I don't think it's always appreciated by new Governors, and I don't think...and certainly don't think it's appreciated outside. And if one thinks about more sinister threats to the BBC than simply political pressure, political pressure is the norm, then actually that is a massive safeguard, that what you have got within the BBC an infrastructure that will resist not only political pressure, that's the norm, but subversion in any form. That's the real lesson of 'Real Lives'.

INT:                   A very profound statement I think, I'm glad to have it.

END OF RECORDING