

To: Broadcasting Complaints Commission
Complaint Ref: 311/07

The Broadcasting Act uniquely assigns to RTÉ a central role in Irish cultural life, with the result that its sound and film productions and archives are themselves a primary historical and educational resource. This is the context in which the Hidden History documentary must be set.

Director Niamh Sammon's comments on my complaint consist in large measure of technical points of history, and complex discussion of historical sources, some of which were touched upon in her documentary, and others which were not mentioned in it but which are part of the public controversy about the documentary and its subject matter.

Following the first published account of these events by Paddy Heaney in his 2002 book, the controversy began in 2005 with the publication of Alan Stanley's booklet and Eoghan Harris's newspaper commentary on it in October 2005, continuing in my publication of March 2007, in the October 2007 RTÉ documentary, in the January 2008 issue of the journal History Ireland, and through to the present in the newspapers and elsewhere.

Because of Ms Sammon's documentary, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission is now confronted with a mass of technical historical detail about the minutiae of little-known events of nearly a century ago. How has this situation come about? Why is the Complaints Board having to address itself to such things?

Ms Sammon lists the academic historians involved in her documentary. There were – not one, not two – but more than four of them, whose merits and qualifications she extols.

Yet here we are, more than three months later, submerged in an avalanche of undigested technical details and raw source documents.

RTÉ claims, in its letter to the Commission of 27 November, that Dr Paul Rouse was Consultant Historian. Dr Rouse confirmed to me by phone that his correct designation was Researcher. Ms Sammon's January comments confirm Dr Rouse's statement, in contradiction to RTÉ. She says in her comments that she was under no obligation to have a Consultant Historian.

But the subject of her documentary was not one which had been previously been thrashed out, studied, debated, analysed and published by professionals. It is new, raw, unknown. **Never was there greater need of a Consultant Historian**, a professional who would have authority over the historical quality and content, who would ensure that the technically important elements would be given appropriate weight and significance; so that, no matter which side of the issue was favoured in the documentary, the viewers would get reliable information, including the means of weighing up the arguments for themselves.

Instead of this, we find that the "ownership" and defence of the programme was dominated by Senator Eoghan Harris who is a journalist and polemicist, but not a professional historian, not a relative and not a member of the community with direct knowledge of the events. In other words, "ownership" of the documentary was exhibited by somebody who is not in any of the categories of people Ms Sammon says she sought out in order to give substance to her programme.

The problems of lack of objectivity and impartiality could have been averted if professional historical quality control had been implemented in the normal way – **by a qualified Historical Consultant with overall responsibility for the reliability of the content.**

This is the fundamental cause of the breaches of 24(2)(a) of the Broadcasting Act, leading to the description of the programme in January's History Ireland editorial as:

"a text-book exercise in media spin".

I enclose more detailed response to Ms Sammon's comments, which, along with this, form my reply to her.

Pat Muldowney
January 30, 2008