

Tom Cooper
23 Delaford Lawn
Knocklyon
Dublin 16
Tel: 085 7065200
Email: tomcooper@yahoo.co.uk

Re: Complaint 14th May 2012 "An Tost Fada"

Dear Mr. Cooper,

Thank you for your emails of 10th & 14th May 2012.

I am sorry that you felt the need to complain about the programme "An Tost Fada" which was broadcast on RTÉ One on 16th April 2012.

Your email goes into great detail and I propose to deal with the substantive issues under the following headings:

1. That the programme-makers deliberately broadcast incorrect information and set out to use Canon Salter to further a political agenda.
2. In particular, that the programme makers deliberately conflated two separate sets of killings to further that agenda.

Respectfully, RTÉ disputes these assertions.

The programme was clearly presented to viewers as the personal testimony of Canon George Salter, an 87-year-old Church of Ireland clergyman, and not as a wider historical examination of the Irish revolution in West Cork.

Following the 2009 programme - 'Cork's Bloody Secret' – Canon Salter approached the programme-makers, through his daughter, expressing a wish to put on the record the story of the exodus of his father's family from their farm in Dunmanway in 1922. He emphasised in the programme his belief in healing those past divisions.

RTÉ believes that this account from a member of a minority community brought a significant perspective to our understanding of a complex period of our history. RTÉ has

covered many perspectives of the revolutionary period in a wide range of programming, and will continue to do so.

Following the broadcast, Canon Salter has stated that the programme makers "truthfully and fairly reflected my viewpoint and recollections in the programme as broadcast". RTÉ equally does not accept that Canon Salter was manipulated to further a political agenda.

In regard to the broadcast of inaccuracies, you detail a number of issues.

a) " a photograph of the family is misdated as having been taken in 1915"

Canon Salter maintains that the photo was taken in 1915, as stated in the programme.

b) "The narrator asserted that Rev'd George Salter's father, William, received £1,700 "compensation" from the British Govt."

It was Canon Salter's recollection in interview that the sum was £1,700. If this sum was not the correct amount, RTÉ regrets that this error was broadcast and it will be removed from any future broadcast of the programme. It does not undermine the material point that the Salters were compensated by the British Government.

c) "Contrary to the film's description, William Salter reportedly left Ireland on 5 June (not April) 1922 with £1,900, proceeds of the sale of his farm in May...."

The programme does not specify a date when Canon Salter's father left. The account is Canon Salter's personal understanding of the events. The fact that the farm was sold is included in the programme.

d) "Two men, Matthew Connell and William Sweetman reported in the script as "close friends of the Salter Family", were presented as shot during April 1922 (after the War of Independence and prior to the Civil War). That is False.

In his interview Canon Salter made a mistake of memory by conflating the killings, in 1921, of two Protestant farmers near Skibbereen, Thomas Connell and Matthew Sweetnam, with the later killings of other Protestants in Dunmanway in 1922.

This mistake should have been identified and corrected during the production process, and RTÉ will ensure that it is corrected in any future broadcast of the programme. However, the conflation of the killings does not affect the central point that Canon Salter was making; that his father and his family left the area because they were in fear of their lives.

In conclusion, RTÉ regrets that two factual errors were broadcast. We do not believe that they had any material impact on the viewers' understanding of the testimony being presented in the programme.

In terms of RTÉ producing a separate 'balancing programme' as you suggest, as previously noted we have presented many perspectives on the events of the revolutionary period and will continue to do so in the future.

While it is regrettable that you personally were unhappy with this programme, you may be interested to know that following the broadcast Canon Salter received more than one hundred supportive letters from a wide range of people in Cork.

Thank you for the considerable effort you've taken in drawing your criticisms of the programme to our attention. Your detailed complaint has been carefully investigated and considered in drafting this response.

Le gach dea ghuí



Kevin Cummins
Léiritheoir Feidhmiúcháin na gCláracha Gaeilge
Executive Producer
Radio Telefís Éireann
Tel: +353 1 208 2921

