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PRIME MINISTER

Statements on Cable and Citizens Advice Bureaux

The Home Secretary made a statement on cable at Mr. Hattersley's request. It is hard to see why Mr. Hattersley made this request since the Opposition had no real points to make in questions. Their only arguments were that the development of cable should be entrusted to British Telecom and that the Government appeared to be acting with unseemly haste. They made some more minor points about the need to maintain advertising standards, to maximise the UK content of the programmes shown, and to prevent pay-per-view channels from buying up the most interesting programmes. The only excitement was caused by Jonathan Aitken, who warned the Home Secretary of the need to ensure that cable companies had sufficient financial backing; he also questioned whether limiting the experimental areas to 100,000 viewers would provide adequate profits for the companies involved.

In his statement Dr. Vaughan announced that Government funding for the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux would be maintained on the normal basis throughout the current financial year. This was grudgingly welcomed by the House. There were two themes to the Opposition's questions: first, that Dr. Vaughan should withdraw the accusations of improper political activities that he had made about the CABs; second, that he should issue a circular to local authorities explaining that they should now continue funding the bureaux on the normal basis. Dr. Vaughan tried to keep a low profile and said that he had never made any allegations about the CABs; he had simply passed on allegations made by others. He said that he would consider very seriously the need to issue a circular to local authorities. At one point, he was accused of having instigated a witch-hunt against the CABs and he made the mistake of complaining that the only person who had been the subject of a witch-hunt was himself. He also had some difficulty in explaining how the review by Sir Douglas Lovelock would be funded; he could not say how much it would cost since no tenders had yet been received.

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STATEMENT BY THE HOME SECRETARY

27 APRIL 1983

CABLE WHITE PAPER

TO BE CHECKED AGAINST DELIVERY

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I will now make a statement on the Government's White Paper on the Development of Cable Systems and Services, which is published today, in the name of myself and my rt. hon. friend the Secretary of State for Industry. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The White Paper, as the subject requires, is a long and complex document - nearly 250 paragraphs. The House will need time to study it and form its views on it. Subject to arrangements to be made by my rt. hon. friend the Leader of the House, there will be an early opportunity for a full debate.

Meanwhile I hope it will assist the House if in this statement I draw attention to the main cable issues, to do with the regulation of programme services and the safeguarding of public service broadcasting, which were still unresolved when we debated the Hunt Report on 2 December last.

The White Paper sets out a plan of action for future cable development. Central to this plan is the creation of a new statutory Cable Authority. Work is ~~now~~ starting on the preparation of a Bill to be introduced at the earliest practicable date. The Cable Authority will have two main roles: to award

/franchises to

franchises to cable operators for the provision of cable services, and to exercise supervision over those services in the manner which the White Paper describes in detail. I wish to stress five particular aspects.

First, pay-per-view. The Government has decided not to follow the Hunt Report in excluding this method of financing cable services. Cable operators have made it clear that they attach much importance to it and we believe that over a wide field, pay-per-view can be allowed without damage to BBC and ITV services and the many viewers who rely and will continue to rely on them. To protect the interests of those viewers, the Cable Authority will have the duty to exclude from pay-per-view events customarily covered by BBC or ITV.

Secondly, that restriction is in addition to the ban which, adopting the Hunt recommendation, we propose on the acquisition by cable of exclusive rights for the great national sporting events, such as the Cup Final.

Thirdly, advertising. We follow the Hunt report in proposing that the Cable Authority should adopt an advertising code which in essential particulars would follow the existing IBA code. Arrangements for clearing the copy of advertisements would follow broadly the pattern for those on independent broadcasting. On the amount of advertising, we depart from Hunt in preferring to limit advertising on cable, on channels broadly comparable to ITV, to the amount allowed on ITV - currently six minutes an hour on average. Channels wholly

/or mainly

or mainly devoted to classified or other advertising will however be allowed, and these limits will of course not apply then.

Fourthly, foreign programme material. Here we intend that there should be from the outset more stringent obligations than Hunt proposed on the use of British programme material. The Cable Authority will be required to see that a "proper proportion" is shown on each channel as appropriate; to work towards a progressive increase in that proportion as United Kingdom production capacity grows; and to report progress regularly to the Government. We are anxious to maintain and develop the strong national production capacity which the BBC and ITV have helped to create.

Fifthly, the Government is anxious that the Cable Authority should ensure high standards of cable programme services. The same rules regarding good taste and decency as apply to BBC and IBA programmes will apply to all cable channels. There will be no exception for channels with electronic locks. As the White Paper says, so-called adult channels have no place on the sort of cable systems which the Government wishes to see develop.

Finally, in the period before the legislation is enacted we are anxious to maintain and continue the momentum for cable development, through interim arrangements, of two kinds. First, the Government will be prepared, under existing powers, to authorise a limited number of new cable systems - not more than 12 - as pilot projects, each covering a maximum of ^{about} 100,000

homes. Projects will be chosen for offering a positive contribution to advanced technology, a comprehensive range of programme services and a capability of interactive services. Secondly, we propose to allow cable relay operators to offer new programme services over their existing systems for a transitional period. Where necessary the obligation to relay BBC and ITV services on the cable will be dropped, provided operators offer their customers alternative means of reception at no extra cost. No application under either of these interim arrangements will be entertained until Parliament has debated and approved the White Paper.

Mr. Speaker, the Government believes that the White Paper offers an acceptable and well-balanced set of proposals. They will give cable an excellent opportunity for development, with the stimulus that this will provide for advanced technology. At the same time they will protect public broadcasting services and those who rely on them. I commend them to the House.

RA

- 1 potential benefit
- 2 WP aims at private profit not public benefit
- 3 BT as national common carrier
- 4 Stop pay per view buying up most interesting
- 5 Advertising: standards: enough to go round
- 6 Content: programming? & how control
- 7 What rush? legislation passed last December?
2 TV nations

WW

- 1 BT monopoly - substantial with exclusive
- 2 Pay per view affects my home area.
- 3 Advert controls the same
- 4 Foreign material: Cable Authority to decide - two extra duty programmes
reduction
- 5 No work. After WP we will use powers under current legislation

State of the highways.
Mr. Vintner's Post suppliers

PDA strike (skinned)

Aitken: licences to lose. 100 000 viewers / area inadequate. Adequate
finances in banks.

NACAB

Skinner: Lovelock: A multilateralist?

Archer: whole house will welcome. No one will dispute review.
Glad not touching on political allegations. Are there without
foundation? Letter on 12/4 Damage to CABs. Local authority
funding. Circular?

Dunne: DHSS caller service.
Offices. Look at circular.

Cost? (Not until tenders)
who meets

J. Robber: NACABO report on DHSS local

Seek to persuade V to apologise
Cost of face saving.
Mistake of saying switch hunter