

FROM THE EDITOR

29 September 1986

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RECEIVED

The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP  
Chairman of the Conservative Party  
Conservative Central Office  
32 Smith Square  
London SW1

Dear Norman,

I am writing to you about a matter which is giving increasing concern to us here at ITN. It is no secret that the BBC want to start a World Television News Service as a video version of their English-language news service from Bush House. As we understand it, it would take the form of about four half-hour news programmes at different times of the day, fed up to the satellite and available free to anybody who wants to pay for the down-leg of the satellite.

Our concern centres on the fact that, in addition to use of Licence Fee money, the BBC is counting on major funding from the Foreign Office on the lines of the existing subvention to the External Services from Bush House. We understand that a BBC report recommending this system is with the Foreign Secretary right now.

There are several reasons why ITN would object to a Government-aided BBC TV World Service on these lines.

1. If taxpayers' money exists for such a purpose, should it not be open for ITN to tender?
2. ITN, together with ABC News of America and the National Nine Network of Australia, owns an international news video agency called Worldwide Television News (WTN), which serves broadcasters in over 100 countries throughout the world with an international news service several times a day. (The Prime Minister opened WTN's new headquarters in Foley Street in December 1983). The WTN turns over 20 million dollars a year. We are concerned about the effect on that business if a new BBC video service, subsidised by the British taxpayer, were to make its product available virtually free.

As you know, ITN has its own aspirations to provide a trans-frontier news service in English. Our first step in that direction will be taken in about three months' time when we shall supply a half-hour news at 2200 on the new Superchannel cable service to Europe.

ITN also envisages a major news presence for itself in the English-speaking world built upon the services it will provide to the UK DBS service in three years' time. Unfair competition from the BBC would jeopardise such aspirations.

Though we would like to tender for a world service if Government finance is to be made available, we see no reason why public money should be called upon at all. Such a service should be funded by advertising and by programme sales. Indeed, a British-originated news service of this kind could be an attractive platform for advertising British exports.

I wrote to Sir Geoffrey Howe earlier this year expressing these views, and he has assured me that no policy has yet been formulated about funding such a BBC programme.

However, the BBC is busy selling their new product worldwide so I thought you might like to be briefed on how the idea is developing, which is the reason for this letter.

Yours ever,  
David

David Nicholas