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10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

A/

8 June 1989

I attach a copy of a letter which the Prime Minister has received from Michael Darlow.

I should be grateful if you could provide a draft reply, for the Prime Minister's signature, to reach me by 22 June.

PAUL GRAY

Colin Walters, Esq.,
Home Office

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**INDEPENDENT ACCESS
STEERING COMMITTEE**

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The Right Honourable Margaret Thatcher, FRS, MP
10 Downing Street
London SW1

June 7, 1989

Dear Prime Minister,

INDEPENDENT TELEVISION PRODUCERS

Your Government has set the BBC and ITV companies the target of commissioning 25% of original material from independent producers and the recent White Paper says that the broadcasters are committed to achieving this target by the end of 1992. However, I have recently received a letter from John Major, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, in which he says "national news and news-related programming" is explicitly excluded from the Government's target.

Independent producers are deeply concerned that this exclusion is being used by the broadcasters, and possibly some officials in government departments, to create confusion about the total number of hours represented by the 25% target and seriously undermine the intention of your Government's 25% access policy, especially in the case of the BBC.

25% of BBC original output is approximately 2,500 hours. The BBC has so far announced its intention of commissioning only 600 hours by March 1991 and I understand (although the Corporation has not been so inept as to announce this publicly) only intends to commission between 900 and 1200 hours from independents by 1992.

When I and my colleagues campaigned for independent producers to provide 25% of original television output within five years, rather than the 40% over ten years proposed in the Peacock Committee Report, we did so with the intention that this, while a compromise, was a target attainable by the broadcasters which was nevertheless sufficient to introduce genuine competition into the supply of television programmes. Because this target remained sufficient to introduce the discipline of the market place into the field of television production it would provide an impetus to force the broadcasters to overhaul their inefficient, overstaffed, bureaucratic and molly-coddled production organisations, thus providing a better and more cost effective service to the public. In announcing the Government's 25% target in November 1986 the Home Secretary specifically referred to the campaign mounted by the independent producers.

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Even if news related programming is excluded (amounting to 1,000-2,000 hours of total BBC original output) we believe that it is vital that the full 25% target is achieved, even if this means the BBC commissioning compensatory numbers of hours in other programme categories.


I fear that the broadcasters, and some officials, may, by arguments about the minutiae of hours and exclusions be attempting to bamboozle the Government and hijack the access policy.

I remember that during the Downing Street seminar you said that you did not want to see the little boys, by which I (and most others) took you to mean the independents, bullied by the big boys. In the matter of achieving fair contracts with broadcasters some of the producers whom I represent have had to put up with a good deal of bullying. However, in the matter of achieving a genuine 25% of independent production on BBC and ITV we may be facing the biggest and most effective piece of bullying of all.

Meeting record at flat

16

Yours sincerely



Michael Darlow

BROADCASTING: Seminars

PT2