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QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

4 August 1989

BF?

Dear Nigel

NEWS FOR CHANNELS 3, 4 AND 5

Thank you for copying to me your minute of 27 July raising two points on the proposals I set out in my minute of 25 July. *for*

On your ^{first} point, the proposal that Channel 3 licensees be required to show high quality regional news is not so much a new requirement as a clarification of the effect of the decisions we have already taken. The White Paper made clear that licensees would be required to show high quality news and current affairs, and to show regional programming. We have since decided to enhance the quality threshold by means of a requirement on licensees to show a reasonable proportion of programmes of high quality. In these circumstances it would, in my judgment, look odd were the legislation to indicate that regional news need not be of high quality. Given that there is to be a requirement for regional programming (including regional news), I cannot see that in practice it is unduly burdensome to require that the regional news should be of high quality; and if we decline so to provide, the effect will be to undermine our commitment to the regional character of Channel 3, a point which our critics will quickly seize upon.

My proposal that Channel 3 licensees be required to broadcast national news simultaneously springs from representations I have received from ITN, and others, that if news is to retain its requisite high quality it must be transmitted live, since pre-recorded news loses much of its momentum and up-to-the-minute value. However, ITN are clear that no single news organisation would have the resources to provide a live news service to perhaps 15 regions at various times during an evening schedule. The implication, therefore, is that news services should be provided live from a single source and transmitted in all regions simultaneously. I see considerable force in these arguments and would be reluctant to drop the requirement for simultaneous news transmission. On your point about flexible scheduling and market share, however, I would point out that my proposal is that Channel 3 licensees collectively should determine the scheduling and duration of the news broadcasts from the approved news provider, but that there would be nothing to stop licensees individually from taking additional news services of high quality from a non-approved news provider if they judged this to be in their commercial interests.

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson, MP.

/over....



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I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, to other MISC 128 colleagues, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to Sir Robin Butler.

Lowery,

Dougherty,