



CCP

Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP
Home Secretary
Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON
SW1

NBM
at his stage

8 August 1989

Reilly

Dear Douglas,

I should like to comment on one aspect of the proposals in your minute of 21 July to the Prime Minister about commercial television news.

You propose that the forthcoming Broadcasting Bill should, among other things, include a requirement that all regional Channel 3 licensees should show high quality regional news, as part of the requirement to show regional programming. Regional news is important in all parts of the country. But, for obvious reasons, it is of special importance in Northern Ireland. At present both the BBC and Ulster Television make considerable efforts to provide an informed and balanced service and it is important to our long term approach that this authoritative source of information is available.

It is likely that any regional licensee in Northern Ireland would continue to provide a news service. However, news and particularly high quality news is an expensive commodity. Accordingly, while I see the force of Nigel Lawson's argument that we rely on market forces to ensure the supply of high quality regional news where there is a demand for it, I would be reassured if we could adopt your approach because there is an overriding policy interest in ensuring that this happens, whether or not market forces were to produce that result.

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

L
Lawson

PM

PB

Broadcasting Policy PC 9.

