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CAB
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Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd CBE MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT

13 August 1989

Dear Douglas,

BROADCASTING BILL: REQUIREMENT FOR POLITICAL MESSAGES

I have seen your proposal of 28 July, Kenneth Baker's comments of 3 August and Nick Ridley's of 7 August.

We did not propose statutory powers requiring commercial television licensees to show Ministerial, electoral or political broadcasts in the Broadcasting White Paper and I am not certain that we should do so now. Licensees will wish to carry political and electoral broadcasts if they believe their viewers want to see them. In these circumstances, licensees will be bound by the rules covering political impartiality to offer a balanced coverage. If viewers do not want to watch such broadcasts they will be able to avoid them by switching to one of the many territorial or satellite TV channels that will be available by 1993. So there may be little purpose in giving the ITC powers to require licensees to carry political or electoral broadcasts, particularly if their allocation were to remain a matter for voluntary negotiation.

There may be a case for requiring licensees to allow Ministers to broadcast after key announcements or at times of crisis, followed by a reply by the Opposition. But in these situations it seems most unlikely that commercial television companies would not wish to broadcast the message voluntarily given its inherent newsworthiness - unless the power was being abused. So again I am not convinced new powers are required.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, other MISC 128 colleagues, Geoffrey Howe, Kenneth Baker and David Waddington.

Yours ever

Peter

PETER LILLEY

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BROADCASTING: Party BC

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