



CCP

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PRIME MINISTER

GAELIC TELEVISION SERVICES

Douglas Hurd's minute of 17 October covered a report by officials on Malcolm Rifkind's proposals.

The report notes the commercial television companies' view that showing Gaelic programmes results in a reduction in average viewing figures, with knock on effects for adjacent programmes on the same channel. This suggests there is little demand for the 100 hours of Gaelic TV broadcast at present. I do not believe we ought to inflict more on a largely unwilling audience.

I am particularly concerned with the suggestion that an addition be made to the quality threshold in the Broadcasting Bill: to require the two franchise holders in Scotland to provide a specific number of hours of Gaelic programming. Each addition to the quality threshold to promote particular interests will make it more difficult to resist further amendments. The officials' report asks whether we want to adopt this approach and I am sure the answer must be no.

The report also concludes that without a guarantee that Gaelic programmes would be shown, the Gaelic Production Fund proposed by Malcolm Rifkind would not be effective. I conclude we should not pursue the idea further. This would be entirely consistent with the policy set out in our Broadcasting White Paper, which held out no prospect that more Gaelic programmes would be provided unless and until the demand for them existed.



However, should some financial support be felt to be worthwhile, I would expect it to be met from the Scottish block and paid for from a cash-limited Scottish vote. No link should be made between the size of any payments of public monies to the fund and revenues of television companies. Scottish Ministers would then be able to determine in future years whether financing Gaelic television programmes remained a high priority.

I have no firm views as to who should administer any fund except that it should not be the Independent Television Commission; which is to be a regulatory body, not a broadcaster nor a programme commissioner. If, as officials suggest, no suitable Gaelic representative body is at present capable of administering the proposed fund without assistance, the case for providing a new public subsidy cannot be that strong.

I am copying this minute to members of MISC 128 and to Sir Robin Butler.

RL

[N.L.]

25 October 1989

[Approved by the Chancellor
and signed on his behalf]

Broadcasting - Pamy PV9

