



FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE
AND THE CHIEF WHIP

ce/p
n.b. P.M.

BHP

17/9

17 September 1990

Jean Peter,

BROADCASTING BILL: QUALITY THRESHOLD

Thank you for your letter of 7 September. Both the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip are most concerned about the way in which this decision has been announced. They fear that it may have serious implications for the future of the Bill, though they will obviously work to minimise that.

As a general rule, the announcement of the Government's intentions regarding a defeat in the House of Lords should not be made whilst the Bill is still in the House. It creates bad blood if an announcement is made outside Parliament, particularly by a Commons Minister. It is very possible that the Leader of the Opposition will make a formal protest about this on the floor of the House, thereby getting the Report Stage of the Bill off to an exceptionally bad start in the spill-over.

Secondly, from the point of view of handling Government defeats in the Lords, the Chief Whip always argues strongly that all hostile amendments that might be sent back from the Lords to the Commons should be considered as a package, after the Bill has completed its Lords stages, so as to ensure that the handling of reversals is as smooth as possible. To make premature announcements relating to individual defeats runs counter to this. This may not seem to matter in the present case, granted that this very large and controversial Bill has so far suffered only one defeat in the House of Lords. That is, however, all the more reason for avoiding creating bad feeling at Report.

There is probably nothing that can be done in the light of Mr Mellor's announcement of 4 September to rectify events in the present case. The Lord Privy Seal and Chief Whip would however be grateful if proposals for any similar announcements could in future be cleared with them in advance.

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries to members of MISC 128, to Gillian Kirton (Lord Privy Seal's Office), and to Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours etc
Jean Peter

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