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10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

7 December 1989

Dear Sara,

BROADCASTING BILL: REGIONS AND SUB-REGIONS

Thank you for your letter of 5 December which the Prime Minister has seen. She is content with the proposed sub-regional programming power, on the understanding that the ITC will retain the right to reconsider the regional map in the light of commercial experience.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of MISC 128 and to Stephen Williams (Welsh Office) and Sonia Phippard (Cabinet Office).

Yours,
Paul

Paul Gray

Ms Sara Dent
Home Office.

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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

cc/ll



Prime Minister

Brian Griffiths suggests that the sub-regional programming power should be agreed, as long as the ITC retains the

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5 December 1989

Dear Paul

right to re-consider the regional map in the light of commercial experience. Content on that basis?

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BROADCASTING BILL: REGIONS AND SUB-REGIONS

The Home Secretary has been giving thought to the scope of the requirement, to be included in the Broadcasting Bill, for Channel 3 (ITV) licensees to show a suitable amount of regional programming.

As presently conceived, this requirement would be met by a licensee broadcasting a single set of regional programmes to the whole of his franchise area. There are at present however three ITV regional franchisees (TVS, HTV and Central) who are obliged through their contracts with the IBA to provide some differentiated regional programming on a sub-regional basis. The IBA originally adopted this sub-regional concept, rather than specifying smaller separate regions, because they did not believe that such regions would be viable on their own.

For Central and TVS the requirement for sub-regions simply reflects the diverse nature of these relatively large regions. The position in relation to HTV is rather different, in that one of the sub-regions is the whole of Wales, which, unlike Scotland and Northern Ireland, does not have an ITV franchise of its own. The IBA doubt whether a separate Welsh licence would be viable.

The Home Secretary is concerned that if the ITC do not inherit the IBA's power to require sub-regional programming, viewers in these areas could find themselves presented with a less satisfactory regional service in the future. The Government's commitment, emphasised in the White Paper, to preserving the regional identity of Channel 3. could thereby be called into question. There would obviously be particular difficulties if the concept of the Welsh sub-region were thought to be at risk. The regional issue is naturally politically sensitive, and the Home Secretary is concerned that the handling of the Bill could be made unnecessarily difficult if this point is left unaddressed.

/The Home Secretary

Paul Gray, Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street

The Home Secretary has consulted the Chairman of the IBA who has indicated that if the ITC were not able to specify dual regions, they might have to reconsider whether they could maintain the same regional structure as exists at present. The Home Secretary considers it highly desirable that the existing regional structures should be retained. He has therefore concluded that the ITC should have a power to require some regions to provide sub-regional programming.

Currently, each of the three regions which are required to produce differentiated programming broadcast about eight hours per week of regional programmes. In the HTV area entirely separate programmes are broadcast in the two sub-regions. In the other two areas just over half of the programmes are differentiated and the remainder are common to both sub-regions.

The Home Secretary is clear that the requirement would extend only to the provision of separate programmes in sub-regions. The ITC would not have the power to require licensees to have premises in each of the two sub-regions. It would, therefore, be entirely possible for a licensee to broadcast the sub-regional programmes from the same base.

The Home Secretary would be grateful to know if MISC 128 colleagues are content that the regional requirement should be refined in this way.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to MISC 128 colleagues and to the Secretary of State for Wales and Sir Robin Butler.

Yours sincerely
Sera Dent

MS S J DENT



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