

PRIME MINISTER

BROADCASTING BILL: IMPARTIALITY AND BALANCE

Ten days ago you talked through with Brian Griffiths a complex letter from the Home Office setting out proposals for impartiality and balance for inclusion in the Broadcasting Bill.

The Home Office have now written back (Flag A) on two of these points:

- (i) You were concerned that, on the question of political and industrial controversy, matters with a historical aspect should still be included within the restriction. The Home Office argue that, by limiting the restriction to matters of current controversy, that would still include issues with a historical aspect; all that would be excluded would be old controversies which were no longer matters of current interest or concern. They therefore reiterate the case for basing the restriction on matters of "current controversy".

- (ii) You had questioned the proposal to extend to national satellite television services (BSB, Sky, etc.) the tighter "due impartiality" requirement - which applies to national terrestrial television - rather than the lighter "undue prominence" test. Again, the Home Office wish to stick to their earlier proposal. The Home Secretary argues that all major national and international terrestrial and satellite services, which are competing for mass audiences, should be subject to the same requirements; and that only specifically local services should be regulated by the lighter "undue prominence" test.

The Broadcasting Bill has now been published, and the Home Office letter explains that its drafting reflects their preferred approach. If you wanted to press your earlier comments, it would therefore be necessary to bring forward amendments at an appropriate point during the passage of the Bill.

Brian Griffiths (Flag B) continues to favour your earlier amendments, although he suggests that neither of the issues is a major one to do battle over.

Against that background, you will want to consider whether to press your earlier concerns.

(i) Content, reluctantly, now to accept the Home Office approach on these two points;

Yes not

or

(ii) Do you want to press your earlier objections?

Satunia A. Parker

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Duty blank.

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