

11 December 1989

BROADCASTING BILL: IMPARTIALITY & BALANCE

The Home Secretary raises two points:

First, the Bill should make clear that "due impartiality" should apply to programmes which deal with current political or industrial controversy and not as the White Paper proposed, simply political or industrial controversy. The problem with the latter is that it might include programmes which deal with matters of "purely historic interest".

While this issue is not a major one to do battle over, it would still seem worthwhile to keep to the original proposal in the White Paper, as there are many potential programmes which could be produced under the label "purely historical interest", but which would be a vehicle for left-wing and Marxist propaganda. Better to be safe than sorry.

Second, there is the question of whether satellite TV services should have the "due impartiality test" imposed on them or whether they should be subject to the lighter regulatory requirement of "undue prominence".

Again this is not a major issue. Up till now, the Government has encouraged cable & satellite TV to develop under a lighter regulatory regime. The advent of competitive television means that in time this medium will be become more like newspapers so that the scope for detailed supervision will be reduced.

During the transition, however, satellite TV will remain a small fraction of UK television and there seems no particular reason to add more controls to the development of these new services.

When, however, satellite TV and cable have become major players in the market alongside terrestrial TV, then if there is still inadequate competition, the position might need to be reassessed. Until then present policy seems entirely adequate.

Recommendation

Stick to original proposals.

BG

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