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SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Rt Hon David Waddington QC MP
Home Secretary
50 Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON
SW1

MBM to his stage.

*Rec 6
1/2*

31 January 1990

Dear David,

BROADCASTING BILL: THE NORTHERN IRELAND LICENCE

Thank you for your letter of 9 January. *flap*

I am grateful for what you say about the importance of treating Northern Ireland as a separate licence area, and am reassured that you propose to ask George Russell to let you know if there is any question of combining Northern Ireland with some other existing regional franchise so that we could if necessary return to the issue at that time.

In your letter of 20 November you said that you proposed to let George Russell know, informally, that if the Northern Ireland licensee were to run into financial difficulties you would look sympathetically at what might be done by Government to help. I welcome that, while noting that any financial support would presumably come from the Home Office because of its responsibility for broadcasting matters. Your most recent letter explains that you would envisage discussing the source of any such finance with the Treasury at the time. On the assumption that there is no suggestion that such support should be found from within the Northern Ireland Public Expenditure Block I am content to leave the question of the future viability of a Northern Ireland licensee on this basis.

I am grateful for what you say about the costs of independently produced programmes in response to the concern that I reported about the impact that this might have both on the Channel 3 licensee and on BBC (NI). I note that you propose to follow this issue up both with the BBC and with the independent producers and I look forward to hearing the outcome in due course. I quite appreciate that the situation is a dynamic one, but I am also conscious both that the transitional strains may bear quite hard on a region like Northern Ireland, and that the net result of the dynamic process now being initiated may be the transfer of jobs in the television industry away from Northern Ireland to Great Britain or to the Republic.

There are a number of issues on the question of ownership:

(i) I am sure that the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland will be able to let the Independent Television Commission know about any relevant issues concerning the structure and background of applicants for the Northern Ireland licence, against the possibility that the licence should fall into undesirable hands.

(ii) I am glad to see that you are considering preventing the holding of UK broadcasting licences by broadcasters whose services are already received to a significant extent in the licence area in question. That would not rule out RTE from holding a licence in Great Britain, but it would certainly meet my primary concern that they might secure the Northern Ireland licence. Accordingly, I hope that you will indeed decide to make an amendment to achieve this result and I would be grateful if you would let me know the outcome of your further consideration.

(iii) I am content not to press further the point I exposed in my earlier letter: namely that the outcome of this legislation may be that a legitimate company based in the Republic will



secure the Northern Ireland Channel 3 licence. As you say, there are various provisions in the Bill which may be relevant and it is clearly important that the licensee will be required to provide a suitable proportion of regional programmes. On that point I am grateful to you for your response about the importance of reflecting the dual traditions in Northern Ireland. I very much hope that the amendment I understand you have recently proposed to MISC 128 can indeed be drafted so as to enable the ITC to specify that the licensee for Northern Ireland must provide adequate programming for the two communities there. Again, I should be most interested to learn the outcome of your further exchanges about this.

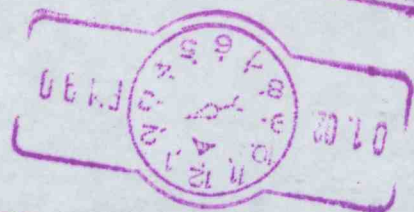
I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Lord President and the Foreign Secretary.

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PB

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BROADCASTING

POLICY

P210

THE EDITOR

Value for money on TV franchise

From Lord Thomson of Monifieth and others

Sir, As the last three chairmen of the Independent Broadcasting Authority, we are naturally proud of the fact that for the last 35 years, under successive acts of Parliament, Independent Television has provided viewers in Britain with the unique achievement of a public broadcasting system of quality, yet wholly commercially financed. We plead that Parliament, in the new Broadcasting Bill, will preserve that distinctive quality.

We welcome the fact that between publication of the White Paper and the Bill the Government showed a willingness to make changes, and that ministers have since said they may be ready to consider further amendments in response to reasoned arguments.

Amongst a number of matters of considerable concern in the Bill, we place particular importance on modifying the present proposal to allocate a commercial television contract to the highest bidder, albeit from a shoplist of those whose promises of programme quality have proved acceptable to the new Independent Television Commission.

We believe that this will lead to a serious risk of over-bidding. The consequent financial pressures will result in reduced resources for programme making and in lower standards overall and endanger the provision of serious drama, documentaries and educational programmes.

If the Government are not prepared to accept some of the more radical alternatives that have been suggested to safeguard quality, we urge them at least to adopt the majority recommendation of the Peacock committee that the ITC should have the right to decide that a company offering a lower price was giving more value for money in terms of public service, and accordingly award the franchise to them, while making a public statement of its reasons.

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE THOMSON

(Chairman, Independent Television Authority, 1981-88),
BRIDGET PLOWDEN (1975-80),
HERBERT AYLESTONE (1967-75),
9 Cavendish Place, W1.

*From the Minister of State,
Home Office*

Sir, The letter from the chairman of Granada Television which appeared in your columns today about the Government's broad-

casting proposals is based in part on a misunderstanding. I wonder if I might set the record straight.

Mr Plowright says that the financial bid offered by applicants for Channel 3 licences will be "hidden in a sealed envelope" until after the licensing authority (the Independent Television Commission) has decided whether the applicant has passed the required quality threshold. The ITC will therefore be unable, he says, to make any sensible assessment of the applicant's overall forward financial projections.

This is not so. Clause 15(2) of the Broadcasting Bill makes it clear that the applicant must give the ITC full information at the outset about his projected financial position for the whole of the licence period. That information will necessarily include the financial bid which the applicant puts forward, as well as the revenue projections illustrating how that bid will be funded over the term of the licence.

It is true that the formal ranking of the financial bids takes place at a subsequent stage of the licence allocation process. But that does not mean that the ITC is unable to satisfy itself before then that the bid is realistic in terms of the applicant's overall business plan.

More generally I take issue with Mr Plowright's assertion that our proposals subordinate quality programming to cash for the Treasury. The Bill provides a rigorous quality hurdle which applicants will have to jump convincingly before their financial bids are considered. Those who in Mr Plowright's words "brush against the top of the fence" run a serious risk of being adjudged to have failed the quality test.

To the extent that there are substantial quality differences between applicants who do clear the quality threshold — and I am not convinced that this will be a very frequent occurrence — the Bill already gives the ITC power to consider whether these constitute "exceptional circumstances" enabling them to override the highest financial bid in order to award the licence to an applicant offering a significantly higher quality of programming.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID MELLOR,
Home Office,
Queen Anne's Gate, SW1.
January 30.

Arts research grants

*From the Secretary of the
Graduate Tutors' Committee*

the number of its awards for this academic year, 1989-90. As tutors for research students in both

Dutch treat for British schools

How are Dutch teachers preparing to help tackle the crisis in our classrooms? Douglas Broom reports

Marga Veen is a Dutch relief worker. She is 21, just out of college, and heading for Britain to help solve a crisis that threatens the education of thousands of children in London and the south-east.

Although she has never had a full-time teaching job in her native Amsterdam, and her experience of Britain is limited to a week spent in Milton Keynes five years ago, Veen wants to take on one of the most demanding jobs in teaching. If she is successful, she will fly to London in a few weeks' time to take up a teaching post in Hounslow, a deprived and racially troubled borough close to Heathrow airport.

But unlike the 60 Dutch teachers recruited to help plug London's chronic teacher shortages last September, Veen is not entirely unprepared: she is one of the first graduates of a new course at the University of Amsterdam designed to give recruits from The Netherlands some idea of what they are coming to.

Judith Burdell, one of the English tutors on the 10-day course, says that many of the first intake were shocked at the contrasts between the formal Dutch education system, where all schools follow a national curriculum, and the more progressive teaching methods favoured in London. In addition to the problems of having to work in a foreign language all day, many had difficulty coping with a situation in which they were simply given a timetable, and told to devise their own lessons.

Professor Chris Mullard, Professor of Education and Ethnic Studies at Amsterdam University, is critical of the methods used by the Inner London Education Au-

thority to recruit the first wave of Dutch teachers last summer. Finding itself short of more than 1,000 teachers, the Labour-controlled authority resorted to a "press-gang" approach, with the result that recruitment was "unprofessional in the extreme", he says. His "grave concerns" prompted him to set up Euroselect, the consultancy which now runs the Amsterdam course.

Mullard, a pioneer of "anti-racist education", had particular worries. "We initiated this because we were very upset by the initial foray by Ilea, which recruited almost only white teachers. Forty per cent of schools in Amsterdam have significant numbers of black children in them. We also have a considerable number of black teachers, but Ilea did not appear to look at them."

The formation of Euroselect was prompted by a desire to base crisis recruitment on "a firm ethical basis". If Dutch teachers are going to predominantly black schools in London, Mullard asks, would it not help if they too were black?

His approach seems to have won support from Labour and Conservative education authorities alike. Ilea was one of the first to sign up for Euroselect's services. Although the authority, due to be abolished in nine weeks, has now halted its recruitment drive, Euroselect is working for outer London boroughs such as Hounslow and Newham, as well as Essex, Berkshire, Kent and Liverpool.

There is no shortage of applicants. The Netherlands has 3,000 unemployed teachers, the result of a system of higher education that lacks Britain's checks on the supply of graduates, particularly teachers. Any Dutch pupil who gains the equivalent of