

PRIME MINISTER

BROADCASTING BILL: QUALITY

Following your last Constituency Surgery, you asked the Home Secretary for a note about the violent films on television and video. His minute at flag A promises to write to you further about that. But he takes the opportunity to launch into a minute of fundamental importance for the remaining handling of the Broadcasting Bill.

In the light of discussions in Committee, Home Office Ministers have concluded that a series of concessions are necessary to enhance the "quality" requirements for ITV. These would involve:

- as the central proposal - redefining the power to award licences to lower bids from "exceptional circumstances" to "exceptional quality difference".
- specifying that a suitable amount of religious and children's programmes must be included in schedules.
- extending the quality to mean a suitable proportion of high quality programmes in each category of programming.
- requiring that regional news coverage must be of high quality.

Home Office Ministers argue that this is the minimum package necessary to achieve the passage of the Bill; and that it does not involve any fundamental changes of substance.

Brian Griffiths (flag B) analyses the proposal. He argues that, on merit, all the proposed changes are a backward step. The issue is whether the politics of getting the Bill through override the underlying policy aims. At the end of his note Brian sets out the proposed concessions in ascending order of damage, namely:

Note

Told Home Secretary's office that
he P.M. wished to discuss this with
him; now arranged for next week.

Re 6
27/1

CC Bachy

- religious broadcasting;
- children's broadcasting;
- high quality regional news;
- high quality across all programmes;
- "exceptional quality difference".

You will want to consider whether to reach a firm view on the proposals now or to talk this through with Home Office Ministers.

(i) Do you want to talk to Home Office Ministers?

OR

Yes please

(ii) Do you want to reach a firm view now? If so, which if any of the proposed concessions are you prepared to let through?

Perf.

PAUL GRAY

26 February 1990

Note I agree with Brian's note - but we cannot agree it that way.

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The real difficulty is in defining quality. We don't see much of it on our television but the T.V. companies constantly give the impression we do. The ordinary person considers bad language (and we hear 4-letter words on both channels) violence, bad & disgusting behaviour and undernourishment which would be acceptable standards as bad & that it should be cut out of all programmes.

What is 'good quality news'?

The whole thing is a terrible increase in regulation in terms that are difficult to apply but which will favour the present to the detriment of their constant aim. We should, in fact, make it quite clear that the proposed quality amendment must not be used to prohibit existing witnesses and reduce the opportunities for new ones, not