

me MJ

MR INGHAM  
PROFESSOR GRIFFITHS  
MR WHITTINGDALE

BROADCASTING OF POLITICAL MESSAGES

You will all wish to glance at the attached minute from Douglas Hurd setting out how he proposes to handle political broadcasts in the context of next session's Broadcasting Bill. Before I put this to the Prime Minister, perhaps you could let me have any comments. Given my leave commitments it would be helpful to have these by next Monday please.

Paul Gray

28 July 1989

MJLADF



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PRIME MINISTER

**BROADCASTING BILL: REQUIREMENT FOR POLITICAL MESSAGES**

I have been giving some thought to the extent to which the Broadcasting Bill should empower the Independent Television Commission (ITC) to require licensees to show Ministerial announcements, party political broadcasts and party election broadcasts. As this is a potentially sensitive area, you and colleagues may wish to be aware of my proposals.

2. At present there is no statutory basis for the provision of any of these broadcasts. The BBC has an arrangement concerning Ministerial broadcasts under which Government and Opposition spokesmen are given facilities to broadcast, which is contained in an aide-memoire first drawn up in 1947 and revised in 1969. Similar provisions exist in the IBA'S guidelines for independent television. For party political and party election broadcasts, the BBC and the IBA have developed non-statutory arrangements with the political parties over the provision of such broadcasting time and this generally meets with agreement, although some of the smaller parties have in the past complained that they do not get a fair share of broadcasting time.

3. In the future, however, each of the independent television licensees will be a broadcaster in his own right and it might prove more difficult to achieve the same degree of co-operation. Accordingly I propose that the Broadcasting Bill should empower the ITC to require the licensee to broadcast a Ministerial announcement, and to show party election broadcasts.

4. I do not believe that the same powers would be justified in relation to party political broadcasts. I believe that the requirement that programmes should be balanced politically (not necessarily within a programme but across a range of similar programmes) will prevent any licensee from exercising any unreasonable discrimination either against or in favour of any particular party. My general conclusion is that party political broadcasts should continue to be a matter of agreement between the parties concerned and the licensees (with the ITC possibly offering a brokerage service), subject to the general requirement that licensees should not show any unreasonable discrimination.

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5. I am not proposing any statutory provision concerning the way in which Ministerial announcements are requested or the method for determining the allocation of party election broadcasts. Such arrangements would be better developed informally, as has been the case in the past.

6. To sum up, I am proposing that the Bill:

- (a) should contain a provision empowering the ITC to require licensees to show Ministerial announcements and party election broadcasts;
- (b) should be silent concerning party political broadcasts.

7. I am copying this minute to MISC 128 colleagues, to Geoffrey Howe, David Waddington and Kenneth Baker.

*Geoffrey Howe*

28 July 1989

