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QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

5 May 1983

Dear Jim

JD  
7/6 -

WHITE PAPER ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CABLE SYSTEMS AND SERVICES

Thank you for your letter of 25 April on the Cable White Paper which was, as you know, published on 27 April.

Cable will give the opportunity for more politically committed programming than has been possible on public service broadcasting but I entirely accept what you say about the need to guard against subversion or incitement to violence. The Bill will require the Cable Authority, like the IBA, to ensure that nothing is included in programmes which is likely to encourage or incite to crime or lead to disorder or to be offensive to public feelings. I am sure that the Authority will take this responsibility seriously. As far as local sensitivities are concerned the Cable Authority will, as paragraph 68 of the White Paper states, be required to consult locally before awarding a franchise. I doubt whether it would be expedient to write anything specific into the legislation about the possibility of differing standards of taste and decency in particular parts of the United Kingdom but in considering what is likely to offend accepted norms the Cable Authority will, I believe, want to take account of the likely audience.

I have never been in any doubt that if the Cable Authority, on the analogy of the BBC and IBA, has reserved places for national Members Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will each have to be represented. As you say, however, this is not really compatible with our intention of having a small, flexible Authority. The BBC and IBA each have 12 Governors/ Authority members and I fear that, if we conceded the case for national Members, we should inexorably be led towards that sort of number, instead of the seven proposed in paragraph 46 of the White Paper. I can, however, give an assurance that in making appointments to the Authority I should wish to give particular attention to the need to secure representation from various parts of the country but I propose that work on drafting the Bill should proceed on the basis that there will not be statutorily reserved places for national Members. This would not, of course, in any way preclude George Younger or Nick Edwards from raising the point when we come, as no doubt we shall, to discuss outstanding policy issues during the drafting of the Bill.

Copies of this letter go to the Prime Minister, Cabinet colleagues and Sir Robert Armstrong.

James Prior

The Rt. Hon. James Prior, MP.

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