CIB

CAMPAIGN for INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING

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Formerly-National Commercial Radio Movement

Pressure group favours two-tier free radio

ONE OF THE pressure groups for free radio, the Campaign for Independent Broadcasting, last week met the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications to express its views on the setting up of independent sound broadcasting stations in the UK, writes Bob Raggett.

In general terms the CIB supports the setting up of a two-tier systems of local and regional stations.

The multiple units of small regional independent stations with unit coverage of between 50 and 100 miles would, it believes, overlap and stimulate healthy competition between the operating companies, encouraging them to aim their programmes at different sections of the commercial market.

The method of transmission advocated by the CIB for the regional service lies in the use of VHF FM with transmitters powers of the order of 20 to 60 kW in the 97 to 100 MHz range. It adds that the movement of Home Office mobile services from Band II would allow the use of vertically polarised aerials for improved reception of FM on car radios.

Power and coverage allocated to a successful licence applicant should, says the organisation, bear a relationship to the potential audience coverage; and the provision of services over mountainous areas, particularly in Wales and Scotland, will require the use of MF rather than VHF and here frequencies released by the ending of the BBC English regional "opt out" programmes could be made available.

Low power medium wave transmitters, it believes, could carry the local commercial services, operating in the main under Article 8b of the Copenhagen Plan during the hours of daylight using VHF during hours of darkness.

The larger local stations may be in a position to run the VHF and MF transmitters during daylight hours, in which case a separate programming requirement for one or other of the outputs for at least 10 to 20 per cent of the total operating time would be desirable.

Of the suggestion that low power medium wave transmitters could operate a service during day and night hours, the CIB feels that while this is possible using the international common frequencies, the number of stations able to use these channels would be restricted.

The use of MF after dark, utilising directional aerials, would cause little or no interference to Continental services, but unwanted signals arriving from the Continent would give a drastic reduction in the usable service area of each local transmitter, and such a system, therefore, is not considered by the organisation to long term prospects.

The CIB is against an ITA-type organisation controlling the transmitters, licensing and standards of local and regional broadcasting companies. They suggest the setting up of a Broadcasting Council which would grant licences to successful applicants, renewable after a period of five years on the provision of a satisfactory standard of service. This system would also, they believe, avoid commercial monopoly.

The Council, members of which should be appointed by the Government, should also have its own technical officers who would advise on the allocation of frequencies on receipt of blocks or sets of separate frequencies from the Ministry.

Frequency availability looks like imposing the limit on the number of stations, but the CIB suggests three or four local stations in London with one or perhaps two in other towns and cities.

The main opposition to this overall proposal will obviously come from its advocation of the use of FM which will initially, anyway, reduce the potential audiences of the stations.

However, from a technical point of view, there can be little doubt that this is the right way to go.