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CAMPAIGN for INDEPENDENT BROADCASTING

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Formerly–National Commercial Radio Movement

Independent Broadcasting in the United Kingdom

Now that the desirability of additional independent sound broadcasting stations as well as the B.B.C. has been recognised, the question arises as to what form those additional services are to take in order to provide the widest possible variety of choice, and technical progress available to the maximum number of the population. The following section is given to the consideration of commercially financed radio.

National Commercial Radio

Would meet the requirements of availability to the maximum numbers of the population, but owing to limitations of frequency space it is unlikely that more than one or at the most two national programme channels could be engineered. This would leave such a system open to the undesirable effects of a commercial monopoly, and must therefore be regarded as unsuitable.

Regional Commercial Radio

The introduction of multiple units of small regional independent radio stations with unit coverage of between 50 to 100 miles would give extensive overlap of service areas. The healthy competition ensuing would encourage companies to aim their programme outputs at different sections of the commercial market. This would provide a wide variety of choice available to a high population percentage.

The method for transmission of this type of service lies in the use of V.H.F. F.M., with transmitter powers in the order of 20 to 60 Kw in the 97 to 100 Mhz range. It has been said in certain quarters that V.H.F. radio is a non-starter from the commercial point of view. The number of receivers incorporating the F.M. band is constantly increasing and should soon render these views obsolete. The movement of Home Office mobile services from Band II would allow the use of vertically polarised aerials with consequent improved reception of F.M. on car receivers. These principles have been applied in the United States where the use of FM car receivers is widespread, as indeed is FM stereo broadcasting, which will now hopefully receive its much needed impetus in the U.K. These views are supported in principle by the radio receiver manufacturers.

The power and coverage allocated to a successful licence applicant should bear a relationship to the potential audience coverage, by this means rural areas should provide sufficient viability to ensure a service.

The provision of these services over mountainous areas such as in Wales and Scotland will require the use of medium wave rather than V.H.F. and here consideration should be given to those frequencies released by the ending of the B.B.C. English regional 'opt out' programmes (as suggested in the B.B.C. Handbook 1970, page 58).

Small regional radio would be in the position to provide a positive increase in opportunity for the musical trades, thus aiding the financial negotiations over any increase in "needle time". The advertising content of stations of this type is likely to be mainly of a national character and as such is unlikely to affect local newspapers.

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Local Commercial Radio

Can provide a new concept in listening habits in our major cities and large towns. The advertising market for this type of station would be of a predominantly local character. Local newspapers should be able to take a stake in these stations. Here again the coverage allocated to a successful applicant should take into account potential audience coverage. Low power medium wave transmitters could carry these services, operating in the main under article 8b of the Copenhagen Plan during the hours of daylight using V.H.F. during hours of darkness. The larger local stations may be in the position to run the V.H.F. and MF transmitters during daylight hours in which case a separate programming requirement for one or the other of the outputs for at least 10-20% of total operating time would be desirable.

It has been suggested that low power medium wave transmitters could operate a service during day and night hours, while this is possible using the International common frequencies the numbers of stations able to use these channels would be restricted. The use of medium wave after dark utilising directional aerials would cause minimum 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. Such a system is not considered to hold long term prospects.

Control of Licences

A Broadcasting Council granting renewable licenced frequencies to successful applicants would allow maximum flexibility and development in the management of individual stations. Licences running for a period of five years would be renewable upon the provision of a satisfactory standard of service. Strict controls must be made to avoid commercial monopoly. The renewability factor of licences should provide the main element of control. The objective of the Council should be to develop a system with the minimum of pre-set controls. Members of the Council should be appointed by the Government for their term of office and should represent a wide cross section of public life. Not more than one third of its members should represent any one political party.

Regional sections of the Council would report on broadcasting in their areas, the Chairman of each regional section would be a member of the National Council. The Council should have its own technical officers who would advise the council on the allocation of frequencies on receipt of blocks or sets of separate frequencies from the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications who would give broad guidelines as to the type of usage for each classification of frequencies.

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Sound Broadcasting in the United Kingdom

B.B.C. Local Radio

The B.B.C. has currently nine stations operational. There are proposals towards a figure of forty of which twelve further locations have been named. We have no objection to the B.B.C. further extending its services in principle, but on technical grounds the shortage of frequencies would mean that the B.B.C. would have a majority stake in the available channels, particularly in Band II V.H.F. On this basis we recommend that the B.B.C. be allowed to implement some of the twelve local radio locations which have been named, but that the remaining number of proposed B.B.C. local stations be held over pending the results of the studies being made into the establishment of independent stations.

It is worthy of note that we suggested to the B.B.C. during their study period for "Broadcasting in the Seventies" last August that they could achieve the coverage of large unit local radio by utilising the Radio 4 V.H.F. transmitters in an 'opt out' system to give 'local' coverage for the 5 or so hours per day leaving the national Radio 4 on medium wave at these times.

The Open University

Has requested a separate national network of V.H.F. transmitters 97.6 to 100 Mcs to be built at an estimated cost of £4.5 million and to be operated by the B.B.C. We support the concept of University Radio but suggest that as B.B.C. 'local' radio stations have been increasing in unit coverage from the original B.B.C. Radio Leicester 14 miles coverage, to the proposed B.B.C. Radio London approx. 40 miles, better use can be made of existing frequencies and transmitters as follows:-

B.B.C. Radio 3 transmitted on the existing V.H.F. network, reserving the higher fidelity for its music output.

B.B.C. Radio 3 existing medium wave transmitters to separate and carry the Open University for the required number of hours each day.

This system would

(a) save around £3½ million at a time when the Prime Minister is calling for all round economies

(b) allow 97.6 to 100 Mhz to be used to provide high technical quality independent regional broadcasting on the lines of our proposals to you on 14th July.

We are aware of the public's resistance to the movement of programmes to V.H.F. exclusively, but the scarcity of frequencies makes moves of this type desirable. The reception of V.H.F. on British car receivers has been somewhat sub-standard. However, one of our radio manufacturers will be releasing a new V.H.F. car receiver having very high sensitivity early next year. Coupled with independent broadcasting on V.H.F. public acceptance would be forthcoming. The change could be phased in as the University requirement develops.

Non-Commercial Broadcasting

Non-Commercial independent broadcasting, e.g. University Radio as pioneered at the University of York, should we believe be given the opportunity to develop, responsible to the Broadcasting Council which we have advocated, and receivable by the public in the locality of University towns and cities. University Radio York broadcasting a wide range of programmes produced by University students, operates on the medium wave, licenced experimentally by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. The programmes originally receivable in the City of York but now further restricted in power by the Ministry.

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