



SCOTTISH OFFICE  
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~~CCPS~~

The Rt Hon Norman Lamont MP  
Chief Secretary to the Treasury  
HM Treasury  
Parliament Street  
LONDON SW1

*Not to this stage. (The S4C  
Scotland still appears to accept the point  
in his 10 Nov. that Scottish money  
should come from a cash-hatched  
vote.)*

1 December 1989

*RRG  
4/12*

*Dear Chief Secretary,*

**GAELIC TELEVISION SERVICES**

I am surprised by the assertion in your letter of 29 November that it is an accepted principle that services provided in Scotland but not in England should be funded from the Scottish Block. The principle is rather the other way round, ie that the Block normally covers only services which are comparable north and south of the Border. Scottish services which are not comparable, such as the funding of the Highlands and Islands Development Board, the various crofting grants, the integrated and agricultural development programmes, some aspects of fisheries expenditure and water services, are funded from outwith the Block.

But your letter seems to attach importance not so much to comparisons with England as to the "distinguishing features" which you perceive between the Welsh and Gaelic positions. I cannot see a distinction which is relevant to the issue of Vote responsibilities. The real distinguishing features between the Welsh and Gaelic situations are of course that S4C is a "fait accompli" and is a full blown broadcasting authority as opposed to the modest mechanism I am proposing. (The Gaelic community may also draw unfortunate conclusions from another distinction, that between the impact of the high pressure campaign, including the notorious hunger strike, mounted by Welsh interests during the late Broadcasting Bill, and the impact so far of the relatively rational and moderate approach which the Gaelic organisations have adopted this time round, in the face of some pressure for different tactics.) But these distinctions cannot be used to defend funding Gaelic broadcasting from the Scottish Block at the cost of other Scottish services, far less the absence of a basic Gaelic broadcasting service.

S4C and the Gaelic TV Production Fund are parallel arrangements to provide a basic broadcasting service in the 2 indigenous languages which exist in these islands alongside English. The grants you mention for educational and cultural support of the languages are a different matter; both the Welsh and Scottish Offices have long made such grants and I am certainly more than content to regard these as part of my general educational and cultural responsibilities and to fund them from the Scottish Office Block. But broadcasting services are the responsibility of

the Home Secretary and it is surely better for the relationships between the Government and the broadcasting authorities and between the broadcasting authorities and "nationalist" political pressure groups that the Home Secretary's responsibility should not be diluted by the allocation of some of the financial responsibility to the territorial Secretary of State. The ambitions of these pressure groups are more likely to be contained successfully if it is quite clear to them that the Minister who carries responsibility for all broadcasting is the Home Secretary. I am entirely with Peter Walker in wishing to avoid exacerbating the politicisation of the "nationalist" language issue in broadcasting; indeed this has been my main objective in framing the proposals for Gaelic which I have put forward.

Peter Walker in his letter of 3 November argued that the position of Welsh in Wales differed from that of Gaelic in Scotland; certainly Welsh speakers are proportionately more numerous and this of course is why I have never argued for a Gaelic broadcasting authority. But as I have said before, it would be a mistake to underrate the importance of the Gaelic broadcasting issue for Scotland. Even in numerical terms it has to be remembered that the numbers watching the present Gaelic television programmes are frequently as high as the numbers watching S4C.

As the Home Secretary's paper for L Committee acknowledges, it will be important for the Government to show that it is sensitive to Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and regional concerns in presenting the Bill's proposals. The Prime Minister and colleagues have accepted, partly because of the existence of S4C, that it is appropriate to ensure the provision of a very basic broadcasting service for Gaelic viewers. A scheme has been drawn up which would secure such a service in the post-Bill broadcasting conditions at minimal cost in terms of money, regulation and bureaucracy. But now, in your arguments over the funding for this scheme (and for S4C) you are adopting a stance which to my mind undermines the policy reasons for taking action in the first place and disturbs established functional relationships between departments in a way which could be damaging to wider objectives. Nor do you acknowledge, as the L Committee paper does, that the new arrangements will leave the Exchequer a net beneficiary, quite possibly by substantially more than the relatively small sums needed for the Gaelic production fund. I feel that the comparison between the Welsh and Scottish positions is still not properly understood and that you and I should meet urgently to discuss the funding arrangements further.

Until we have done so I am afraid I do not think it is possible for the Home Secretary to make any kind of statement on the position of Gaelic, even if this means delaying a statement until after the introduction of the Bill. I say this despite concern that publication of the Bill without a statement will confound the expectation in Scotland that the Government is bound to use the Bill to correct the anomaly in its approach to Welsh and Gaelic broadcasting.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, other members of MISC 128 and Sir Robin Butler.

*Yours sincerely  
Malcolm Rifkind*

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(Approved by the Secretary of State  
(and signed in his absence))

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