



CONSULTATION on MEDIA OWNERSHIP RULES

The Media Committee of the National Council of Women was extremely interested in the new proposals you have recently sent out. We realize the need to reform media ownership but we feel some of the new proposals go too far and appear to making it 'free for all' with very little control.

We do realize that it is very difficult to control Media Ownership now that the Internet is available for news and opinions and with various forms of television beamed over international frontiers. But we do think that there should be control over our own media which are the most easily accessed. Our suggestions, with reference to the consultation paper on Media Ownership Rules are as follows.

General Prohibitions

Some regulations is definitely required and the rules preventing Local Authorities and Advertising Agencies owned by media companies should **NOT** be revoked. Local Authorities are often organized in political parties and advertising agencies are employed as Public Relations Advisers for political parties. We see no point in allowing them ownership when it is planned to keep the prohibition on ownership by political parties; it would completely undermine this.

Foreign Ownership

We agree that prohibition on non EEA ownership of broadcasters must be retained.

Religious Ownership

We are against individual Religious Organizations holding licences or owning station outright. We certainly do **NOT** want our religious broadcasting to become like America, but they should be allocated airtime within the present set up.

It is suggested

- a) that if the disqualification is lifted the finances for such religious programmes/channels/stations might come from extremist of all religions, crowding out the more moderate groups and also the serious discussions and research now undertaken.
- b) If this was lifted the BBC might feel relieved of all responsibility for religious programmes – thus leaving the field free for anybody who has money or the influence to launch such a channel.

Television

Plurality of controlled broadcasters is acceptable if it is established that the companies are completely separate. A board of directors or an owner who is clearly named is essential and is the real source of authority; there must **NOT** be a puppet-master in the background pulling the strings.

We agree with the retention of the nominated News Provider system for ITV; this should not be revoked with joint ownership of ITV and Channel 5 News. At present Sky (Rupert Murdoch) is gradually gaining more and more influence over the News. If the 20% limit on ownership of nominated News Providers is relaxed we feel the

THE
NATIONAL
COUNCIL OF
WOMEN OF
GREAT
BRITAIN

36 Danbury Street
Islington
London
N1 8JU

Tel: 020 7354 2395

Fax: 020 7354 9214

Registered Charity No.
1001015

Founded in 1895
Affiliated to the
International
Council of Women
in 1897

Registered Office:
36 Danbury Street
London N1 8JU

Registered in England
No. 502692

A Company Limited by
Guarantee

news will no longer be non-biased in reporting news and views. The owner will impose their own opinions as happens with many newspapers. At least a minimum of 3 owners should be a requirement to establish non-bias.

Radio

National BBC Radio should be retained although we can see no reason why local stations should be restrained as long as there are at least 3 owners of independent stations as with TV Channels. We agree that each region should have a well developed choice of stations. We feel ownership of national radio licences should still be limited to ONE only. Who would be responsible for protecting the interests of the very small specialised or community stations if the ownership restraints were removed?

Newspapers

We are very concerned about the merger of newspapers as this could severely limit the accurate presentation and free expression of opinion. We feel the press already has too great an influence on the general public and Rupert Murdoch now controls more than 30% of the British newspaper market as well as dominating pay TV through British Sky Broadcasting. We are very concerned that he could control more than he does now. (And he is not even a citizen of the EU!)

In 1996 the 20% rule was introduced – No company which controlled more than 20% of the national newspaper market can own more than 20% of a terrestrial TV broadcaster or a national radio station.

Local papers are important and the development of a strong regional press is essential. Very small local newspapers have a valuable function and should not be swamped by the very large papers.

Cross-Media Ownership

Total cross-media ownership should be resisted as there is the continuing danger to fairness/freedom of speech/freedom from bias if certain interests have too much power. But minority shareholdings in press, TV and radio could be allowed.

Review of ownership rules

Automatic periodic reviews by OFCOM should be encouraged but OFCOM must be non-biased and non political.

Media Committee

January 2002