[GB] Regulator Issues Direction to Private Television Company on "Due Impartiality"

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The Independent Television Commission (ITC), which regulates UK commercial broadcasting, has issued a direction to Scottish Television, a Channel 3 company, requiring it to ensure due impartiality in the run-up to a local Parliamentary election.

The company had broadcast throughout the UK, including Scotland, a programme entitled "Ask the Prime Minister" in which Tony Blair answered questions from a studio audience for one hour. This took place on 12 December. The election was due to take place on 21 December. Section 6 of the Broadcasting Act 1990 requires the Commission to do all it can to secure that every licensed service complies with the requirement to preserve due impartiality as regards matters of political or industrial controversy or relating to current public policy. The Commission considered that the appearance of the Prime Minister was "a high-profile network programme with party-political relevance". It thus issued a direction requiring that Scottish Television provide other major political parties in Scotland (including the Conservative, Liberal Democratic and Scottish Nationalist parties) an opportunity to comment on current political issues in a manner proportionate to the party-political dimension of the Prime Minister's opportunity. This must be broadcast in peak time on or before 20 December 2000. Failure to do so would amount to breach of the company's licence.

ITC Issues Direction to Scottish Television on Due Impartiality, ITC Press Release 83/00, 14 December 2000

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