



PRIME MINISTER

CABLE SYSTEMS AND BROADCASTING POLICY

I have seen the Home Secretary's minute to you of 7 March in which he refers to the difficulty of a worthwhile enquiry into the broadcasting policy issues raised by this complex subject being completed within the timescale agreed by E Committee. As he says our joint proposal anticipated that this enquiry would be carried out within six months.

2 In paragraph 8 of his minute the Home Secretary recognises the strength of the case for legislation on BT next Session - for which I am grateful - but (assuming a decision to go ahead with cable) suggests that its broadcasting aspects need not be dealt with in legislation next Session. Use of his own powers under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts would of course allow considerable expansion of cable systems and I am glad to see that he has indicated his intention to use these powers to their fullest extent. My own powers under the British Telecommunications Act 1981 may also help us forward.

3 However, I do not believe that use of existing legislation coupled with public statements will alone convince the private sector to commit the enormous sums of capital which will be



required - particularly with an election pending in 1984 - and I am certain that to gain the industry's whole-hearted and early commitment we must have specific cable legislation on the Statute Book before the end of the next Session. We should also make provision to enable BT to participate in local cable networks; its ducts and wayleaves may be important if we are to get cable systems into operation quickly.

4 One possibility would be to omit any provisions relating to cable from my proposed Telecoms Bill and have a separate Bill on cable, to be introduced as soon as possible after the Christmas Recess. But I can appreciate that the Leader of the House may see objections to this course. The alternative would be to instruct officials to do as much preparatory work as possible for the cable legislation in the next few months, while the independent enquiry is in progress. The aim might be to legislate only to establish the broad principles of the cable regime, leaving more detailed arrangements to be set out in subordinate legislation subsequently. So long as the independent enquiry were completed without fail by the end of September and collective Ministerial decisions taken by mid-October, there should still be time for the final stages of drafting the legislation to be completed in time for introduction before Christmas, so long as all concerned recognised the need to give absolutely overriding priority to the work required.

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5 I am copying this to the Home Secretary, the Lord President,
the other members of E Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

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// March 1982

Department of Industry

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Committee and Sir Robert Amptson. The other members of

COMMISSION



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