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From the Private Secretary

15 March, 1982

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Cable Systems and Broadcasting Policy

The Prime Minister has considered the Home Secretary's minute to her of 7 March on this subject, together with the Secretary of State for Industry's minute of 11 March.

The Prime Minister is very anxious that the studies of the broadcasting and other aspects of cable systems should be completed as quickly as possible and the present momentum maintained. She is anxious also that any necessary legislation should be prepared in time for introduction during the next Session, although she agrees that a first important step so far as the UK cable industry is concerned is to make a clear statement of the Government's policy intentions before the end of this year.

The Prime Minister accepts, however, that it would be wrong to rush the broadcasting inquiry, given the sensitive and controversial issues that are likely to be involved; and she has commented that Ministers will also, of course, need to have an opportunity to consider collectively the Secretary of State for Industry's proposals on telecommunications before decisions can be reached on their relationship to the broadcasting and other aspects of cable systems (e.g. the role of British Telecommunications in the ownership or operation of cable networks).

Subject, therefore, to any further comments that the Lord President may have, the Prime Minister suggests that the Home Secretary should proceed in accordance with the earlier timetable that he and the Secretary of State for Industry proposed for the broadcasting enquiry, on the strict understanding that it will be completed without fail by the end of September. This will allow Ministers to consider soon thereafter comprehensive recommendations on cable systems in the light of the work done by officials in MISC 73, which will take into account the conclusions of the broadcasting enquiry, and permit any necessary legislation arising from them to be prepared before the end of the year for introduction as early as possible in the next Session.

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The Prime Minister is content with the Home Secretary's endorsement of Lord Hunt of Tenworth as a suitable chairman of the broadcasting inquiry, and would be grateful if the Home Secretary would now approach him as soon as possible.

I am copying this letter to Jonathon Spencer (Department of Industry), to the Private Secretaries to the other members of E Committee and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

W. F. S. RICKETT

J F Halliday, Esq  
Home Office

6/2/51