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From the Private Secretary

1 October 1987

Dear Philip,

TIMETABLE FOR BROADCASTING LEGISLATION

The Prime Minister has been reflecting on the timetable for the proposed Broadcasting White Paper and legislation. She is concerned that the Government may be trying to compress too much into too short a time.

The present plan is to publish a White Paper at the turn of the year and to legislate in the next Session, 1988-89. However this means that decisions will have to be taken in the busy period leading up to Christmas. The results of the BBC, IBA and DTI study of the possibilities for MMDS and Channel 5 will not be known for ten weeks or so. It will also be difficult on this timetable to take into account the results of the studies commissioned from consultants on the Peacock recommendations which bear on telecommunications policy. Yet changes to the ITV system, including the levy, cannot take effect until 1 January 1993. It is also relevant that on the present timetable legislation will be going through the House just as Astra is beginning to have its effect on British television.

Against this background the Prime Minister would be grateful if the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry could prepare a paper on the timetable and options, for consideration at the next meeting of MISC 128. One option, for example, might be to publish the White Paper around Easter next year, to legislate on the Broadcasting Council, radio, and other more minor matters, in the 1988-89 Session and to follow with the remainder of the legislation in the Session 1989-90. This would allow the final decisions on television broadcasting to be taken in late 1988 and early 1989. Alternatively, all the legislation could be taken in the 1989-90 Session, provided that the Broadcasting Council and other safeguards on standards could operate satisfactorily in the meanwhile without formal statutory backing. Either of these options would have the incidental advantage of transferring substantial legislation from the second to the third Session of Parliament, which is likely to be the lighter of the two.

In view of the Manifesto commitments and the importance of the legislation, any postponement will of course need to be considered with great care.

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I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of MISC 128 and to Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

*Yours,
David.*

DAVID NORGROVE

Philip Mawer, Esq.,
Home Office.

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