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PRIME MINISTER

Report of Information Technology Advisers on Cable Systems

The Panel of Information Technology (IT) Advisers, whom you appointed last June, have now completed a study of cable systems. Their report, which is addressed to you and has been submitted through the Cabinet Office IT Unit, is attached.

2. I also attach a note by the IT Unit which draws attention to the main issues raised in the report and makes recommendations on how it should be handled. These recommendations are subject to the views of the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Industry who propose to minute you on the subject of cable shortly. I understand that in general they both welcome the report and agree that it should be published and considered quickly, but that the Home Secretary is likely to wish to propose special arrangements for considering the broadcasting aspects.

3. I believe the report is a timely and valuable document and I agree in general with the analysis and recommendations in the IT Unit's note. But clearly a number of difficult and sensitive issues will need very careful examination, including the implications of the proposals for legislation, and I therefore endorse the proposal that it should be remitted for official consideration under Cabinet Office chairmanship, prior to substantive consideration by Ministers. It should then come, later in the year, to Ministers; I suggest in the Ministerial Committee on Economic Strategy, for decisions.

4. Before reaching final decisions on handling, you will wish to see the forthcoming submission from the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Industry. Subject to that, I will, if you agree, set the necessary arrangements in hand for considering the report. At that stage it would also be desirable to bring the report to the attention of all the Ministers principally concerned and I will arrange for that to be done.

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5. The Advisers recommend that the report should be published. Extensive consultation will be necessary with outside bodies, for which the report, whether formally published or not, will have to receive fairly wide circulation. I am sure that publication is desirable, perhaps in conjunction with a Written Answer by you to a Parliamentary Question, which would make it clear that the Government is not at present committed to any of the policies recommended, but is considering the report as a matter of great urgency. If you agree, I will make arrangements for publication, subject to any further proposals relevant to this from the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Industry.

6. Finally, I think it would be appropriate for you to write briefly to Mr. Read, who chaired the Working Group of the Advisers who prepared the report, to thank him and his colleagues for the work they have done. I attach a short draft.

Robert Armstrong

9th February 1982

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DRAFT LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER TO:-

C.N. Read, Esq
Director
Inter-Bank Research Organisation
32, City Road
London, EC1Y 1AA

I am most grateful to you and to the other members of the Information Technology Advisory Panel Working Group for the report you have submitted to me through the Cabinet Office on cable systems. It is a very important piece of work and I congratulate you on the speed and thoroughness with which you have completed it.

You will not, I know, expect me to comment further on the substance at this stage. I am considering urgently with the Ministers principally involved how the Government should handle the report in the light of your recommendations.