



10 DOWNING STREET

Mr Weeks

Mr Clarke

*From the Press Secretary*

Murdo Maclean Esq  
PS/Chief Whip  
12 Downing Street  
London SW1

14 November 1985

*Dear Murdo,*

TELEVISIONING THE COMMONS

This note confirms my oral briefing of the Prime Minister's reaction to my minute of the above date on the televising of the Commons.

The Prime Minister confirmed that she wished no action to be taken on her behalf. She had, however, told George Gardiner MP that she was not in fact leading the move for television but was having increasing reservations about it.

She rejected as inaccurate in the draft of P2 of my minute the idea that she thinks televising would bring advantage to herself and the Government in office.

After some discussion, I was authorised, if asked, to say:

"The Prime Minister has always been in favour of televising the great Parliamentary occasions. She continues to have some reservations about the effects of televised broadcasting of the House's proceedings on the lines of radio broadcasting.

"Should the matter go to a Select Committee she hopes the Committee will consider all these matters. She is most anxious that any television should do nothing to undermine the dignity and authority of Parliament."

If asked how the Prime Minister is going to vote, I can say:

"She is thinking hard about it."



I think the Prime Minister accepts that the answer to the last question will produce stories that the Prime Minister is going relatively cool on the televising of the Commons.

Yours sincerely

Bernard

BERNARD INGHAM



c: Chief Whip

1. MR WICKS
2. PRIME MINISTER

*The Chief Whip has spoken to me in similar terms. He thinks some MPs may vote in favour of TV because they think you are.*

*W. C. W.*

*14.11*

TELEVISIONING THE COMMONS

The Chief Whip and I are concerned lest news of your approach to televising the Commons gets out today or to the Sunday newspapers, as it might.

There are both substantive and presentational considerations.

Substantially, if you would like to rally the troops against televising the Commons, it would perhaps be useful to let your view be known soon, along with your reasoning. Otherwise MPs who are lukewarm, solely out of loyalty to your supposed support for televising the Commons, may make commitments this weekend they would prefer not to enter into.

If, on the other hand, you wish to take a passive line (perhaps abstaining in the end) we could rest more or less comfortably on the line: "The Prime Minister will not make up her mind until the time comes. She sees a case for televising the Commons but thinks it is a big decision and is thinking very hard about it. We think she is more likely to be swayed by her perception of what is in the longer term interest of Parliament than on an assessment of Government/Party advantage."

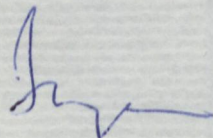
Presentationally, I find myself in difficulty. The Chief Whip believes that most MPs think you have been brought reluctantly to favour televising the Commons. I am bound to say that that accurately reflects my briefing over the last couple of years.



It is therefore extremely important to manage the presentation of any change of view. If you want to be seen to be against television I think I can best protect your position, personally and politically, with this line:

"The Prime Minister has been considering the case for televising the Commons for some time now and she started from a position of being against it. Gradually she came to see a case for it - a case which she still thinks includes ~~advantage to herself as Prime Minister and the Government in office.~~ But at the forefront of her mind all along has been the good of Parliament and Parliamentary democracy. She has reluctantly come to the conclusion that television, on the basis of radio coverage before it, would not be helpful to Parliament. And that is the crucial point. I think the Prime Minister would be in favour, subject to agreed ground rules, of continuous televising of the Commons' proceedings on a separate television channel. She might even be prepared to vote for televising great occasions, such as the Budget or debates on the really major issues of our time. What she is not convinced of is the value to Parliament of television on the same basis that radio covers Parliament."

You may care to comment on the substantive and presentational points.



BERNARD INGHAM

14 November 1985



810  
See  
I get more money  
worried about this  
prospect. Is it  
covered to vote -  
for it?  
not

PRIME MINISTER



- 1, Mr Wickes <sup>and</sup> 12-11
- 2, Prime Minister

Agree this approach:  
It involves an experiment  
beginning in the 1986/7  
session

TELEVISIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

W  
12/11

You will have seen the recent exchanges in the House and I have agreed with the Chief Whip that a Debate will take place next week, probably on Wednesday 20 November. I shall also make a brief reference to our intentions in my wind-up speech tomorrow night.

The Motion before the House next week will propose a public experiment in the televising of the proceedings of the House and the establishment of a Select Committee to consider how that should best be done. It would probably report in Spring 1986 enabling the House to approve the Select Committee's report very soon thereafter; thus enabling the experiment to commence by the start of the 1986/87 Session. Its duration will be for the House to decide but of the order of 6-12 weeks would be the broadcasters' preference.

There are two aspects which have emerged in the course of my consultations. First from discussions with them it seems likely the Alliance may make a strong bid in the Select Committee that when proceedings are televised, far greater prominence should be given to what they say in the House. Clearly meeting any such demand would be totally unacceptable since the balance of coverage could only reflect the balance of actual proceedings in the House. The Chief Whip will have an important say in the composition of the Committee, and we will therefore be able to ensure that the Government's view is fully represented on this as well as any other difficult matters.

Secondly the speed with which an experiment can take place will be largely conditioned by whether the Select Committee recommends manned or unmanned cameras in the Chamber. The former are readily available; the latter, which

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would cause less inconvenience, could take up to six months to procure as new design and technology is involved. This point could be material as to how quickly we make progress generally.

Finally you commented that the financing of any experiment should be carried out from within the BBCs existing revenue. I understand that the Broadcasting Authorities will be willing to bear the main staffing and equipment costs between them.

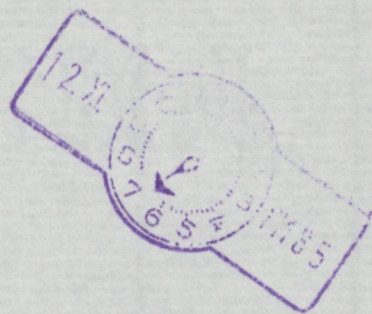
I am copying this minute to Cabinet colleagues, the Chief Whips of both Houses and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

WJB

W J B

12 November 1985







1. ~~MR. WICKS~~

1. PRIME MINISTER

PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS

Attached is the Business Note for next week which, with the exception of the debate on televising the House on Wednesday, looks pretty humdrum. I imagine the Cabinet will want to have a brief discussion about television and you might like to ask the Lord Privy Seal to explain at slightly greater length his views which were set out in his minute of 12 November, a copy of which I attach.

Statements next week:

Only the Scottish Office have put in a firm bid for one on Tuesday about the Aggregate Exchequer Grant to Local Authorities but of course you may be making one on Monday yourself.



Timothy Flesher  
13 November 1985



PROVISIONAL

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

MONDAY  
18 NOVEMBER

SECOND READING OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BILL

TUESDAY  
19 NOVEMBER

REMAINING STAGES OF THE OKEHAMPTON BYPASS  
(CONFIRMATION OF ORDERS) BILL

THERE WILL BE A DEBATE ON A MOTION ON THE EUROPEAN  
COUNCIL DIRECTIVE 85/397/EEC ON HEALTH AND  
ANIMAL HEALTH PROBLEMS AFFECTING INTRA-  
COMMUNITY TRADE IN HEAT-TREATED MILK  
AND THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE,  
FISHERIES AND FOOD'S EXPLANATORY  
MEMORANDUM OF 26 JUNE 1985.

WEDNESDAY  
20 NOVEMBER

THERE WILL BE A DEBATE ON A MOTION ON THE  
TELEVISIONING OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE HOUSE  
OF COMMONS.

MOTION ON THE SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT (REQUIREMENTS  
AND RESOURCES) MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS (NO.2)  
REGULATIONS ORDER.

THURSDAY  
21 NOVEMBER

SECOND READING OF THE ARMED FORCES BILL FOLLOWED BY  
SECOND READING OF THE MUSEUM OF LONDON BILL

FRIDAY  
22 NOVEMBER

THERE WILL BE A DEBATE ON UNESCO ON A MOTION FOR  
THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE. THE 5TH REPORT  
FROM THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE SESSION  
1984/85, "UNITED KINGDOM MEMBERSHIP OF  
UNESCO", HOUSE OF COMMONS PAPER No.461  
WILL BE RELEVANT.

MONDAY  
25 NOVEMBER

SECOND READING OF THE AGRICULTURE BILL

13.11.85.



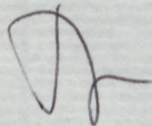
1. MR. WICKS  
2. PRIME MINISTER

N.L.U  
13.11

TELEVISIONING PARLIAMENT

You were worried about the Lord Privy Seal's minute. This will be an unwhipped debate as usual on the subject and although the Lord Privy Seal himself will vote in favour he will offer no advice on behalf of the Government. As soon as the Lord Privy Seal announces that there will be a debate, there will be pressure on the Press Office to confirm that you are going to vote in favour of television. Bernard would like to be in a position to confirm that this is indeed your view. Can we have a brief talk on the issue <sup>during</sup> ~~after~~ Questions briefing tomorrow morning at 09~~00~~ hours?

If you like we could also arrange for a discussion with the Lord Privy Seal and the Chief Whip.



We spoke  
my

Timothy Flesher  
13 November 1985





Prime Minister

Content with this?

FEB 12.7.

Yes

PRIME MINISTER

TELEVISIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

1. You will remember that, at the meeting that you held on 1 April, you asked me to consider further with the Lord President the timing of a debate in the Commons on this subject.

2. I said in the House on 4 July (OR, Col 320), in answer to Neil Kinnock, that I hoped this matter "would be available for a Commons decision early in the new session". I accordingly propose, with the agreement of the Lord President and the Chief Whip (Commons), that this debate should now take place towards the end of November. This would have the advantage of coming directly after the debate on the Loyal Address and also give Members an opportunity to assess the Lords' experiment. It will be too soon for the Select Committee on the Lords experiment to have delivered their final report but the Lords are expected to hold a debate before the summer recess on the question whether television cameras should continue to be admitted pending a final decision on future televising; it seems likely that the Lords will agree to this. Any further delay therefore, on a debate in the Commons would, in our view, lead to speculation that the Government was being unnecessarily tardy. If you are content, therefore, we will proceed on that basis.

3. We have now contacted the BBC and IBA and are arranging meetings at official level with them during September. This will enable me to give the House some general indication of the basis on which an experiment might take place, although the details would be for consideration by the Select Committee that would need to be appointed for that purpose if the House votes in favour of the principle of an experiment. In order to ensure appropriate inter-Departmental liaison, the Cabinet Office



will be co-ordinating the work of an informal group of officials to prepare, as necessary, for the proposed discussions with the broadcasting authorities. These will cover such matters as the financing of any experiment, its timing, and other questions such as privilege and copyright, on which the preliminary views of the broadcasting authorities would be useful.

*From the  
D. B.'s  
meeting  
minutes*

4. The House authorities will need to be kept in touch with the work of this group, but it will be important to ensure that this is done in a way which does not give the impression of regarding the introduction of television in the House as a fait accompli.

5. I am copying this minute to the Lord President, the Home Secretary, the Chief Whip of both Houses and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

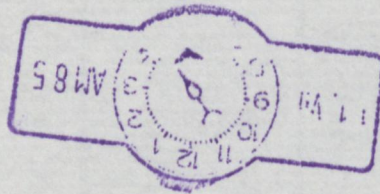
W J B

W J B

11 July 1985



PARLIAMENT: Opening of HC: PE 6.





CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET

cc LPO  
HO  
GWO, HL  
CWO  
CO

HL

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

15 July 1985

TELEVISIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Prime Minister has seen the Lord Privy Seal's minute of 11 July and, subject to any comments from other colleagues who received it, is content with the Lord Privy Seal's proposals. She has commented that the financing of any experiment from the House of Commons should be carried out from within the BBC's existing revenue.

I am copying this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), Hugh Taylor (Home Office), David Beamish (Government Whips' Office, House of Lords), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

E. E. R. BUTLER

David Morris, Esq.,  
Lord Privy Seal's Office

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PRIME MINISTER

TELEVISIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Lord President and I recently discussed with the Chief Whips of both Houses the general handling of this issue in the light of the progress of the current experiment in the televising of proceedings in the Lords.

The Lords experiment with television is proceeding and plans have been made for it to be reviewed after the Lords has risen for the summer recess.

In the aftermath of the initial televising of the Lords there was a degree of Commons interest. I then told Dr Owen on 28 January that 'The House will wish to consider the matter further and I hope that I shall be in a position to offer time when the occasion arises' [Hansard col 16].

Since then interest has ostensibly slackened. However the situation could change quickly as the end of the Session draws near. Questions are now being tabled and the matter has been raised in the context of next week's business. A substantial body of opinion could be speedily mobilised to support an Early Day Motion or a Ten Minute Rule Bill on the issue.

In anticipation of that event, it would now therefore be an appropriate time to consider whether there should be a general Commons debate on this subject. Exact timing would depend on how opinion in both

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Lords and Commons develops. We suggest that the Motion before the House should enable Members to express their view, as to whether they were, in principle, in favour of a public experiment in the televising of proceedings in the Commons; and that, if the House passed this Motion, a Select Committee should be established to advise on the necessary arrangements for the experiment. In accordance with past practice, there would be a free vote.

It would then be for that Committee to consult with the broadcasting authorities on questions such as the format of the experimental programmes, editorial control, accommodation etc. The House would need to have a further opportunity to debate the Committee's detailed proposals before any experiment could actually begin. In view of the importance of the issues involved, the membership of the Select Committee would require careful consideration. We would also need to contact the broadcasting authorities before any debate to tell them what we had in mind.

The above suggested response is low key but should be able to keep the timing of the debate within Government hands. This will be necessary to secure co-ordination between the Lords and Commons, and for the Government to provide the framework for a major political decision of considerable public interest.

We appreciate the strong views that are held on this subject. You may therefore like to discuss the issue further. At the same time the Lord President will be able to bring you up to date with progress on the Lords experiment.

I am copying this minute to the Lord President, the Home Secretary, the Chief Whips of both Houses and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

WJB

W J B

27 March 1985



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28 MAR 1985

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

1 April 1985

Dear David,

TELEVISIONING OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS  
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Lord Privy Seal's minute of 27 March was mentioned at the Prime Minister's meeting with the Lord President, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chief Whip and the Paymaster General this morning.

In discussion it was agreed that the right course was to provide an opportunity for the House of Commons to have a debate, with a free vote, on a motion similar to the motion in the House of Lords which preceded the current experiment. This would enable the Commons to express a view in principle on televising the House of Commons and would establish an all-Party Select Committee to advise on the arrangements on the lines proposed in the Lord Privy Seal's minute. The Prime Minister asked the Lord Privy Seal to consider further with the Lord President the timing of such a debate.

I am sending copies of this letter to Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's Office), Hugh Taylor (Home Office), David Beamish (Government Whips Office, House of Lords), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,

Robin Butler

David Morris, Esq.,  
Lord Privy Seal's Office.

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