

AH

PRIME MINISTER

TELEVISIONING THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

I can see no reason to object to the Lord President's suggestion in his Private Secretary's letter below that a small interdepartmental committee of officials should be established to advise the Lord President on certain aspects of televising the Commons.

But I think it important that you should have an early discussion with the Lord President (and the Chief Whip) about strategy. In that discussion, you should tell the Lord President that:

1. Televising should not begin with the State Opening of the 1988-89 Session. That event, and the Debate on the Address, is a quite untypical circumstance in the Parliamentary year and thus not a representative beginning of the experiment. A better time to begin televising Parliament would be, say, after the Christmas Recess.
2. He should keep you in the closest touch with the Department of his thoughts regarding televising Parliament. You will want to discuss with him and the Chief Whip the composition of the Select Committee, its terms of reference and the evidence which he, as Leader of the House, will wish to place before it.

You would welcome advice from the Lord President on arrangements for editorial control of television broadcasts, including the practicality of the approach suggested by Tim Brinton to you in his recent letter, as well as technical points regarding the rules for the control of the pictures shown.

You will also want advice from the business managers on security aspects of the Chamber, bearing in mind that televising the House will provide incentive for exhibitionists (and indeed terrorists).

Content to proceed in this way?

N. L. W.

N L WICKS

16 February 1988