

Broadcasting  
ge. F. M. Munt-

PRIME MINISTER

TELEVISION AND THE SCHOOLS

In my minute to you of 8 January I told you of my concern about the impact of television on school children. I proposed to ask HM Inspectorate to convene a group of teachers from a variety of schools to study, in co-operation with the BBC and the IBA, the values and images of adult life and society presented to school children by a selection of popular adult television programmes. The group has now completed its work: I enclose a copy of its report to me. I have sent it to the Home Secretary, telling him what I have in mind and have had his comments. The purpose of this minute is to consult you, as I undertook to do, about my proposals for the next steps in handling the report.

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In my judgement the report is a modest but serious piece of work on a matter which merits more thought and discussion. The teachers did not constitute a representative sample in any statistical sense, but they were a balanced group, as is explained in the Introduction to the report; and they were selective in the programmes they chose for study (partly for practical reasons and partly because the programmes selected were those most likely to be watched by school pupils). The report is impressionistic, therefore, rather than a sociological study - and none the worse for that; it gains from the fresh and direct way in which the group dealt with their remit. The report is obviously relevant to some of our thinking about family policy; like any such document, it could be misinterpreted or discussed in a slanted way, but to the dispassionate reader it offers a basis for some useful action both educationally and politically.

The main messages of the report are that those responsible for adult television programmes have not taken sufficient account of the effect which those programmes have on the attitudes of children and

young people; that teachers generally do not take television sufficiently seriously in their teaching; and that parents should carry an important responsibility in guiding and controlling what their children view.

The first of these messages might be challenged by some people in broadcasting, who necessarily have to meet at once a number of conflicting objectives and who are under multifarious pressures which indeed are likely to intensify in consequence of the rapid expansion of the video-cassette market and of developments in cable television. I am bound to bear in mind that among the duties imposed on the broadcasting authorities by Parliament is the duty to educate: at the same time it is (as the Home Secretary has stressed to me) not for Ministers even to appear to be transgressing those authorities' independence or to be telling them how to do their job.

My proposals for action are:

- i. I should have an informal discussion with the Chairmen and some Governors of the BBC and IBA jointly about the report, both as a matter of courtesy and to share with them my reaction to the study and my proposals for new contacts between teachers and broadcasters.
- ii. The report should then be made public, and be made readily available within the educational community. It would be made clear that the report was not a Government or Departmental statement but that the views expressed in it were those of the group only.

Subsequently, in relation to the report's three main messages as described above -

- iii. We should consider the creation of new means for discussion between teachers and broadcasters: the existing consultative network, both for the BBC and IBA, is concerned with educational broadcasting but might be

adapted; in addition it seems necessary to find new means of contact at a more local, working level.

- iv. The report might be used in the course of initial and in-service training of teachers with a view to helping them to handle in the classroom, and to exploit educationally, the responses of pupils to what they view, and to take these into account in fostering effective school-parent links.
  
- v. Informed public discussion should be encouraged of parents' role in relation to what children view: this topic could, for example, be referred to in Ministerial speeches concerned with the values of our society.

In all of this, the public presentation of the report would need to be carefully handled. No excessive claims would be made for the work; rather, it would be presented as a modest piece of enquiry, sponsored by the DES and HM Inspectors, and no apology needs to be made for the committee's straightforward approach.

I should be glad to know whether you are content with the way in which I propose to handle this matter. Copies of this minute go to the Home Secretary and to the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.



Department of Education and Science.

7 December 1982