



Prime Minister

Mr Whitehead has some hesitations about the proposed study, but no doubt Sir Keith will proceed with these points in mind.

Yes Mr. (what?) MP 13/1

Prime Minister

I have seen with interest the minute of 8th January from the Secretary of State for Education and Science outlining his proposals for a study of the impact of television on school-children.

As the Secretary of State recognises, there has been a good deal of past research effort in this field, by the broadcasting agencies themselves and by independent social scientists, and on the whole the results have been inconclusive - no doubt because of the intrinsic difficulty of establishing the hypotheses that such research must seek to test. I would not wish to stand in the way of the further efforts in this direction which the Secretary of State proposes. But there are three comments that I wish to make at this stage:

- (1) I do think it important that the study proposals should be fully discussed with the B.B.C. and I.B.A. - as so far, I believe, they have not been. Neither body will be slow to criticise the results of a study which it judges to have been unsoundly based. I should also be glad for the D.E.S. to keep my own Department in touch with progress, in view of my responsibilities both for broadcasting matters and for research in cognate areas.
- (2) I see that publication of the results is envisaged, and I do not quarrel with that. However, careful thought will need to be given to the presentational aspect: a report of a study carried out in part by civil servants, and published under the Government imprimatur, which evaluates the content of television programmes runs the risk of infringing the constitutional position by which programme content is the responsibility of the broadcasting authorities and is not the subject of comment from government.

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- (3) A similar point arises on para. 6 of the Secretary of State's minute, where he speaks of seeking "to build on the study at the political level". I need not point out the dangers if the content of broadcast programmes becomes a matter of political controversy.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Secretaries of State for Education and Science, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

WIL

13 January 1982



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