

9 December 1982

Policy Unit

PRIME MINISTER

TELEVISION AND THE SCHOOLS

This is an extremely sensible report from a group of level-headed and realistic teachers. They are worried about the presentation of violence and sex and about attitudes towards authority (the police, politicians etc) shown on the screen, but they are well aware that TV is primarily for entertainment. Indeed, if TV attempted to be more educative, we might have more cause to be worried, in view of the broadcasters who would be in control of the educating.

There are reassuring signs - the cool and intelligent comments from children and teenagers which are quoted in the report, and the decline in viewing figures, especially among older teenagers who have better things to do.

In truth, what TV is suffering from at all levels is staleness - stale techniques, stale interviewers, stale programme ideas. This staleness encourages a mechanical resort to gunfire, innuendo and cheap jokes about blacks or homosexuals (or politicians!).

We cannot make TV producers make better programmes. But we can suggest that they might try to raise their sights a little.

In particular, we can suggest that they might try to make more adventurous and demanding programmes for children. As I have said to you before, children's TV is feeble and trivial. It entirely lacks the imaginative richness of, say, the old Children's Hour on the radio. Some colleagues dispute this, but having spent most of the last 10 years working at home with young children, I can claim to have done some exhaustive consumer research.

I suggest that:

- (a) you should agree that Keith should go ahead as he proposes;
 - (b) in his discussions with the broadcasting authorities, he should emphasise the need to improve children's programmes on TV.
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