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be Mr Lewin

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 February 1985

ECONOMIC AWARENESS

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's minute of 12 February. She is content with his revised proposals for injecting some teaching of economic awareness into the curriculum.

I am copying this letter to Rachel Lomax (HM Treasury), Callum McCarthy (Department of Trade and Industry), Leigh Lewis (Office of the Minister without Portfolio) and Peter Gregson (Cabinet Office).

Andrew Turnbull

Miss Elizabeth Hodkinson
Department of Education and Science.

LOT

Prime Minister ^①
 Agree to Sir Keble's
 revised proposals?

cc [initials]
 [initials] BI

PRIME MINISTER

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 13/2

Yes not

ECONOMIC AWARENESS

1. I have allowed myself so far to be persuaded by you that I should not openly seek to establish in the curriculum, with the agreement of the local authority associations, some limited teaching of economic awareness. You fear that teachers would exploit any such ingredient for collectivist purposes. The Chancellor agrees with you.

2. This dangerous possibility exists - sometimes it materialises even now. But it will not, I believe, materialise throughout the schools. Moreover the existing situation, throughout the schools, is more dangerous still. Pupils are being left in a state of ignorance about economic reality, and naive acceptance of "statism" and "the bottomless purse" pervades.

3. Moreover those many teachers who are not economically aware have no knowledge with which to counter the widespread fallacies that their pupils and their colleagues take for granted.

4. The profound ignorance and lack of public understanding about economic reality - which the schools are doing little or nothing to correct - is reinforced by the media which endlessly peddle panaceas for every real or perceived problem by way of extra public spending as if we lived in a costless world.

5. Unless we provide pupils with some awareness of where Government spending comes from: of the desperate need for profitable competitiveness in trade: and the respectability of serving the customer within the law and subject to competition, we shall continue to lose the case by default.

6. So I remain convinced of the urgent need to use the curriculum, the examination system and teacher training to give those who leave school some basic awareness of economic facts. To reduce

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the danger of subversion I now propose to define economic awareness more simply and neutrally than in my letter of 14 November to the Chancellor: ie the operation of supply and demand, price, quality, profit and loss, competition and monopoly; such aspects of the creation of the nation's private and public wealth as customer satisfaction, enterprise, management and productivity; and taxation. I propose also to follow Geoffrey Pattie's advice in his response of 29 November and put still more emphasis on my policies on school/business links.

7. As regards examinations I have inserted into the national criteria for economics and social studies syllabuses for the new GCSE a significant reference to those aspects of economic awareness which I believe to be important - and this insertion has been agreed by the local authority Associations and Examining Boards. I also intend to promote in-service training of teachers to support my initiative in the curriculum.

8. I plan as you know a White Paper on schools to be issued before Easter. I do not want to miss the opportunity to make in it a very short reference to economic awareness and want now in preparation to go out to consultation on the basis of this pared down - and less contentious and exploitable - list of topics.

9. Do please read the enclosed short article printed - all credit to the editor - in last week's Times Educational Supplement. You and the Chancellor are against me. Other colleagues - David Young with particular strength - are with me. If you still want to argue against me please do give me the chance of a talk and let perhaps Norman Tebbit and David Young be invited also.

10. I am copying this minute to Nigel Lawson, Norman Tebbit and David Young.

KJ.

12 February 1985.

'I'd rather she sold hamburgers'

An Oxbridge graduate explains why she's glad her daughter did not go on to the sixth form

A lot of push and shove shot me out of the London backstreet into Oxbridge. Later, I married into a family with that fierce, Welsh passion for further education, and later still occasionally gratified them by taking on exam-coaching. So when my daughter chose to snub the local sixth-form college and stay on working at McDonald's, my approval rather shook her admissions tutor.

But then, the whole situation was an odd one. Last year's local comprehensive sixth-forms had been jam-packed with unlikely entrants, lurking out of the reach of unemployment; militant, in a shambling fashion, for the right to smoke in the corridors and wear a sort of jogging uniform composed of holes held together by slogans. The inevitable result, a fifth-form right-wing backlash, had labelled staying on at school as naff and unthinkable. By February, every place that autumn in local colleges of further education had been heavily oversubscribed.

By early September it appeared that the sixth-form college had few spare places, and was trying to select, among a number of school-leavers, all with equally dismal results, the lucky second-chancers to fill them. The voice on the phone, while hastily declining to put it just like that, admitted that the pass levels had been well down on expectations. My child had achieved the three hardest O levels, her school report seemed favourable, would she be interested in some sort

of modified course?

I said that, on the whole, I thought I would actually prefer her to continue in her fast-food-outlet career. I realize that the quick recap of a holiday job leading to five gold stars, three pay rises, promotion from C-for-Crew to A-for-Admin and a promise of intensive training, must have sounded like Mother singing up the Twelve Days of Junk Food. But the tutor's reactions raise wider questions about where education is supposed to be going, and how it got to where it is.

My casual remark that many of McDonald's managers are in fact graduates, provoked a rather sniffy, "So you need a degree to sell hamburgers, now?" Well, of course, companies in the United States do encourage graduates in the service industries.

Americans are constantly amazed at the English attitude to further education that renders people on the one hand superior to most known forms of human employment, and, on the other, totally inadequate for them. It isn't entirely by chance that the countries where education is supposed to lead on to grubby-handed expertise are also the ones milking off the best of our designers and engineers; pulled by the money, of course, but pushed out by the snob factor.

Which is what, I suppose, had been inhibiting me into apologetic babble, until my caller, surprising me in turn, suddenly asked, "What is McDonald's secret?" He had observed, it

appeared, that while most young shop-assistant school-leavers droop and glower over their counters, unable or unwilling to serve him, McDonald's attendants seem welcoming, competent and even to be enjoying themselves.

I was glad to be able to tell somebody in the educational field about McDonald's secret. I hope he runs around telling it to everyone else, though of course it may seem unacceptably transatlantic and old fashioned.

First, they tell employees what to do. Exactly what to do, and how to do it, and even why it has to be done. Then they provide recognizable gradations of supervisors, whose job it is to notice if it gets done.

To make this easier for everyone, there is a grading-sheet. Here, under a page-long list of headings, marks are given for everything - exactly, in fact, as in the American school system. You get your ratings, and your average, at the end of the month or whenever, and if you score high you get rewarded, and if you're low enough you could get fired, and you never, ever, feel that you don't know where you stand.

Moreover, as you progress, you win your stars, for a mixture of increasing specialist skills and general aptitude - little metal stars, worn for all to see on a plastic badge that makes a present of your name to the paying customers.

Isn't it simple? Isn't it well-childish? But then aren't our children - well - children. Under

the pom-pom haircuts, the battle-fatigues and bunched-up boiler-suits, most of my daughter's generation seem to be trying to swagger through a world that terrifies them, and for which they know they have been rottenly-prepared.

I have watched one dismal drooping gloomer turn into a lively young adult. In place of scarcely-marked homework, she wears a badge that says she is good at what she is learning; in place of totally untutored note-taking, she has a well-designed form listing her strengths and weaknesses, a point of reference to turn to when she wants to improve; in place of teachers who muddle with chumminess and shatter with random negligence, she has a clear and motivated chain of command to support her.

Oh, I'm not saying it's the millenium. The people she works with and for are using her in their own interests - to get their promotions, to up their turnover, to keep company profits rolling in. But that is going to be true of every job, whether our children start off working in Woolworth's or end up writing *Economist* editorials - or chairing a government inquiry into education.

Surely the difference I am complaining about, the divergence the admissions tutor had noticed, is that whereas most of our educational methods seem, more and more, to produce a glumish-proletariat, here is a system that makes people happy to TRY.

Bridget Rees