

PRIME MINISTER

EDUCATION BILL

The Lord President has been continuing his discussions with Sir Keith Joseph, the Lord Chancellor and Lady Cox and her colleagues. The current state of play is as follows. There are three key areas where Lady Cox will be pressing for amendments:

Crime Prevention

Sir Keith has agreed that the Government should table an amendment which would see that schools provided for the involvement of the Police in courses on crime prevention and road safety. Sir Keith is now trying to draw up a form of words that will be acceptable to the Police.

Political Indoctrination in Schools

Although both Sir Keith and the Lord Chancellor were very reluctant to agree that the Government should put forward an amendment to tackle political indoctrination (for rather different reasons) they have both now agreed that the political reality means that something must be put forward. The Lord Chancellor's preferred option is for a duty to be imposed on schools to tackle political issues in a "responsible way". It seems likely that Lady Cox will say this does not go far enough, and press for wording to refer to "impartial (or balanced) and objective" treatment of political issues. It also seems quite possible that the Government will have to put up with wording of that kind in the end.

Freedom of Speech in Higher Education

There is still a significant problem here. The Government will be pressed to accept an amendment imposing a duty on

universities and colleges to secure freedom of speech. The Lord President thought he had agreed with Sir Keith that the Government should put forward an amendment along these lines, with suitable qualifications about the availability of resources and the involvement of the Police where necessary. But Sir Keith's preferred option is now to say that the Government has thought hard about the amendment, that it has concluded it is the wrong way to proceed, but that it will accept the will of the House. Sir Keith is apparently genuinely concerned that the amendment will encourage all sorts of undesirable fringe groups to provoke confrontation and litigation for their own publicity purposes, and that legislation in this area is therefore the right way forward. But seeing that the Government is going to have to accept an amendment of this kind anyway, his approach seems needlessly hair shirt. It will in any case be difficult to argue against enshrining in legislation a sentiment that would command such very widespread support, and seems to do no more than state the obvious. ?

The Lord President is seeing Lady Cox again on Monday. He needs to be able to put a package to her, along the lines discussed, if he is to succeed in saving the Government from embarrassment. It would be better, certainly at this stage, to leave these discussions to the Lord President, and not to see Lady Cox yourself. But if the Lord President is to succeed, I am sure a nudge from you now would help him. ? wrong!

Content therefore that I should tell DES that:

- i) You have seen the recent correspondence on the Education Bill (letters attached, though you do not need to read them)
- ii) You appreciate some of the legal difficulties in finding precisely the right form of words to tackle these problems; but
- iii) Bearing in mind first that you and other Ministers are on the record as being determined to tackle the problem of

indoctrination, and second the political realities which the Lord President faces in the Lords, you are clear that the Government must be willing to put forward the best amendments it can to deal with crime prevention and political indoctrination in schools, and with freedom of speech in higher education.

Yes - I am very much on the side

Mark Addison

MARK ADDISON
8 May 1986

→ Caushe Cox and
do not find the contrary
arguments convincing.
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