

PRIME MINISTER

**EDUCATION BILL: POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION**

The Lord President yesterday met Lady Cox and her colleagues to discuss the various amendments which they are proposing to table at the report stage of the Education Bill. The attached letter records the outcome of the meeting.

You will see that the Lord President explained that the Government would be willing to come up with amendments on political indoctrination and crime prevention in schools (and also on access of parents to syllabuses). On freedom of speech in higher education, the Lord President has undertaken that the Government will produce its own amendment on third reading.

Lady Cox and her colleagues could not be said to be content with this. They do not believe the amendments they have come up with are technically suspect, and they themselves seem likely to press at least some of them in the face of Government amendments which are designed to work at least towards the same end.

But if Lady Cox is not particularly content, neither, I understand from his office, is the Lord President. As you know, he has had a great deal of trouble in persuading the Department of Education and Science to come this far. That was his first task. Having done so, I think he would have liked to have seen rather more recognition on the part of Lady Cox that some real progress has been made.

In sum, it has not been a happy episode for the Lord President. I am sure you are right to have lent your general support to the case Lady Cox was putting but to have kept out of the detailed discussions.

J.M.

pp. MEA  
13 May, 1986.

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CSBG

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE  
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

13 May 1986

Dear Rob

## EDUCATION BILL: POLITICAL INDOCTRINATION

I said I would write to let you know the main points emerging from the meeting the Lord President held yesterday with Lady Cox and others (see list attached at Annex A) in confirmation of our telephone conversation. Before doing so, I should mention that the Lord President specifically asked me to pass on his thanks for the extremely helpful briefing you supplied for the meeting on Friday.

At Annex B is a list of amendments handed to us at the meeting, which we have numbered for ease of reference.

It was clear on amendments 1 and 2 dealing with political activities in primary schools and political indoctrination generally that there remained a substantial and unbridgable gap between Lady Cox and the Government. The Lord President said that the Government could go no further than it already had done to meet Lady Cox on this matter. It was clear that Lady Cox and her colleagues were incapable of seeing the disadvantages attaching to a total ban on political activities in schools, or the reasons for Government reluctance to go along with the formula in amendment number 2 because of the platform it would provide to extremists at both ends of the political spectrum. The Lord President has asked me to say that it is important the Government spokesman should have a persuasive and cogent speech setting out these matters and emphasising the strengths of the alternative Government amendment requiring the responsible treatment of political issues in schools, so as to minimise the number of people who might be persuaded to vote for these other amendments if, as expected, they are pressed to divisions.

The delegation was divided in its response to the proposed lines of a Government amendment to ensure that the police are not excluded from schools. Some of them doubted whether the Government formula went far enough, given the activities of extremist groups of teachers and the resolution by the NUT in London

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against admitting the police to schools. It was, however, interesting that Lord Renton supported the Lord President's explanation of how the amendment would secure its objective. Lord Boyd-Carpenter would have preferred the Government formula to require heads etc "to comply with" rather than "to have regard to" representations made by chief constables. The Lord President explained why he thought this suggestion could not be accepted, but undertook to pursue the matter. As I explained, what we should like now is a letter setting out the case against the suggestion which we can use in reply to Lord Boyd-Carpenter and other peers to explain the Government's thinking.

On the access of parents to syllabuses, the proposal to place a duty on the Secretary of State was generally well received, but Lord Renton asked whether the amendment could include a reference in terms to "syllabuses" and not just refer to children's programmes as it does at present. The response by Government Ministers present at the meeting implied that this would be achievable, and the Lord President has asked me to seek your advice on whether this slight modification could be made, subject to any necessary qualification that you see.

The discussion on freedom of speech in further education establishments centred on the parliamentary handling of the amendment at present favoured by Lady Cox and others in the light of the Government's undertaking to produce its own amendment on Third Reading. The amendment at present favoured by Lady Cox and others. The Chief Whip explained that, if the Lady Cox amendment was pressed to a vote on Report, the Government would have to reserve its position on tidying up the provision in the Commons. If, however, the peers were to leave the matter open until Third Reading, in order to see the shape of the provision which the Government would be bringing forward at that stage, they could, if still dissatisfied, press their own proposal then. To give the peers time to reflect on how to handle this matter, it was agreed that the Government would seek to make available to them, in good time for Third Reading (which I believe is 2 June), the text of the amendment it proposed to table.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Mark Addison at No 10, to the Private Secretaries to Lord Denham, the Solicitor General and Lady Young, to Lord Swinton and Lady Hooper, and to Michael Stark in Sir Robert Armstrong's office.

*Yours sincerely  
Nick Gubbons*

*mm*

JOAN MACNAUGHTON  
Private Secretary

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ANNEX A

Lord President

Lord Denham

Lord Swinton

Lady Hooper

Lord Boyd-Carpenter

Baroness Cox

Lord Renton

Hon Mary Pearson

Joan MacNaughton

Rhodri Walters

AMENDMENTS

Clause 16

1. BY THE LORD HARRIS OF GREENWICH  
THE LORD CHARTERIS OF AMISFIELD  
THE BARONESS COX  
THE LORD ORR-EWING

Page 19, line 33, at end insert -

("() It shall be the duty of every local education authority to forbid the pursuit of partisan political activities in their primary schools as part of school life, whether in their schools or elsewhere.")

BY THE LORD RENTON  
THE LORD CHARTERIS OF AMISFIELD  
THE BARONESS COX  
THE LORD HARRIS OF GREENWICH

2. Page 19, line 33, at end insert -

("() It shall be the duty of every local education authority to forbid the promotion of partisan political views in the teaching of any subject in any of their schools.")

BY THE LORD RITCHIE OF DUNDEE

3. Page 19, line 33, at end insert -

("() It shall be the duty of every local education authority to ensure that in the teaching of any subject in any of their schools the presentation of political views shall be impartial and objective.")

After Clause 18

BY THE LORD HARRIS OF GREENWICH  
THE BARONESS COX  
THE LORD ANNAN  
THE LORD BELOFF

4. Insert the following new Clause -

(" . . . The articles of government for every school shall provide that courses on crime prevention and road safety are provided by any constable appointed for the purpose by a chief officer of police.")

Before Clause 19

BY THE LORD ORR-EWING  
THE BARONESS COX  
THE LORD CHARTERIS OF AMISFIELD

5. Insert the following new Clause -

(" . . . It shall be the duty of the governing body of every school to prepare up to date written statements of the school's syllabuses and to make copies available to parents on demand.")

Before Clause 48

BY THE BARONESS COX  
THE LORD CHALFONT  
THE LORD ORR-EWING

6. Insert the following new Clause -

(" . . . It shall be the duty of any university, polytechnic or college of further or higher education to use available resources, including if necessary requesting the help of the police, to prevent serious interference with freedom of speech within the law on their premises.")

