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PRIME MINISTER

28 February 1986

TEACHERS' PAY

It is clear that to achieve 'better education' and a lasting peace in the schools then new legislation will be required. Once Government has decided on the form this is to take, the easiest way would be to publish a consultative document and then move directly to a Bill.

But DES expect the ACAS talks will collapse and the disruption of the schools to be renewed. They believe an enquiry would end any such disruption and therefore see this as the better way of moving towards the necessary legislation for 'better education'.

But it is almost impossible to set terms of reference and membership of an enquiry that will both produce a temporary end to the disruption and the longer term goal of 'better education'.

Either the terms of reference and membership will be sufficiently tough to avoid another Houghton, in which case the unions will boycott it and the current disruption will continue, (Keith Joseph has frequently stated that the unions will abhor any enquiry into both pay and conditions).

Or the enquiry will be constituted along the lines of Houghton and Clegg and will recommend a restoration of Houghton pay levels with only lip service to 'better education'.

Any compromise between the two extremes seems likely to yield the worst of both worlds - both higher pay and continuing disruption.

If the ACAS talks are able to continue they must surely represent the best chance of ending the disruption without

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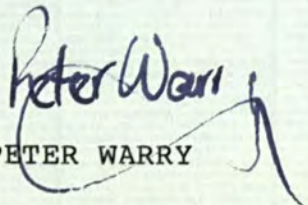
spending at least double the £1,250m on offer and perhaps considerably more. DES and others were never sanguine about the results of the NASUWT ballot, although the teachers ultimately voted 2 to 1 against a strike. Perhaps the DES are also being unduly pessimistic about the ACAS talks, especially if Government were to take a more supportive attitude than it has done so far.

Of course the ACAS talks will not lead to a long term solution of the education problem: this can only be done by taking education out of the hands of the LEAs and giving it back either to the parents (through voucherism) or to the paymaster (through a Central Education Service). But this offers no immediate solution, even if voucherism were started today it will take a long time to bite, whilst the Central Education Service would have to be a manifesto commitment.

Conclusion

It is almost impossible to formulate conclusions of an enquiry that would be sufficiently acceptable to teachers to bring about an end to disruption yet still yield 'better education' at a realistic price. We therefore strongly recommend that the Government should soldier on with ACAS and offer it all possible support.

Consideration could also be given to pressurising Conservative LEAs to take disciplinary action against those (NUT) teachers still in breach of their contracts. The LEAs defence that this will bring about a total closure of the education system must be much weaker now that the NASUWT have voted to end disruption.


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