

PRIME MINISTERTRAINING COLLEGES

We agree with the Secretary of State for Employment's assessment that there is a great need for technical schools rather like those which were either abolished or traded 20 years ago. Some evidence of the demand for this sort of education is evinced by the rise of many private schools of computer science, electronic maintenance and engineering, etc. But the private sector has been limited by the fact that there is no tax deductibility for fees. So there has been much too little straightforward technical education.

The Secretary of State argues that we should set up some technical colleges under the aegis of the Manpower Services Commission, as a demonstration project. This can be done quickly and outside the establishment hierarchy of the DES.

The advantage of using the MSC is that it is quite apart from the bureaucracy of the existing education system. It would avoid the corrupting influence of many LEAs and it would avoid the pseudo-intellectualism of the universities. There would be the opportunity to set up a management system which would energetically push the projects along and make sure they achieve their objectives.

The MSC is by no means an ideal body. One would prefer that the trade union involvement be much smaller and the industrial participation much greater. Perhaps this can be specified in the terms of the administrative structure used, but at least it should be closely monitored.

Although MSC is by no means ideal, all the alternative possible aegises are clearly worse. The local education authorities would be quite inept and probably disastrous. The Department of Industry would not be an appropriate agency and would be unlikely to perform as well as the MSC. The Department of Education and Science would find it very difficult to do anything outside its normal constraints.

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Our general view is then that the MSC initiative is worth further investigation. We would think it is worthwhile insisting that the trade unions have only a minor role in this development. Close participation with local industry is essential, and this should be one of the basic criteria for support. We believe also it would be wise to have some central control on the curricula.

With all these conditions, however, we suggest that the MSC initiative should be supported.

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