

Polis – Milking The Media?

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Milton - Pasteurised Lost

Number 10's decision to [kill off the idea](#) of taking free milk out of the mouths of poor children was as wise as it was quick.

What on earth possessed Anne Milton to try to emulate [Mrs Thatcher's 'Milk Snatcher' epithet?](#)

In her letter she candidly admitted that this was cost-cutting measure and that it would hit the poorest and least well-nourished children. There is tons of evidence linking poor diet to all sorts of bad educational and developmental outcomes for low-income kids.

Perhaps it was all part of the 'strategy' of getting the bad news out of the way early in the parliament. There is always the temptation to float some really dodgy ideas so that you can appear moderate when you rein in errant ministers. But there is always a danger that you leave a sour taste in the mouths of voters.



Milk Snatcher

Back in 1971 it was actually local authorities who led opposition to Mrs Thatcher's decision to cancel deliveries of all those luke-warm little bottles. This time it was trending on Twitter within minutes of breaking on broadcast news. As [@PaulWaugh](#) pointed out, Number 10's quashing of the idea came too late for Education Minister David Willets who was already being grilled upon it on the BBC's morning politics show.

It seems to be a good example of how the coalition PR machinery is still relatively relaxed compared to the pager culture of early New Labour. Milton obviously felt it was fine to float such a toxic idea in an honest and open way without running it past

Cameron's spin-doctors or even the advisers within her own department. Either that or the SPADS and spin doctors were a) incompetent or b) very brave. The speed with which the idea was killed off reminds us that the Prime Minister's early career was in public relations. He also is enough of a career Conservative wonk to know how damaged Thatcher was by what appeared to be a callous and small-minded cut.

Of course, Milton may have been right. The health benefit of feeding frothing fat suspended in water to the nation's bairns is at least debatable. And certainly the delivery mechanism of such a universal benefit will always be questioned at a time of fiscal stringency. But that rational debate has been swept aside in the wake of this small, but perfectly-formed PR own-goal.

It makes you wonder how they will play the much tougher decisions that are still to come.

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