

Fabian Society No. 514

Equality and Quality



**A Socialist Plan
for Education**

Giles Radice

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Equality and Quality: A Socialist Plan for Education

Chapter

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Giles Radice is MP for Durham North and Labour's front bench spokesperson on Education.

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I. Introduction

During 1986, for the first time since the 1960s, education has become a major political issue. In part, this is a response to the long drawn out teachers' dispute and the glaring inadequacies of educational provision. But there is now also a growing public awareness of education's importance, both for improving individual life chances and fostering self-development and for securing social progress and prosperity.

As we move towards a knowledge-based economy, it becomes ever clearer that our future will increasingly depend on our human capital — on the intelligence, information and creativity of our people. It is equally clear that the best way to develop that capital is by investing carefully and effectively in education and training. It is clear, too, that in today's and tomorrow's world the prizes will go not to nations which educate only their elites but to those which are prepared to give good quality education to all their citizens.

In this race, Britain has considerable ground to make up. Authoritative studies for the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) and the National Economic Development Office (NEDO) have shown that we are less well educated and less well trained than many of our main competitors. Only one half of the work force in this country holds recognised qualifications equivalent to O-levels, compared with two thirds in West Germany and Japan and almost 80 per cent in the United States. Britain is also well down the league table in providing education and training opportunities for young people.

In 1983, 64 per cent of the 16 to 18 age group received such provision, compared with 84 per cent in West Germany, 79 per cent in the United States and the Netherlands and 73 per cent in Japan. A much smaller proportion — 12 per cent — of the relevant age group has

qualifications at degree level compared with 22 per cent in the United States and 24 per cent in Japan. Moreover, the proportion of adults receiving training or enjoying continuing education is smaller than in a number of other advanced countries (*Competence and Competition*, NEDO/MS, 1984). Relatively speaking, Britain is a badly-educated and badly-trained nation.

The Conservative failure

It is against this background of relative educational backwardness and what is needed to equip ourselves for the future that we have to judge the Government's performance. By any standards, it is a miserable one. Indeed, it is widely recognised by members and supporters of the Government that the Conservatives have failed on education.

Our schools simply do not have the level of resources for the job that we are asking them to do. Even Conservative ministers have admitted that teachers, the key educational resource, are underpaid. For the past few years, Her Majesty's inspectors, the Secretary of State's own advisers, have been warning the Government about the shortage of teachers in key areas, the inadequate supply of books and equipment, and the bad state of repair and maintenance of too many of our schools. At the same time, the Government has deliberately

encouraged, by the assisted places and other schemes, the expansion of private schools, allowing the better off to buy their children an inside track into higher education.

The bland assertion by the Conservative Government that, because of a sharply declining school population, spending per pupil is higher than it was in 1979 ignores the costs of falling rolls. It also conveniently hides the fact that, instead of using the leeway that falling rolls could have provided to repair the glaring inadequacies of provision and to provide the necessary investment in improving standards, the Conservatives have chosen for ideological reasons to impose tight curbs on educational spending.

The consequences of this policy of squeezing education spending are extremely alarming. The most significant paragraph in the 1986 report of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) said: "While most LEAs appear to have held or slightly improved the overall levels of their provision for schools, the baselines of some of that provision are such that it seems unlikely that present levels will be sufficient to enable schools to respond successfully to the national and local calls for improvement in pupils' achievements and the curriculum" (*paragraph 98 of the Report of Her Majesty's Inspectors on the Effects of Local Authority Expenditure Policies on Education Provision in England*, Department of Education and Science, May 1986).

In a recent speech, Mr Eric Bolton, the Senior Inspector, confirmed that, unless schools received sufficient resources, these improvements could not be implemented. He went on to point out that, while money was not the only answer, it was a vital part of the solution.

Another important ingredient in educational success is morale. But Britain's schools are suffering from a crisis of

confidence. For more than a year, most children's education was disrupted, leaving pupils uncertain, parents anxious and teachers demoralised and alienated. Too many of our schools still exist in a state of crisis, hardly the best atmosphere in which to improve standards.

Under the Conservatives, the United Kingdom is also the only major Western European country which has cut resources going to higher education. Since 1981, there has been a cut of 16.3 per cent in real terms in the recurrent grant to the universities. As a consequence, at least 12,000 well-qualified students, who would otherwise have been successful, have failed to obtain university places, while the overall reduction in the recurrent grant has meant that there is less money for research.

The polytechnics and other institutions of higher education have been rightly praised for their contribution to increasing access. Yet the Government has failed to provide the extra resources to match the extra students. Indeed, the spend per student has fallen by 22 per cent in real terms since 1980-1 and only a major political row has prevented a squeeze which would have led to 9,000 students being turned away in 1987-8. The Government has paid lip service to continuing and adult education. But in practice, they have cut resources for adult and continuing education in a number of crucial areas, including university extra mural departments, the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) and the Open University.

With such a catalogue of mistakes, omissions and failures, it is hardly surprising that voters are so concerned about what is happening to education and so opposed to government policies. This increased public interest in and concern about education is good news for the Labour Party. Not only is education a more salient issue but, in contrast to the position in 1983, Labour

now has a big lead in the public opinion polls on education.

Labour's approach

But it will not be enough merely to expose the Government's failures. As in the 1960s, Labour must put forward its own positive approach. Without such a strategy, it is unlikely to continue to carry conviction with the electorate. It will certainly be unable to retain the support necessary to carry out reforms, to widen opportunity and raise standards.

Education has always been of great importance to socialists because of its key role in promoting greater equality. The Labour Party's record is, on the whole, an impressive one. It was Labour which pioneered the modern primary school, introduced comprehensives and created the polytechnics and the Open University.

However, in the 1970s, Labour was forced on the educational defensive. There were growing doubts about the effectiveness of education in promoting equality and securing economic growth. And while socialists lost their confidence, the Conservative Right unfurled the 'standards' banner. It may have been a flag of convenience. As James Callaghan stated in his 1976 Ruskin Speech: "We all know those who claim to defend standards but who in reality are simply seeking to defend old privileges and inequalities". But there is little

doubt that the standards issue helped the Tories occupy the high ground of educational politics.

The new surge of public concern about education and about the Government's handling of it has given the Labour Party a fresh opportunity to recreate a progressive consensus in favour of educational change. That opportunity has to be seized.

This pamphlet attempts to set out the main outlines of Labour's approach. Three linking themes run through it. First, for both social and economic reasons, all pupils must be given a broad and balanced education which fully prepares them for adult life. Secondly, for social and economic reasons, good quality education must be made available to all throughout life. Thirdly, again for social and economic reasons, the importance of quality has to be emphasised. Increasing educational opportunity and raising educational standards can and must go hand in hand.

But it is not enough for a practising politician approaching a general election merely to discuss general principles, important though these are. It is also necessary to propose practical recommendations, achievable in the early years of a Labour government. In this pamphlet, I put forward a plan to raise standards in schools, set out my views on Labour's educational priorities and consider the most effective means of "delivering" its education programme.

2. Educating for Life

The purpose of education has to be clearly stated. In the recent past, uncertainty about educational objectives has allowed Conservatives to propagate with growing acceptance a crudely vocational education for the many, alongside a narrowly academic version for the few. For both social and economic reasons, socialists must advocate a broader and more comprehensive approach, which recognises education's role not only in preparing young people for the world of work and leisure but also for democratic citizenship. In the widest sense, we must educate for life.

Traditionally, the socialist vision of education has always been broad in concept. When in 1924 Tawney put the case for secondary education for all, he argued that its main aim should not be to impart the specialist technique of any particular trade or profession but "to develop the faculties which, because they are the attribute of man, are not peculiar to any particular class or profession of men, and to build up the interests which, while they may become the basis of specialisation at a later stage, have a value extending beyond their utility for any particular vocation, because they are the conditions of a rational and responsible life in society" (R H Tawney, *Secondary Education for All*, Labour Party, 1922).

Comprehensive education

In the 1950s and 1960s, the case for comprehensive secondary education was primarily made in terms of social justice, efficiency and community. But a powerful subsidiary argument was that a comprehensive secondary school would be able to provide a broader and richer curriculum than the grammar, technical or secondary modern school

which it replaced. It would offer a much wider range of academic subjects than the technical school, and more music, drama, arts and technical education than the grammar school. A comprehensive school had also to offer a wide range of courses to meet the different needs of different pupils. In short, comprehensive schools would provide a "comprehensive" education.

There is no doubt that the changeover to comprehensives brought significant improvement both at the primary and secondary level. Freed from the shackles of the 11 plus, most primary schools were able to devise a curriculum which stimulated the appetite for knowledge and assisted the development of learning. There were also gains for secondary schools because more pupils had access to a broader range of courses than ever before.

However, there were also considerable difficulties in constructing a curriculum appropriate for a comprehensive secondary school. One observer commented that for some schools "it was simply a case of combining the orthodox grammar school curriculum with the much less precise curriculum of the secondary modern, and hoping for the best" (H Judge, *A Generation of Schooling*, Oxford University Press, 1984). Inevitably in a school environment

which was still dominated by an exam system designed for, at best, only 60 per cent of school leavers, it was the 'academic' approach which tended to win out. For the most part, the comprehensive curriculum was organised to suit the minority of pupils who went on into higher education.

When the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, made his Ruskin speech on education in October 1976, he was responding in part to the claims made by right-wing propagandists that the change over to comprehensives had led to a decline in academic standards — claims which, as we have seen, he rightly rejected. He took more seriously the assertions of industrialists and others that pupils were leaving school without a proper grounding in literacy and numeracy. There was no virtue, said Mr Callaghan, in "producing socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed because they do not have the skills".

James Callaghan's emphasis on the link between education and industrial performance was regrettably transformed by Conservatives into a narrow vocationalism. The Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) was originally conceived as a way of providing vocational education for what Sir Keith Joseph, the then Conservative Secretary of State for Education, called the bottom 40 per cent of secondary pupils. It was highly significant that TVEI was devised and directed by the Manpower Services Commission rather than by the Department of Education and Science (DES). Manpower rather than education has been very much in the driving seat under the Tories, a development accentuated by the appointment of Lord Young, former MSC Chairman, as the Secretary of State for Employment. Lord Young strongly believes that the Manpower Services Commission should extend its influence over secondary, further and

higher education and has worked hard to promote his plans.

A socialist vision

In the face of this resurgent vocationalism, socialists now need to reassert a more generous view of the purpose of education. Education must enable pupils to learn basic skills. It must also help them to think and argue logically. It must develop artistic, creative, moral and physical potential. It must impart a knowledge of our cultural and religious heritage and that of others. It must give an understanding of today's technological, industrial and economic world. It must make young people aware of their democratic rights and responsibilities. And it must encourage and appreciate, not only academic achievement, but also other kinds of attainment — the practical as well as the theoretical, the oral as well as the written, and the ability to communicate and cooperate with others. In the broadest sense, education must be a preparation for adult life — for leisure and work, for home and the world outside, for personal and social relationships, and for participation in a democratic society.

A socialist vision of education emphatically rejects vocationalism as being not only culturally and socially restricting but also economically ineffective. There is, in fact, far more common ground than is often supposed between the aims of education and the needs of industry. Tory politicians have failed to understand that modern industry requires not an updated version of the Victorian "hewers of wood and drawers of water" but school leavers who have mastered a broad range of basic linguistic, communication, numerical, technical and scientific skills, and who are creative, adaptable and able to work with others, as the CBI itself argued in a memorandum on Schools and Industry

presented to the National Economic Development Council in 1984. In an age of rapid change, what is required is not pupils who are narrowly trained in techniques which rapidly become obsolete but independent-minded young men and women who have the intelligence, imagination and skill to adjust to different jobs, different situations and different people. A broad-based school curriculum is, in fact, an essential pre-requisite to a more effective industry.

The role of education in promoting citizenship should also be emphasised. Socialists, of course, fully understand the importance of education in promoting personal, moral and intellectual growth. But, as one writer has put it, "the educated man in a democratic society is a cooperative individual, not a selfish individualist" (Denis Lawton, *Education and Social Justice*, Sage, 1977). In a country which is so marred by conflict and in which the concept of community is so weak, the comprehensive school, which can bring together young people from different backgrounds and races, teach them a common curriculum, and stress the necessity of cooperation, has a key role to play in fostering a greater sense of social harmony. Our schools must also underpin democracy. That is why political and social studies are of such importance in a common curriculum. The purpose of these studies is not to indoctrinate but to impart an understanding of politics and society and a knowledge of civic rights and responsibilities. For a healthy democracy requires self-confident and informed men and women, educated to share in decision making and participate in democratic life.

Post-16 education

The wider vision of the purpose of education remains valid beyond 16. It is

true that, with the growth of youth unemployment, both Labour and Conservative Parties have given greater emphasis to post-16 vocational preparation and training. But we should not forget that Japan and the United States maintain a broadly-based education until at least 18. At the very least, we need to ensure that there is real choice between education and training, that training programmes contain a strong educational element and that a vocational qualification can lead back into further and higher education.

The higher education sector is, in theory, dedicated to the idea of a "liberal" education. The practice is somewhat different. Law and medicine have always been taught at universities, while many vocationally-relevant courses, including branches of science, engineering, economics and business studies, are on offer at universities and polytechnics. What is important is not the purity of the "liberal" ideal as that there should be a broad and representative range of courses. The case against the Government's proposal (contained in the Green Paper on the future of higher education — Department of Education and Science, *Development of Higher Education into the 1990s*, HMSO, Cmnd., 9524, May 1985) for a sharp switch away from the arts and social sciences is not only that it undervalues arts subjects but also that, because it is made at a time when the Government is also reducing resources going to higher education, it would lead to the severest restriction for many years in what is taught in British universities and polytechnics.

It is certainly true that there is an extremely serious shortage of some kinds of engineers, technologists and scientists as the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Education for New Technologies revealed (*2nd Report*, Vol 1, December 1984). Government, higher education and schools

have a clear duty to respond. But a demand for particular scientific, engineering and technological skills does not justify the case for such a drastic switch away from the arts and the social sciences. Indeed, the evidence from employers is that firms are also increasingly looking for graduates with a knowledge of both science and the humanities. What are needed as both the University Grants Committee and the National Advisory Body for Local Authority Higher Education have recommended, are more courses which straddle subjects and disciplines.

It is also important to stress that education ought not to stop at 16, 18 or even 21 and 22. For personal, social and economic reasons, opportunities for a wide variety of educational and training experiences at different levels must be available throughout life. In an age of rapid economic and technological change, those in employment will need to update their information and skills. The unemployed will urgently need to be retrained for new fields of employment. There are also the educational and training needs of those (overwhelmingly women) who have to break their careers.

However, education can also open many doors for adults which are not

directly job related. As the Labour Party said in its policy document: "Adult literacy courses can give people the skills and motivation to read, comprehend and communicate. Personal and social education can restore to people the confidence and competence to shape their own lives and participate fully in their communities. Education for leisure can encourage adults to develop their interests and enjoy cultural activities" (*Education Throughout Life*, Labour Party, 1986).

The truth is that industry needs not only literate scientists and numerate arts graduates but also a highly-educated and skilled labour force. Society needs critically-minded men and women who are prepared to participate in democratic decision making. Our civilisation needs people who can talk, and continue to talk, to each other. Unlike Thatcherite conservatives, socialists understand that "an educational system for the 21st century must have ambitions beyond that of a commercial training camp" (AH Halsey in the *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 7 June 1985). It must not only equip young people for work and leisure but also to play their full part in a more open, caring, and less divided society. It must educate for life throughout life.

3. Equality and Quality

Socialists have always believed that education can and should be one of the main instruments in reducing inequality. However, in recent years, the egalitarian role of education has been in eclipse. This is in part because of the impact of government policies which have accentuated inequality of provision. But it is also because of loss of confidence on the Left. Indeed, if we were formerly inclined to underestimate the underlying background factors in generating inequality, there is now equally unjustified pessimism about what access to high-quality education can do to improve life chances.

How far can education compensate for social and economic disadvantage? Research in the 1970s showed that at both primary and secondary school level pupils from working class homes consistently did less well than pupils from middle class homes. The Oxford Social Mobility project also revealed that working class children were much more likely than their middle class contemporaries to drop out of school as soon as the minimum leaving age was reached, were less likely to continue their school career into the sixth form, and less likely to go on into higher or further education (A H Halsey et al, *Origins and Destinations*, Clarendon Press, 1980). Studies in America, such as those of Coleman and Jenks, seemed to indicate that educational attainment was largely independent of the schooling a child received (J S Coleman in *Review of Educational Research* 45, 1975 and C Jenks et al *Inequality*, Basic Books, 1972). While, in Britain, research by the Department of Education and Science concluded that variations in exam results were to a considerable extent explained by social factors (*DES Statistical Bulletin* 10/83).

Anthony Crosland, the Labour Secretary of State who initiated the comprehensive revolution, himself warned that educational change alone could not bring about greater equality:

"To make equal opportunity in education a reality, we shall have not only to eliminate bad housing and inadequate incomes, but steadily to make good the educational deficiencies of parents who cannot give their children the encouragement they need" (C A R Crosland, *Socialism Now and other essays*, Jonathan Cape, 1974). He believed that equality of opportunity could not be accomplished in one generation, or by education alone, and that it needed a wider social revolution.

With the benefit of hindsight and experience, it is clearly wise to conclude that we can only expect education to help make society more equal if it is part of a general egalitarian strategy. But if we accept that there are limits to what education alone can achieve, we should also emphatically reject the pessimistic view that education makes no difference at all. The evidence is that good schooling improves both educational attainment and life chances.

The findings of the National Child Development Study have shown that there is an academic pay-off, irrespective of social class and independent of home environment and parents' education, for children who have pre-school education. At the ages of both five and ten, they had higher marks in mathematics, English and general intelligence tests than children who had

not received any form of pre-schooling (J Essen & P Wedge, *Continuities in Childhood Disadvantage*, Heinemann Educational Books, 1982). This confirms similar evidence derived from the monitoring of the experience of children who took part in the American Head Start programme in the 1960s.

Rising standards

If we consider the impact of reforms at primary and secondary school stage, there has been a significant increase over the last fifteen years in the proportion of pupils achieving exam success at all levels. In 1983-4, the most recent year for which statistics are available, over 18 per cent of United Kingdom school leavers achieved one or more A-level or Scottish Higher Grade passes — an improvement on the 16 per cent who obtained these results in 1970, with progress more marked amongst women candidates.

In addition to those young people who leave school with A-levels, 37 per cent of the relevant age group have obtained at least one higher-grade O-level (Grades A, B or C), CSE Grade 1 or equivalent Scottish qualification compared with 24 per cent in 1970-1, and of these some 10 per cent have achieved five or more such higher grades. At more modest levels of achievement, another third left school with at least one lower-graded result, compared with only a tenth in 1970-1. Thus only 12 per cent of young people left school with no public examination results whatsoever, compared with 44 per cent in 1970-1.

So much for those who argue that the spread of comprehensive education has led to lower standards. The reality is that, by attempting to meet the needs of all pupils and by providing a broader and richer curriculum, the comprehensive school has for the first time made it

possible to raise the standards of achievement of all pupils.

There is also growing evidence about the beneficial impact of successful schools. The conclusion of the Rutter study on Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) secondary schools was that children's behaviour and attitudes were shaped and influenced by their experiences at school and, in particular, by the qualities of school as an institution (M Rutter et al, *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, Open Books, 1979). A recently published study on ILEA primary schools confirms that good schools have a marked influence in their pupils' progress (ILEA Research and Statistics Branch, *The Junior School Project*, ILEA, April 1986). In short, schools, in which there is effective leadership, stimulating teaching, and parental involvement make a real difference.

Increased opportunities

There is also plenty of evidence about the influence of education and training on life opportunities. The more skilled and educated the person, the better the job, the income and the prospects of self-development. Yet a high proportion of young people enter adult life with only a limited grasp of the basic skills. This is not because they are incapable of learning. The reason is that post-16 education and training facilities in this country are still grossly inadequate.

Despite the expansion of the 1960s and the early 1970s, the percentage of working class children going into higher education has risen only slightly. Yet the Oxford Study on Social Mobility has demonstrated conclusively that the proportion could easily be doubled without any lowering of standards. Wastage takes place either because able children do not stay on at school or because of the lack of places available in universities, polytechnics and colleges, a shortage

which the Government-imposed cuts have exacerbated.

If good schooling improves both educational achievement and life chances, then access to high-quality education ought to be a basic right of citizenship. Good education ought to be available to all at every stage throughout life. The case for such radical extension of rights is partly a matter of simple justice. Every citizen ought to be able to enjoy the educational opportunities which are currently available only to some. However, it is also a question of efficiency. As we have seen, the most successful countries are those which are prepared to give all their citizens a decent education. The arguments for greater educational opportunity are overwhelming on both social and economic grounds.

It follows that the main aim of Labour's educational policies over the next decade should be to open up opportunities for high-quality education for all throughout life. Every three and

four year old must have the chance of a place in a nursery school or class. Every child and young person should have the opportunity of being taught in adequately resourced comprehensive primary and secondary schools. Every sixteen year old should have the right to at least a two year period of high-quality education and training with adequate financial support. Every adult should have the right to benefit from education and training. Higher and further education ought to be opened up to a much wider group than ever before.

Of course all these objectives cannot be achieved overnight or even in the first years of a Labour government. As is argued later, there must be priorities. But these are obtainable and realistic longer-term aims. After all, our industrial rivals have achieved at least some of them already. And it surely makes good sense to set ourselves achievable targets against which we are able to measure progress.

4. Raising Standards

Socialists must always stress the link between equality and quality. For it is not schooling as such which improves achievement and increases opportunity. So high-quality education must be made available for all.

For many years educational progressives have been reluctant to use the word 'standards' as part of their vocabulary. They have been rightly concerned to emphasise the need to widen access and opportunity through the ending of selective secondary education and the expansion of post-school education and they have been understandably wary about the association between standards and learning by rote, excessive emphasis on examinations

and a narrowly 'academic' view of educational achievement. But the consequence of this reluctance has been to allow 'standards' to become the watchword of the Right.

This has led to the paradoxical situation in which progressives, genuinely committed to ensuring every child gets a good education, are sometimes thought to be less in tune with parents than the educational reactionaries who talk loudly about standards, but in

practice support an elitist approach of confining good education to a select few. And it is certainly true that, despite our good intentions, the neglect by progressives of the standards issue has left too much of the educational 'high ground' in the hands of the Right.

Standards clearly has meaning to most parents. Indeed they consider it to be the central issue in education. It reflects their insistence that their children are taught in effective, well-ordered schools. It demonstrates their desire that children's progress is monitored, assessed and acknowledged. Above all, it expresses their passionate concern that their children should develop, learn and achieve at school.

A socialist objective

Socialists and progressives must make the standards issue their own. Higher standards of educational achievement for all should be as much a socialist objective as better standards of health and housing. As already argued, access must be opened up and educational opportunity widened. And as even Government ministers have recognised, the level of resources invested in education needs to be increased. But, having rightly stressed the need to open up access and increase investment, socialists must say loudly and clearly that it is essential to raise standards.

As we have seen, it is simply untrue that standards, even when judged by the often incomplete measure of public examination results, have fallen. On the contrary, they have risen significantly. But, although progress has been made, we are still a considerable way from ensuring that all pupils achieve their potential.

Pupils in some other countries are achieving more at school. Research conducted by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research suggests

that German school leavers reach a higher level of attainment in a broader range of subjects than do school leavers in Britain. They also achieve significantly higher standards in mathematics throughout the ability range (S J Prais & K Wagner, *School Standards in England and Germany*, NIESR Economic Review, May 1985).

It is also the case that the class, race and gender of a pupil has a marked impact on achievement. The National Child Development Study found that reading scores achieved by eleven year old pupils from middle class families are significantly higher than those achieved by pupils from families where the parents are in unskilled occupations. There are marked differences in the pattern of achievement between boys and girls, particularly in mathematics and science. And the Swann Report has underlined the fact that many schools are failing to develop the full academic potential of pupils from black and Asian families (*Education for All*, HMSO, Cmnd. 9453, 1985).

To ensure that every young person fulfills their potential and that we match the performance of our competitors, raising standards in schools must be a national priority.

A standards strategy cannot of course be considered in isolation. We have already seen how the social and economic circumstances of pupils will influence their achievement in school. So a Labour government committed to higher standards has also to be committed to tackling family poverty, unemployment and the disintegration of the inner cities. It has to ensure that extra resources are invested not only to overcome inadequate levels of educational provision generally but also to give schools in areas of high unemployment and social deprivation extra facilities.

But higher standards is not just a question of money. The evidence of the study by Rutter and the recently pub-

lished study of Inner London primary schools shows that, with similar levels of resources and taking account of differences in the background of pupils, some schools are more successful than others in developing their pupils' potential. If we are serious about raising standards and about providing equal opportunities, then all schools must be brought up to the level of the best. Changes are needed in three areas — reforms in the curriculum and in the way achievement is assessed, improvements in teacher performance and closer home-school links.

Reforming the curriculum and exam systems

Our notion of standards should not be limited to academic achievement by the gifted few but should be about the development of the skills, intelligence and knowledge of every pupil. All pupils should develop the ability and capacity to express themselves both orally and in writing, memorise and organise facts, information and knowledge, investigate problems and apply knowledge to solve problems, and cooperate and work with others to achieve both individual and group goals. Above all, pupils must acquire a high level of self-confidence, self-discipline and self-esteem.

To achieve these objectives each pupil should pursue a coherent and balanced curriculum which in covering the main subject areas seeks to integrate academic knowledge and practical skills. A common curriculum until the end of the third year of secondary school should be followed by a common core curriculum in the fourth and fifth year.

This common core should include an element of technical education. This should aim to give pupils an understanding of an important part of our culture and break the notion that technical and technological knowledge has a

second class status. It will require our schools to be provided with significant new resources. The national extension of the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative, recently announced by the Government, has not been backed by the kind of resources needed to make this important curriculum change a success. A common core curriculum would also ensure that girls have a broad education with access to subjects they too often drop. Combined with initiatives to tackle gender stereotyping in the curriculum and in teaching materials it would make an important contribution to raising achievement by girls.

Existing public examinations, even the new GCSE exam, assess only some of the skills which pupils need to develop. They also place too little emphasis on continuous assessment and project work. The pursuit of higher standards will require more broadly-based assessment systems, including pupils' profiles and records of achievement. The development of a modular approach to study would tackle the problem of pupils at the age of 14 being asked to set off on a two year educational journey towards nebulous and distant goals by offering instead a series of interconnected units lasting between six and eight weeks. In this way, pupils would have a greater sense of having something to show for their efforts.

The reform of the 16+ exam and assessment system will make it even more essential that we replace A-levels by a less specialised exam at 18+ which becomes part of an integrated system of assessment covering both academic and vocational qualification. One of the curses of the English and Welsh education systems (in contrast to that of Scotland) is the excessive specialisation which prevents pupils from receiving a broad education and restricts their choices and opportunities later on. A-level reform would also help the de-

velopment of more broadly-based higher education courses.

Improving teacher performance

Teachers are the key resource for raising standards and it is a vital task to improve their effectiveness. It will be essential to have a Secretary of State for Education who is aware of the difficulties facing teachers and understands the need to raise the profession's morale. There must also be higher salaries for teachers along with a new salary structure to ensure that the profession attracts and retains able people. But it is not just a question of morale and money, important though these are. It is also a question of performance.

Good teachers are those who have high expectations of their pupils and the ability to realise those expectations through the careful identification of each pupil's educational needs; who have the capacity to teach with enthusiasm and with a variety of teaching styles; who have the ability to plan their work and are able to make effective use of the resources available to them; who have the professional expertise to communicate with parents and involve them in their children's education; and who have a good match between their initial qualification and the subject they are teaching.

Judged by these benchmarks, HMI reports have made clear that some teaching is less effective than it needs to be if standards are to be raised.

The following changes will be needed:

- good teachers should be encouraged and rewarded for remaining in the classroom;
- there must be appraisal of teachers, linked to more in-service training, to help their career development;

- teachers should have more time for preparation and planning, for consultation with colleagues, parents and pupils, and for self-assessment and record-keeping;
- head teachers need to be trained to provide purposeful team leadership, acting as the leader of a team of professionals rather than, as is too often the case, a "crisis manager";
- all teachers should be aware of the dangers of gender and race stereotyping and should be helped to overcome them;
- there must be a better match between teachers' qualifications and the subjects they teach. Science, mathematics, craft design and technology are the problem areas;
- above all, teachers need to be encouraged to raise their expectations of what their pupils can achieve.

The July 1986 'heads of agreement', negotiated between the Labour-led employers and the teachers' unions, sets out the outlines of what would be a new deal for the profession, covering salary structure, conditions of service, appraisal and negotiating machinery. But, if it is to be effectively implemented, it will need the support of the Government to pay for the £2.9 billion which the package will cost over five years. Central government can also contribute to achieving a more effective teaching profession through a number of other initiatives. These should include:

- giving more support for initial teacher education;
- encouraging more people from the black and Asian communities to train to become teachers;
- expanding in-service training;
- organising a national information exchange network on "good practice"

and on successful innovation both to improve standards and tackle class, race and gender inequalities;

- using the Assessment of Performance Unit to raise teachers' expectations by showing the level of achievement being reached by many pupils and to stimulate informed public debate on standards;
- introducing emergency measures to boost recruitment of teachers in shortage subjects by supporting the recruitment and secondment of experienced people from industry and the public services and by setting up intensive in-service training programmes;
- increasing teacher numbers to allow teachers to spend more time on preparation, consultation, assessment and to benefit from in-service training.

Closer home-school links

Parental involvement in education is also essential for raising standards.

Parents are very much involved in the learning process of the under-fives in the home and in play groups. But at secondary school (and often at primary school) that involvement is not sufficiently encouraged and is sometimes even discouraged. A recent poll conducted for the National Consumer Council found that in one city only two thirds of all parents asked attended parents' evenings to discuss their child's progress, only 39 per cent attended a school concert or sports event, fewer than one in eight attended Parent/Teacher Association meetings and only one in a hundred had attended one of the child's lessons. Schools are least

successful at involving parents from the black and Asian communities and working class parents (*Missing Links*, National Consumer Council, 1986).

There is a strong case for the increased representation of parents on school governing bodies contained in the Conservative Government's legislation, though the Taylor Committee's formula that parents should be equal partners with local authority representatives, teaching and non-teaching staff and community representative is preferable to the Government's arrangements. It is also right that there should be support and training for parent-governors. But more will be needed to encourage home-school links.

All schools should operate an open-door policy. Teachers need to have the time and training to talk with and involve parents.

There is also a strong case for a new education Ombudsman in each local education authority to protect parents' rights by providing a quick-acting channel for dealing with grievances from individual parents. Alongside the Ombudsman, education authorities should establish a network of independent Education Advice Centres to help parents make effective use of the education service. New rights for parents and greater parental involvement will be important sources of pressure for higher standards and quality.

In general, schools need to be developed as educational and recreational resources for their surrounding communities. More community schools, meeting the needs of parents and adults as well as ordinary pupils, should be created. The DES should give educational support grants to encourage their development. The aim must be to make the school much more a part of the community.

5. Resources and Priorities

In the 1960s, there was a generally shared view that greater expenditure on education would lead to an increased growth of national output. As over equality, opinion as to the value of education expenditure, particularly among Conservatives, then swung much too far in the opposite direction. The time is long overdue for a reassertion of the importance for Britain of investing in education.

It may well be that in the sixties there was too much optimism about the immediate economic benefits to this country of increased educational expenditure. A distinguished economist has remarked that "early enthusiasts for the 'economics of education' may have muddied the waters somewhat by over-emphasising a positive association found between the volume of education, measured by the number of years spent at school and at university, and the level of income. We have no more reason to believe that all education is favourable to economic growth than that all scientific research will raise future national income" (GDN Worswick in *Education and Economic Performance*, Gower, 1984).

But if it is wise not to expect an immediate pay-off in increased economic growth for increased educational expenditure (particularly when our competitors are also investing in education), few experts doubt the long-run importance of education to a modern economy. As Professor Stonier argues in the 'information' economy the expansion of education is required "to upgrade the human capital to make the work force economically more productive, ranging from manual labour to theoretical scientist, to create an informed citizenry capable of manoeuvring effectively in an information economy, and to

keep everybody from going neurotic in a rapidly changing information environment" (T Stonier, *Wealth of Information*, Methuen, 1983). Certainly, there is now increasing support for the view that Britain's recovery will depend at least in part on ensuring that we have a better-trained and better-educated work force at all levels.

Spending on education

Under the Conservatives, spending on education has too often been considered a luxury item which, as with higher education, can be severely cut without damage to the future. Although the spending per pupil has increased (as a result of a sharp fall in the number of pupils), the share of education as a percentage of total public spending has declined from 11.8 per cent in 1978-9 to 10.8 per cent in 1985-6. A good indication of the Government's priorities is that in 1985-6 we were spending £3.7 billion more on defence than on education, whereas in 1978-9 we were spending £260 million more on education than on defence. As a nation we must give education higher priority. Expenditure on education ought to be regarded as a prudent long-term investment to be protected at all costs.

However, there will be many compet-

ing demands on the next Labour government, including those of health, housing and social security. Above all, the case for more educational spending will be made in the context of its economic strategy whose overriding objective is the creation of jobs. It follows that all Labour's educational objectives will not be achieved in the first years or even in the first term of a Labour government. So, it has to be recognised that, within the education programme, there will have to be priorities and plan accordingly.

Inevitably, Labour's first task will be to address the problems bequeathed by the Tories. As successive HMI reports have shown, the squeeze on local authority budgets has left many schools without adequate supplies of books, teaching materials and equipment and has led to growing dependence on parental contributions to buy even 'basics'. So there will have to be an immediate programme to increase the supply of basic items such as books and equipment. There is also an urgent need for a boost to capital spending on school and college buildings which has fallen by over a half in real terms since the mid-1970s. Such investment in building will do much to improve the environment for learning and will also provide the additional bonus of jobs for unemployed building workers.

The cuts in higher education will immediately be halted. A Labour Secretary of State for Education taking office tomorrow would provide the public sector colleges with the resources needed to protect access and their level of spending per student and enable the universities to plan on the basis of level funding.

These initial measures will do something to protect opportunity and maintain standards. But it will be important that Labour does not allow its education policy to be determined simply by the present Government's failures. From

the start the education system must be shaped in a way that promotes and increases equality and quality.

For example, progress towards meeting parental demand for nursery provision for three and four year olds must be made. As soon as possible, all local education authorities will be required to end selection. The assisted places scheme will also be ended and early action will be taken to remove tax concessions (including charitable status) enjoyed by private schools. A programme to improve standards will be launched. As we have seen, this is not only a question of extra resources. But extra teachers will be needed for smaller primary school classes, to provide cover for more in-service training and time for planning and preparation and to fill vacancies for subjects in short supply.

Guidelines for a coherent system of education and training opportunities for 16 to 19 year olds will be established as a matter of urgency. There must be greater coordination and equality of provision, coherence in the range of courses and qualifications available and greater integration and comparability (including financial support) between the different education and training routes young people choose at 16. A series of initiatives will need to be taken to increase "return to learn" and continuing education opportunities for adults. High priority will be given to making it easier for the unemployed to take part in education. Extra resources for higher education will be earmarked for continuing education and access.

Not all the measures outlined above will require more resources. Indeed, abolishing the assisted places schemes and getting rid of tax relief for private schools will actually produce savings. Some initiatives, for example, in the adult education field, could produce significant results with relatively small increases of expenditure.

But if progress both in tackling the

Tory legacy and in beginning to increase opportunity and raise standards is to be made, substantial extra resources will certainly be needed. Labour's £6 billion jobs plan will underwrite a schools and college building and repair programme, as well as the supply of extra teachers needed for nursery and primary classes and to provide cover. Over and above

this, additional funds for education will clearly be necessary but how much and how fast will depend at least in part on the state of both education and the economy by the next election. However, I strongly believe that the more that can be invested in education, the better it will be for the nation.

6. A Framework for Partnership

Under the Conservatives, the partnership for delivering education has broken down. The next Labour government must restore it. In this partnership, the Secretary of State's role should not be to attempt to administer directly a system involving several thousand schools and colleges, but to act as an advocate for education, to set the national framework and create a national consensus for action. The Secretary of State should be the initiating partner in a balanced relationship between central and local democracy.

A highly centralised system, as in France or Italy, would not only be less accountable to those most closely affected but, in this country, would also probably be less effective in delivering education. The Association of County Councils recently put the value of a locally administered system very persuasively: "The balance between central and local democracy is an essential feature in our society not only because of the need to give expression to local wishes, needs and aspirations, but more importantly as part of the fabric of a society which wishes to retain scope for freedom of expression of differences. Alternative methods of service delivery can be considered and tested and local

people feel identified with the local service. For a service to be valued, the recipients need to feel that they have a stake in it, they need to feel identified with it and they need to feel that the service is for them" (Association of County Councils, *The Way Ahead*, January 1986).

This Government has undermined the understanding on which the educational partnership is based. Their restrictions on local government spending have damaged the standards of provision and made it immeasurably harder for the local authorities to reach a long-term settlement with the teachers. And successive Conservative Secretaries of State have failed in their initiating

role because they have not attempted to win support for their reforms from the other educational partners.

A new Education Act

To implement successfully a strategy for promoting quality and equality, the next Labour Secretary of State for Education will need to reforge the partnership between central and local government. New links will also be needed with parents and teachers. At the heart of this partnership will be a new Education Act which will redefine objectives and functions and, like the 1944 Act, provide a basis for a renewed consensus on education.

The Act will place fresh obligations on the local authorities. They will be required over a fixed period of time to meet parental demand for nursery places for three and four year olds, to end selective secondary education and to extend their provision of further and adult education. These new obligations will be matched by government commitments on funding and new opportunities for the local authorities to be involved in national education policy making through the setting up of an Education Council, as a parliament for education. As well as representatives from the local authorities, the new Council would include representatives of the teachers' unions and parents' organisations, as well as independent experts and representatives from industry and the unions. The Council's remit would be wide ranging and bodies such as the Examination and Curriculum Council, as well as the HMI, would report to it as a matter of course. The Council would discuss the elements that should make up the core curriculum and the outlines of the new system of assessment. The Education Council would not by itself guarantee consensus but would make it easier to achieve.

The Act will recognise the need for parents to be fully involved in the education partnership with the extension of parental rights and influence through opportunities to be involved in school management and the creation of a new Education Ombudsman service linked to a network of educational advice centres in every local education authority, as proposed above.

The Act will make teachers a full partner in school management and provide for teacher representation on the new Education Council. Within this framework of partnership we need to explore ways of promoting equality of access to education throughout the country by setting minimum standards of provision. Successive HMI reports have revealed the very wide differences between authorities in their spending on books, equipment and teachers. These differences are, I believe, incompatible with our commitment to equality of opportunity for all and too great to be acceptable to a nation which is serious about raising standards for all. One alternative might be to lay down minimum standards of provision by legislation. In my view, this would involve too drastic an increase in central government powers. A more attractive compromise would be to oblige the Secretary of State to discuss with the other education partners, perhaps on an annual basis, what an acceptable minimum level of spending on books, equipment, teachers, etc should be. Her Majesty's Inspectorate should be obliged to publish an annual report on levels and effects of individual local educational authority spending. On the basis of HMI reports, the Secretary of State should put pressure on recalcitrant authorities to ensure better provision of educational services.

Partnership in education will also require changes in the role of the Manpower Services Commission. The Labour Party supported the MSC's

creation and the last Labour Government significantly extended its responsibilities. Through the Youth Training Scheme and other programmes, the MSC has now become a major provider of training opportunities. The Conservatives have also extended its role in the education service, in particular through the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative and in non-advanced further education. There is a

strong argument that the MSC has now taken on too many responsibilities and is involved in areas where its expertise is not suitable or best used. The next Labour government will need to review urgently the workings and role of the MSC to increase local authority involvement in both its local and national decision making and achieve better coordination between education and training.

7. Conclusion

This pamphlet has argued that the Labour Party should now put forward a broader vision of education. It has also maintained that education can significantly improve life chances and that improving educational opportunity and raising educational standards ought to go hand in hand. I have put forward a plan for raising standards, set out my view on educational priorities, and proposed a new framework for achieving Labour's policies.

Education must now be given higher priority. It is of vital importance, not only for personal development and improved life chances, but also for the future economic and social health of our society.

As we approach the next election, it is certain that education will be a major issue. In that election, Labour will need both to expose the inadequacies of Tory policy but also put forward its own positive vision. It should do so with confidence. For the first time for a decade, Labour's educational policies are likely to be a significant asset to the Party, because they now run not against but with the grain of popular opinion. Labour stands for giving higher priority to education, for opening up

educational opportunity, for ensuring that every pupil enjoys high quality education, and for effective educational investment. Priority, opportunity, quality and investment — these are Labour's watchwords — and they are likely to prove immensely attractive to the voters.

Building up support for Labour's educational themes and policies is not only a matter of electoral calculation (something for which no socialist should ever apologise) but also a vital step in ensuring their implementation. For the only sure way to enduring educational advance in this country is by creating and then maintaining a progressive consensus for change.

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- progress toward meeting parental demand for nursery provision for three and four year olds within a fixed period of time;
- an end to the assisted places scheme and removal of tax concessions for private schools;
- reform of the curriculum and the way achievement is assessed;
- better pay and conditions for teachers in return for improved performance;
- closer links between home and school;
- a coherent system of education and training opportunities for 16/18 year olds.

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