

# politicians, equality and comprehensives

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Only ten per cent of secondary school children were in *fully* comprehensive schools in 1970 when Labour went out of office (C. Benn and B. Simon, *Half way there: a report on the British comprehensive school reform*, p57, McGraw Hill, 1970) and it had long been apparent that a new Education Act would be necessary to carry through the reorganisation of education on comprehensive lines. Yet we should welcome Labour's failure to pass an education act in 1965. The educational policy record of Labour's leading politicians shows that any legislation would have been a partial, half-baked and confused measure which could have set back the cause of educational reform for another 20 years. And indeed the first socialist education act still seems a long way off.

In the field of comprehensive reorganisation Labour's politicians have had the worst of both worlds: they have achieved no changes in the educational system, yet they have been successfully branded as trying to "interfere politically" with education. The truth is, of course, that educational policy is inevitably political and a matter of controversy, since it deals with the distribution of life chances, resources and power in society. That is why Conservatives try to present education as an area which should be the exclusive province of the professional. But unfortunately Labour has gone along with this view. Within rather broad and confused egalitarian and democratic intentions, no detailed educational policy has been worked out. As a result, the policies pursued when Labour has been in office appear to have been largely dictated by the "permanent politicians" of the Ministry of Education (now the Department of Education and Science). And these civil servants have been far from radical in their conception and execution of educational policy.

Thus, Labour's basic strategy in 1965 was to present comprehensive reorganisation as a response to overwhelming technological and popular demands, backed by increasing research evidence of waste and social divisiveness in the bipartite system. Politicians, Labour suggested, had merely to ride and guide the swell of economic and social change. Comprehensive schools were allowed to appear as machines to engineer equality without the redistribution of resources in the educational system or the rest of society. Crucially, Labour politicians failed to embrace what should be the Party's historic role. The Labour Party's task has always been not merely to articulate and guide but actually to arouse and lead a popular demand for equality in education, a demand which has been perpetually damped down and distorted by the overshadowing images of the public and grammar schools. Without such a lead during the last Labour Government's spell in office little progress was made towards the reduction of educational inequality.

Failure to move towards equality in education thus raises as many questions about the nature of the Labour Party and its leadership and ideological base as about any supposed "conservatism" and rigidity in the educational struc-

ture itself. Only a section of the Labour Party, not the leadership, has ever contemplated radical changes in education, but the Party has been ineffectual because of internal arguments at cross purposes and a lack of decision coupled with a failure to learn from experience.

Fortunately, if the Party is now prepared to learn, a start has already been made upon the essential historical, political, sociological and administrative analysis of educational changes (O. Banks, *Parity and prestige in English secondary education*, Routledge, 1955; P. W. Musgrave, *Society and education in England since 1800*, Methuen, 1959; D. V. Glass, "Education and social change in modern England" in M. Ginsberg (ed) *Law and opinion in England in the twentieth century*, Stevens, 1959; B. Simon, *Education and the Labour movement*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1965, and *The common secondary school*, Lawrence and Wishart, 1955, and the Labour Party's educational policies). Throughout this pamphlet I have drawn heavily on M. Parkinson's *The Labour Party and the organisation of secondary education, 1918-1965*, Routledge, 1970, (see also O. Banks, *op cit*), and we can also draw on a number of detailed discussions of comprehensive reorganisation and the workings of comprehensive schools (C. Benn and B. Simon, *op cit*; R. Pedley, *The comprehensive school*, Penguin (revised edition), 1969; D. Rubinstein and B. Simon, *The evolution of the comprehensive school*, Routledge, 1969; T. G. Monks, *Comprehensive education in England and Wales*, National Foundation for Educational Research, 1968; and see also articles in *Comprehensive education*, and *Where?*).

What is most needed is to close the disastrous gap between the "political" and the "educational" elements of the comprehensive debate; the gap which has been Labour's achilles heel and which the Conservatives try so assiduously to maintain. Labour and the egalitarians must think much more strenuously about what political definitions of equality mean in terms of the everyday workings of the comprehensive school. And at the same time educationists and educators need to be much more aware of the implications of particular school structures for the wider society. Closing the gap thus involves an exploration of the various "political" aims for the comprehensive school, to see how far they match up with the internal dynamics of existing comprehensive schools.

We will find that different sections of the Labour Party and the educationists who support comprehensive schools have never agreed upon how great a social change can be expected from secondary reorganisation alone. Nor has there been adequate discussion of the alternative strategies and possible contradictions contained in an educational policy which is variously described as aiming for a meritocracy, for engineered social equality, or towards the wider goal of helping to create a community. The debate inside the Labour Party obscurely mirrors the political disagreements among the left as to whether we are content with a society stratified on intellectual criteria, where control is in the hands of a small number of the most able, or whether we want a wider diffusion of control in society to create local democracy.

When we turn to research on the schools we find that research projects themselves embody or conceal a confusion of values. As a result it becomes

difficult to decide how "successfully" existing comprehensive schools embody the various political goals which have been set for them by politicians. We can, however, use recent educational research to challenge the Labour politicians' lack of interest in the educational process. For legislation about the framework of education is vital but not sufficient, and ultimately the achievement of the comprehensive *principle* and equality in education will be dependent on the teaching profession. Research also questions the Fabian Society's faith in achieving societal change through bringing influence to bear on only a small legislative elite.

## LABOUR'S EDUCATIONAL POLICIES UP TO 1964

Labour has never passed any major piece of educational legislation, but has worked within the blueprints provided by other governments. This is unfortunate because education acts passed by other governments have been complex compromises, notably between the central government and the secondary school teachers, the private schools and the church interests; but also between different sections of the political parties, between the Minister and his civil servants, and between the central and local administrations. As a result the major education acts (for example 1870, 1902, and 1944) have all appeared late on the scene to legitimate changes which were already substantially under way and to shore up the existing creaking and out of date structures, but scarcely to promote change. Moreover, the rather loose compromises provided by the acts have been over-ridden both by pressures inside the schools and by the external demands made upon the educational system (see O. Banks, *op cit*, for a discussion of parental and teacher influence on the grammar school curriculum, and P. W. Musgrove, *op cit*, on the role of Education Acts in educational policy).

Most importantly, the public schools with their high prestige and elite academic curriculum have distorted our state educational system, in spite of politicians' hopes to the contrary. Under competition from the public schools and hypnotised by their example, the grammar schools have retained a predominantly non-vocational and largely non-technical academic curriculum.

And the emerging parental and pupil demand for education has consistently been geared to this academic curriculum, because it obviously gave access to the more prestigious local jobs and to the higher reaches of the national educational system (see G. Lacey, *Hightown grammar*, Manchester University Press, 1970, for an analysis on the use of a grammar school by its local population). But worse, the Conservative influence of this elite image on Labour's own politicians and policies is the most striking feature of the period both before and during Labour's post-war spells in office. Labour's obsession with the public schools and with gaining access to the grammar school has prevented adequate discussion of the education of the bulk of the population.

Thus before the Second World War Labour was preoccupied with opening up the grammar schools to the highly achieving working class child, and now the Party's official policy is comprehensive reorganisation. But the shift in emphasis is, for the majority of the Party, merely from unequal educational

provision in different schools to the provision of different and unequal education within the same school.

Radicals in the Labour Party have been worried that official policies were doing too little to promote equality and democracy through education. They have argued that if we want children to have more equal chances in later life, then education is one very obvious area where the legislature possesses influence, and at the very least an equally good education should be provided for all children. More recently it has been suggested that for the lower achiever education ought in some ways to be superior, in order to "compensate" for the initial unequal distribution of life chances.

The urge of the radicals has been, therefore, to push selection out of the schools altogether, or at least to delay differentiation in education and to foster qualities of citizenship by the provision of a schooling which would be common to all children. An associated change towards more democratic ethos in the schools has also been sought. For example the 1925 Labour Party Conference was urged to seek: "the creation of a specifically working-class education which would develop socialist values, substituting co-operation for competition among children and other qualities and outlooks essential to a citizen of a co-operative Commonwealth." (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, p21). Such calls echo an earlier, pre-urban English radical ideal of the "common school." But to suggest any very strong direct link with the past would exaggerate the degree of support for such schools. There has been no movement in England of comparable strength to that which powered and shaped the expansion and achievements of the American comprehensive high school.

In America, because the aim of the common school was to break away from hierarchical and stultifying societal patterns and to found a new, more democratic society, the common school became associated with the "progressive" movements in education which have tried to emphasise looser organisational structures and more child-centred learning, with less emphasis on set curricula and hence on formal examination passing techniques. In England, however, the most conspicuous, and even notorious, experiments in progressive secondary education have remained cloistered retreats for the children of rich deviants, and their influence on state secondary education has remained, by reason of their vastly superior resources, peripheral and irrelevant (M. Punch, Ph D thesis, Essex University, 1971).

Since the 1920s, however, and more successfully since the last war, supporters of the common school among teachers in England have begun to work out innovations in forms of school organisation and the curriculum which will be appropriate in mass education. For example the National Association of Labour Teachers early pressed for a school with a variety of courses around a common base, and more recently there has been a movement towards non-streaming and open plan schools, especially in the primary school (see various issues of *Forum*).

The study of Labour's educational policy thus becomes a twofold analysis: of an internal debate about three or even four possible working definitions of

“equality,” which takes the form of a slow, partial and often acrimonious transition from one definition to the next more radical policy; and of an external and uneasy debate with educationists who have tended to become impatient with the Party for its lack of application to the practical details of teaching.

### the 1944 education act—an opportunity missed

Seen from this perspective the 1944 Education Act was a great opportunity missed. Both the grammar schools and the public schools were at a low ebb of popularity. The country was ready for change—but the Labour Party was not. The public schools were feeling the financial draught and in those egalitarian times had made overtures to the state concerning some form of “integration” (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, p98). Also it can be argued that because the working class had never been admitted to the grammar schools in any numbers, only a minority of the electorate would have regretted the absorption of the schools into a “multilateral” system of streamed “comprehensive” schools such as we are getting in many areas today. There was not then the determined public and professional support of the grammar school which we have seen develop more recently. For in the 1920s and 1930s the grammar school had obstinately remained, to the despair of its teachers and more elitist supporters, largely “a social factory for turning the sons of clerks and shopkeepers into clerks and shopkeepers” (Lord Eustace Percy in 1933, quoted in O. Banks, *op cit*, p124). Its curriculum was forced to make some concessions to the duller fee-paying pupils who formed part of its intellectually more “comprehensive” intake. “Multilateral” schools (which preserved a grammar stream within a larger school) had won some support from the selective and fee-paying schools’ Assistant Masters Association. And the NUT was more wholeheartedly in favour of multilateral schools because the union had always recognised that the different function of the elementary schools in which its members taught had influenced their inferior rewards and working conditions (Rubinstein and Simon, *op cit*, pp15-16).

The LCC had already during the 1930s announced its intention of reorganising its secondary education on multilateral lines—although Sir Graham Savage, the Chief Education Officer, intended that within these schools the teachers should “stream like mad” (R. Pedley, *op cit*, p98). And in 1942 the Labour Party as a whole had advocated selective development of multilateral schools. Rubinstein and Simon, *op cit*, p24). Politically, then, a much stronger bid to curb the public schools and the establishment of a system of multilaterals would have been feasible in 1945.

But the Labour Party as a whole was not committed to changing the structure of education, and the moment passed. There were even influential voices among the Party’s educational policy makers who feared that the LCC’s multilaterals might be “sacrificing educational for social considerations” (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, p33). A coalition government had drafted and passed the 1944 Education Act only a year before, and rather than reopen the whole field Labour submerged its disagreements and implemented some of the Act’s provisions. This Act accepted much of the existing structure. The public schools remained unscathed, protected by the smallest token of integration in

the Fleming proposals (see J. Hipkin, "Integration: the Fleming response", *New wine in old bottles?* Bell, 1968). Once again the shaky church schools were propped up with state cash. The Act's main achievement was probably to whip into line the majority of backward authorities who had not yet followed the Hadow and Spens recommendations for the reorganisation of elementary education on primary and secondary lines. True, grammar school fees were abolished. But, thanks to Labour's earlier efforts to expand the free place system, equality of opportunity (in terms of equal access to grammar schools for children of equal measured intelligence) had arrived in some areas as long ago as the 1920s, and it was within the power of all local authorities under the previous educational structure. The 1929-31 Labour Government had raised the number of free places an LEA could offer to 50 per cent and the middle class, by and large, did not compete for these (see J. Floud, *et al*, *Social class and educational opportunity*, Portway, 1966, and M. Parkinson, *op cit*, p27).

The left wing of the Labour Party can be seen to have won a small victory by insisting that the 1944 Education Act should not actually specify tripartitism, thus permitting some experiments on comprehensive lines (see O. Banks, *op cit*, p133). But this action tempered the restrictiveness of the selective system and relieved the 1964 Labour Government of the absolute necessity of passing new legislation. Thus it can be seen to have helped the 1944 Education Act to postpone by 20 or 30 years the major reform of the structure of education which was then due.

There were, in fact, to be rather few major schemes for comprehensive schools. The exceptions were London and Coventry, after extensive bomb damage, the West Riding and Leicestershire with enlightened education officers, the New Towns where there were no entrenched grammar schools, and a few rural areas like Anglesey where the comprehensive school made economic sense. Most authorities proceeded to reorganise on bipartite lines (the third element of tripartitism, the secondary technical school, was killed by the grammar school). And indeed many solidly Labour local authorities failed to plan comprehensives at any time in the later years when comprehensive reorganisation became Labour's national policy.

By and large the teaching profession accepted the offer of parity of conditions between different types of secondary school (which however has never been honoured because of the extra resources allocated to schools for sixth formers). Meanwhile the grammar school teachers began to swing away from support for multilateral schools as they sensed the vulnerability of the separatist grammar school culture which they were trying to maintain.

After the nation's education had been reconstructed on bipartite lines it became less likely that authorities could be persuaded to go comprehensive: the very buildings and educational capital became a conservative influence, not altogether precluding reorganisation but restricting it to schemes using the existing bipartite schools. Yet this factor was as nothing compared with the post-war rise of the grammar school. Once the grammar school was opened to a slightly wider and larger population and the teachers achieved their ambition of making it a preparatory school for the universities, the

political problems of reorganising secondary education increased (see C. Lacey, *op cit.*) Public support for the schools grew. And following on the Hadow, Spens and Norwood Reports a whole rationale of intelligence testing and psychological typing was elaborated to bolster up the academic curriculum and cognitive style of learning. To do the psychologists justice many would have little part in this, and to some extent we have to distinguish between the use for which psychological testing was devised by psychologists and the use to which it has been put by educational administrators in rationing resources. But not until the late 1950s were psychologists able to mount any kind of counter attack on the predictive validity of the tests in education, and even today supporters of the tests are strongly entrenched (see A. Jensen, "How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement," *Harvard educational review*, Winter 1969, and replies, Summer 1969). Now as a final defence against reorganisation the grammar schools have claimed a monopoly of elite culture and have begun to assert a "centuries old tradition" of training leaders and transmitting the national heritage, a "tradition" which has reached its apotheosis in the *Black papers*.

Comprehensives made a little headway before 1964. Saddled with a large number of grammar schools over which it had no control, London succeeded in getting 45 per cent of secondary school children in new comprehensive schools by 1964, although many of the schools were heavily creamed (A. Corbett, "Far from comprehensive," *New Society*, 11 July 1968). In Leicestershire a very influential scheme showed how comprehensive reorganisation could be carried out within the limits of buildings designed for bipartitism, by tiering lower and upper schools. Together with the West Riding schools these schemes went some way to confound continuing fears about the "lowering of standards."

They confirmed what was already being learned from the secondary modern schools where the attempted official embargo on examinations had been broken, that many pupils rejected by the grammar schools could succeed in national examinations (Rubinstein and Simon, *op cit.*, pp55-57).

Unfortunately this very slow and unco-ordinated build-up of comprehensive education got the worst of both worlds. There was relatively little chance for educational innovation where schools still deprived of the top ability range of pupils had to struggle to justify their existence in terms of examination results. And the schools were permanently in a politically delicate situation, newsworthy only if there was some catastrophe or hooliganism. Because the schools were largely replacements for secondary modern rather than grammar schools, there was little education of the public as to what they were intended to be. London's new comprehensives had to be single sex rather than coeducational to convince the public they had academic pretensions. And the fate of Rivinghill tells us much about the political climate in which comprehensive schools had to struggle to "coexist" with the old attitudes (Leila Berg, *Rivinghill, the death of a comprehensive school*, Penguin, 1968).

At this time, then, the aims of the common school advocates, to introduce new methods of teaching or to work out a new educational ethic, could gain their opportunity only in the *primary schools*. In these schools, for example

in Leicestershire under the Leicestershire plan, the removal of the 11 plus strait-jacket released a "creative explosion."

### Labour's internal disagreements

Labour's period of power after the war brought into the open the very deep cleavages of educational opinion within the Party, both at national and local level. Because the public schools remained intact, Labour Ministers of education were the more reluctant to touch the grammar schools for fear of weakening their competitive position. Above all the Ministers believed in the grammar schools, and it became clear that their views were those of the civil servants at the Ministry of Education.

The civil servants, in official ministry pamphlets, had tried to ensure only a limited role for the comprehensive school, and they continued to press (as in pre-war days) for a reduction of grammar school places on the grounds that there were too few able pupils to fill the places already available. After the war the Ministry tried to prevent secondary modern pupils from entering for external examinations, on the unrealistic grounds that the schools were supposed to be catering for a different kind of child and should therefore develop a different curriculum.

An acrimonious running battle between the Minister and the Labour left continued throughout the post-war government's spell in office, crystallising in the refusal of the Minister to withdraw the civil servants' pamphlet and refusal to permit the absorption of grammar schools into comprehensive schemes (see R. Pedley, *op cit*, pp37-42, M. Parkinson, *op cit*, chap 3). To do the Ministry of Education justice there was as yet no research evidence that the abolition of grammar school fees had failed to open up the grammar school to working class children, nor was there any working experience of English comprehensives which would point to new directions.

Towards the end of Labour's first spell in office the left won the Party's nominal acceptance of a comprehensives policy, the official commitment being made in 1951. The process had been gradual with the National Executive Committee swinging against the Minister in the later stages of the battle. Thereafter the comprehensive issue dropped temporarily out of sight. There was no controversy visible within or between the parties, for little was happening (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, pp71-72).

Disagreement reappeared, however, a year or two later when the Party tried to decide what sort of comprehensive schools should be established. Finally a commitment was made to the 11-18 school, with the possibility of a minor role for a sort of senior or sixth form college system, but the latter was much mistrusted by the left at that time (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, pp73-75). The remaining period up to 1964 was marked by considerable confusion about what comprehensive schools were to be like, what was their purpose, how they were to be presented to the public and how local authorities were to be persuaded to reorganise. In fact the debate had to be damped down to avoid tearing the defeated Party to pieces. Lack of detailed working evidence from comprehensive schools and the difficulty of discussing the subject

without causing rifts were to cost the Party dear when a firmer, clearer policy was needed in 1964. Considerable energy was still being diverted into discussing the issue of the public schools.

### the changing image of the comprehensive school

In different ways support for the comprehensive school in the early 1950s was couched in social terms. The National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT) stressed the common school concept. But some of the major theorists of the left saw only a limited role for the comprehensive school, and there was in their thinking a limitation on changing the actual education the schools offered. G. D. H. Cole, for instance, wrote that the schools should be "designed so as to give every child a chance, but at the same time to avoid the creation of a new class structure based on differences of ability." In his ideal school "*differences of curriculum and standard in the classroom are combined with equal participation in mixed activities on the playgrounds, in clubs and societies and in any sort of out-of-school activity*" (my italics). ("Education, a socialist view," *Year book of education 1952*.) It seems significant that Cole, at that time, did not foresee the present day developments in non-streaming, mixed ability teaching, and integrated curricula. Later in Labour's approach to educational policies there were the same blind spots: change was to be achieved by "social engineering" around the existing curriculum, rather than, as NALT wanted, through a change in the structure and ethos of education itself: merely easing the friction of inequality was not a function of the comprehensive school which would content "common school" supporters.

These more detailed disagreements about internal structuring of the schools went largely unrecognised, subsumed under the common if vague aim of a more equal society. They were to be totally submerged by a complete switch of the image of the comprehensive school away from explicitly social aims to a stress on its "efficiency" in the provision of educational "opportunities." This came about through the difficulty of selling egalitarianism to an electorate which was now shown to be largely indifferent to the social divisiveness of the educational system. The Labour policy makers were thrown into temporary disarray by the severe shock of a private poll in 1957 which revealed that the general public were almost totally ignorant on the comprehensive issue, and that only ten per cent felt that segregated education was socially undesirable (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, p81). On this basis the comprehensive programme looked a non-starter. And worse, the programme had become politicised as the Conservatives, the grammar schools and the press managed to create the persuasive and not altogether artificial distinction between policies which were "educational" in aim and those which were "politically motivated."

Yet whatever the degree of uninformed support for the existing inegalitarian structure of education the public's dislike of the 11 plus was at its height, for the 11 plus was in its crudest "stand and deliver" form during the 1950s. Any programme which planned the abolition of the 11 plus was therefore a potential winner. This public dislike of an important examination at the early age of eleven was sufficient to push the Conservatives in 1958 into a grudging

admission that new comprehensive schemes would be permitted provided that the proposals were genuinely "educational"; that is, if they did not involve interference with existing inequalities of education provision, a policy which restricted new schools to working class estates or New Towns.

The political problem of comprehensive reorganisation was (and to some extent remains) that large numbers of people, including MPs of both parties, apparently cannot be made to connect the continued existence of the grammar school with the injustices of the 11 plus and inferior secondary modern schools. As a Labour Party study group put it in 1957, in advocating comprehensive reorganisation, "a policy argued around conventional educational opportunities is bound to have considerable popularity. One which argues on manifestly doctrinal or egalitarian grounds would prove unpopular even among our own supporters" (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, p82). The acceptance here by the Labour Party of the language of Conservative propaganda is startling.

The solution to the problem of selling the comprehensive school to the electorate was sought by the Labour politicians in a change of image for the programme. They exhibited a growing squeamishness in relation to the issues of educational and societal inequality. And in this switch of emphasis they were helped by the accumulation of evidence about the "wastefulness" of the bipartite system and the "inefficiency" of the 11 plus. Educationists who supported the comprehensive school were also forced to concentrate on more expressly (but for the public more obscurely) educational arguments. The shift in tone is well caught by this passage: "Some educationists still held, as had long been argued, that the move to comprehensive secondary education was inspired by a wish to promote social equality—a 'sentimental egalitarianism'—rather than representing a positive educational policy. In response the general move in the direction of unifying secondary education in many European countries was pointed to and the fact that the technological revolution created new educational needs and opportunities" (Rubinstein and Simon, *op cit*, p96). Politicians too now began to bracket the notion of educational equality with technological and economic efficiency. The arguments for comprehensive became more "meritocratic" and less concerned with the possible divisiveness of a society stratified by intellectual attainment: comprehensive schools, it was said, would make better use of the nation's brain-power but just in case they didn't, influential figures like Roy Jenkins argued that established grammar schools should be preserved with "comprehensives as a bridge between them and the secondary moderns" (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, pp80-87). As in the nineteenth century, "school power" seemed likely to prove a handier political slogan than a mere call for social justice. Such a programme fitted all too well Harold Wilson's new technology and science image of 1964.

It is not being argued here that the community school cannot be "efficient" and egalitarian. And at that stage supporters of the community school might expect to move forward towards their aims within the overall strategy of comprehensive reorganisation. But it became apparent once more that the Labour Party leadership had no wish to change education but merely wanted to enclose the grammar school ethos within a more accessible framework.

Anthony Crosland, who would be the man in charge of implementing comprehensive reorganisation, had tended to accept the feeling of the 1950s that economic differentials had been narrowed, and from this he drew the conclusion that the comprehensive school must replace the grammar school only to remove the status or life style distinctions created by education (C. A. R. Crosland, *The future of socialism*, Jonathan Cape, 1956). This over-simplified the problems faced by schools in a society which, we have learned since, is still heavily unequal in its distribution of economic life chances. Harold Wilson, for his part, in the nervy period immediately before the 1964 election, assured the teachers that the grammar school would be abolished "only over his dead body," and as late as 1970 in a TV appearance he was still presenting the comprehensive school (in Gaitskell's earlier phrase) as a "grammar school for all." This was hardly the leadership to carry through a major restructuring of education.

### the persistence of educational inequality in 1964

The dimensions of educational inequality in the twentieth century, against which we may measure the achievements and problems of the Labour Party up to 1964, may be summarised as follows. After the 1902 Education Act had officially permitted state secondary education but of a grammar school type only, with a subsequent backing of scholarships and free places, the flow of working class boys receiving secondary education increased from virtually 0 to 10 per cent before World War Two: at that time almost 15 per cent of all boys of secondary school age went to grammar or independent schools, but only 40 per cent of the boys' grammar school intake was working class (see J. Floud, "Social class factors in educational achievement," in A. H. Halsey (ed) *Ability and educational opportunity*, pp34-37 and 91-109, OECD, 1961). Only 1.7 per cent of manual workers sons reached university. The situation of working class girls was, of course, even poorer educationally.

After the 1944 Education Act, abolition of grammar school fees and an overall expansion of selective school places resulted in about 15 per cent of working class boys attending grammar schools: there were now about 23 per cent of the secondary school population in grammar and independent school places, and the proportion of the grammar school intake which was working class had risen to 56 per cent. Yet now only 1.6 per cent of manual workers' sons reached university. Meanwhile almost half of all middle class boys went to independent or grammar schools, and almost a quarter went to university.

In fact, the post-war attempts to open up education had tended to bring into the grammar schools and the few technical schools only the *most able* sons of the *skilled* workers, and by no means all the working class children whose measured ability should have entitled them to a place. And having entered grammar school many children still left at or before the sixth form threshold, which now replaced the 11 plus as a barrier to highly achieving working class children. Altogether, as has been demonstrated by the *Crowther Report*, half the nation's top ability boys had left school at the age of 16 or younger, and this huge wastage occurred mainly in the working class (15-18,

HMSO, 1959). Could we but develop working class potential to the same degree as that of the middle class child we would need to double and treble the provision of university places. It has been said that there is enough talent here to provide top staff for another Britain.

One cause of these inequalities of educational opportunity was the large regional variation in selective and other school provision. The policy of "roofs over heads" (that is concentrating on building new schools for the expanding and migrating population rather than renovating old schools) had led to growing inequality between north and south, city centre areas and the new suburbia. A NUT survey published in 1962 had shown that a quarter of all primary schools and a sixth of all secondary schools should be rebuilt (*The state of our schools*, NUT, 1962). The *Newsom Report* in 1963 found only 21 per cent of secondary modern schools "generally up to present standards," and as many as 41 per cent of schools "seriously deficient in many respects" (*Half our future*, p258, HMSO, 1963). Schools on council estates or in new towns were considerably better than those in mining areas, one-third of the former achieving an excellent score and only one in ten a very poor score, compared with the mining area schools where none were rated excellent and one in six scored very badly. Some areas were so bad that the Report made the hitherto novel suggestion that they should be made priorities for spending, a recommendation which was later strongly reinforced by the Plowden Committee's report on primary education. The *Plowden Report* confirmed the NUT Survey's findings and made the staggering estimate that to bring all primary schools up to an acceptable standard £588 million would need to be spent: almost three-quarters of a million primary school children were in school buildings put up before 1875 (*Children and their primary schools*, p389 and 391, HMSO, 1967). We can see what good use the Conservatives and Mrs Thatcher have made of this particular inequality in de-fusing the comprehensive debate. Associated all too closely with these inequalities of building provision were the inequalities in staffing, since poor schools in poor areas have what the Newsom Report described as "poor holding power." Conditions of educational deprivation substantially mirrored conditions in the surrounding catchment areas.

Overall, Brian Simon calculated one indicator of educational inequality, by region, sex and school provision, showing that a middle class Cardiganshire boy had 180 times as much chance of reaching university as the daughter of a West Ham unskilled labourer (*Inequalities in education*, CASE, 1965).

Such inequalities cannot, however, be entirely attributed to unequal provision of educational resources. Early in the 1960s evidence was mounting to show the very early influence of social class and inequality on a child's *educability*—that is, on the child's acquisition of those skills and abilities which enable him to do well in school. The complex influence of such environmental factors on the child's skills and motivation and disposition handicaps him in school.

The two major areas of loss to the educational system could thus be identified in the early 1960s as the early years before five, when most children are not provided with schooling, and the threshold of the sixth form, where some

schools lose almost two thirds of their pupils. Evidently secondary school reorganisation without expenditure in other areas of policy would not solve all these problems of educational inequality.

Patently, when Labour came into office in 1964, almost 60 years of the Party's struggle for educational equality had achieved virtually no reduction in educational differentials. Nevertheless, in view of what we are now learning about inbuilt trends in our society towards greater inequality, it may even be a matter for congratulating the Labour Party that the working class share in the expansion of educational expenditure did not actually decline over this period. For the discovery of continuing and possibly growing inequality in education was paralleled by the rediscovery of inequalities in other areas of the social services, for example, housing, the health service, and the social security system.

## COMPREHENSIVE REORGANISATION IN 1964

By 1964 Labour should have been prepared for the Party's first major piece of educational legislation, and should also have been preparing to deal with inequality in other areas of policy. The failure of the 1944 Education Act to achieve greater equality, even on a narrow definition, had been repeatedly demonstrated. The distorting influence of private and grammar school education was manifest, and indeed struck at the base of egalitarianism. The form of common secondary education had been debated since the 'twenties, and working comprehensive schools—albeit struggling to “coexist” with grammar schools—had been in operation for a decade. Comprehensive reorganisation had been the official policy for 13 years. But again, as in 1945, the Party was unprepared with its own legislation (with less excuse this time), and existing patterns and trends in education were accepted.

It is true that there were more formidable political and practical obstacles than in 1945, largely through Labour's failure to seize the earlier opportunities, and also at first there was only a small political majority. But it might be argued that a really imaginative educational programme could have won support (and the same might be said of the 1970 election). This would have required careful handling, of course, for unfortunately the new educational needs and opportunities which, it had been asserted, were created by social and technological change did not emerge in demands either by parents or industrialists for a switch to comprehensives. Rather the public looked to a slight improvement of the schools they knew: as late as 1967 a much quoted *New Society* poll which ostensibly gave 52 per cent of the population in favour of “comprehensive” schooling also revealed in two other questions that only 16 per cent would choose comprehensive school for their own child, and 76 per cent wanted to retain the grammar schools (“Education and opinion,” *New Society*, 26 October 1967). As David Donnison rightly observed in his commentary on these figures, this was not a vote for comprehensive education so much as a vote against the secondary modern schools. Moreover a poll of this kind does not indicate the strength of the choices. Pro-grammar school marches of local citizens, teachers and pupils, were the only marks of political agitation about the comprehensive school, and it seems very likely that the support for the grammar school was far more

vehement and practical than any wishy-washy poll preference. A further problem, indicated by the poll, was that the educational debate was still obscure so that its details might play little part in the electorate's calculations. Claims of a mandate for comprehensives were therefore so much eyewash. Nevertheless a determined campaign to abolish 11 plus and the secondary modern school would have made sound electoral sense and is indeed proving effective in shifting reluctant Conservative councils today, in Richmond and Bedford (see *Times educational supplement*, 25, 1970, *Comprehensive education* 10, 1968). Moreover at this time the public schools, although never stronger, were again growing uncomfortable about their social elitism and were once again flirting with the idea of some deal with the state.

The Labour Party also inherited a large balance of payments deficit in 1964, but lack of cash was not the main obstacle to comprehensive reorganisation. Educational expenditure expanded more rapidly than any sector of the economy apart from natural gas, and money could have been found for comprehensive reorganisation had the Labour Party been prepared to take the step of choosing priorities—which might, for example, have meant holding back the decision just taken by the Conservatives to expand a largely middle class higher education sector (*Planning for education in 1980*, Fabian research series 282). The major influence of the cash shortage should have been only to cause more serious thought to be given about tailoring reorganisation to the use of existing buildings in tiering schemes such as that of Leicestershire. The further problems created by the lateness of the Plowden Committee's recommendation for the age of transfer from primary schools, the single sex schools and church education, also indicated complex local tailoring, but not a major barrier to progress.

It was characteristic of Labour's remoteness from education that a problem which did not receive sufficient attention was that the attempt to combine secondary education under one roof involved the fusion of two sets of teachers who had maintained a careful social distance from one another for the last 100 years. Teachers resented the demonstration of the state's power over their working conditions, and there were genuine worries over the assimilation of career structures and the disappearance or raising of qualification standards for jobs. Extensive and public information services at both national and local level, and consultations with teachers, were therefore essential. The same was true for parents, and especially for local Labour councillors who could have controlled the details of many comprehensive schemes. In the event an understaffed and under-budgetted Transport House did not even know who represented Labour on the local education committees.

Legislation was all the more necessary because although the Minister of Education's powers had grown large (in spite of attempts to build in countervailing mechanisms), they were unspecific in key respects. In line with comfortable Conservative consensus philosophies, the powers were extensively delegated to local power groups; and, most important, the Minister could not directly specify the form of secondary education and had only the weapon of power to approve new schools. (We can see a notable example of this decentralised rule in Mrs. Thatcher, who not only withdrew Circular

10/65 but has said that she will not approve local schemes as a whole but only plans for individual schools.) A clear national statement of goals in legislation was evidently needed before any substantial educational change could be brought about.

Labour's failure to legislate had its roots in the failures of perception and will described earlier: the leadership was still quite prepared to live with the grammar and the public schools. And there is evidence of a lack of commitment to the ideal of reducing inequality in society. There was a failure to appreciate that economic and structural changes left to themselves will not reduce and may increase inequality. Labour politicians had apparently developed an overpowering coyness about taking any action which would curb or interfere with the existing maldistribution of power or resources.

As a result the direct grant schools have continued to receive state support and to create problems for local comprehensive schemes into the 1970s, although here was an area easily within the Labour Government's control. And yet again the issue of the public schools was fluffed. A policy of integration was available but instead there was a Commission because the Party could not resolve its own internal difficulties. This was revealed as a sham when the advice of its research workers, to the effect that the schools could not and would not in any meaningful sense be "integrated", was ignored in producing the final recommendations for integration (Royston Lambert and his research team felt impelled to put out to the press a note disowning the Report). There was some interference with the tax evasion whereby parents paid children's fees, but other forms of support from the government have been untouched and Eton is, ludicrously, still a charity.

### **the ineffectuality of circular 10/65**

Labour's lack of commitment to equality and manifest unpreparedness in educational policy emerges most clearly from a study of the strategy adopted in comprehensive reorganisation. The new Labour Government chose unconvincingly to define itself as responding to an overwhelming spontaneous "grass roots" movement, which merely required to be regulated in the interests of coherence, much as the 1944 Act had regulated secondary reorganisation, but which needed little central guidance. The assistance of such a "grass roots" movement was indeed necessary, but to pretend that it was actually there was either a gross misreading or misrepresentation of the facts.

Whatever else Labour learned from the first post-war spell in office, it should have been manifest that controversial change could not be entrusted to the DES to accomplish. Yet this is substantially what happened. Lacking a policy, Labour may have adopted suggestions from the civil servants, and the device of Circular 10/65 was used to request, but not to require, local authorities to prepare plans for the reorganisation of secondary education on comprehensive lines. A year later Circular 10/66 also made it clear that funds would not be provided for reorganisation, but added teeth to the earlier Circular by refusing to sanction building on bipartite line. Above all, in January 1968 the postponement of the raising of the school leaving age

struck a major blow against reorganisation, since the measure would have brought much-needed funds for building new schools on comprehensive lines. In 1970 a bill to outlaw the 11 plus was defeated by Labour's negligence and by the running out of time.

A lack of central guidance and definition appears clearly from the form of circular 10/65 itself. No commitment was made to comprehensive reorganisation, the Circular merely commenting on six schemes which had been tried out by local authorities. Some of the schemes were not even comprehensive in that they retained parental "choice" of transfer into an academic sector, a choice exercised mainly by middle class parents. Middle schools, the one scheme which was feasible without rebuilding, were at first explicitly discouraged (although this injunction was later withdrawn). Throughout, the civil servants behaved as if there were no controversy. It has been pointed out that certain actions of the new Department of Education and Science seemed to assume the permanent co-existence of comprehensives with the bipartite structure: for example, no ongoing research to evaluate the comprehensive school has been undertaken, and research projects on timetabling and allocation procedures have continued to deal only with the selective system, as though comprehensives will always be peripheral (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, pp40-41).

Anthony Crosland may have hoped that slow changes at local level would provoke less hostility and permit time for the education of the public. Comprehensive schemes are proving difficult to reverse (although not to subvert). It is arguable that, with another spell in office and reorganisation plans for most of the country secure, Labour could have isolated a few recalcitrant authorities and used all available sanctions to bring them into line. But the issue was already hotly controversial, and no programme of public education was undertaken—indeed the only successful one seems to be the establishment of comprehensive schools. Moreover time was not on Labour's side in that public pressures against the 11 plus were on the whole diminishing: secondary selection was shifting away from the 11 plus single shot examination and becoming more secret and more unfair, *but less disliked*. It was the *exam* rather than selection itself which people disliked (see D. Marsden, *Where?* no 9). Authorities such as Essex have now switched to verbal reasoning tests, and teachers' judgements which are biased against the working class (see P. E. Vernon (ed) *Secondary school selection*, NFER, 1957).

Thus the expectation that handing over the problem of redistribution to local authorities would damp down opposition seems naive. In the event there has been a long drawn-out quarrel, rather than a short sharp one.

For all its shortcomings, this comprehensives policy had some results. There are now more comprehensive schools, including more fully comprehensive ones, than there would have been without a Labour government in office. Authorities who were cautiously moving towards the change were encouraged to produce plans, and with some reluctant authorities the small weight of the Circular's request may have tipped the balance or bluffed them into reorganising. The discussion of comprehensive education and the establishment of more schools has also apparently won some support: current figures in a poll

which correctly asks the question of whether the respondent prefers the comprehensive system to the continuation of grammar *and* secondary modern schools shows 46 per cent for comprehensives as opposed to 37 per cent in favour of bipartitism, with 17 per cent "don't know," the bulk of support being in areas where schools have been established (*Comprehensive education*, no 14, Spring 1978). From the new schools we are gaining more valuable experience of the practical working out of the comprehensive principle, information which has been badly needed and which no amount of discussion could have afforded.

But now that the dust has settled, the dimensions of the changes can be seen to be disappointing when compared with the expectations aroused by Harold Wilson's hundred days. The Circular was unsuccessfully challenged in the courts (R. Batley, *et al*, *Going comprehensive*, pp11-14, Routledge, 1970), but reluctant authorities found that they need not openly oppose the Department; they had merely to engage in endless "consultations" or to submit a scheme which moved towards comprehensive education at a vanishingly slow pace. So pathetically eager, or incompetent, was the DES that the official statistics relating to the speed of reorganisation were worthless: they included such items as plans for which no date of completion was ever fixed, partial plans, and plans which were selective in principle but which were never required to become comprehensive (C. Benn, *Comprehensive reorganisation survey 1968-69*, CSC). The rate of change was artificially inflated by counting authorities rather than the proportion of school pupils involved in schemes. As a result, for accurate information the public had to turn to the Comprehensive Schools Committee, the major private pressure group campaigning for reorganisation. Much of the behaviour of officials in inflating the figures and accepting non-comprehensive schemes is, however, explicable in a less than Machiavellian way, by the fact that sheer pressure of work on the DES necessitated the extensive delegation of the vetting of plans to officials who neither understood the aims of comprehensive education nor perceived when these were in fact being flouted in particular schemes.

For a while after Labour came to office the number of comprehensive schools expanded at a faster rate, from 262 in 1965, to 387 in 1966, 507 in 1967, 745 in 1968, 960 in 1969, 1,150 in 1970 and a projection of 1,275 for 1971 (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, p58). Nevertheless, by 1970 when Labour went out of office and Circular 10/65 was immediately withdrawn by Mrs. Thatcher, only 10 per cent of all secondary school children were in schools with an unselective intake. One third of secondary school pupils were in schools called "comprehensive" but these were still skimmed, sometimes by as much as the top 20 per cent of their ability range: they should not be permitted the description "comprehensive" in some instances. The comprehensives are still missing on average the top 5 per cent of the ability range, and at the moment despite rising numbers of schools this proportion is not changing (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, p301). By the end of Labour's spell in office it was clear that a number of large and very influential authorities like Birmingham were determined not to reorganise, and that a new Act would be necessary to compel genuine planning for comprehensives. In fact over the years 1961 to 1969 the percentage of the secondary age populations in

grammar schools dropped hardly at all (see *Social trends*, HMSO, p124). Thus far comprehensives had merely upgraded secondary modern schools.

### equality and the neighbourhood school

Circular 10/65 had failed because it ignored the obstacles created for the redistribution of educational resources by the existing unequal distribution of resources and power at the local level. In the debates of 1964 Labour ducked the issue of redistribution most obviously in relation to the neighbourhood school concept. In fact the issue of redistribution of educational and other resources crystallizes in the neighbourhood school. As Benn and Simon have pointed out, the bulk of the population have always gone—and will continue to go in the foreseeable future—to “neighbourhood” schools, the old elementary schools, and the sometimes not so new secondary modern schools, and often the grammar schools. The “community school” ideal comes up against its severest political obstacle in the inequality and class segregation of large urban areas, for here there is no balanced community mix, and the populations of such areas suffer not merely from educational deprivations but from a shortage of many other types of resources. Comprehensive schools alone could not hope, and should never have been asked, to solve such problems alone.

The effect of the debate about neighbourhood comprehensives was to focus attention on the fact that if schools were zoned to neighbourhoods and parental choice was restricted to those zones, some pupils who had formerly gone to grammar schools would have to share the comparative deprivations of the secondary modern schools: the few bright working class children whom the state now “rescues” from such conditions would be “contaminated” by the education it provides for the residue. Meanwhile, the superior resources of the former selective and new suburban schools would often be even more overtly devoted to a predominately middle class population. Yet instead of seeing the moral that the comprehensive school must be part of a wider attack on inequality, the debate turned to give the impression that the comprehensive school would *create* inequality. Both the Labour and Conservative Parties evaded the issue, but it was the Conservatives who were able to exploit inequality to defeat the neighbourhood school concept.

Thereafter there was a switch in the DES's presentation of the comprehensive school from that of a school serving the population of a neighbourhood to a school which, Labour allowed it to appear, would engineer equality by containing within its walls a balanced social mix of children. The ideology of this alternative definition of comprehensive education is that where “social engineering” schemes operate the catchment areas are drawn and the intakes of the school adjusted in other ways (by bussing, by allocation according to bands of ability, and so on) to form as representative a social cross section as possible, the schools thus being required to undertake the social mixing which radicals desire but which market forces inhibit. Students of the new towns policy will see a close parallel in the ideology here (see B. Heraud, “New Towns: the end of a dream,” *New Society*, no 302, 1968). In fact, of course, as Benn and Simon have shown, in the large majority of cases the dilemma is not acute and carefully drawn boundaries do not flout local

communities, claims for whose existence can in any case be sometimes over optimistic. The problem remains, significantly, a feature of our larger cities like London, which almost alone has tried to operate a banding scheme.

It is important to note that it was at this point that community school and social engineering definitions of the comprehensive officially diverge. All earlier Ministry documents had defined a comprehensive school as a school providing secondary education for all the pupils in a given area. But after 1965 the definition frequently put forward by the DES was merely a school in which pupils of all abilities and social classes are represented. As Caroline Benn has pointed out, even the official research commissioned by the DES could not decide by what criteria to define comprehensiveness (C. Benn, reviewing Monk's survey, *op cit*, *Comprehensive education*, no 10).

### equality and the local power struggle

Having evaded the issue of redistribution at national level the Labour Party then proceeded to evade it at local level. Without any guidance they handed over to local councils and local education authorities the hot potatoes of drawing the catchment areas of the schools and determining by how much parental choice should be restricted. In these two issues lie the bases of redistribution, which is undoubtedly why they generate so much noise and why, with the abrogation of central authority, there were such unequal local struggles.

We are only just beginning to piece together reports of the mess. There were wide variations in willingness to reorganise, and splits opened up not only between the opposing local political parties but within the Labour Party itself, the unconvinced older members clinging to "their" grammar schools. To a striking degree some Labour councillors are out of key with even the limited advances of central policy, a phenomenon only partly explained by the lack of information and coordination within the Party, and more expressive of the peculiar propensity of some natural conservatives to operate under a Labour banner.

Depending on the quality and commitment of the local councillors and particularly upon the persuasion and experience of the Local Education Officer, the participants in the debate might be more or less well briefed. Some councils gathered a great deal of evidence and visited widely to look at existing schemes; but others were merely fed by the Education Officer with all the most negative evidence on reorganisation. In the absence of evidence the argument could not but be "doctrinaire" on both sides. On the other hand, as examples of what a good Education Officer can do with councils which are not markedly radical we have only to look at Sir Alec Clegg in the West Riding, and the Mason Plan in Leicestershire.

Without clear central guidance the councils also varied in the extent to which they consulted local teachers and parents. One study indicates that the teachers' unions voted in different ways in different areas, to some extent depending on the branch members' ages, for the younger NUT teachers backed "egalitarian" aims while the older teachers were more concerned with

the possible disruption of career lines. However in none of the four areas studied did the teachers' opinions materially alter the final plans (P. E. Peterson, "The politics of comprehensive education in British cities," paper given to American Political Science Association).

The greatest mockery was in the pretence of parental "consultation." Minority groups of middle class grammar school supporters and teachers were much more active and articulate, and they were better served by the press. The behaviour of middle class parents appears sometimes to have been very much affected by the proportion of grammar school places in the area: for instance a shortage of grammar schools in Richmond meant that 25 per cent of children were in fee paying schools, a fact which evidently helped to power local middle class resentment of the state selective system (see *Comprehensive education*, nos 10 and 13). But in the majority of areas the middle class were well served by the grammar schools and were reluctant to relinquish segregated education for their children.

The verdict of a comparative study of the two areas, Gateshead and Darlington, is worth quoting in detail (R. Batley, *et al*, *op cit*). The authors conclude that in Darlington the grammar school supporters were able to influence the form of the plans to some extent, while the hardest battle for the comprehensive principle was fought between different members of the Labour Party, the final plan being the work of the Chief Education Officer. In Gateshead, without a middle class, where a Labour council had long been in favour of comprehensives, the constraint was the problem created by the early reorganisation of education on bipartite lines. Councillors and the Education Officer worked together, and the final plan appears to have been influenced more by the configuration of school buildings and the geography of Gateshead than by pressure groups. It may be that only where power is evenly balanced can external groups influence the decisions. The authors of the study conclude that "consultation" functioned mainly as a valuable pill sweetener. The truth is, of course, that it is difficult for "consultation" or "participation" to take place where bodies of teachers and parents are radically split in their opinions and differ very greatly in local power. What was needed here was a strong central definition within which these local discussions could have been educative.

The resulting local comprehensive schemes display a range of aims lying between a "meritocratic" concern to preserve the grammar school ethos and more explicit social engineering or neighbourhood school schemes. For example, different schemes can be seen to be more or less concerned with speed, with the retention of selectivity at sixth form level, with the sometimes conflicting aims of providing all schools with sixth form work yet conserving scarce sixth form staff (a problem with a thoroughgoing set of 11-18 schools), and with opening up the schools to the community.

Almost three fifths of the schools have an age range from 11 or 12 to 18 years, a small proportion of these schools taking pupils at sixth form level from other schools (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, p72). Another fifth have an age range of 11 or 12 to 16 years, and these are more typically old secondary modern schools. One in fourteen schools is an upper school,

from 13 or 14 years, or a sixth form college. There are two types of sixth form college, with selective or non-selective entry, and there are now interesting proposals for linking the sixth form with the local College of Technology, a development which is frustrated by the separate administrative structure of the schools. One in seven schools, approximately, is a lower school, taking pupils from 11 to 13, 14 or 15 years only. Only 27 per cent have been purpose-built, and 23 per cent of schools occupy more than one site. Most interest is now being shown in the sixth form college, and plans submitted by 1968 indicated that in future only 38 per cent would be all through schools, 25 per cent would be tiered, and 32 per cent would have separate sixth forms (Benn and Simon, *op cit*).

But the overall design of the schemes tells us nothing of the inbuilt dynamic of change in the comprehensive ethos, and the social and intellectual achievements of the schools. Are we yet in a position to say that the schools are "successful" in achieving anyone's goals? To answer this question we must take a rather more strenuous and sceptical look at the aims and the evidence than has yet been attempted by the bulk of political supporters of the comprehensive school.

## EVALUATING THE COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL

A rational model of planning in the social services, such as is Labour's aim, would seem to require that change should follow careful research and prediction. But an examination of the development of comprehensive policies in education has revealed a different pattern. Research has followed changes which have been initiated on the grounds of ideological criticism of the existing order. And so far, research has served primarily to legitimate and perhaps accelerate such changes. Disturbingly, with the comprehensive programme nominally one third to a half implemented, many of the findings of educational research are still proving of little help to those concerned in the formulation of the next stages of policy.

The problem lies at a number of levels. Above all there has been considerable confusion and lack of finer educational detail at the level of formal statements of the aims of the comprehensive school, and correspondingly about the criteria which must be used in its evaluation. But even if we could agree on a number of alternative aims which could be tested against one another, there would still remain very formidable methodological and value difficulties in the educational research. In view of the increasingly technical tone of the educational debate—including in the *Black papers*—some of these problems must be briefly discussed here.

### meritocracy, equality machine, or community?

One way of describing, if not resolving, the confusion about the goals of the comprehensive school is to abstract from the debate three sets of criteria—the "meritocratic", the "social engineering," and the "community" aims for the schools which have been underlined in the previous discussion as they appeared. It must be stressed, however, that this is chiefly a comment on the public political *debate*, on the stated intentions for the

schools, and only in an indirect way relates to the workings of the schools themselves (see Marsden, "Which comprehensive principle," *Comprehensive education* no 13, 1969 and replies in two following issues). These aims express sets of political beliefs and in some sense derive from and possibly influence existing schools, particularly if we are dealing with teachers' statements about their goals. But we have enough studies of organisations to know that the form which they take is a result not merely of their stated goals but also of the sometimes conflicting aims of their many members or participants, and of the internal and external pressures which work upon them.

The difficulty in specifying the exact relationship between the ideal types of schools described in the debate and the actual schools symbolises the gap between politicians' simplified aims for education, and the practical dynamic embodied in the comprehensive school as a complex working structure. The lesson is that we must look more closely at what education is doing, not what politicians and teachers (and writers of pamphlets) hope or intend it to achieve. Real schools will exhibit trends in one or another of the following directions, but cannot, as we shall see later, be as dissimilar as the many participants involved in the debate about comprehensives might wish them to be.

The "meritocratic" view of the comprehensive school may have few or indeed no overt strictly social aims: the comprehensive school must stand or fall on its development and maximisation of the child's qualifications at whatever consequences to social and societal relationships and, some opponents would add, to education (see R. Boyson, "Threat to tradition," in N. Smart (ed), *Crisis in the classroom*). Such a view of the schools is as far as the present nervous flirtation has taken some Conservatives, and it avoids all discussion of the undoubted social influence of present educational arrangements.

The "social engineering" approach has looked for both the development of talent *and* for improved qualities of citizenship, but has not contemplated any radical change in the education offered in the schools: change is to come about by manipulation of social relationships, but around and not through the curriculum and the educational process. Thus, to take another quote from Anthony Crosland, "Both common sense and American experience suggest that (unstreaming) would lead to a really serious levelling down of standards and a quite excessive handicap to the clever child. Division into streams remains essential" (*The future of socialism*, p202, Cape, 1963). Such a view is undismayed by the prospect of societal divisions based on intellect, which are in fact one democratic justification for rule by a small number of individuals.

The supporters of the "community school" would subscribe to the aims of academic excellence and improved social relationships, but would stress that these cannot be achieved without a change in the educational ethos and the structure of the learning process itself: accordingly the true community school must exhibit a whole range of educational innovation and openness in the curriculum and teaching methods and relationships with the outside

world which will bring about a new ethos and a new view of the child. Only in a cooperative framework which sees children as of equal worth will equality eventually be achieved.

It will be seen that these prescriptions represent distinctly different educational systems. The variety of goals and orientations of the supporters of comprehensive schools would lead in evaluation to a differing stress on, for example, examination results, rates of stopping on after the school leaving age, the children's qualities of citizenship and social horizons, aspects of the school's internal structure, of rewards and punishments, of decision taking, of learning, and the overall integration of the school with the surrounding community. As yet the relative importance and inter-relationships of changes in these areas, as an indication of the attainments of the comprehensive principle, have scarcely been spelled out.

The major points to look for in evaluating the comprehensive school would be: how nearly do the existing schools approximate to any of the above models; and do the schools bear out what would be the community school criticism of Labour's "social engineering" approach, that Labour has wanted talent development and citizenship but has not been sufficiently aware of the need to change the ethos of the schools towards greater internal democracy. It is interesting to look at Julianne Ford's attempt to construct Labour's ideal type of comprehensive and then to evaluate an existing comprehensive school against a grammar and a secondary modern school to see which system best fulfils Labour's goals (J. Ford, *Social class and the comprehensive school*, chap 1, Routledge, 1969). Unfortunately Dr Ford's survey, which is meant to be a systematic evaluation of use to socialists, seems seriously misleading both in its design and in its conclusions. She has not indicated that the ideal type of comprehensive she constructs is drawn mainly from the social engineering approach of Labour's leading politicians rather than, say, community school writers. And she does not sufficiently stress that the school against which she tests her ideal type is apparently of the more crudely "meritocratic" kind, with scarcely any of the attempts even at social engineering which may be found in other schools. A further serious defect in the research design itself (discussed later) vitiates her findings, which seem to support the *Daily Telegraph* thesis that the introduction of comprehensives will reduce opportunity even for the bright working class child. In any case, no London school can be fully comprehensive. From other surveys, on more narrowly meritocratic criteria there appears as yet to be fairly little to choose between the comprehensive schools and the bipartite system. Obviously from any standpoint examination results are of some interest, and significantly one of the original comprehensive bogies of size was laid for the meritocrats (see R. Boyson, *op cit*) chiefly because of the range of opportunities and specialist teaching which could be offered in the larger school. Benn and Simon (*op cit*, pp81-82) and Pedley (*op cit*, 105-113) in their surveys of comprehensive school "O" level results were able to conclude that there was no evidence that the schools have "lowered standards". The "O" level results from some of the new comprehensive schools which do not gain their full quota of the top ability groups are actually up to and slightly above the corresponding results for the bipartite system. The interpretation of "A" level results is still

premature because of the lack of top ability students and the newness of the schools. The proportions of pupils in all through schools who stop on after the minimum school leaving age is above the national bipartite average (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, pp72-73). But the stopping on rate for schools which are not providing education up to eighteen, and where a transfer to another school is involved, is very poor, as indeed was feared by the left in the early 1950s when the schemes were first suggested (M. Parkinson, *op cit*, pp72-73), and a tendency for more able pupils to leave early from "comprehensive" systems has been noted (J. W. B. Douglas, *All our future*, pp62-63, Peter Davies). The situation is that such schools are usually older secondary moderns, and the transfer is to what used to be the grammar school—in other words these are scarcely comprehensive systems (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, p124).

I have not quoted the comprehensives' figures here in detail because it seems to me that while they may already be a little better than the bipartite performance in some respects, neither supporters nor opponents of the comprehensives would claim that they are as yet *sufficiently* different in either direction to constitute meritocratic arguments for or against the comprehensive school at the present time. And in that case the burden of proof of the superiority of the comprehensive system must depend on future firmer evidence or must shift to social criteria.

However, the evaluation of the new order in the comprehensive school cannot yet take place because the educational ethos appears to have changed only slowly under the impact of comprehensive reorganization. For those who had hoped for a new educational and social order to be bred in the comprehensive schools, initial reports of the internal organisation of the new schools were disappointing. Virtually all the schools were streamed, some of them very intensively; and some research by Douglas Young has suggested that certain kinds of streaming in large schools create serious problems of morale and social control, not only for the schools but later for society. Thus, if pupils are streamed by IQ but are frequently moved according to their attainment, there accumulate at the bottom of the school pupils who have low attainments and/or low motivation, and the larger the school the more disastrous the sieving (D. Young and W. Brandis, "Two types of streaming and their probable application in comprehensive schools," *Bulletin*, XI, pp13-16, University of London Institute of Education, 1967).

We do not know how often this situation occurs, but it has been suggested that the phase of competition with the grammar schools and direct grant schools which lies, perhaps, at the root of such anti-educational practices will be only temporary. When the comprehensive schools have been established longer and the comprehensive system becomes more widespread, new patterns will appear (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, chaps 9 and 14, R. Pedley, *op cit*). And already there is evidence of a trend away from streaming and the competitive atmosphere. Up to 1963, according to Benn and Simon (*op cit*, p151), there was rather little movement, but the National Federation for Educational Research (NFER) in 1965 indicated that four per cent of comprehensive schools were using complete non-streaming, and only three years later Benn and Simon

found 22 per cent of schools using predominantly mixed ability types of organisation (*op cit*, p151). A greater proportion would be experimenting with non-streaming in non-academic subjects. Robin Pedley from a survey of long-established comprehensive schools had found that in 1968 38 per cent "were operating in unstreamed situations to a greater or lesser extent" (*op cit*, p101). There remains the question of how far this swing will go. Have we here the beginnings of a "grass-roots" movement among teachers? Will it fizzle out, or can it be assisted by the national policy makers?

Another, cruder indication that the schools are shaking off tradition and adopting new initiatives is in the abandonment of organisation into houses. The NFER survey found that in 1965 as many as 90 per cent of schools in their survey had house systems of organisation. (T. J. Monks, *op cit*, p41.) By 1968, however, according to Benn and Simon a pure house system with no other form of organisation was used in only 17 per cent of the comprehensives and was combined with other divisions in only a further 20 per cent. Robin Pedley has some suggestive data on the move away from "competitiveness." In 1961 nine-tenths of his sample of comprehensive schools gave their children ranking orders in class. In 1968 the proportion had dropped to just above a half (R. Pedley, *op cit*, p131). On the other hand he found that the award of trophies and prizes for academic or sporting achievements had remained constant involving around four-fifths of the schools.

One straw in the wind might be taken as an indication of curriculum changes. Only three-fifths of the comprehensive schools with sixth forms were offering Latin, and the proportion for all comprehensives was only 43 per cent (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, pp145-146). Benn and Simon comment on the relationship between Latin and streaming: where Latin is taught there is invariably division of the curriculum since it is never taught to all ability groups. This stresses the social divisiveness inherent in some of the academic curriculum's specialisms. And the way in which such control of knowledge through the curriculum determines children's life chances is further underlined when we note that many universities still cling to Latin as a requirement in language subjects: until the universities relax this requirement, pupils in comprehensives not teaching Latin will be disadvantaged (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, p354). Finally, 44 schools more intensively surveyed by Benn and Simon were fulfilling the function of community schools to some extent (Benn and Simon, *op cit*, 34). Only two schools, both in country areas, were not open after hours. 33 were open after school for two or three hours, and more important 31 were open in the evenings. Half the schools had evening classes, and half let the schools be used by local groups for meetings. Only four schools had sports facilities in use all the year round by the community. These, however, are only very crude and superficial indicators of the relationship between education and the community. Very few schools would yet fit many of the criteria of the local community school.

### **the best comprehensives we have—the primary schools**

For the most useful and suggestive research on attempts to create a new educational order in the schools we must turn to an area of education usually neglected by politicians, for the primary schools are the best comprehensives

we have. They are the only uncreamed schools where non-streaming is practised to any great extent, now that examination pressures are being reduced in a way that the comprehensives cannot expect to happen for some time.

NFER research on *Streaming in primary schools* by J. Barker Lunn stands out head and shoulders above research on comprehensive schools, and it is worth quoting here not only for its implication for the future of comprehensive reforms but also as an indication of the sorts of methodological difficulties which must be overcome if we are to compare fully the success of two educational systems embodying different sets of values.

The survey attempts with some success to evaluate streaming and non-streaming as alternative forms of organisation in primary schools. Its greatest contribution is to focus our attention on the teachers and the teaching process, rather than the organisational framework. Non-streaming and a changed ethos in a school appear to be as much a result or expression of teachers' (or the head teacher's) values as an influence upon them. Thus, the survey notes, "any effect which may be shown to be associated with streaming or non-streaming is unlikely to be purely and simply due to the form of organisation used. Teaching methods, the ideas which underlie disciplinary systems, the views teachers hold about their children, in short the whole climate of relationships built up by what teachers say and do and what they appear to their pupils to imply may ~~be~~ well be the critical factors." As a result, "*It is clear that a mere change in organisation, such as the abandonment of streaming, unaccompanied by a serious attempt to change teachers' attitudes, beliefs and methods of teaching is unlikely to make much difference; in fact it is likely to result in a change from streaming between classes to streaming within classes*" (my italics). It was found that "teachers believing in streaming in non-streamed schools treated their class as a streamed one. Their teaching methods, their lessons and their attitudes tended to reflect the pattern found in streamed schools. They even streamed their children into geographically located ability groups."

What may yet prove to be the key finding of the research was that teachers on the whole consistently over-estimated the ability of middle class children and under-estimated that of working class children. Research is now demonstrating the effects of teachers' expectations upon children's school performance, and here may lie a major barrier to the achievement of equality in education (R. Rosenthal and L. Jacobson, *Pygmalion in the classroom*, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1968).

Thus, in this research on the primary school, we are brought suddenly face to face with the classic problem of those who seek radical reforms in society: when the formal revolution has been won there remains the "cultural revolution." The behaviour of the "streaming" teacher in a non-streamed school appears a microcosm of the comprehensive *non-reorganisation* previously described.

Because of the problem of "streamers" in the non-streamed school, the full effects of non-streaming could not be effectively tested. But the research concluded that academically (or meritocratically) there was nothing to choose

between the two systems in terms of performance on attainment tests. Socially, however, there were advantages to be gained in an improvement in the atmosphere of the school.

Lest we be tempted to try to legislate for non-streaming (a step not, in any case, possible under the existing structure of control in education which gives individual head teachers large powers), the research found that the worst possible teaching situation for the below average child is in a non-streamed school with a streaming teacher: such teachers manage to make below average children isolated within the class. Incidentally, one controversy about streaming which was convincingly resolved was its effect on the child's self-image. A below average child was found to be likely *himself* to feel duller in a non-streamed class in comparison with his brighter class-mates, yet a similar child in a low stream was likely to feel that *other people* would think him duller although he himself might have a better opinion of his own abilities.

The survey may provide an important result for socialists, the first indication we have from research about the influences of separatism in education upon parental attitudes. It was found that in streamed schools the children's parents were also "streamed" by aspirations, whereas in unstreamed schools the parents' aspirations were higher. "It seems that the mere fact of a child being in anything but the top stream has the effect of lowering parental expectations and aspirations for a grammar school place." However, as we shall see, such results must be treated with caution: it seems likely that schools where unstreaming was possible (against parental and local authority pressures) would already be in areas where the class composition of the neighbourhood was of a different kind, more homogeneous in other respects apart from the parents' educational aspirations.

This research seems to confirm the tentative findings of research on comprehensives, that there is no evidence as yet that without a change of school ethos a comprehensive framework will make better use of reserves of talent. Moreover a comprehensive school which (like the school in Dr. Ford's research) makes no serious attempt to organise pupils' relationship across social and intellectual difference will achieve nothing in the way of class mixing. In any case a rigidly hierarchical school structure would appear to be an outward expression of a hierarchical view of intellect and society. Across attempts to move away from a rigid structure at primary or secondary level falls the pressure of examinations, at 11- or 18-plus. And the key to the achievement of the comprehensive principle must therefore lie in central administrative action which will combine with and foster a "cultural revolution" among the teaching profession.

### research and values in the comprehensive debate

The delicate political situation of the comprehensive school has demanded quick proofs of success. However, the implications of this attempt to clarify aims and evaluate research have been that research alone cannot help us to choose between systems which ideally at least represent different educational orders. Indeed inadequate research and the premature or illegitimate use of research findings have only tended to obscure the debate over values. The

NFER streaming research stands almost alone in its achievements; and I have therefore not quoted in detail from any other research on values in the comprehensive school, all of which inevitably suffers from methodological defects which render it insufficiently rigorous for use in an essentially political, rather than educational, argument. To make matters worse some highly influential research has been formulated in such a way as to ignore or distort the influence of inequality on parents' values and children's educational performance.

Consider first the methodological problems facing educational research workers who attempt to compare the results of bipartite and comprehensive schools (see H. Passow, "The maze of research on ability grouping," in A. Yates (ed), *Grouping in education*, pp161-169, UNESCO, 1966). The researchers must gain adequate responses from comprehensive schools which are flooded with questionnaires. They must in addition match a sample of bipartite and comprehensive schools for age of buildings and level of amenities, age of staff and their experience and qualifications, types of comprehensive scheme, staffing ratios, social origins and intelligence of pupils, curricula, teaching methods, and for geographical region (since the occupational structure and educational traditions outside the schools will influence stopping-on rates and performance in school). There are also factors which are more difficult to measure and control, such as the degree of commitment and enthusiasm of the staff at a time when comprehensives are in a minority and also in a delicate political position, when they may be recruiting staff who on the whole are more committed to the comprehensive ideal and more determined to prove that it works. Other imponderables are the school ethos, the mark-hungriness and test-sophistication of the pupils, the schools' commitment to examinations, their policy of entering pupils, and the difficulties of comparing "O" level standards across subjects like woodwork and Latin, and across Examination Boards. If opponents of the comprehensive schools insist that we must check pupil performance at all levels of intelligence, we find that we are as yet unable to make accurate reports on the high intelligence groups who, because of the continuation of selection, are under-represented in comprehensive schools.

It must be confessed that comparisons involving foreign countries such as Sweden and America, where comprehensive schools have been longer established, involve even more imponderables. It is for this reason that no parallels are here drawn between England's progress towards comprehensives and movements in other countries, because the underlying assumption of such comparisons is that change takes place through a sort of technological determinism and cultural borrowing. Such comparisons can therefore be seriously misleading, and they have been, indeed, a major weakness underlying Labour's official policy approach.

Thus, cross-nationally we have difficulty in comparing the different cultural traditions, of individualism in America and social engineering in Sweden. There are differing degrees of inequality in these other societies, and neither country suffers to the same degree as England from an entrenched private classical sector of education (see R. Bendix and S. M. Lipsett (eds), *Class, status and power*, pp437-472, Routledge, 1967). The administrative structure of education is centralised in Sweden, but decentralised in America. In Sweden

teaching is anomalously traditional, whereas America pioneered "child centred" education on a mass scale. We might summarise the American problem by saying that the country possesses an overtly egalitarian ideology of education, but paradoxically anti-collectivism sets its face against willing the means for an egalitarian school structure. The comprehensive community school, in these circumstances, has met serious problems with the development and decay of the large American city and the residential segregation of the ethnic and income groups. Sweden, on the other hand, has a remarkably egalitarian philosophy which includes a redefinition of the masculine and feminine roles such as England has scarcely begun to consider in education, and there is a tradition of collectivism and social engineering to back it, but the teaching profession has not as yet lived up to the needs of the new structure. Sweden thus exhibits the paradox of formal teaching in a progressive and egalitarian structure. America, on the other hand, has covert differentiation in what is formally an open and egalitarian system. English comprehensives must try to avoid both these pitfalls. These difficulties of comparative research do not mean that we can learn nothing from cross-national studies; only that we must be more cautious in drawing inferences good or bad.

But in the context of political controversy methodological difficulties take on a new role. For a while sociological investigations, which have been characteristically sceptical and innovatory in the field of English education, were on the side of comprehensive advocates (although unfortunately they were negative in a society where only change needs positive justification). But then the opponents of the comprehensive school began to play the researchers at their own game, and the previous discussion of research problems will have indicated why there is always some objection, major or nit-picking, which can be advanced against "proofs" of the comprehensives' superiority.

At the present time educational controversy has thus become erudite but obscure to the layman, who will feel justified in dismissing all research or alternatively may select from the flying references those which best suit his beliefs. Either way he can remain in invincible ignorance of research findings.

Turning now to research which is possibly misleading in relation to the influence of inequality and a divided educational system upon parental values, the failures here arise in the inadequacies of perception of social attitudes rather than from the inherent difficulties of research. The problem is that we wish to know whether a particular kind of school creates greater social mixing and a change of social attitude towards a feeling of community. Also we wish to compare performances. The difficulty is that research workers neglect to view and measure parental background with sufficient subtlety means that we have a number of confusing results. For example, there are findings which seem to indicate that if we take two working class children of comparable measured ability and send one to a "good" primary or secondary modern school (as indicated by past 11 plus or "O" level figures, teacher qualifications and so on), which will invariably have a higher middle class intake, the working class child at the "good" school achieves a better academic performance (see J. W. B. Douglas, *op cit*, pp37-38). The same has been noted of working class children attending grammar school as compared with comprehensive schools (see J. Ford, *op cit*, p40). The superficial conclu-

sion is that the school *moulds* the child to a measurable degree, independently of his class background, and in particular "rescues" working class children from a fate of manual work. Such an interpretation can be used for arguments for putting cash into schools rather than households, in favour of the retention of grammar schools and against comprehensives, and so on.

It is not denied here that schools may have *some* effect in changing the child's values and educability, but what needs challenging is the assumption that the observed effects are entirely due to the schools and are not in some way a further expression of the influences of home background and hence of economic inequality. All these pieces of research suffer from what might be called "background fallacies." Thus, for example, the kinds of children who get into grammar schools or who live in the catchment areas of "good" primary and secondary modern schools are the offspring of working class parents with relatively middle class attitudes, aspirations and styles of life. These aspects of the child's environment are seldom imaginatively explored by research. Similarly, we know that the kinds of children who go to grammar schools from working class homes are unusual in many ways. It is not surprising, therefore, that these upwardly-aspiring children should mix more readily with other children of the social class they are destined to join. But we cannot attribute this to the school's influence. The much-quoted finding from Ford's research that social mixing occurs to a greater degree in the grammar school than in the comprehensive *may* be entirely accounted for by differences in the social origins of the two sets of pupils, the bulk of that particular comprehensive's working class intake being drawn from a largely working class estate where children might be expected to come from families with different social horizons.

With the kind of patterns of residential segregation and the sorts of schools we have now, we should still probably picture schools less as moulders of social attitudes and performances and more as sieves or selectors of children with backgrounds and potentials favourable for high educational attainment. Although we cannot claim to understand why nominally working class parents should show middle class aspirations and behaviour, there is some evidence that the key may still lie in these parents' economic and social position in life, rather than being evidences of personality quirks or some cultural pattern which persists or develops independently of the structure of economic inequality (see D. Swift, "Social class, mobility ideology and 11-plus success," *British Journal of Sociology* XVIII, vol 2, 1967). Yet socialists have been side tracked by recent influential research, by Dr Douglas (*op cit*) and the Plowden Committee, which has appeared to demonstrate that economic inequality is of relatively less importance than parental attitudes in children's educational performance. The policy implications of such findings would be that a programme of parental stimulation and enlightenment, rather than one of economic redistribution, should be embarked upon. However, it is arguable that what Dr Douglas loosely calls an "interest in education" might more appropriately be described as an interest in the middle class pretensions of the grammar school and in upward mobility. And conversely a "lack of interest in education" is attributable to the class segregated nature of our educational system which has hitherto always excluded the bulk of the working class. Similarly the "attitudes to education" identified by the Plowden Report are arguably indicators of

social class and are dependent on the parents' economic position, which in any case the research scarcely attempted to explore (see B. Bernstein and B. Davies, "Some sociological comments on Plowden" in R. S. Peters (ed), *Perspectives on Plowden*, Routledge, 1969).

The policies indicated by this alternative analysis would be the redistribution of educational and economic resources and rewards, since parents' attitudes could not be manipulated otherwise.

These seemingly dry and esoteric academic points must be stressed, for not only is educational research failing to formulate questions about the influence of the economy and educational system upon parental attitudes and children's performances in a sufficiently subtle and perceptive way, but the trend of influential research is actually misleading us. The problems of reducing inequality in and through education are being minimised, no doubt unintentionally, to fit all too closely the facile optimism of Labour's educational policies.

## A SUMMARY OF LABOUR'S RECORD

This pamphlet has been primarily an attempt to clarify some of the confusion surrounding political aims for the comprehensive school, and to indicate why comprehensive education has been a key Radical issue in various guises for over a century and a half. Supporters of the schools have hoped that comprehensives would tackle the question of inequality and forge new societal bonds. We discover in the comprehensive philosophy a tradition of thought stretching back to some idealised pre-industrial and pre-urban community, alongside a half hearted and unpractical attempt at rational planning. In neither area has the Labour Party achieved much advance on the nineteenth century. The Party has always suffered from a confusion of aims, the leadership apparently being content with relatively minor adjustments to the educational system and accepting the view that education was responding to social and technological change rather than being a force in its own right. The left has taken the different view, sometimes too naively, that education can be a power for social good, and has pressed for more far-reaching reforms, although perforce working within a framework of changes acceptable to the leadership. In both post-war spells of Labour government the Party's arrival in office gave evidence of the lack of an original policy: 1945 saw the acceptance of the coalition's Education Act, 1964 the acceptance of the Robbins expansion of higher education partly at the expense of secondary reorganisation. In spite of much huffing and puffing the direct grant and public schools have remained unscathed. Only a small pressure group on the left has had a coherent educational policy which the leadership seems barely to have understood but which is at long last emerging as a possible challenge to the present educational structure.

To do the Party leaders justice, the issues have been complex. The influence of inequality and our divided educational system in stimulating inegalitarian demands has a parallel in the field of wages, where the increasing rewards for the higher salaried classes and the manifest inequality in rewards generally is provoking wage demands from the workers and frustrating any development of a wages ethic which is in the national interest. In formulating demands for

educational equality the Labour Party has had to persuade those of its own supporters who were not interested in grammar schools to see the value of extended education. The establishment of comprehensive schools has shown that public demand will follow rather than lead educational changes. Research has proved no substitute for commitment in pointing the way to new educational policies.

The absence of a clear perception of inequality and a commitment to its reduction appeared in the 1964 Labour government's behaviour chiefly in the handing over of redistribution to the local authorities and in shying away from the issues of poverty which the debate on neighbourhood schools had crystallised. The solution of turning the comprehensive school into an equality machine was both transparently evasive and abhorrent to the strongest advocates of comprehensive education and to much educational opinion.

The major lesson of the historical review of Labour's performance is that we cannot talk about Labour's educational policies because the Party is not unified and has never had an agreed policy. When in office the politicians' actions show too much evidence of the hand of the civil service, being concerned with the administration and the framework of schooling, and giving relatively little thought to education proper. Crucially there has been an artificial separation between political aims for education and the thoughts of professional educationists and teachers, between hopes and claims for the schools and the schools' actual achievements. This has not been for lack of educationists within the Party, but chiefly for lack of an adequate hearing.

What is needed is to close the gap between politics and education, to persuade egalitarians and the Labour Party as a whole to work out the finer details of an egalitarian policy.

## GETTING THE EDUCATION WE WANT

Would the Labour Party's having a policy have made any difference? How much truth is there in the Conservative position that education responds only to broad societal change? Paradoxically, although the rigidity of the school curriculum derives from its relationship, via examinations and qualifications, with the occupational structure, it is far from true to say that the schools "fit" society. The reason is that qualifications are given by educational institutions and recognised as valuable by parents, students and employers, but the teaching and learning behind the qualification may bear little relationship to the job for which it forms the credential. Indeed the tradition of the English "amateur" has been founded on education being completely *unrelated* to subsequent employment, except in a few professions.

The link between education and society therefore depends on confidence in educational qualifications. On the one hand, in the schools and universities there are professionals determined to teach what they know but what the country may not need economically, what may be of little interest and use to the student, and what, as Margaret Mead has observed, it may not be agreed that anyone has any desire to learn. This relationship is of course a good thing in some ways, certainly for the functioning of academic freedom and

probably for the education of the child. The average child "needs" rather little education for the sort of work the economy affords: it is no accident that intelligence declines in adult life.

But what is being stressed here is that the proposition that we as a society somehow automatically get the sort of educational system that we want and deserve will not hold water. If we want an adequate educational system we'll have to fight for it. The schools are quite a long way out of line with society in terms of the curriculum, values and life style they aim to transmit. And such a marked lack of fit between education and society at least suggests that the educational system could, in some sectors and to some extent, lead society towards a more egalitarian ethos, could we but encourage teachers to share this view and behave in accord with it. Putting aside this not unpractical vision, the immediate problem remains the much more limited and obviously more feasible objective of bringing the social ethos and curriculum of our schools out of the nineteenth century.

### a strategy for equality

The political goal of equality in and through education is still valid. But comprehensive reorganisation makes sense only in the context of a total educational programme where the policies are dictated not by largely middle class pressures to preserve the existing structure but by a rational application of planning to the needs of pupils, students and teachers. The present distribution and trends of growth of resources as between sectors of education, types of school, regions, and children of different abilities and sexes, is neither rational nor socialist. This is not merely an argument for more money to remove inequality. The necessity of an expansion of the education budget, in view of the birth bulge and the trend in stopping on, must be argued against the needs of services for the poor, the aged, the subnormal and other disadvantaged groups. It may indeed prove that education (or some sectors) have too great resources in view of the needs of other groups. In that case there would be all the more need for Labour and the DES to choose priorities in education in a way which has hitherto been avoided.

At present there is scarcely a procedure for deciding priorities within education, but we have the odd spectacle of a Conservative Secretary for Education and Science looking more determinedly egalitarian than Labour in her urge to balance up inequalities between the different sectors of education. As the writers of the Fabian pamphlet *Planning for education in 1980* (*op cit*) have pointed out, there is even less machinery for deciding priorities between education and other social services.

Fully comprehensive reorganisation with an egalitarian aim also makes sense only within the context of a redistributive programme of income and social capital between individuals, families and areas. The educational arguments for neighbourhood schools are strong, not the weakest argument being that we will get such schools under any system we can devise. Thus, as Professor Titmuss has written: "The real challenge resides in the question: what particular infrastructure of universalist services is needed in order to promote a framework of values and opportunity bases within and around which can be

developed socially acceptable selective services aiming to discriminate positively, with the minimum risk of stigma, in favour of those whose needs are greatest?" (*Commitment to welfare*, p122, Allen and Unwin, 1968).

Since the Plowden Report and the Urban Aid Programme the idea of positive discrimination has gained some ground, but is still far from a practical achievement. However within a general programme of redistribution, positive discrimination around and through the neighbourhood school seems to be the policy which makes most educational and social sense. It might be argued that positive discrimination in buildings, teaching staff, amenities and play space would provoke a suburban backlash, but the fact is that a neighbourhood school and urban area programme would have to go a long way before resources were evened up.

Another danger is that we must avoid priority schemes which become a substitute for other kinds of distribution, for the family remains the main transmitter of inequality in society and inequality is not confined to a few pockets of slum dwellings.

To carry through such a strategy against inequality, future Labour Secretaries of State cannot afford to adopt a Conservative supine posture. Yet how far does the Secretary of State have control over education proper? Evidently the existing decentralisation of the Labour Party and the educational administration, and backgrounds of the local councillors and various administrative officials pose obstacles to the co-ordination and execution of plans. But what the Secretary can supply is a strong central lead by a commitment to comprehensive reorganisation defined in the context of an imaginative Education Act. This above all was lacking in 1964. Comprehensive reorganisation is the policy *within* which, rather than about which, discussion should take place.

Beyond this Labour must start working out the crucial areas of control in education where a future Secretary might hope to prevent subversion of plans for equality by the permanent officials or pressures at local authority level. Some areas of Secretarial powers seem to be ambiguous or at least open to definition by the Secretary himself if he takes a firm line, as for instance in the recent attempt to overhaul the examination structure. A further new aspect of the Secretary's role must be that of an educator. The role of the DES must be oriented towards an extensive information programme.

A positive definition of the Secretary's role cannot mean authoritarian direction, for as we have seen, the organisation and attitudes embodied in education are as much or more expressions of teachers' values as influences upon these values. It thus becomes not only desirable but indispensable for success that there should be a movement among teachers to achieve the comprehensive principle within the comprehensive framework provided by the central decision to reorganise. This implies that apart from its function in disseminating information about comprehensives, the DES must look to the recruitment and training of teachers, the facilities which they are given, and the influence of the organisation of curriculum subjects and examinations upon teachers' behaviour. One of the consistently disappointing findings of educational research is that teachers leave the training colleges expressing the progressive

philosophies which these colleges espoused long ago, but these same teachers very rapidly lose their idealism and progressiveness when faced with the exigency of a real-life teaching situation. This failure may be the responsibility of central government, in the sense that teachers' behaviour may be a response to scarce resources and large classes. For years a squeeze on resources in the secondary school sector in the face of rising demand has distorted the behaviour of primary school teachers, and we may still be seeing the after effects of this primary school 11 plus culture in the behaviour of teachers today. The same is obviously now true of distortions in teaching caused by the 18 plus. Again this underlines the necessity of awkward and complicated decisions about the setting of priorities for allocating resources. The next Education Act must have sufficient breadth of vision to inter-relate the effects of policies in one part of the educational system upon other parts.

But all this discussion is still concerned with handing education out to the people. As Sir Fred Clarke has written: "Schools have always been provided for (the mass of the English people) from above, in a form and with a content of studies that suited the ruling interests. Hitherto there has appeared no sure sign of the growth of a genuine popular philosophy of education which would seize upon the elementary school and make it the instrument of its own clearly conceived social and cultural purpose" (*Education and social change*, pp30-31, Sheldon, 1940). Truly "democratic" community schools will need a different administrative structure and philosophy to bring into the educational process parents as well as children. Here, as with other talk of participation these days, there is lots of woolly thinking: English school teachers stoutly resist any threats of the dilution or control of education by parents, and if we are not careful the parents who do the "seizing" will be the middle class. How education might become less isolated and more internally democratic are matters which have not yet been sufficiently explored: somehow this should be in and through the learning process rather than around but in isolation from it. An Education Act which neglected this issue would already be out of date.

A resume of the areas of comprehensive reorganisation for immediate concern is therefore as follows The next Education Act must contain a clear definition of and commitment to a *fully* comprehensive system of secondary education. Recognising regional and individual inequalities, this commitment must be in the context of a wider priority area and redistributive policy. The issues of parental choice and school boundaries for a neighbourhood system must be faced for what they are, redistribution of life chances, and they must be rendered as open and democratic as possible. And within the national strategy for equality the crucial role of the teaching profession must be fostered. In the past Labour has given the appearance of wanting to "interfere" too much and yet has not taken a sufficiently strong line over those provinces where control and leadership should have been exercised. In the future there should be no doubt about the value of a positive central statement of what the structure of education and distribution of resources is going to be; but equally the ultimate dependence of any educational policy upon the teachers must be recognised.

Towards the end of Labour's spell in office a new Education Act was being prepared. The indications are that at long last something will be done about

the direct grant and public schools, the provision of nursery education, the integration of further education and higher education, the structure of control of the schools (with parental and teacher representation on the governing bodies), and the issue of parental choice of school. But of the nine issues discussed by Mr. Short in a *Where?* article comprehensive education and equality received no explicit mention (*Where?*, no 56, 1970). Perhaps Labour still believes a separate short bill outlawing the 11 plus will do the trick?

Mr. Short called for a great national debate. Such a debate has already started. The *Black papers'* dishonest attempts to blame the failures of the secondary modern school on a progressive education which is only just becoming established in the primary school, and discussions of the grammar school and examinations, mean that we are now talking about whether we like what has been taught and the way it is taught. Is separatist education really our cultural heritage, and are examinations natural ways of keeping up standards and preparing a pupil for life? Is the choice really between meritocratic and egalitarian ideals, or between meritocratic ideals well or badly carried out?

We must recognise that we can never hope to settle the definition of educational equality for good. The price of equality will be eternal debate and research: debate to provide a rolling, detailed *educational* definition of equality; and an ongoing programme of relevant and carefully designed research to inform the debate. Only in this way will Labour's educational policies ever catch up with the apparently infinite regress of educational inequality. Fortunately, the debate has started now, and not, as in the past, when the Party has found itself in office without an educational policy.

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