

# CLASS AND GENDER IN THE STUDY AND TEACHING OF HISTORY IN ENGLAND IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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Historians of education in England cannot but be aware that they live in momentous times. The Conservative party, led by Margaret Thatcher, has won three elections in a row, the first in 1979, the third as recently as 1987. At present her government looks set to continue in power into the twenty-first century. The Education Reform Act of 1988, the most important and wide-ranging piece of educational legislation in English history, seems likely to have a revolutionary impact. The powers of local authorities, the traditional providers of public education, have been profoundly reduced, whilst the largest of them, the Inner London Education Authority, has been simply abolished. All secondary schools, and primary schools with more than 300 pupils, are to be allowed, under certain conditions, to opt out of local authority control. Polytechnics and other large colleges are also to be removed from local aegis. The freedom of universities is to be curtailed, and academic tenure has been abolished. A national curriculum is to be established for all children aged 5-16 in maintained or aided schools, and national testing will take place at ages 7, 11, 14, and 16. English, mathematics, and science are to be the three core subjects. History, geography, technology, art, music, physical education, and a modern foreign language (this last in secondary schools only) constitute the further seven foundation subjects. Pressure from the churches has also ensured that some provision must be made for religious education, and that such religious education "shall reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian while taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions."<sup>1</sup>

The national curriculum will specify the content of the various subjects, and the present Secretary of State for Education, Kenneth Baker, himself an historian, has publicly declared that the school subject which most concerns him is that of history. This concern is widely shared, and history has been the most contentious subject in the new General Certificate of Secondary Education taken by 16-year-old students for the first time in June 1988. The results of that examination suggest that history is one of only two subjects (the other being English) in which standards have declined from the previous year.

The current debate about the study and teaching of history, however, is not simply an academic one about what shall be taught in classrooms. It reflects a much more fundamental series of clashes in respect of the whole political, social, and cultural fabric of the nation. The Thatcherite revolution, which has in so many ways transformed the present state of the United Kingdom, and which is based upon a radically different view of the present, and vision of the future, from

that which has predominated since 1944, is now concerned to create, or rather to recreate, a different perspective on the past.

This article focusses upon two of the most contentious issues in the debate about the interpretation of English history—those of class and gender—and is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of the dimensions of class and gender in recent English educational history. The second considers class and gender dimensions with specific reference to the formal study and teaching of history. Finally some conclusions are drawn.

One of the most unique features of English education, even in 1989, is the extent to which its formal educational system is still strongly differentiated by the factors of social class and gender. Awareness of those differences has been heightened by the work of historians of education, for such differentiation reflects an educational system not only strongly rooted in the nineteenth century, but even ultimately in the medieval period. One of the original purposes of such a system was to recruit scholars into a celibate clergy, a clergy which might also play an important part in affairs of state. By the nineteenth century, however, the elite establishments, the so-called "public schools," had become the preserves of the sons of the upper and middle classes, and were engaged in a status-confirming and conferring exercise. The Clarendon Commission, which reported in 1864 on the nine leading public schools, found within them neither boys from the poorer classes, nor any girls.

Similarly grammar schools, which in the first half of the nineteenth century had often provided some elementary schooling and admitted some girls, divested themselves of this work, and of these pupils, as the century progressed. The Taunton Commission, which reported on these schools in 1868, found within them 36,874 boys, but only 622 girls. Consequently in the last 30 years of the century some of the grammar school endowments were reorganized. Rather than admit girls to existing grammar schools, however, the preferred solution was to use some of the endowment to create a separate girls' school. Similarly, under the Education Act of 1902, which provided for locally-maintained secondary schools, single-sex establishments predominated.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the sisters of those boys who attended public and grammar schools would have been educated in private schools, or at home. Boys and girls of the poorer classes, however, attended the same types of schools, and in broadly the same numbers. Though the statistics collected by the Newcastle Commissioners who reported in 1861 must be treated with some caution, the figures given for day scholars in schools run by the major religious and denominational bodies, including the National Society and the British and Foreign School Society, showed 827,801 boys to 721,511 girls. Both the Roman Catholics and the Primitive Methodists recorded more girls as pupils than boys. Similarly the Ragged schools, which catered for those at the very lowest end of the social scale, listed 10,601 girls against 10,308 boys. Sunday schools, which in the nineteenth century were an important educational agency,

also showed a slight preponderance of girls over boys, at 1,210,297 to 1,178,100. This pattern was spread across the Sunday schools of all the largest Christian groups—Anglican, the various Wesleyan and Methodist churches (except the Calvinistic Methodists where figures were taken from the 1851 Census), Congregational, Baptist, and Roman Catholic.

Girls of the lower orders also attended private day schools (including the private working-class schools) in greater numbers than boys. Gomersall has calculated that in 1861 females constituted 54.7% of those who attended private day schools for the working classes.<sup>2</sup> Gomersall has also shown that prior to the introduction of compulsory elementary schooling in England and Wales in the 1880s, in some rural areas girls attended schools in greater numbers and for longer periods of time than boys.

Thus, by the second half of the nineteenth century, whereas separate spheres were the norm in school provision for the upper and middle classes of English society, at the elementary school level a much greater similarity of provision existed. Girls of the middling and upper classes were not prepared for careers in the public professions—politics, the civil and armed services, the church, law, and medicine—for women had no access to such roles. All children, however, both boys and girls, it was believed, needed to be taught their Christian duty, to recognize their social superiors and to defer to them, and the basic rudiments of literacy. Role differences in the adult lives of males and females of the lower orders were of course reflected in elementary schools in various ways—in terms of access, attendance, length of stay, curriculum, and expectation—but the contrast with school provision for the upper classes was most marked.

Demarcation lines between the elementary and secondary worlds were tightly drawn. Even after the introduction of universal elementary schooling, children who attended such schools were not expected to progress to the grammar schools, and certainly not to the public schools. Indeed, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, of every 1000 children who attended an elementary school only four or five proceeded to a grammar school.

Such was the hierarchical nature of English education, however, that even within public, grammar, and elementary schools further various gradations of social class were clearly observed. Eton remained the predominant public school, so that in 1839 Thomas Arnold, the great headmaster of Rugby, had reluctantly advised the Duchess of Sutherland to send her son not to his school, but to Eton, "where he would meet with others of his own rank."<sup>3</sup> The Taunton Commission designated three levels of secondary schools, graded according to the social background and aspirations of parents, which would cater for pupils wishing to stay at school until 18, 16, and 14 years respectively. In the 1880s Charles Booth similarly divided the elementary schools of the London School Board into six "Classes," with Class VI schools attracting large numbers of pupils from the lower middle classes. Fleet Road Board School, Hampstead became famous as "the Eton for a penny a week."

In the twentieth century, although there is no doubt that girls and women have gained greater access to formal education than before, significant gender differences still exist. High status girls' boarding schools, notably Cheltenham Ladies' College, Roedean, and Wycombe Abbey, were founded in the second half of the nineteenth century, but neither individually nor as a group have they, or the girls' secondary day schools, come to rival the influence and prestige of the boys' public schools, nor of their representative body, the Headmasters' Conference. Not until 1968 was this male monopoly breached, when John Dancy, headmaster of Marlborough College, admitted a few girls to the sixth form (16-18 year-olds). In 1988 whilst more than half of some 200 schools represented on the Headmasters' Conference admitted girls, only 72 did so from age 11 or 13. Total numbers remain small, often a token presence. Only in four schools do girls constitute a third or more of sixth formers. On the other hand even fewer boys have been admitted to girls' independent schools.

Similarly in 1989 women do not have the same representation in higher education as men. For more than 600 years the two English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, were for males only. Not until the 1870s did women gain entry to these institutions, and then not on the same terms as men. Separate colleges were provided, Girton and Newnham at Cambridge, and Lady Margaret Hall and Somerville at Oxford. This token situation existed for nearly 100 years. Not until 1948 were women admitted to full membership of the University of Cambridge. Even in the 1950s men and women sat their examinations in separate halls. Not until the 1970s did Oxford and Cambridge colleges become coeducational. They still remain highly exclusive in terms of social class and wealth. Fee-paying schools (including the public schools), which cater for some 6% of the secondary school-age population, still provide about half of the undergraduate students at Oxford and Cambridge.

Although the new universities founded in England in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were invariably open from the outset to women as well as men, the proportion of female students is still amongst the lowest of any advanced country. In 1962 only a quarter of university entrants were women, although this proportion had risen to nearly 40% by 1979.<sup>4</sup> In 1983-4 there were 113,069 male full-time undergraduate students in English universities as opposed to 75,839 females. Postgraduate full-time student figures showed an even greater imbalance, with 26,863 men to 12,367 women. Even Open University students in 1984 showed a preponderance of men—36,586 to 30,177 women.<sup>5</sup>

In the twentieth century the ideal of separate elementary and secondary spheres was replaced by that of a continuous process—from primary to secondary. The concept arose of an educational ladder whereby boys and girls from the lowest social groups might attain entry, via secondary school, to Oxford and Cambridge, and to positions of influence in society and the state. Scholarships to grammar school and to university were intended to increase social mobility, and to enable the nation to draw upon a wider range of talent. The grammar school became the agency whereby children from all but the wealthiest social

classes might mix together in the pursuit of truth and excellence. In the first half of the twentieth century some progress was made towards the goal of increasing equal opportunities in education. Success in educational terms could be achieved by the intelligent, talented, and hardworking, irrespective of their social class origins. This did not mean equal access to secondary schooling and the university, but it did represent an important change from the situation which existed in the later nineteenth century. Differences, however, were still quite marked. Thus in the 1930s nearly all children with an Intelligence Quotient of 140+ from professional families attended grammar or private secondary schools, as opposed to just over half of children from clerical, and just under a third of children from unskilled families.<sup>6</sup>

Expectations aroused by the 1944 Act and the Second World War that such inequalities of access would be further diminished, or even ultimately disappear, were to be frustrated. Studies undertaken in the 1950s showed that working-class children were not only failing to gain the proportion of grammar school places consistent with their numbers in the population as a whole, but that even those who did reach grammar schools performed less well there than those from lower middle- and middle-class homes.

A detailed analysis of the arguments and political processes which led to the widespread, though not universal, abandonment of selective secondary schooling, and its replacement by a comprehensive system, would constitute a separate article in itself. During these debates, however, it became clear that performance in the eleven-plus examination could be affected by a number of social factors. These included the home environment, parental attitudes and expectations, the child's age and sex, the position in the family, the size of family, and the cultural nature of the tests employed, not least in respect of language. Such factors applied not only at age eleven but could also be significant throughout formal education. They helped to explain, for example, why, on average, children from working-class homes left grammar schools earlier than, and failed to achieve as many qualifications as, children from professional and clerical backgrounds. Thus in his classic study of the relationship between the home and the school, published in 1964, Douglas<sup>7</sup> showed the effects of a variety of domestic factors upon children's school performance. The Swann Report<sup>8</sup> of 1985 indicated, moreover, that for many children from working-class and ethnic minority backgrounds the basic disadvantages outlined above were compounded by further factors, including the racist attitudes of some teachers and employers. Such analyses have led to the generation of strategies to compensate for perceived disadvantages. Whether, and to what extent, education can compensate for society, however, remains extremely problematic. In a recent book Roy Lowe<sup>9</sup> has argued that not only has the rapid expansion of higher education since the 1960s produced an extension of hierarchy both between and within institutions, but that the expected democratization of secondary education attendant upon the abolition of grammar schools has not materialized. This he attributes to the suburbanization of England since 1945 with its neighbourhood schools and tradition of internal streaming.

A.H. Halsey has also concluded that "the evidence is that comprehensive reform of the secondary schools has contributed heavily to the output of entrants to higher and further education but without changing the correlation between social origin and educational attainment." Indeed he cites evidence to show that whereas the professional and managerial class constituted 18% of the population in 1971 "their children formed 51 per cent of university entrants in 1975 and 54 per cent in 1979."<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless an overall apparent constancy in terms of broad social groups and their access to, and success rate in respect of, education, masks a considerable amount of intergenerational class mobility. It also does not take account of the ways in which, historically, good schools and teachers have overcome the negative effects of a whole range of factors, including those of class and gender.

Since, however, there is a growing perception that the abolition of the grammar schools has failed significantly to alter the social class, and gender, inequalities which exist in English education, the next step for reformers from the Left might well be the abolition of the ultimate bastions of class and male power—the public schools. There can be little doubt that, were the Labour party to be returned to power, such a policy would be actively considered and probably pursued. Even *The Sunday Times*, a supporter of the present government, used the occasion of the birth of a daughter to the Duke and Duchess of York to mount a blistering attack on Mrs. Thatcher's support for the old-boy network. "The unpalatable fact is that the upper tiers of her government are stuffed with the products of educational privilege.... Too many members of Britain's permanently ruling classes are still drawn from the overlapping circles of aristocracy, public schools and Oxbridge."<sup>11</sup> The aim of the Conservative government, therefore, has been to create a school system which is as like the independent school model as possible. Thus the public schools, instead of being an anachronism, will be once again seen as the peak of the system, and a goal towards which other schools should aspire. Central government intervention on the scale embodied in the 1988 Act is being justified in some quarters as a necessary but transitional step to ensure the creation of a free-market economy. Once such an economy is created, however, perhaps with the incorporation of a voucher system, then central government may be able to adopt a much lower profile in education.

Changes of this sort—the privatization of the former state monopolies, the sale of council houses to their tenants, increased charges for the National Health Service—which involve the strengthening of the free-market as opposed to the public-service or Socialist economy, can be seen as a reversal of the whole tenor of public policy in Britain since 1945. Collectivism, within a broad framework of social democracy, has been the intellectual orthodoxy of the day in post-war Britain, but, interestingly, education was one of the first areas to witness the emergence of a counter-revolutionary policy. The first *Black Paper*, which called for a return to traditionalism in education, was published in 1969, and by 1971 80,000 copies of the first three papers had been sold. Victory in three elections, and the apparent world-wide spread of popular capitalism (even in Socialist

states), has not given Margaret Thatcher's government the confidence to take on the education interest and to seek to turn back the clock in education. The purpose is to wipe away the history of the last 30 years, the years of progressivism, of the Plowden Report, of comprehensive secondary schools, of radical and rebellious university and polytechnic students, of sociologists of all sorts, of a perpetual search for equality which has simply led to mediocrity, and to restore a meritocracy, with respect for authority, hierarchy, and traditional cultural, religious, and moral values.<sup>12</sup> Such a programme requires the rewriting of much of the history, including the history of education, that has been produced in the last 30 years. It is also expected to involve, indeed is already involving, even tighter control of teacher education. Part of that control has been expressed in an attack upon the "disciplines" of education, including history of education. University education departments are often seen by this government as places where student teachers are initiated into subversive ideologies, rather than being prepared for the serious business of classroom teaching.

Generalizations about the formal study and teaching of history in England in the twentieth century are not easily made. Examinations, syllabuses, textbooks, government handbooks, and other publications provide a wealth of evidence, but it is very difficult to measure and assess the actual processes which take place in classrooms and seminar groups. Nevertheless, it can be stated with some certainty that the professional, academic, study of history (as of history of education) in England, was moulded in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. It reflected elements both of the scientific approach, a search for evidence and truth, and of the idealist philosophy of the time, with its fundamental tenet that "Inspiration is more important than information." Thus at the same time as historians of education were seeking to inspire, socialize, and educate teachers with accounts of the lives of the great educators, and the celebration of the achievement of universal schooling, J.R. Seeley, Regius Professor of History at Cambridge from 1869 to 1895, was promoting his vision of the historian as the educator, particularly the political educator, of the whole nation. The opening sentences of his influential work *The Expansion of England*, published in 1883, which sold 80,000 copies in two years and remained in print until 1956, declared "that history, while it should be scientific in its method, should pursue a practical object. That is, it should not merely gratify the reader's curiosity about the past, but modify his view of the present and his forecast of the future."<sup>13</sup>

Seeley's forecast of the future was that although Russia and the USA would be the natural superpowers of the twentieth century, if England (or rather Britain) wished to join them, a British Empire must be created, an empire based upon peace, good government, railways, Christianity, and improved plumbing, an empire which could be justified by British history. Thus British history, as taught in universities and schools for the first 60 years of the twentieth century, was cast in a broadly self-congratulatory and heroic, high political mould. Emphasis was placed upon the role of Britain as a peacemaker in India and other colonized

countries, and as an opponent of tyrants from Napoleon to Hitler. Good government was exemplified by Westminster, the "mother of parliaments." Britain's role as leader in the first industrial revolution, confirmed by the Great Exhibition of 1851, was seen as proof of the nation's technical and entrepreneurial skills. Missionaries like Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, and Livingstone were hailed for having carried the Christian message into the darkest corners both of England and of the Empire.

This is not to say that in the first 60 years of the twentieth century English history, and historical writing and teaching, were unproblematic, or devoid of controversy.<sup>14</sup> Many issues, however, including those of gender and social class, were considered to be subordinate to the greater themes attendant upon England's greater role. Where such themes were considered—for example the place of girls and women of all social classes, and males of the working classes, in education, in the professions, or the political sphere—they were considered within an anodyne, ameliorist framework. As Rob Gilbert has shown, particularly in respect of history taught in schools, an ideology of history and of historical writing was created which sought "to explain the process by which individual agents and social change have addressed and largely solved the problems of equality, opportunity, mobility and material welfare."<sup>15</sup>

Such a framework and ideology supported a style of history which glossed over many of the problems in English education and of society, whilst applauding the efforts of moderate individuals and groups who worked through traditional institutions and procedures. Thus, for example, in history of education, attention was drawn to the work of Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale, and of the two pioneering girls' schools over which they presided, rather than to a society and system which excluded virtually all girls from public secondary schooling until the twentieth century. Emphasis upon the achievements of moderate reformers, upon progress, indeed, was also a means of masking continuing problems and deficiencies. Above all, perhaps, history was conceived of as one history, an entity. It was a national history, writ large into an imperial history. It was a means of socializing children, and adults, into their roles, and of explaining that whatever contemporary problems might exist, the ameliorist process which was clearly visible in English history, as opposed to the revolutionary and reversionary histories of many other countries, would prevail. All would turn out for the best, as it had done in the past.

In 1989 this view of one history has been challenged from several sides. Historians from those countries colonized by Britain have shown how British rule often distorted and weakened the natural political, cultural, and economic development of the colonized to promote the interests of the colonizers. Even within Britain itself historians like Bernard Porter have sought to rationalize the disappearance of empire, much as Seeley had sought to rationalize its appearance one hundred years earlier. Porter argued that the acquisition of empire was a sign of weakness rather than of strength, and that it soon caused Britain to neglect



further weaknesses in her economy and society, and to pursue a grandiose role at exorbitant expense, as recently in the case of "fortress Falklands."<sup>16</sup>

At the same time historians of, and from, the working classes have provided a different perspective, with history from below. In terms of the history of education, a history which has been fed into the central areas of historical debate, this has meant searching out the historical priorities and achievements of the working classes, as in the studies of Humphries<sup>17</sup> and Gardner,<sup>18</sup> and then seeking to show how such priorities and achievements have been frustrated by the formal educational system imposed from above and marginalized by its historians. Thus in recent years, in some courses, the celebratory textbooks have been dispensed with, and students in history of education classes have been asked not so much to acknowledge the achievements of the state in bringing great benefits to the children of the working classes through the creation of a national system of education, but rather to appreciate how such a system was specifically designed to ensure the continuing superiority of the elite groups in society. Prospective and practising teachers may also be invited to consider how this system fails working-class children, and to reflect upon their own roles as agents in this process.

Similarly feminist history has raised fundamental questions in showing the sexist nature of the very processes of English history and of English historical writing. For example even the working-class or labour historians of the 1960s and 1970s were still essentially interested in the experiences of "the working man." Formal English historiography remained essentially patriarchal both in tone and direction. Thus John Kenyon's widely-acclaimed history of the historical profession in England from the Renaissance to the present day was entitled *The History Men*,<sup>19</sup> and in his preface the author remarked, with no further comment, that his work was an attempt to expand and bring up to date Butterfield's volume of 1944 entitled *The Englishman and his History*.<sup>20</sup>

Thus much of English historical scholarship has been criticized as being seriously flawed in respect of its omissions and assumptions, about such dimensions as race, class, and gender. The one best history, along with the one best history of education, has been shown to be, in many respects, racist, elitist, and sexist. As yet, however, no widely-accepted, reformulated history has been constructed. Indeed such a reformulation may never be possible again. Instead there are now competing, or perhaps complementary, histories and historians—black histories, feminist histories, Marxist and neo-Marxist histories, oral histories, heritage histories, academic histories, school histories, etc.

This revolutionary change in the nature and status of history is not of course simply an English phenomenon. Marc Ferro's analysis of history as perceived in societies around the globe led him to conclude that "universal history is dead; it died from being a European mirage, which reflected Europe's own illusions as to her own destiny."<sup>21</sup> A similar phenomenon has been identified in Canada: witness, for example, J. Donald Wilson's statement that "when it comes to a discussion of the history of education in Canada...it is important to be cognizant

that there is no one history, as C.E. Phillips implied in his monumental *The Development of Public Education in Canada*, but rather many histories."<sup>22</sup>

Divisions amongst historians are complex, and reflect many of the general divisions in society and in education. There are clearly tensions between historians in the older universities on the one hand, and those in the newer foundations and poly-technics on the other. Gaps have also appeared between history teachers in schools and those in higher education, and between these and members of the general public and the popular press. The Historical Association, founded in 1906, open to all persons interested in the study and teaching of history, and the natural body to speak for historians, has become instead a battleground for warring groups. Even if some consensus is reached amongst these groups, it seems likely that central government will impose its own particular brand of history upon the school curriculum.

Historians in the older universities are more likely to be committed to traditional historical courses, to the study of high politics, and to a concern for "history for its own sake." Many such historians are sceptical of the changes which have been taking place in school history, and welcome the return to a more hierarchical model. In their view it is the job of the university historian to determine the historical record, and the job of the school teacher to receive such wisdom and present it in simplified form to school pupils. Alan Beattie's *History in Peril: May Parents Preserve It*, is typical of this genre. Published by the right-wing Centre for Policy Studies, itself founded in 1974 by Margaret Thatcher and Keith Joseph, the former Secretary of State for Education, this pamphlet, not surprisingly, noted with approval "that history is in a relatively healthy state in the public schools."<sup>23</sup>

Historians in polytechnics and in some of the newer universities, on the other hand, are more likely to support both the reformers of school history, and historical analysis based on the perspectives of those who have been excluded from power in English history. For example, in the pages of *Past and Present*, P.R. Coss of Newcastle Polytechnic has launched a fierce attack on an earlier article by David Cannadine of Christ's College, Cambridge.<sup>24</sup> Coss focusses on the elitism of university historians who formed the History at the Universities Defence Group, but resisted pressures to include within such a group historians working in polytechnics and other public-sector institutions, who in consequence had to establish a separate Campaign for Public Sector History. Coss also points to the hierarchical nature of the Historical Association, which he sees as dominated by university historians who believe that "true research is a matter for the professionals and is to be conducted preferably in a consensus manner (appropriate to scholar-gentlemen?); lay persons are, by implication, to be excluded therefrom. Their role, and that of the schools, is to receive the fruits of research and reappraisal in readable and neatly packaged form!"<sup>25</sup>

Typically, the major centre for historical research into all aspects of women in society in England, the Fawcett Library, which includes some 40,000 books, pamphlets, and leaflets, 700 periodical titles, and 500 boxes of archives, is located

not in an ancient university, but at the City of London Polytechnic, in London's East End. The UK-based co-editor of the new journal *Gender and History*, to be launched by Basil Blackwell in 1989, Leonore Davidoff, is a member of the department of Sociology at Essex University, one of the most radical of the new universities. William Lamont, an historian from Sussex, another of the universities founded in the 1960s, who has himself been involved with teacher education, has taken issue both with Cannadine and with the Historical Association. He deplores, as have many school teachers, the Historical Association's list of 60 key topics in British and world history as a basis for a core curriculum, and concludes: "We have come from a discredited tradition of facts-that-must-be-learned chronology. Where we have gone wrong is in allowing our representatives to convey to central government the message that this is a tradition which can be revived without sacrificing our historical integrity. Where we ought to be going is in the opposite direction to the Historical Association."<sup>26</sup>

The major initiative in school history in recent years has been the Schools History Project (originally the Schools Council History Project), which was established in the 1970s. The essence of the SHP approach has been to teach historical process rather than historical content. Key historical concepts and skills have been identified—for example, those of the identification, selection, and use of evidence, awareness of bias, empathy, causation and motivation, change and continuity—and children have been assessed upon their progress in historical understanding rather than upon their historical knowledge. In 1986 one issue of the Historical Association's journal, *Teaching History*,<sup>27</sup> was devoted entirely to an assessment of the progress made by SHP in its first ten years.

Not all school teachers, however, are content with SHP, and the Project has been assailed by traditionalists as well as by reformers. For example, Stewart Deuchar, author of another Centre for Policy Studies pamphlet on history teaching,<sup>28</sup> and a leading member of the Campaign for Real Education, has attacked both SHP and GCSE history on the grounds that they are designed not to promote true independence of thought among pupils, but to undermine traditional English culture, and to replace it with subversive perspectives. In a letter to *The Daily Telegraph* in criticism of the first GCSE history papers, he has written "all the talk about 'skills' and 'understanding' and 'empathy' is pure humbug. The idea that traditional history simply consisted of reproducing facts has been deliberately fostered by the education establishment as an excuse to bring in mischievous nonsense. Their real aim is to leave children with no sense of identity and no awareness of their cultural heritage." This gap, he believes, is being filled by "the trendy opinions of the educational establishment, which are not necessarily shared by the wider community."<sup>29</sup> Two other letters which appeared on the same day in this right-wing newspaper attacked the GCSE examination for its Marxist basis. Quentin Davies, a Conservative MP, declared that many of the questions could be answered with no reference to facts, but rather invited "the repetition of received caricatures, based on the crude Marxist assumption that class determines consciousness."<sup>30</sup>

In July 1988 the Centre for Policy Studies launched yet another furious attack on the New History. In his foreword Deuchar declared that such history lay "at the heart of Britain's cultural crisis." The main thrust of this new publication, entitled *Errors and Evils of the New History* and written by Helen Kedourie, was to castigate the SHP, and particularly the evaluation of the project by Denis Shemilt. Kedourie called for a return to "the more modest aim of communicating to children a picture of the past as it is established for the time being, and the cultivation of skills necessary to inquire further should a child be so inclined...."<sup>31</sup>

The neutralist position, however, has also been attacked by those reformers who are seeking to promote greater awareness of the factors of class, gender, and race, both in contemporary and in historical analysis. Thus it has been argued that, although SHP has supposedly allowed pluralism to flourish and a multiplicity of interpretations and histories to be presented, nevertheless the actual structure and materials of the project are still essentially white, male, and overconcerned with high politics. Though, in their defence, proponents of SHP have argued that the materials, which are largely a product of the 1970s, are being updated to take account of the new awareness of such issues as class and gender, such changes only reinforce the concept of socially-constructed, rather than objective, historical knowledge and procedures. Thus even the basic ethos which underlies SHP, and its extension into the 17-18 year age range with the Cambridge History Project (CHP), that of acquiring skills and concepts which are universally applicable to any historical study, cannot avoid the issue of values in society. As Bourdillon and Bartley have asked, "If the main aim of teaching history is to develop an understanding of these concepts it may be interesting to ask if a course based on the history of black women would be considered as a balanced and neutral curriculum?"<sup>32</sup> In answer to this question Jenkins and Brickley have argued that it would be quite possible to seek to promote historical skills and concepts while studying a syllabus in which the choice of topics and the style of approach were taken from a black, Marxist, feminist perspective. Such a syllabus, however, is not likely to be found in an English school at present, and certainly not when the core history curriculum is introduced under the present government. Why, they ask, is that so? "Well, not because it wouldn't be history because it certainly would be, but because, to put it starkly, black, marxist, feminists don't have the *power* to put it there."<sup>33</sup>

The concern of Kenneth Baker, and of the Conservative government, however, a concern reflected both in the abolition of the ILEA and in the assumption of power by the central government over the school curriculum, is precisely that history of the black, Marxist, feminist variety is being, or beginning to be, taught in the schools of the capital and elsewhere. If, as Seeley maintained, the historian is the political educator of the nation, then a government which has taken a whole series of measures to promote its own political philosophy in the adult sphere of life, is not going to allow that strategy to be undermined by the promotion of a different philosophy within the schools. As Giroux has written, "Historical consciousness is acceptable to the prevailing dominant interest when it can be

used to buttress the existing social order. It becomes dangerous when its truth content highlights contradictions in the given society....<sup>34</sup>

In October 1988, in winding up the education debate at the Conservative party conference, Kenneth Baker signalled his determination to ensure that historical consciousness, as transmitted in schools, would once again be used to buttress, rather than to challenge, the existing social, economic, and political order. He advised that all children would learn about the key events in British history, and provided some examples. These included: the establishment of the Anglican Church in the sixteenth century, the development of Parliament in the seventeenth, the subsequent industrial revolution, the extension of the franchise, and "the spread of Britain's influence for good throughout the world." "We should not be ashamed of our history," he declared. "Our pride in our past gives us our confidence to stand tall in the world today."

Thus, in conclusion, in the England of 1989 the particular features which provide the context for the debate about the place and nature of history, both in society in general, and in the formal educational system, may be identified as follows:

1. A nation which has become deeply confused by the loss of its traditional assumptions and bearings—the ending of empire; the advent of previously-ruled ethnic groups and cultures to its shores; the onset of severe, relative economic decline and of regional divisiveness; the breakdown of traditional patterns of faith, family, employment, and housing; a crisis of masculinity brought about by changes in the balance of gender power. Such a society has produced the English football hooligan—white, male, racist, violent, xenophobic.

2. Political parties which are largely based upon social class and regional differences.

3. A central government which, while in general seeking to return education to the market place, is also determined to exercise central control over the curricula of the formal educational system. This it has sought to do by going back to the subjects contained in the Secondary School regulations of 1904, and simply imposing this framework upon all children aged 5-16 in maintained schools.<sup>35</sup>

4. A central government which is particularly concerned about what is being taught in history and which seeks, apparently, in restoring history to a central place in the school curriculum, to use the image of a homogeneous and heroic past as a means of producing a more homogeneous and heroic present.

5. An historical profession which is deeply divided amongst itself.

In this situation, for a country like England which has no recent experience of a centrally controlled and directed curriculum, there is much to be gained from a study of the comparative perspective. Two examples may be cited, from East and West, of formal history syllabuses which proclaim considerable commitment to historical study as an objective pursuit of truth, but combine some basic assumptions about the wisdom of the prevailing political philosophy and the nature of society. In Hungary, the goals and objectives outlined for academic secondary schools are defined as being to help students to "make an independent

analysis of historical information, draw conclusions and make judgments, evaluate individual phenomena and recognize the connections between phenomena." Such a statement could well be applied to the aims of teaching history in England (or Canada) in 1988. The accompanying message that "students should know, understand and consciously undertake the obligations demanded of them by the building of socialism and communism," and "become active participants in socialist life,"<sup>36</sup> presumably could not. By contrast, or comparison, in California the new *History-Social Science Framework* of 1987 calls in Section 13 for teachers to present controversial issues honestly and accurately, and in Section 15 for critical thinking skills to be included at every level. Section 11, however, encourages the development of civic and democratic values, while Section 12 states that "this framework supports the frequent study and discussion of the fundamental principles embodied in the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights."<sup>37</sup> England in 1989, some 300 years on from its last "Glorious Revolution," urgently needs a new Bill of Rights, and an end to Whiggish history, and in this respect useful models are provided by the Canadian 1982 Charter of Rights and Bill C-93.

In his recent study of the American curriculum, Herbert Kliebard quoted with approval Carl Kaestle's comment that "public school systems are the result of contests between conflicting class and interest groups,"<sup>38</sup> a statement equally applicable to the construction of the curriculum. The historian of education in England, however, can point to the radical change which the 1988 Act has brought to the nature of those contests. Since 1870, and earlier, the twin themes of English history of education have been a gradual extension of the state education system, and a contrasting diminution in central control over its curriculum. The new legislation, at a stroke, reverses these two processes.

In the twentieth century hitherto, the relaxation of central control has meant that history has been taught in England for a variety of reasons—to promote historical skills, mental discipline, patriotism, peace, moral excellence, sheer interest. Since 1944 changes in the nature of educational institutions and of examinations, and changes in English society, have combined to produce a particular proliferation of purposes and styles of history teaching. In the last 15 years issues of class and gender have achieved a new prominence in English historical study and writing, and such historical analysis has been used to justify the promotion of changes in contemporary society. Overt entry into the political arena, however, has made history and historians a particular target for central control. Were historians to be united in their understanding of what history is, it would be difficult for any other agency to determine the content of the new history curriculum. Historians, however, have publicly proclaimed their own differences, and many of them have acknowledged the right of all groups to make their own histories.

Central government, the most powerful group in society, also has a view about history, and disputes amongst historians have led to the feeling that if the so-called experts cannot agree then common sense should prevail. Common

sense for a Conservative government means that, however valid the causes of greater equality in terms of social class and gender might be, they should not be systematically advanced by teachers in school history lessons to the detriment of other aims. The great public interest in history in England—an interest reflected in visits to places of historical interest, in commemoration of historical events, in the reading of historical fact and fiction, and in a nostalgia for the perceived confidence, security, style, and graciousness of the past—is consistent with the heritage approach to history which the present government is keen to foster. Pamphlets from the Centre for Policy Studies, and carefully orchestrated newspaper campaigns, are designed to promote the cause of traditional history and traditional values.

It is not as yet clear whether the final rounds of this contest over what history and whose history shall be taught, will take place within the working group appointed to determine the history curriculum, between that working group and the Secretary of State, or at the ballot box. What is clear is that the nature of the contest has been radically changed. A government which has deprived disunited teachers of their negotiating rights and simply imposed new contracts, salaries, and conditions of work, and which has abolished tenure for university staff, is not likely to flinch from the task of imposing a new, or rather an old, history upon disunited historians. A national curriculum, including history, for schools and colleges is one thing. A national curriculum, however, which proscribes objective consideration of such issues as class and gender, and requires adherence to a particular ideology, whether from right or from left, would be another. The dangers of excessive central control in such matters have recently been shown in the USSR. There, it is reported, last summer's history examinations were cancelled, as a result of the need to rewrite the Stalin and Brezhnev eras of Soviet history.

## NOTES

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