"Further than ever before...": NEW RIGHT IDEOLOGY AND EDUCATION[1]

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On the eve of her third election victory in 1987, Margaret Thatcher said, "We are going much further with education than we ever thought of doing before."[2] Within a year she had rushed through the 1988 Education Reform Act to round off what many saw as a sustained assault on most of the assumptions and attitudes which had underpinned the provision of education in England since 1944 and possibly for most of the twentieth century. My purpose in this paper is to attempt to unravel something of the nature of these events; to raise questions about the extent to which what was happening in England was part of a world-wide phenomenon; and to speculate on why these things happened when they did and as they did.

It is possible to identify four central themes in the Thatcherite educational agenda: they overlap but are distinct. First was the appeal to market forces, which in education means making schools, colleges, and even cost centres within individual institutions more directly responsible for their budgeting. It meant in practice that competitiveness between schools was sharpened and put onto a new basis. It meant that the power of those agencies such as, in England, Local Education Authorities (whose historic role had been to ensure the even-handedness and fairness of grant distribution), was semi-permanently eroded. It meant that the performance of schools, colleges, and departments was subjected to closer scrutiny and measured by objective criteria such as external examination results which were to be publicly advertised.

Second, and set against this (at first glance quite contradictorily), the determination of central government to exercise control over the working of the system was a strong element in Thatcherite thinking. This was to be achieved through the rationing of funding, the imposition of a national curriculum, and the direct linkage to their funding of the schools' perceived success in delivering that curriculum. The use of directives on the detailed working of various aspects of the system also ensured this control. Another element was the raising of the profile of the governmental inspectorate and the use of their reports to determine

1. This is a revised version of a paper given to the Canadian History of Education Society's Annual Conference, St. John's, Newfoundland, October 1994.
2. C. Chitty, *Towards a New Education System: The Victory of the New Right* (London: Falmer Press, 1989), 196.

the future of institutions. The inspectorate had been a semi-autonomous quango; it became the Office of Standards for Education with a tighter remit and far less power to criticize government policy. As the nature of this inspectorate changed it became possible for industrialists and businessmen to offer their services as inspectors, so drawing some of the sharpest critics of the school system into its supervision. These moves to make the school system more accountable were underpinned by the call for efficiency in the use of scarce public resources.

Following from this, a third element in the Thatcherite assault was the appeal to a sense of nationhood, which was particularly significant in specific subject areas such as religion, history, geography, and modern languages, but which underpinned government edicts on education. Schooling was to be used to confirm and enhance a sense of nationhood, which, among other things, marginalized the growing ethnic minorities. In England this meant particularly a confirmation of the national religion (a particular version of Protestant Christianity) and a focus on a very nationalistic and introspective history.

The fourth major theme of the New Right assault on education was the reinforcement of a demand which had been made in different ways for over a century. This was that education should come to play a more active role in the regeneration of the economy through the promotion of technology, in this case of a new technology. Economic difficulties were being attributed by some commentators to the failure of schools to develop an appropriately trained labour force and so there developed an emphasis on information technology, the use of computers in schools, and also a readiness to encourage specialist schools (City Technology Colleges) with a brief to develop skills which were immediately applicable in employment.

The rhetoric around these four key elements had several clearly identifiable themes. Perhaps the most frequently heard was that the education system and those working within it should be more accountable to their publics. No less powerful was the promotion in public statements of education as one of the keys to national recovery. So it follows that these policies were derived from and depended on the view of a nation in decline, both economically and spiritually. This perspective involved harking back to some golden age when things were better: in general terms within Thatcherism it meant an appeal to "Victorian values"[3] and in respect of schooling it involved a concept of a better past when teaching was focused on "the basics" and when selective grammar schools transmitted high culture to those who were to be the leaders of society. There was no formal link to any religious revival, although it is worth remarking that the 1980s was a decade which saw a resurgence of fundamentalism in religion

3. M. Thatcher, "Those Good Old Days," *The Standard*, 15 Apr. 1983; see also for an analysis of the elements in Thatcherite policy, A. Seldon, "The Conservative Party Since 1945," in *Britain Since 1945*, ed. T. Gourvish and A. O'Day (London: Macmillan, 1991).

and politics on a world scale. However, the phenomenon of Thatcherism was certainly marked by strong anti-Communist sentiment and many of the pronouncements on education may be thought of as quasi-religious in their invocation of a set of beliefs and attitudes.

A brief account of the chronology of this assault on education in Britain shows at once that it was by no means confined to the late 1980s, but had a much longer pedigree. Several commentators have identified the "Great Debate" on education, initiated by Labour Prime Minister James Callaghan in his October 1976 Ruskin speech, as marking the start of a more direct governmental interest in schooling.[4] The 1977 Taylor report, commissioned by the same Labour administration, called for the closer involvement of parents in running schools. When she became Prime Minister in 1979, Thatcher seized on this recommendation as the basis for her first educational legislation, which, in 1980, confirmed the statutory right of parents to election as school governors.

There followed a succession of initiatives which, in sum, transformed the educational landscape.[5] The Assisted Places Scheme redirected fifty million pounds annually from the state sector to the private as selected pupils were funded through private schools: effectively, a government supplement to the private sector. Inspectors' reports were now to be published, submitting schools to press coverage of what previously had been private criticisms. Also, during this early period of Thatcher government, the funding of education was put under heavy pressure, forcing schools to look to industry or charity for financial help. In March 1981 the funding of the education service by central government was cut, while the "rate capping" of local authorities introduced a few months later made it virtually impossible for them to top up any shortfall.

Then, in 1982, the Manpower Services Commission was used to introduce the Technical and Vocational Initiative by which technical courses and new qualification routes were set up. This tied in with a drive to ensure that all schools had microcomputers. TVEI did mean significant new income for many schools but also meant that well-established patterns of funding were broken down as schools were made to look to a growing variety of sources of revenue depending upon which particular needs were to be met.

During the mid-1980s several initiatives were sustained at the same time. First, Keith Joseph floated the idea of educational vouchers. This had been developing as an aspiration for several years within the Conservative "think tanks" although the general party response made vouchers unworkable at this time. Then the 1984 North of England Conference was used by Joseph, then Secretary of State, to attack the professionalism of many teachers and their conditions of service. This identified the central issue which remained in dispute

4. See, for example, B. Simon, *Education and the Social Order, 1940-1990* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), 446-51.

5. For a more detailed account of these developments see ibid., 427-549.

during a two-year period of acrimony between government and teachers' unions, involving protracted industrial action. It was only ended by the removal of Joseph as Secretary of State and the imposition of a unilateral solution by his successor, Kenneth Baker. Offering the sop of more money for the education service, Baker ended the industrial action at a stroke by imposing the 1987 Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act, which summarily removed most of the teachers' negotiating rights.

It was in 1984 too that the restructuring of teacher training began in earnest with Circular 3/84 specifying the content of all initial teacher training courses, and subjecting them to governmental inspection through the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. The 1986 Education Act gave two further powers to parents. Now the composition of governing bodies was specified, with local business interests being drawn in. Future employers were given a direct stake in the running of schools. These reconstructed governing bodies were to be given and to make public the specified syllabuses followed by schools. Their power to suspend teachers was confirmed. Further, they were given the responsibility of ensuring that there was no political bias within schools and also that sex education was provided in a form which projected "the values of family life." Also in 1986, the introduction of City Technology Colleges was announced at the Tory Party Conference. These were to be specialist schools of technology funded by industry.

The climax of this Thatcherite interest in education came in the 1988 Education Reform Act. This followed the suppression of the teachers' industrial action and the consequent impotence of the teacher unions, and came hard on the heels of Thatcher's success in the 1987 election. It was at this time that she promised to go further in education than ever before, and the mechanism was to be new legislation. The bill was published in November 1987 following a two-month period of consultation (during which three van-loads of protest letters arrived at the Department of Education and Science) which had coincided with the 1987 summer vacation. The act introduced a National Curriculum, and enforced the testing of pupils at four key stages with results to be made public to enable league tables of schools. It also ended the Inner London Education Authority, in the process further threatening the viability and future of all local authorities. Perhaps most importantly, what the Act did was to set school against school by making their funding in large part dependent on their ability to attract students. If vouchers had proved unacceptable, to make the student himself or herself the voucher was now politically feasible. This the Act did and so introduced an element of managerialism and publicity to the running of schools.

Two further initiatives are worth mentioning and may be seen as part of this New Right initiative in education. One was the concurrent drive to control and restructure higher education, beginning in earnest with the 1981 financial cuts, involving a restructuring of the quangos responsible for university funding, and leading ultimately, in the early 1990s, to the redesignation of all polytechnics as universities, thus doubling, at a stroke, the number of institutions in the university sector. Several other initiatives made the higher education sector more answer-

able to government and public, notably quality assurance of taught courses and the formal assessment of research productivity, much of this based on the ability to win funding. Finally, the restructuring of external examinations at 16 plus, long debated, was implemented in 1989 with the introduction of the GCSE examination. While on the one hand the greater emphasis on continuous assessment and coursework seemed to militate against the worst evils of formal written examinations, it was also, in reality, a gift to those members of the middle classes who had more resources to provide a supportive home environment and might have more chance to give various kinds of practical help.

This thumbnail sketch of Thatcherite initiatives in education in England raises four central issues. First, just how new was this New Right? Did these developments really amount to anything more than simply another increment in right-wing resistance to popular schooling which had gone on in one form or another for over a century? Or did they mark a sea change in the politics of education? Second, how universal were these trends? Was Thatcher's interest in schooling part of a phenomenon covering at least the whole of the developed world, or was it unique? The view we may take of this second issue clearly relates to and colours our perception of a third, which is the speculation as to just why these things happened when they did. Finally, we may ask whether it is possible to discern any long-term implications for school systems in these developments, a question that leads directly to a consideration of the changing role of the historian of education.

How New Was The New Right?

Most commentators so far have identified a sea change somewhere around the mid-1970s in the politics of education in England.[6] Equally, there can be no doubt that since the coming of industrialization there had been a succession of commentators who would set limits to the schooling to be offered to the common people. Andrew Bell, one of the enthusiasts for popular education, wrote of his Madras School in 1808:

> It is not proposed that all of them be taught to write or cipher....Utopian schemes for the universal diffusion of general knowledge would soon...confound that distinction of ranks and classes of society on which the general welfare hinges.[7]

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6. See, for example, Chitty, *Towards a New Education System*, 72-106.
7. F. Smith, *A History of English Elementary Education, 1760-1902* (London: University of London, 1931), 79.

Similarly, in 1861, James Fraser cautioned that

> even if it were possible, I doubt it would be desirable, with a view to the real interests of the peasant boy, to keep him at school till he was 14 or 15 years of age.[8]

By the twentieth century this argument was muted but the attitudes it reflected continued to inform government. R.L. Morant, before the First World War, was clearly concerned to distinguish elite (grammar school) education from popular (elementary),[9] and even so well-known a figure as R.A. Butler, architect of the 1944 Education Act, suggested during the 1950s that fee paying should be re-introduced for various forms of schooling which previously had been beyond the reach of the common people.[10] By this time the criterion of merit (usually found through IQ tests) was that most commonly used to deny universality in schooling. But none of the rhetoric around the New Right is about limiting education; that would have been politically impossible after the widespread acceptance of popular schooling during the post-war era of social democracy. New Right rhetoric is concerned with redirecting education, with its restructuring.

So, while elements of New Right thinking seem to hark back to an earlier period, and the overall effect of the New Right may be to reinforce social divisions in education which have existed for a very long time, it does seem that the changed conditions of the post-war world (in particular the economic transformations of the 1960s and 1970s) promoted the view that education was one of the keys to the modernization of society and that constituted a significant part of the agenda of the New Right. The call to open up education to market forces was also new and tied in with a more general New Right rhetoric. In education the result was experiments in local management which were novel and different in kind from the forms of local control which had evolved during the nineteenth century and been adapted during the early twentieth century. But the call for a technical education which would keep education in step with the latest technology was an old one, first voiced more than a century earlier, as was the expectation that schools would be a key arena for the transmission of national culture.

There is, in brief, no simple answer to the question of how new is the New Right. Parts of its agenda are historically very familiar, parts of it seem quite novel. But what was not new was the impact of New Right policy, since it meant a sharpening of existing divisions between the education received by the better

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8. J.S. Maclure, *Educational Documents: England and Wales, 1816-1967* (London: Methuen, 1965), 75.
9. Roy Lowe, "The Divided Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 8, 2 (1976): 142.
10. Simon, *Education*, 163, and Roy Lowe, *Education in the Post-War Years* (London: Routledge, 1988), 89.

off (the new post-war middle classes) and the dispossessed. In this sense the New Right meant more of the same and it used schooling to confirm, more sharply than ever before, the divisions in society.

How Universal Were These Trends?

Moving on to the second question, it is clear that what took place in England was in reality part of a worldwide phenomenon. Certainly there is a close mirror in North America as well as some very pertinent comparisons with Australia. The decentralization of decision-making is a common characteristic. In the U.S.A. there have been several examples, during the last decade, of school site management being introduced. In Florida for example in 1979 the Management and Training Act enabled schools in Dade County and elsewhere to assume control of their own budgets.[11] There have been similar initiatives in Canada. In Australia, where state administration is particularly powerful, there has been a conscious effort, especially in Victoria and Western Australia, to devolve economic responsibility to individual schools and school districts.

This decentralization and increased appeal to market forces is a powerful example of education mirroring industrial practice. Multinational corporations, threatened by Pacific Rim developments and in particular the success of Japanese manufacturers whose decision-making and economic responsibility are devolved to small identifiable units, have sought to confirm the cost-effectiveness of each of their component elements. The model has been transmitted particularly deftly to public health and education.

The extent to which central government has become the arbiter of these changes clearly does vary from place to place. This is to be anticipated. Historically, both in Canada and the United States, as well as Australia, state or provincial power and autonomy is respected by central government. In this situation two things follow: first, it is less likely that national or federal government will seek to intervene to the extent it has in Britain. Second, this leaves the way open for greater assertiveness at state level either by the local legislature itself or by non-governmental agencies such as the industrial lobby which have the opportunity to be much more vocal and to exercise far more direct influence. This appears to be the case in both Canada and the United States. So, if the English experience has not been exactly replicated elsewhere in the developed world, it is certainly true that education systems generally have become increasingly

11. T.B. Timar, "The Politics of School Restructuring," in *Education Politics for the New Century*, ed. D.E. Mitchell and M.E. Goertz (London: Falmer, 1990), 67.

susceptible to external pressures and increasingly answerable to their publics in ways which have not been the case at earlier periods.

The appeal to a sense of nationhood, and the readiness to use education systems to impose a particular stereotype of the national community, seem to be fairly universal. In the U.S., Secretary of Education William J. Bennett stressed in 1986 that

> common culture, common values, common knowledge and a common language are essential to sharing dreams and to discussing differences. There are some things that we must all learn and learn together.[12]

In Britain and the United States during the 1980s there was a close similarity in government rhetoric on history teaching. Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education to Margaret Thatcher, said in 1984:

> One of the aims of studying history is to understand the development of the shared values which are a distinctive feature of British society and culture...an element of national history is an inescapable part of any balanced school history course....British history has something to offer which cannot be conveyed through American history or Caribbean history.[13]

A few years later the National Curriculum called on teachers to "help pupils, particularly on courses on British history, towards an understanding of the development over time of social and cultural values."[14] It was Thatcher herself who said in 1977:

> The Victorian age, which saw the burgeoning of free enterprise, also saw the greatest expansion of voluntary philanthropic activity of all kinds, the new hospitals, new schools, technical colleges, universities, new foundations for orphans, missionary societies....The Victorian age has been very badly treated in socialist propaganda.[15]

Bennett mirrored all this in the United States. At the N.E.H. he authored *To Reclaim a Legacy*, claiming that some humanities professors presented their

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12. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 Nov. 1984, 16-21.
13. Sir Keith Joseph, "Why Teach History in School?" *The Historian* 2 (Spring 1984): 12.
14. National Curriculum History Working Group, *Final Report* (Apr. 1990), Department of Education and Science.
15. M. Thatcher, foreword to H. Thomas, *History, Capitalism and Freedom* (Centre for Policy Studies, 1979).

subjects "in a tendentious, ideological manner." He emphasized the need to make Western culture central to the curriculum because "our society is the product and we the inheritors of it." As Secretary of Education he called on schools to transmit the nation's social and political values:

> If taught honestly and truthfully, the study of history will give our students a grasp of their nation, a nation that the study of history and current events will reveal is still, indeed, the last best hope on earth. Our students should know that. They must know that because nations can be destroyed from without they can also be destroyed from within.[16]

This consideration extends to religious and ethical issues. On both sides of the Atlantic there have been appeals for the transmission of "family values" in school and, just as Thatcher's government insisted on Christianity as an element in school instruction, so too Bennett called for

> a common body of ethical knowledge that, even if it has religious origin, serves the purpose of maintaining and strengthening devotion to our country.[17]

The fourth theme of New Right thinking, calling for closer links between school and industry, is certainly an international phenomenon. There are common chords across the developed world. It hardly seems to matter whether it is the TVEI initiative in England, emphasizing technology in schools, or the Grandpré Report in Canada calling for a new skilled workforce as "the key to competitiveness and growth,"[18] or, in the United States, the Congress Office of Technology Assessment Report, which claimed that the "key ingredient in the new information society is a productive system for teaching and learning."[19] And these tensions in public debate are only the tip of an iceberg made up of thousands of conversations, such as those which took place within my own family when my father, an engineer, found it difficult to come to terms with my pursuit of history as a career. Our conversations on this issue were, I see in retrospect, a replication of such conversations which were taking place worldwide. The New Right was simply taking on board a familiar dialogue and developing it in the public arena.

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16. W.J. Bennett, "Lost Generation: Why America's Children are Strangers in Their Own Land," *Policy Review* 33 (Summer 1985): 43.
17. Ibid.
18. J. Noble, "High Tech Skills," in *It's Our Knowledge: Labour, Public Education and Skills Training*, ed. J. Davis et al. (Papers presented at the Ontario Federation of Labour Conference on Education and Training, May 1989, privately printed, 1989), 62.
19. Ibid., 61.

Why Did These Things Happen When They Did?

Some explanations of the timing of the moment when the New Right ideology appeared have focused on the emergence of new technologies and on the changing demands of the labour market. Doug Noble, for example, is one of several commentators who see the efforts to introduce a new technology in schools and to make curricula more relevant to contemporary concerns as part of a much broader emphasis on investment in human capital as a key to future national development.[20] Although his analysis is based on Canada, this is as true of Europe as it is of North America. The most cynical commentators see this as an element in what is little short of a conspiracy by multinational companies and by industrialists to generate a docile labour force and an acquiescent market. It is possible, as Noble suggests, that the whole computer literacy movement is no more and no less than a vast marketing confidence trick by the computer manufacturers which has a very limited impact on the future quality of life of school pupils.[21]

It is certainly the case, if we focus on the English experience, that one key element in the rise of this New Right thinking was a growing sense that schooling had become disfunctional during the 1960s and early 1970s; or, in other words, that the changes taking place in recruitment to jobs, especially first jobs, were causing a mismatch between the qualifications, skills, and interests with which children were leaving school, on the one hand, and the demands of employers, on the other. This disfunctionality seemed to apply particularly to the quickly growing "high tech" sector of the economy and was certainly one basis for the criticisms of schools which were being voiced increasingly by those on the political Right.[22]

But, whilst this might constitute part of an analysis of the rise of the New Right, it is surely not in itself a sufficient or complete one. There are other key elements in any full explanation. One of them is the growing awareness of tensions between the public and private sectors of the economy. Patricia Marchak has written of the growth of

> a middle class which has its foundation in the universities, colleges, mass media and the public sector...dependent on the welfare state for its employment...creating a climate of discontent with commercial activity.

20. Ibid., 61-66.
21. Ibid., 73-77.
22. Simon, *Education*, 192 and 198.

> By turning on the intellectuals, media and public sector, the New Right implies that the working class is the natural ally of the ruling class.[23]

This consideration has clear regional and geographic implications. In North America it involves what Marchak calls "the conservative sunbelt coalition versus the Northeastern liberal alliance."[24] In Britain this may be construed crudely as the North-South divide which distinguishes the old industrial areas from the South-East where new industry and the professions are much more strongly in evidence. This contrast was reflected during the Thatcher years in clear-cut voting patterns. Thatcher held the South; Labour's seats were increasingly in Scotland and the North. It follows from this that another element in the explanation of her educational policies is that they sought to deliver an educational system which rewarded her political constituents at the cost of opponents. This may have been reflected in the United States where similar voting patterns, reflecting socio-economic contrasts, were confirmed during the 1980s.

It is worth pointing out, though, that just as Reaganism reached out to seek the support of blue-collar workers in old, threatened industries, so too did Thatcher make an appeal well beyond the predominantly middle-class areas in the South which were the traditional heartlands of Toryism. The essentially contradictory nature of this New Right ideology made it appear to have something to offer to disparate elements in society. For a brief period, those who felt most threatened, workers in fear for their jobs, the growing numbers of new poor, were offered a government which claimed to understand their plight and which offered scapegoats: one of those scapegoats was education. It was this unholy alliance of working class with the emergent professionals, all of whom found attractive elements in the New Right package, which helped to make the restructuring of schooling so pervasive.

Another element in any explanation has to do with the structural changes which have taken place in the teaching profession itself. As schools and colleges became larger and more heavily bureaucratized and new power structures emerged, clear career routes through carefully graded jobs began to develop. This tended to make schools more managerial in several senses and may have resulted in the appearance of a new kind of professional who became habituated to performing not only his or her (most usually his!) immediate professional role but a set of defined tasks and chores which were seen to lead towards the next career rung. And this in turn may have generated a "can do" approach in some teachers and lecturers which helps to explain internal divisions within the profession in response to Thatcherism and which may also make more comprehensible the relative ease with which she steamrollered the teacher unions in 1985

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23. M.P. Marchak, *Ideological Perspectives on Canada* (Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1988), 191.
24. Ibid.

and 1986. David Tyack has made a similar point about developments in North America and has suggested that it is first-generation professionals, especially those drawn from rural backgrounds who pursued careers in urban settings, who were by and large most willing and eager to implement rightist policies within the schools.[25] Whether or not this was the case, the issues around teacher attitudes must be explored to elucidate the ways in which the profession itself was party to these transformations.

Three more deep-seated causal factors need to be taken into account if we are to understand fully the timing of these developments. First, new patterns of suburbanization which had developed since the Second World War involved the creation of contrasting residential areas, geographically discrete, making contrasting demands of their education systems. This was particularly true of Britain, but probably applies elsewhere. In England there were several factors at work. Areas of owner occupation were set against those suburbs where local councils built property for rent (council estates). This worked from the outset to identify "better" or "worse" suburbs. Within these contrasting districts other social contrasts multiplied. Certain kinds of council estate were most likely to contain larger families: the differing ratios of child dependency were heightened by the fact that these suburban areas became "age related" so that there were some districts with a much greater proportion of aged single residents. The growing ethnic minorities were also forced into residence in particular areas within the expanding towns. The multiplication of New Towns and overspill suburbs simply exacerbated the problems which followed from these trends. In brief, the patterns of suburbanization which developed generated contrasting areas within which there were differing demands of the local education system and differing abilities to support school systems through the payment of local rates.[26] This generated tensions and contrasts within cities and towns which predisposed towards a Thatcherite educational solution.

Another prerequisite of this new politics of education was the post-war transformation of the mass media. The "modernization" of the tabloid press, together with the growing influence of radio and television, generated what appeared to be, by the 1980s, sharper political contrasts and an ability to sloganize and to simplify issues as never before. This, too, was a world phenomenon, although once again, England seemed to lead the way. The collapse of the "middle-brow" newspaper market during the early 1960s (the *News Chronicle*, *Daily Herald*, *Sunday Dispatch*, and *Empire News* all disappeared at this time) and the rise of the tabloids generated a situation in which it was much easier for the press barons to propagandize a particular viewpoint. Further, the rhetoric of

25. This observation was made in an unpublished paper given to the AERA Conference at Boston, Spring 1990.

26. Roy Lowe, "Suburbs and Schools: The Generation of At-risk Children in Post-War Britain," *Aspects of Education* 50 (1994): 142-55.

newspapers such as the *Daily Mirror*, which had long campaigned for the elimination of poverty, was dislocated by the coming of affluence, so that, for survival, the press found it necessary to minister to and even define the fears and aspirations of the newly emerging middle class. Increasingly high on their agenda was the worry that the school system might fail to equip their children to aspire to their own newly won lifestyles. Several things followed from this concern. Reporting of the politics of education became increasingly sensationalized. The myth that standards were falling became a *cause célèbre* with the popular press and enabled the dramatization of numerous educational incidents such as the William Tyndale affair or the publication of the Bennett Report, which was used to suggest that traditional teaching methods were superior, even though the Report itself was far from unequivocal on this issue. Figures such as Rhodes Boyson, a Black Paper author, were lionized. The *Daily Mail* described him as "caring passionately about standards," whilst opponents of the Black Paper movement were dismissed as "political fanatics." Even the *Daily Mirror* was drawn into this critique, proclaiming in 1976 that "the brutal truth is that standards have fallen." This newspaper greeted the "Great Debate" in the same year with the banner headline "Crisis in the classroom."[27]

Third, we must see the coming of affluence during the post-war period, and with it of "consumerism," as another element which made the education system more susceptible to these political pressures. Between 1951 and 1983 real income doubled. The growth in the number of salaried occupations and with it the general increase in disposable income resulted in a steadily increasing proportion of the population being able to exercise choice in many areas of life which had not previously been questioned. Owner occupation meant enhanced choice of location. As people (or at least part of the population) came to exercise greater control over which suburb they inhabited, the nature of the schooling available in different parts of cities and conurbations became a factor influencing these decisions, especially for young parents. But, beyond this, the growing range and number of luxury goods worked to redefine citizenship. Whereas, in the early twentieth century, to participate in society meant either a pooling of scarce resources or an acceptance of austerity for most people, now the freedom to select became paramount. Increasingly, suppliers of services, as well as sellers of goods, found themselves accountable to their publics. Professionals and experts, whose work previously had been above question, began to find themselves involved in justification of what they were about. School-teaching, never seen as more than a marginal profession, proved to be particularly susceptible to these trends.

Although these explanations focus on Britain, which provides clear examples and may have led the way historically, each of them might apply, to greater or

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27. See Education Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *Unpopular Education* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 210-15.

lesser extent, to all of those countries which have participated in the lurch to the right in educational policy. The New Right, as applied to education, is a phenomenon which highlights for historians the dangers of approaches which focus on the experience of a single country without taking on board the broader intellectual and economic context.

Long-Term Implications

The long-term implications of these trends are doubtless many and are far from clear to us at this remove. What is already apparent is that, during the most recent twenty years, the power of educational systems to promote those from more socially favoured backgrounds towards the professions and more secure employment has been enhanced. Their ability to promote what in England was called "positive discrimination" in favour of the less well-off and disadvantaged members of society has been conversely diminished. In this the English case is clear-cut. If we look at the strengthening of the private sector, at the little-publicized tilt in university admissions towards the private sector, and at the weakening of the professional autonomy of educators, we see a clear example of the ways in which ideology as applied to education can and does affect outcomes.

Two things follow. First, it will be interesting to see how exactly the Left reformulates to counter these tendencies and how effective these responses are in practice. Just as the Right in England shifted from "preservationism" towards more proactive policies under Thatcher, it is clear that, in Britain at least, the resurrection of an old-style class politics of education has little chance of succeeding. There are fascinating questions around how far an emergent politics of education can weave in the needs and demands of the dispossessed, the urban poor, ethnic minorities, and can take account of a greater understanding of gender as well as a heightened consciousness of issues to do with sexual identity. As yet these questions are largely marginalized in the broader political debate in Britain. If historians of education are to comment on the recent politics of education in any meaningful way, they will need to be sensitized to these issues.

There is a question mark, too, over the power of any one country or state to resist or reverse trends which are so widespread, and there must be interesting questions around how far any response to the New Right politics of education can and will be internationalized. This provides a further challenge for historians of education, who are left with problems surrounding the nature and viability of research which is local to particular provinces or even individual countries. How feasible is a "multinational" history of education and how might it best be tackled? Yet without it, how meaningful are the claims which historians make?

For historians of education the challenge posed by this phenomenon of the New Right is nothing short of monumental. The events of these recent years force us to have the ideology of education at the heart of our agenda and to seek to

move beyond an account of these changes towards an analysis which lays bare the roots of these ideological transformations. We need to seek to understand what it is in any particular context which makes it possible for one set of ideas among many to predominate in day-to-day policy. This paper seeks to play a small part in the promotion of that historical debate.