

SOCIAL CLASS AND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN 1930s SCOTLAND

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SYNOPSIS

Between the wars, most pupils who passed the qualifying examination in Scotland proceeded to post-primary courses lasting two or three years, though a minority went to secondary schools where courses lasted five or six years. In addition, Scottish education authorities provided a number of 'omnibus' schools in which both types of course were found. Though these omnibus schools were superficially similar to the comprehensive schools established after 1945, they did not take pupils who failed the qualifying examination, and their establishment by education authorities owed more to convenience than attachment to the principle of non-selection. Education authorities, which in the early 1920s had protested at the Department's policy of separating pupils on short and long courses, showed little interest in taking advantage of the Department's progressive abandonment of this policy. This lack of interest can be put down to the ease with which Scottish middle-class parents in the 1930s could obtain secondary education for their children.

THE DEPARTMENT AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The official view on education in Scotland beyond the primary stage, was made clear in 1903 and again in 1921. Circular 374 of 1903 prescribed a 'qualifying' examination to find out who had successfully completed the work of the primary school, while Circular 44 of 1921 laid the duty of holding such a test on the education authorities. Where both Circulars agreed was in the stipulation that those who passed the 'qualifying' should be seen as falling into two groups, those who would follow a short course of two or three years and those who would take a course lasting five or six years that led to the leaving certificate and the possibility of university education. Only the latter was a 'secondary' course; the former, whether one of the Supplementary Courses after 1903 or an Advanced Division after 1921, was known as 'post-primary' or, in the Department's words, 'non-Secondary'. And the two groups of qualifiers had such different needs that as far as possible they ought to be kept separate. What was needed, said the Department in Circular 44, was 'wherever practicable, an entirely separate organisation even in subjects which are common to the Secondary and the non-Secondary group. Combination may be convenient, but it is educationally unsound...' (SED, 1921, para 7).

At about the same time as Circular 44 appeared, a very different set of proposals for the future of Scottish education was being put forward by an independent body set up by statute, the Advisory Council on Education in Scotland. Its report proposed a three-stage system of education, with primary education being followed by an intermediate education starting at twelve and continuing either until the pupil left school or to the age of fifteen, and finally a secondary school which would start at the age of fifteen and would cater for those going on to the Leaving Certificate. In other words, the Advisory Council, instead of identifying two distinct groups of 'qualified' pupils with quite different needs, was calling for all pupils who had qualified to go to the same kind of school. There, though there would be a range of curricula, pupils would receive a 'solid common core of instruction for the first two years'. The option of offering different curricula in different types of school was allowed, but the Council spoke of this being done exceptionally in some large

towns. In order to facilitate transfer between courses, its preference was for 'parallel courses within the same building' (Advisory Council, 1923).

The radical nature of this challenge to Circular 44 was clear. The Department's first reaction had been to find an excuse to delay the report's publication by more than a year. Then, when Professor Burnet, the chairman of the Advisory Council's relevant sub-committee, fell ill, the Secretary of the Department had asked Sir Arthur Rose, the chairman of the Council itself and a man whose views could be relied upon, to declare Burnet's resignation temporary and chair the sub-committee himself for the time being. This had ensured that the chairmanship did not fall into the hands of anyone who regarded the Department's policy as 'reactionary' (ED8/3). But it had failed to bring the Advisory Council to heel.

First reactions to Circular 44 showed the Advisory Council's views were shared by the education authorities. When the Association of Directors of Education met immediately after the Circular appeared, it is clear from the minutes that the Director for Glasgow spoke for a number when he described his authority as 'quite... antagonistic' to Department policy and 'decidedly of the opinion that the sub-structure of the Circular is wrong, and that there was therefore no use tinkering with it' (ADES, 27th January 1922). At the same meeting, the Director for Perthshire expressed the view that, since the principle of the Circular was out of keeping with the trend of education in Scotland over the last twenty or thirty years, 'Authorities should just proceed with their schemes as if the Circular did not exist'. Even when indignation had subsided the following year, these Directors of Education passed a number of resolutions critical of the Department's policy. In particular, they wanted to avoid using the term 'advanced division' for three-year post-primary courses. They preferred them to be called Intermediate, thereby aligning themselves with the Advisory Council's vision of short post-primary courses for all, with secondary education for some thereafter, rather than with the Department's policy of splitting children into separate groups at age twelve (ADES, 16th May 1923).

In this, the education authorities were reflecting the widespread opinion that selection, which was likely to be social as much as academic, was not in keeping with Scotland's supposedly democratic heritage (Wade, 1939, p 122). Segregation, however, was also difficult to enforce (Stocks, 1995). Fundamentally, it was ill-suited to a country in which only just over half the population lived in towns with more than 20,000 people (General Register Office, 1931, Table VI). In addition, it was soon clear that, no matter how often those in authority said that the advanced-division courses, which had an element of practical work, were better suited to the average child, many parents preferred the longer, more academic course of the secondary. This might not have mattered if their children had stayed until the end of that course; but the fact that pupils more often than not dropped out after two or three years made nonsense of the Department's policy of special provision for those on 'long' post-qualifying courses (Stocks, 1995, p 57).

Since a policy of strict segregation was proving impracticable, the education authorities were able to diverge from Circular 44 without clashing openly with government policy. In particular, they took advantage of the greater flexibility in the regulations governing secondary schools in Scotland compared to those that obtained south of the border. The English regulations of 1904, tightened in 1921, ensured that only schools whose pupils normally stayed to 16 could be recognised as secondary (Board of Education, 1921). The Secondary Schools (Scotland) Regulations, on the other hand, not only did not make this stipulation, they covered 76 'higher grade' schools whose courses were no longer than three years (SED, 1923). Thus there was nothing to prevent the Scottish education authorities, unlike their English counterparts, having schools which provided both three-year and five-year courses. This type of school, which by the late 1920s was being called 'omnibus', made up,

according to Professor McClelland in 1933, about one third of all secondary schools. In most cases these were in small towns, where it could be argued that selective establishments were not practicable, but the same could not be said in the case of omnibus schools such as Clydebank High School in Dunbartonshire or North Kelvinside Academy and Govan High in Glasgow. These clearly flew in the face of Circular 44's policy of separation. And another sign of the authorities' failure to meet the Department's demands of 1921 was the evidence that within the omnibus schools short and long courses were not always kept distinct (Stocks, 1995, p 54).

Not long after the publication of the 1921 Circular, however, the Department itself began to backtrack. Not long after John Struthers was replaced as Secretary of the Department by George Macdonald, the Department declared that there was a 'great advantage' in having the same scheme of work in the subjects common to both types of course, as it facilitated transfer from the one to the other (SED, 1925, p 8). And the new Secretary appointed in 1929, William McKechnie, went further. In 1931 he not only welcomed the founding of the new Bo'ness Academy as an omnibus school for all children who passed the qualifying exam but expressed the hope that it would soon also take the pupils who failed (SEJ, 2nd October, 1931). By the end of McKechnie's term of office, the Director of Education for Ayrshire remarked that the Department regarded the omnibus school 'with considerable favour' (ADES, May 1937, p 4).

This does not mean that all traces of the Circular 44 policy of segregation had disappeared. The Department continued to believe that there was a need for long and short post-primary courses; only, it was now prepared to accept that they could be delivered in the same school. The continuance of earlier policy can be seen in its ruling that the Day School Certificate (Higher), awarded to pupils in their third year, could not be given to a child who intended to stay at school, and anyone who gained the certificate then returned to school was to hand the certificate back. This was an attempt to force the parents of twelve-year olds either to commit themselves to keep their child at school until age seventeen or to opt for the short post-primary course. There was to be no parachute out of the longer course at age fifteen (SED, 1934).

OMNIBUS OR COMPREHENSIVE?

Omnibus schools can obviously be seen as precursors of the modern comprehensive. There are two important differences, however: one lies in the failure in the 1930s to bring in 'clean cut'; and the other in the overwhelmingly pragmatic nature of education authority decisions about the structure of the system.

The expression 'clean cut' became popular throughout Britain in the years after the Hadow Report of 1926 spoke of the 'tide in the veins of youth' that rose about the age of eleven (Board of Education, 1926). 'Clean cut' meant promoting all children, whatever the level of their attainments, to some form of post-primary education. This might be either in a different school or, if it was a sparsely populated area, at least in a different department. In Scotland, where the tide in the veins of youth seemed to rise at age twelve rather than eleven, the 'qualifying examination' was passed by a majority of pupils in time for them to complete two years in post-primary before leaving at the age of fourteen (SED, 1939a, Table VA). Those who failed were kept back in the senior division of primary, and given the test again the following year. If that was passed, the pupil had time for only one year of post-primary work before reaching the leaving-age; and for those who were furthest behind and were unable to pass the 'qualifying' even at the second attempt, there might be no time for post-primary work at all. This was very widely seen as a weakness in the education system - keeping children at an uncongenial task with which they had little chance of succeeding; and some thought it particularly absurd that children who might succeed with a more practical curriculum (in an advanced division) were being prevented

from embarking on that practical curriculum by their failure in a purely academic test (Smith, 1930, p 14).

This view gained ground in Scotland in the years after Hadow, and 'clean cut' began to be implemented in the late 1920s, though in a patchy way. As early as 1926, when the Hadow Report was published, it was partially in operation in Edinburgh (SEJ, 18th February, 1927), and soon Aberdeenshire had followed suit (ED48/886/3). The county of Roxburgh went further, sending all primary pupils in Hawick to the High School, irrespective of their attainments (SEJ, 27th July, 1928). Gradually 'clean cut' began to be adopted by more and more authorities; but even in 1939 the move was not complete, and, significantly, in that year all the EIS asked was that, when the leaving-age was raised to fifteen, children should be transferred to post-primary no later than thirteen and a half (EIS, 1939, p 9).

There were a number of reasons why 'clean cut' made little headway in the early 1930s. The main problem was cost. The Department wanted to see the new policy adopted as soon as possible: Willie Adamson, the Scottish Secretary, had himself spoken in favour (Hansard, 16th July, 1931, col 879). But neither Adamson nor the Department wanted 'clean cut' to mean everyone being promoted to existing types of course. Adamson regarded the Scottish attachment to a literary or academic curriculum as 'the dead hand of the past'; and the Department thought the need for a more practical curriculum on two- and three-year courses was 'clamant' (SED, 1931, p 17). By January 1933 an internal memorandum in the Department was able to declare that 'The Department has preached this doctrine vigorously for many years and the Education Authorities are in no doubt as to our views on the need for alternative courses' (ED48/886/1). There was support for these views in the universities, both from Professor William McClelland at St Andrews (McClelland 1933, p 530) and William Boyd at Glasgow (Boyd, 1935, p 176).

Against this view there was, according to the Department memorandum, 'considerable conservatism on the part of the Education Authorities and even more on the part of the teachers'. Whether this was true of teachers as a whole, the Department would no doubt have cited as evidence the Scottish Educational Journal, whose leader-page carried a jaundiced comment on the educational fashion that had 'decreed that salvation is to be found only in practical work. It is a specific for making the dull, bright; the stupid, clever; and the lazy, industrious.' 'Teachers' it went on 'know otherwise' (SEJ, 21st July, 1933). As for Directors of Education, their association quite properly distinguished between practical activities, which they thought an important part of the curriculum for all pupils, and vocational courses, which they felt entailed a downgrading of the general, cultural education for working-class children. The Directors, in a submission to the Advisory Council, spoke of the increase in the mechanisation of industry, the growth of leisure, and the 'complex needs of citizenship' as all leading to the need for an education 'on general and cultural lines up to say the age of fifteen years' (ADES, November 1935).

This debate about the competing claims of vocational and general education was one that divided opinion in Scotland at the time of the introduction of the Supplementary Courses in 1903 and has resurfaced periodically since, most recently at the time of the Munn Report. Its relevance in the 1930s is that the Department knew that a practical curriculum entailed extra expenditure not only for specialised staff and equipment, but for the building of bigger central schools to put this staff and equipment to best use. Given the state of the economy in the early 1930s, it was felt that 'on any reckoning the present time is clearly inopportune' (ED/48/886/2).

Another reason for delaying the 'clean cut' lay in the bulge in the number of births in 1919 and 1920. This bulge hit the post-primary stage in the early 1930s, at the very time when the recession, according to the Director of Education for Glasgow, was leading more pupils to stay on longer at school instead of leaving for

unemployment (SEJ, 28th October, 1932). Moreover, before 'clean cut' could be implemented, an answer had to be found to the problem caused by the practice of making primary-school pupils repeat a grade if they had not reached the expected standard: the promotion of all children at twelve would entail some children being promoted to post-primary from Primary 6 or even Primary 5. As it was, figures for one county showed that over a third of pupils in the first post-primary year were thirteen or more at the beginning of the session (SCRE, 1931, p 18).

The second difference between the omnibus schools of the 1930s and the comprehensive schools that arose after the second world war is that in the earlier period the principle of selection was seldom discussed. It was not that the arguments were unknown. There was the social argument, which stressed the need for children to be educated together if they were to form a harmonious society in adult life, a view put forward by those who believed in what has recently been called the 'Scottish myth' (McCrone, 1996). Hardie, the Assistant Director of Education for Edinburgh, for example, thought the omnibus school was the type 'most in harmony with the democratic tradition of Scottish education' as opposed to the 'class distinctions, social and intellectual' that might be fostered by selection (ADES, November 1938). Not everyone agreed. Even F M Earle, a prominent advocate of omnibus schooling, admitted that when Kirkcaldy High School, of which he was head, became an omnibus school in 1929, many parents sent their children to fee-paying schools rather than see them mix with those 'less fortunate in their home circumstances' (Earle, 1944, p 77). Hardie's argument was later to appear more powerful, after war had brought home the need for all members of society to combine against a common foe (Earle, 1944, pp 77-8; ADES, 1943 p 6).

This was not the whole of the case against selection. Some stressed the need to avoid the stigma attached to being sent to a school for also-rans - a point made by a schools inspector, James Frewin (ED48/480). Others pointed out that an omnibus school allowed for children who, for whatever reason, were misplaced at the age of twelve to transfer more easily to another kind of education than if it involved a change of school. There was also in the 1930s another consideration which appealed to the Director of Education for West Lothian: literary courses, which had higher status than practical subjects, were less likely to attract excessive numbers of pupils if the differences between children were disguised by their attending the same school (ADES, November 1932).

Against that, it was sometimes said that the stigma of being slow or 'backward' was felt more in a school which contained the brightest children. Harvey, the headmaster of the omnibus Dumbarton Academy, spoke of the 'humiliation' suffered by the unqualified children in his school. Harvey also argued that in a separate advanced division there was more chance for a moderately gifted individual to shine, and to be given responsibility, than in a multilateral setting (Harvey, 1932). Another objection raised against the omnibus school was that such a school would have to be undesirably large if it was to have an appropriately wide range of courses (ADES, May 1939). This was for long a concern to some who showed interest in, or mild approval of, the comprehensive system in principle, such as the members of both the Spens Committee (Board of Education, 1938) and the Advisory Council for Education in Scotland which reported in 1947.

Though it was sometimes said that these arguments, for and against, were well known (Wattie, 1931 p 165; McClelland, 1934 p 540), it can hardly be said that Scotland was in a ferment over the issue. Indeed, one has to look hard to find the question being mentioned. For example, it scarcely made an appearance in the columns of the Scottish Educational Journal. The EIS, which sponsored the journal, seemed reluctant to take sides. It produced two reports on the reconstruction of Scottish education following the 1936 Act. The first included a chapter on transfer

to secondary, but made no recommendation on whether secondary schools should be multilateral or selective (EIS, 1939). The second went so far as to say that, provided no school went beyond a limit of 600 pupils, the type of secondary school to be preferred was the omnibus school. Where numbers would exceed that total, however, two or more specialised schools should be provided (EIS, 1943 p 6).

Nor was any great interest shown on the Left. Newspaper accounts of the conferences of the Scottish Council of the Labour Party show only one discussion of education in the 1930s, when it adopted a resolution on a subject on which the Left did have strong views, namely 'bias' in school textbooks. On that occasion one delegate declared that history was a subject that consisted mainly of 'military arrogance, Empire-building, and inflating the value of royal personages' (Glasgow Herald, 30th May, 1938). And when the Council adopted a wide-ranging plan for the development of Scotland, there was no mention of formal education; the social sphere being represented by statements of policy on housing, health, and the 'development of social and cultural life by community centres' (Glasgow Herald, 10th May 1937). There was more regular discussion of education at the STUC, but there the concern was with the need to raise the leaving-age to fifteen. Though it was said in a pamphlet on the 1936 Act that there were reasons other than the current level of unemployment for supporting this, it was clearly unemployment that brought this issue before delegates so regularly in the 1930s (STUC, 1936). J P Millar of the National Council of Labour Colleges did put forward a proposal to have an end-on system of nursery, elementary, middle and higher-grade schools with a common course for all pupils for at least part of the middle period, but he too was much more interested in the content of teaching, being keen to instil ideas of citizenship as well as to root out biased interpretations of history (NCLC, 1933).

The views of Scots Labour MPs can be deduced from the annual opportunity they were given to discuss the educational estimates in parliament. This was their chance to raise any issue that seemed important. These occasions show that on the question of secondary education they were split. Some of those whose own formal education had been short, thought there were already too many children going to secondary schools. Willie Adamson, Secretary of State for Scotland in both the Labour governments of the inter-war years, had left school at the age of eleven, only a year after the first school boards were set up, and before the leaving-age of thirteen that had been laid down in 1872 could be enforced. In his view, secondary schools were already 'clogged with pupils who would be happier and who would make better progress in schools that gave more scope for practical activities' (Hansard 16th July, 1931, col 879). Joe Westwood, who had left school at thirteen because, as he said, he could not leave at twelve, thought that even the three-year courses in the advanced divisions were too academic (Hansard 16th July, 1931, col 908). On the other hand, James Maxton and Tom Johnston, respectively a teacher and a journalist before entering parliament, wanted all children to have the opportunity of secondary education, on the basis that, as Johnston put it, 'If secondary schooling is good for the children of the middle class and the children of the rich, it ought to be good for the children of the working class' (Hansard 14th July, 1930, col 1061). But even Maxton and Johnston did not give priority to bringing all forms of post-primary together under the one roof as a means of providing this opportunity. Indeed, although both covered a number of educational issues in parliamentary speeches in 1929, neither of them made any reference to the kinds of institution in which education beyond the primary stage was provided. What they were concerned with was the need for teachers in the Advanced Divisions to be as well qualified as those in the secondary schools, and for pupils staying on beyond fourteen to be supported with maintenance grants (Hansard 23rd April, 1929, cols 826-33; 13th March, 1934, col 179; 20th March, 1934, col 1029).

*Table 1: Towns or cities without separate Advanced Divisions for Post-primary aged children (without ADs) and towns with Advanced Divisions (with ADs):
(a) with populations over 20,000 and
(b) with population between 5,000 and 20,000.*

| Education Authorities | Towns or cities with population over 20,000 | | Towns with population of 5,000 to 20,000 | |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| | without ADs | with ADs | without ADs | with ADs |
| Aberdeen Dundee Edinburgh Glasgow Aberdeenshire Angus | | Aberdeen Dundee Edinburgh Glasgow | Fraserburgh Arbroath Montrose Forfar Brechin Dunoon Campbeltown Oban | Peterhead |
| Argyll | | | Irvine Largs Kilwinning Girvan Buckie | Preswick Ardrossan |
| Ayrshire | | Kilmarnock Ayr | Wick | Rothesay |
| Banffshire Bute Caithness Clackmannanshire Dumfriesshire Dunbartonshire | | Dumfries Clydebank Dumbarton Kirkcaldy Dunfermline | Helensburgh | Alloa |
| Fife | | | B'haven/Methil Leven Burntisland | St Andrews |
| Inverness-shire Lanarkshire | Inverness | Moth.& Wish. Coatbridge Hamilton Airdrie Rutherglen | Lanark | |
| Midlothian | | | Elgin | Musselburgh Dalkeith |
| Moray and Nairn Peeblesshire Perth and Kinross Renfrewshire | | Perth Paisley Greenock | Johnstone Renfrew Barrhead Gourock | Peebles |
| Roxburgh Selkirkshire | | | | Hawick Galashiels Selkirk Grangemouth |
| Stirlingshire | | Falkirk Stirling | Kilsyth | |
| West Lothian Wigtown | | | Bo'ness | Bathgate Stranraer |

Note: Denominational schools are not included

Sources: 1931 census; SED, 1939a.

PRINCIPLE OR CONVENIENCE?

The figures for 1936-37 given in Table 1 show that the majority of towns with population between 5,000 and 20,000 had, apart from any denominational schools, one school for pupils beyond the primary stage. This school therefore had to offer both short and long forms of post-primary education. But what about towns big enough to support more than one school for this stage of education? Every town with more than 20,000 population, except Inverness, had a mixture of secondary schools and advanced divisions. The statistics, of course, do not tell the whole story. In particular, they fail to show the omnibus schools which existed side by side with separate advanced divisions in some large towns. In this category there were not only Govan High School, North Kelvinside Academy and Clydebank High School, already mentioned, but Kirkcaldy High and Dumbarton Academy, where the statistics record the presence of advanced divisions as well as a secondary in the town, but where the secondary in question took all the children of a neighbourhood - plus, in the Kirkcaldy case, a select few from a wider area (Earle, 1944, p 79). To this list should be added Grove Academy which became the omnibus school for the Broughty Ferry suburb of Dundee in 1937, while the rest of the city continued to have bipartite schooling (Dundee, 1938).

Though this list of exceptions may not be complete, the statistics give no support to the idea of any attachment to the comprehensive principle. On the contrary, one is tempted to see a preference for segregation. Certainly, what is striking about Table 1 is the apparent uniformity of practice among the education authorities. If a town had two post-primary schools, in practically every case one was secondary and the other was an advanced division, though the latter might well have a general or literary course, overlapping with what was provided in the secondary school and allowing an occasional child to go from the one to the other at age fourteen. Larger towns usually had the same mixture, and neither there nor in any of the four cities was the omnibus school the norm. The most interesting case is Glasgow, where the Council was under Labour control from 1933 onwards. There, two omnibus schools already existed and the Director of Education reported that they 'were seriously considering the omnibus school as the best solution to many of their difficulties' (ADES, September 1936). Nevertheless, the scheme submitted to the Department following the 1936 Act was basically a bipartite one (ED48/220).

One should be wary, however, about interpreting the actions of the education authorities in terms of principle. They had inherited a system and were constrained by the need to economise. Thus, when the authorities were required to submit plans for secondary education in the wake of the 1936 Act, which provided for the raising of the leaving-age, the limited changes they proposed give the impression of being dictated by convenience. For example, Argyll decided in 1939 to make Lochgilphead omnibus by closing the Advanced Division at Ardrishaig, but the reason given by the chairman of the county council was that it was simply too expensive to have two post-primary schools (SEJ, 21st July 1939). Selkirkshire, on the other hand, which had omnibus schools in both Galashiels and Selkirk, found it convenient to rationalise provision by downgrading Selkirk High School to an advanced division, thus making Galashiels Academy the only secondary school in the county (SEJ, 5th May 1939). Likewise, the education authority of East Lothian proposed to bow to local sentiment and keep open three-year courses in Prestonpans, Cockenzie and Tranent, when the inspector for the area felt strongly that they ought to be closing those courses and converting the secondary Preston Lodge into an omnibus school (ED48/480). And Inverness-shire, like Selkirkshire, proposed to move away from omnibus provision by discontinuing the three-year literary course at Inverness High School, while retaining the Royal Academy as a secondary (ED48/490).

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLES

One chief inspector claimed that the 1936 Act was a landmark in the history of Scottish education (Andrew, 1937, p 17). True, the 1939 Code which followed the Act declared that henceforth all post-primary education was to be known as secondary. But it merely led to secondary schools being called senior secondaries, to distinguish them from the advanced divisions which were becoming known as junior secondaries. As early as 1928 a change of name for post-primary schools had been recommended by the highly conservative R. R. Rusk of Jordanhill College, who realised that it need not mean any change to the basic structure of the system. He knew it was quite compatible with the continuance of two kinds of education beyond the primary stage, the longer one providing a more general education and enjoying greater prestige; compatible too with a system of selection that was part-social and part-academic (RRR, 1928).

Responsibility for the new system of junior and senior secondary schools did not lie with the Department. Not even the new names for the different kinds of post-primary school came from the Department: its Code talked simply of secondary schools. Moreover, the Code was accompanied by a Memorandum which said that even in large towns there could be schools that provided both three-year and five-year courses. Even though it clung (at the cost of some internal inconsistency) to the traditional Department view that the three-year course 'should not ... be regarded as an abbreviation of the five-year secondary course, but as complete in itself and having a definite character of its own' (SED, 1939b), it cannot be denied that this memorandum displays a huge shift in Departmental attitudes since the days of Circular 44. Glasgow Education Authority noted the change with a mischievous reminder of the words of the Circular: it was 'glad to note that the Department no longer regard as "educationally unsound" the combination of Secondary and non-Secondary pupils ... in one organisation' (ED48/220).

Just how far the Department had changed is clear from its reactions to the schemes submitted by the education authorities following the 1936 Act. Within the Department, at a conference of the Secretary and his chief inspectors, a senior civil servant, Mackay Thomson, expressed the view that 'in the revised Schemes for the Provision of Education now being examined there appeared to be a tendency to go too far in the opposite direction by suppressing literary courses in the central schools' (ED7/4/95). And in several cases the Department acted on this concern and asked for a reassurance that in three-year schools these literary courses would continue to be offered. This was partly to keep open the possibility of later transfer to a secondary, or senior secondary, school, and partly to allow parents to choose a course that was short but 'academic'. Thus Lanarkshire (ED48/512), Dunbartonshire (ED48/475), Dumfriesshire (ED48/472), and Perth and Kinross (ED48/541), which had intended to stop the teaching of foreign languages in three-year schools, were all asked to think again. And when Aberdeen proposed to have no foreign language taught in any of its three-year secondary schools, the Department's reaction was emphatic: a heavy-weight delegation, including not only a chief inspector but the Secretary himself, went twice to Aberdeen to speak to the convener of the education committee and the assistant director, until finally the education authority changed its mind (ED48/343).

So who were the reactionaries now? The respective positions of Department and education authorities had been reversed since 1921-2. By the late 1930s the Department was not only not insisting on selective secondary schools, it was explicitly allowing the number of omnibus schools to increase, and insisting on three-year schools being in a real sense multilateral. It was the education authorities themselves, or at any rate those that had had selective systems for years, that decided simply to change schools' names and continue with two types of post-primary school.

CLASS-BIAS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Why was there not more argument about selection and more support for multilateral schooling in Scotland in the 1930s? Why did F M Earle, the nearest that Scotland had to a campaigner for the omnibus schools, go no further than to describe them rather unenthusiastically as 'public service vehicles with no reserved seats'? Why did the Left in Scotland not show the same commitment to multilateral schooling as the sub-committee of the Labour-controlled London County Council which, much against the advice of the Director of Education, came out strongly in favour of the 'multi-bias school' (Simon, 1974, p.194)? Or the TUC, which condemned the separation of children into different types of school as 'bound to perpetuate the classification of children into industrial as well as social strata ...' and made it 'in practice useless to talk of parity in education or equality of opportunity in after life' (Simon, 1974, p 266)? Why indeed was the whole issue debated less than it was in England? The explanation must lie in the relationship between social class and access to the secondary school in Scotland.

In 1936 the Secretary of the Department warned the Lord Advocate of how the system appeared to its critics: 'the children of the poor go to inferior Advanced Divisions, and the children of the middle classes and well-off people go to the superior secondary schools and "academies"' (Paterson, 1983, p 211). Was this simply because middle-class children performed better when selection was made at age twelve? There are good reasons for thinking otherwise.

In 1931 the Research Council published evidence to show that many parents chose the advanced divisions rather than the secondary schools for financial reasons rather than any lack of ability on the part of their children (SCRE, 1931, p.13). In Glasgow in 1932 it was estimated that only 60% of the children whose attainments entitled them to a secondary-school place took up the opportunity (SEJ, 28th October, 1932, p.1297). And in rural Perthshire, where parents who wanted free travel for their children's post-primary education had to promise to keep them at school for three years, the result was that in some years no more than 40% accepted the offer (EIS, 1932). This reluctance to take up the opportunity of secondary education was not exactly discouraged by the local authorities. Their promotion systems often made parents' wishes or headmasters' estimates of the length of time the child was likely to stay at school a factor in selection.

Of course, academic potential counted as well. In some areas a mere pass in the qualifying exam was not enough: entry to secondary might depend on a higher level of pass or on success in a more demanding test. But what if children's academic achievements did not gain them entry to the course their parents expected? On this point John Mackie, headmaster of Leith Academy, let the cat out of the bag. At an international conference in 1935 he contributed to a discussion of methods of selection for secondary education, by explaining in detail the qualifying examination as it operated in Edinburgh. He then went on:

Officially, the pupils' parents are advised by the headmaster ... what course they ought to follow, but they are not bound to accept that advice. Many parents who are advised to send their children to an advanced division course - that is, a course of rather less standing than a secondary course - do not accept that advice ...' (Monroe, 1936, p 59; cf 61-2).

Nor have we any reason to think that Mackie's Edinburgh experience was unusual. The Director of Education for Roxburgh admitted to some doubt as to whether, if parents insisted on their child's entry to secondary, the authorities had any legal right to refuse.

Often, too, education authorities required parents of would-be secondary pupils to sign a pledge saying that their children would stay at school until a certain age.

Though this was usually not enforced, it would no doubt often act as a deterrent. And in Dumfriesshire a case of a parent being fined £5 for defaulting did occur. The local inspector thought this possibly illegal, but the education authority proposed that in future the fine should be increased to £24. 'Either this is bluff,' commented the HMI 'or the future resentment is likely to be of a riotous order' (ED48/472).

Dumfriesshire did not propose, however, to fine all parents whose children left a five-year course after three years. Dumfries Academy retained fees, and parents who paid fees would not need to sign a pledge. Elsewhere in Scotland too there were still secondary schools where fees were paid. In 1934, according to Professor McClelland, a third of Scottish education authorities charged fees in at least some of their secondary schools or departments (McClelland, 1934, p 534); in Dundee, fees were charged, except for scholarship-winners, at all secondary schools until 1937, when secondary-school fees were abolished, only to be replaced by a pledge (Dundee, 1938); fees for secondary were paid in the city of Perth until 1945 (Calderwood, 1955); and in 1939 a Labour-controlled sub-committee in Glasgow voted by 22 to 8 to retain fees in five of their schools.

The significance of fees is not simply that many parents were excluded from the schools in question. Those who could afford them might be able thereby to bypass the academic test for entry. Thus Inverness-shire's scheme for Inverness Royal Academy allowed for separate categories of entrants, fee-payers and those who qualified (ED48/490). Even where secondary fees no longer existed, fees might be charged in a feeder primary or in the primary department of an all-age school. Where that happened, there was a tendency, said the retired Secretary of the Scottish Education Department in 1944, for the secondary school or department to admit the fee-paying pupils even if they had failed the qualifying exam - something that the schemes of Dumfriesshire and Dundee made explicit (McKechnie, 1944; ED48/472; ED48/352).

The policy of the Department also played a part in the social discrimination of the secondary school. The distinction that was drawn in Circular 44 was not between those who could and those who could not pass the qualifying examination: it was between those who were likely to complete a full course of secondary education and those who 'for one reason or another' would leave school at the earliest opportunity. The qualifying examination, or whatever the education authorities used to replace it, was not to be a device for the academic selection of a few. It was to be set at a standard which 'the average pupil of 12 may fairly be called upon to meet'. Thus, until 'clean cut' was adopted, all advanced division pupils had 'qualified'. And yet the department's main objective in Circular 44 had been to keep the two or three-year pupils separate from those on a five-year course. That was why the Intermediate Certificate had been abolished, in a move which some realised would lead 'parents of moderate means' to be 'very chary of allowing their children to enter on a five years' course' (BS, 1922). And, as we have seen, this was part of its policy which the Department refused to change: the new Day School Certificate (Higher), though taken at the same age as the old Intermediate Certificate, was restricted to those who were leaving school at that point. A half-way house would be just too attractive to parents who wanted the best education for their children but who were unwilling or unable to contemplate a full five-year course.

In the light of these policies at local and national level, and the differences in parents' economic circumstances, therefore, one can understand why one chief inspector should say that the course followed by a pupil at the end of the primary stage 'depends mainly on the length of time his parents desire to keep him at school' (emphasis added) (Andrew, 1937, p 17). Nor is it surprising that the Director of Education for Edinburgh complained that parents' wishes at this stage in a child's education had a 'haphazard influence' (SEJ, 29th October, 1937). Just how haphazard

can be seen from the considerable overlap in academic ability between Edinburgh's junior and senior secondary schools: fully 38% of the children who went to senior secondary schools in 1942 had been classified as fit for a junior secondary course, while almost 12% of the much larger number starting junior secondary school had been deemed capable of a senior secondary course (McKechnie, 1944).

CONCLUSION

In order to understand the development of post-primary education in Scotland between the wars, one cannot overemphasise the importance of the assumptions almost universally made about the link between a child's education and the social class of his or her parents. When the chairman of Dumfriesshire education authority listed the factors that would decide whether a pupil went to Dumfries Academy or Dumfries High School, he clearly assumed that 'the duration of the child's school life' was known in advance (SEJ, 10th March 1939). How was it known? In some places, parents were asked to say what length of schooling they wanted, or, if applying for a place in secondary, to pledge to keep their child at school beyond the minimum leaving-age. Elsewhere, headteachers were given the responsibility of making a prediction. Whatever the procedure, this factor in selection was bound to be heavily affected by social class. Although everyone knew that the drop-out from secondary courses was huge, the middle-class twelve-year-old would be assumed to be requiring a full secondary course.

The number of thirteen-year-olds in secondary school in 1936-37 was fully 30% of the pupils aged eleven two years earlier (SED, 1936, Table IIIA; SED, 1939a, Table IIIA). Given the small size of the Scottish middle class at that time, with only 4.3% of the employed population in 'professional occupations' (Census 1931, p xlv), their offspring would almost always have been included. Many of these children would be capable of reaching the academic standard required, and if they were not, their parents might well ensure that the hurdle was bypassed, either by payment of fees or by sheer assertiveness. Nor would middle-class parents be easily deterred from pledging that their children would stay at school beyond the minimum leaving-age, whatever their true intentions.

One possible remedy for a class-biased system of selection was the omnibus school. This had been supported by one writer in 1927 on the grounds that it counteracted 'the errors of the promotion scheme' and what he called 'the vagaries of class consciousness' (X, 1927). His stance was very much in line with the Advisory Council report of 1923 and with the popular opposition to Circular 44 of 1921. The irony is that by the 1930s, although the Department had long since abandoned the Circular's central tenet, the education authorities had lost their radicalism, and critics of class-bias in education were few in number. The explanation has to be that the 'vagaries of class consciousness' operated entirely in favour of the more articulate members of society, and, given the availability of a fairly generous supply of secondary places, there were few among those excluded who would find it easy to challenge the system.

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