

The Politics of ‘Indirect Rule’: Conflict, Contradiction and Control in Education Policy, 1922-9

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ABSTRACT

The 1920s have not been in vogue with historians of education since the 1980s, when the questions being asked – of curriculum control, teacher professionalism, and the role of trade unions – were seen to have particular contemporary significance. As a result, scholarship in this area now feels somewhat outmoded, chiefly because of the dominance of a ‘top-down’ model of control in much of the analysis. This article attempts to gain a new perspective on one of the key issues of this period, the radical politicisation of teachers, through a comparison of stated government policy and the experiences of teachers themselves. This reveals perspectives that complicate and challenge the dominant narrative of the exercise of control in the education system in this period and suggests further avenues for research using a biographical methodology.

INTRODUCTION

‘The general rule is that teachers have the same political rights and freedom as ordinary British citizens...There is no provision either Statutory or in the Code or other Regulations expressly barring the teacher from any political activities in which he thinks fit to indulge.’ (Board of Education, 1926)

In his memoirs, Lord Eustace Percy remarked, in rather self-congratulatory fashion, that his Presidency of the Board of Education in the latter half of the 1920s was ‘the point at which all sections of English political opinion came to learn the lesson of the political importance of educational administration’ (Percy, 1958, p.92). Historians of the interwar education system in Britain seem universally to have agreed with him, citing this decade as the first in which a coherent state policy in education was consciously pursued. It is similarly regarded as all but self-evident that an important component of this policy was the objective of control and, more specifically, the control of teachers’ political opinions (Lawn and Grace, 1987; Kean, 1990a; Lawn 1987; Lawton, 2005). Debates in this area have traditionally been framed in terms of the relationship between teachers and Lord Percy, the face not only of a unified Board of Education but of a unified, single-entity state. This paper will suggest that the complexities of the relationships between the various constituent agencies of the state have so far not been sufficiently emphasised and that the concept of the state has thus been wielded as something of a blunt instrument in the analysis of the attitudes and responses to teacher politicization in this period.

Until the 1920s, teachers in Britain had generally been identified, and indeed had identified themselves, with the Conservative establishment and it was a common view that they were responsible for the counteraction of ‘the crude influences of contemporary life’ and for ‘the making of loyal citizens’ (Percy, 1958, p.102; Starr, 1929, p.18). But, as Denis Lawton (2005, p.18) has pointed out, war has the tendency to stimulate the desire for educational progress and,

after 1918, educational philosophy, and the corresponding political opinions of educational professionals, took what Lord Percy (1958, pp.92-3) was later to describe as a 'dangerously romantic' turn. Teachers appeared to swoon en masse to the left and to ally themselves with Labour, the 'party of education' (Lawn, 1987, p.117). In the context of wider fears of the growing international influence of Bolshevism and socialism in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, great significance was attached to this realignment of teachers' political sympathies by certain sections of the political establishment, who saw it not merely as a threat to Conservative political dominance but, potentially, as a threat to the survival of the existing social order. The perception took root amongst some Conservatives that teachers, with their untold influence on the youth of the nation and their agency in the structuring of popular consciousness, were intent on the subversion of the state (Lawn and Grace, 1987, p.196; p.204). And although Lord Percy was not one of them, the question of the control of politically active left-wing teachers preoccupied the Board under his Presidency.

POLICY

In May 1922, Gideon Murray MP tabled a question in the House of Commons, asking whether, in order to protect against 'certain teachers who take every opportunity to undermine the patriotism and good will towards the King and British Constitution of the children whom they teach', and 'in view of the fact that schoolteachers are paid public servants and are pensioned by the State', the Board of Education would consider 'arranging that they take the oath of allegiance upon appointment' (TNA, ED24/1753). The then President, Herbert Fisher, was resistant to this suggestion on the grounds that there was no evidence of it being necessary, and his successor, Lord Percy, consistently maintained this position from his appointment in November 1924. Calls for an oath of allegiance for teachers became commonplace in the remainder of the decade, not only in Parliament, but also at Local Authority Education Committees, in letters to the Board of Education, and in the press.

Correspondence between Percy and two Conservatives MPs in the Board of Education's 'Oath of Allegiance' file, opened in 1922, reveals the motivations of those pressing for an oath and the reasons for Percy's refusal to consider it. Apparently prompted by the involvement of a small number of teachers in the General Strike of 1926, Colonel K.P. Vaughan Morgan, MP for Fulham East, wrote to Percy in May of that year, expressing the opinion that an oath of allegiance was required for teachers 'in whose hands is the responsibility for guiding the youth of the country during their most susceptible years' (TNA, ED24/1753). In reply, Percy pointed out that even civil servants were not required to take such an oath and, whilst he assured Vaughan Morgan that he would deal effectively with any teacher shown to be inculcating views of a 'partisan political character', he argued that requiring teachers to take an oath would suggest that they were 'not, on the whole, a loyal and patriotic body of men and women' (TNA, ED24/1753). In January the following year, Colonel Sir Charles Yate, former MP for Melton,¹ wrote to Percy, echoing Vaughan Morgan's call for an oath (Brown, 2004). It is fairly safe to assume that Percy had been subjected to numerous similar requests in the interim, as there is a discernible irritation in his reply, presumably at having to rehearse yet again what had become a very familiar refrain. He wrote,

Frankly, I am afraid that I have very little patience with the whole business of Oaths of Allegiance. I am too much of an old-fashioned Tory to believe in the new fangled fashion of poking oaths of this kind under the noses of all and sundry...I should have thought all history

proved the futility of creating a class of non-jurors or, still worse, a class of insincere Vicars of Bray. (TNA, ED24/1753)

This objection to the idea of an oath of allegiance was rooted in Percy's renunciation of centralised control of the system of popular schooling. His letter to Yate continued,

I confess that I am horrified by your assumption that teachers are to be regarded as State servants...What could be worse from your point of view that to encourage the conception that teachers are servants of a Government in the same way as Civil Servants and, therefore, must teach in the schools precisely what any future Labour Government may tell them to teach? ...Where irregularities exist at the present moment those irregularities are the fault of the local politicians...and I still believe that the best safeguard against such irregularities is to give teachers a sense of reasonable independence and not to subordinate them too much either to a central or Local Authority. (TNA, ED24/1753)

Percy even rejected a call for a religious and loyalty test for teachers from his own Party Headquarters, describing the idea as causing 'a great deal more embarrassment than it is worth' (Lawn, 1987, p.120).

After little more than a year in office, then, Percy had come to the conclusion that a model of 'indirect rule' was well-suited to furthering what he considered to be the principal aim of education: the initiation of youth into "responsible thinking" prior to "its discharge into working life" (Percy, 1958, p.108). The concept of indirect rule was popularly attributed to the British colonial administrator, Lord Lugard, whose implementation of this style of colonial administration in Nigeria came to be seen as the definitive example, even though it was by no means the original.² The key principle of indirect rule was to give the appearance of decentralisation and devolution and to afford the 'natives' a quasi-autonomous role to ensure their cooperation. In education policy, Percy translated this into the fostering of the idea of the autonomy of local education authorities, and of teachers themselves. The success of this model of government depended on the cultivation of the idea of a partnership with teachers, which, in turn, required the invocation of the concept of professionalism (Lawn and Ozga, 1986, p.226). In the age of the Revised Code, teachers' training was basic, the curriculum closely controlled by the inspectorate, and the attitude towards teachers who desired any classroom autonomy neatly encapsulated in Robert Lowe's observation that that they were 'as impertinent as chickens wishing to decide the sauce in which they would be served' (Lawton, 1979, p.11). Percy introduced an entirely different conception, one in which teachers were given increased responsibility and a concomitant enhancement of their professional status.

One of the key manifestations of this strategy was Percy's abandonment of central control of the curriculum, simply by its omission from the 1926 edition of the Code. If he saw this as controversial, he never admitted it, even in retrospect. Arguing that the curriculum should derive its authority 'from general agreement rather than from any exercise of the Board's statutory powers', he described the move in terms of 'letting the horse go on a lighter rein' and justified it as the final stage of a process of improvement which had begun in the late nineteenth century (Brooks, 1993, p.91; p.94). Historians of Percy's own generation, in their broad-brushed, Whiggish narratives, went along happily with this interpretation, which remained unchallenged until John White's 1979 reappraisal. White's most significant contribution to debate in this area was his recognition that Percy's abandonment of central curriculum control had an immediate, and very astute, political motive: to hinder the advance of Labour's educational plan to introduce a socialist curriculum which challenged the basis of

the existing dual system of education. Too much intervention by the central state would be likely, in the longer term, to compromise the Conservatives' policies and they therefore had nothing to lose by keeping the curriculum out of politicians' hands. But White stopped short of giving Percy the credit it now appears he is due, subscribing, rather thoughtlessly, to the idea of Percy as a Tory reactionary, a myth generated in the 1920s by R.H. Tawney, who regarded Percy as an agent in the cynical manoeuvrings of the Conservative Central Office (CCO), acting without any understanding of or concern for the nation's true educational needs (Brooks, p.100). In his own, more recent, work, Ron Brooks (1993) has rightly emphasised that Percy was, in fact, often at odds with CCO and that he risked unpopularity within his own party in speaking out in favour of putting greater trust in the teaching profession, especially for responsibility for the curriculum. Brooks also argues that Percy's commitment to technical education, whose development he believed was thwarted by the state curriculum, was a crucial factor in his decision to deregulate. Working within a government which regarded education as first in line for budgetary cuts, Percy saw this as the first step in opening up the curriculum to the influence of industry and commerce, fitting to the needs of older children and the nation's economic interests (Brooks, p.98). In an analysis of indirect rule in its original colonial context, Prosser Gifford (1967, p.352) suggested that it should be viewed as the 'natural result of an attempt to acquire great tracts of inhabited territory quickly and to rule them 'on the cheap' with badly restrained resources and a handful of men', rather than as a coherent and positively constructed approach to government. It is evident that similar arguments of the political and financial expediency of a strategy of indirect rule can be made in relation to education policy.

Percy's attempt to de-politicise the curriculum was integral to his construction of a conception of teachers' professionalism, which rested on the separation of education from politics (Lawn and Grace, 1987, p.207). His ideal was that control of politically radical teachers should operate as a form of peer-pressure and he spent time in public speeches promoting the isolation of radicals and the idea that teachers themselves, the majority of whom were loyal and responsible professionals, should be the bulwark against radicalisation, whilst encouraging his own Party activists with the idea that he would act if there was evidence of subversion. As in the case of his attitude towards the question of the Oath of Allegiance, the sophistication – or naïveté – of this response was rather beyond the grasp of most provincial Tories and other right-wing groups and individuals, and Percy found himself having to explain, reiterate and defend his position on numerous occasions, more often than not in relation to the activities of the Teachers' Labour League. A copy of a minute from the Special Branch of the Metropolitan Police, in May 1925, described the Teachers' Labour League as 'the left wing of the National Union of Teachers, which is deeply tainted with Socialism' and it would be fair to say that this organization ruffled Conservative feathers to a degree out of all proportion with its actual potential to mount any serious challenge to the *status quo*. One of the League's self-proclaimed aims might have been 'working for the abolition of Imperialistic Teaching in the Educational Institutions of this country' but, with never more than about a thousand members, an essentially propagandist position, and the absence of a coherent oppositional strategy which could relate to the material needs of teachers, it is difficult to find any evidence that the League presented a realistic threat (TNA, ED24/1757).

Despite Percy's hope that the public would not 'attach exaggerated importance' to its activities, he was repeatedly questioned in Parliament throughout 1926 and 1927 on his position in relation to the Teachers' Labour League: was he aware of 'a resolution passed at the annual conference of the Teachers' Labour League on 29 December last, affiliating the League to a

Communist organisation known as the Educational Workers International'? (TNA, ED24/1753; TNA, ED24/1757) Did he have 'any control over the appointment of teachers in the public elementary or secondary schools'? Was he 'prepared to introduce legislation for the purpose of securing control by the Board of Education'? (TNA, ED24/1757) Was he aware that the Teachers' Labour League was 'promoting the spread of Socialism among children attending the elementary schools'? What action did he propose to 'prevent party politics being taught to school children'? Did he intend to 'introduce legislation for the purpose of preventing the propagation of disloyal and seditious doctrines among school children'? Would he 'take steps to secure that no teacher shall in school hours or on school premises teach or influence the scholars in favour of the policy of any political party'? (TNA, ED24/1757) The sensational reporting of the League's activities in the press, particularly in the *Daily Mail* and *Morning Post*, whose editorials railed against the Bolshevisation of education, undoubtedly added fuel to the fire and Percy also received a number of letters during these years from provincial Conservative associations, such as The National Party (formerly The National Fascisti), The Conservative and Unionist Central Office, The British Women's Patriotic League, The Women's Unionist Association, and The National Citizens' Union. All contained variations on the demand made by Lieutenant-Colonel Rippon-Seymour, President of The National Party, that Percy take action to 'prohibit persons of known or avowed Communist beliefs from holding appointments in our State Aided Schools and from receiving what are practically State-paid salaries, whilst acting against the real interest of the State' (TNA, ED24/1757). Percy's responses were consistent, pointing out that the appointment of teachers was the responsibility of Local Authority Education Committees and that the Board of Education had 'no voice in the matter', stating firmly that he did not see the need for new legislation, and reassuring his assailants that the membership of the League was insignificant (TNA, ED24/1757). Percy reiterated his confidence in the power of peer-pressure, professing his confidence that 'the Teaching profession itself will see to it that the League's activities are properly checked' and asserting that 'the standards of the teaching profession itself are the only sure protection against evils of this kind (TNA, ED24/1753). But the ultimate justification for his reluctance to take any action against the Teachers' Labour League was the view also expressed in the Board of Education Minute Paper quoted at the top of this paper: the claim to regard teachers as being 'free to join any lawful Association as long as their membership does not interfere with the proper discharge of their duties (TNA, ED24/1757). Percy exploited the notion that true professionals did not mix politics and practice as a way of incorporating the majority of teachers into the framework of state policy and with the apparent, if never stated, intention of maintaining control.

In advocating trusting teachers and marginalising radical groups, the ideological position Percy constructed was very different from the one being urged upon him by backbench Conservative MPs and the Party at large. In theory, his position was dominant but, as the experiences of those whose stories are recounted below testify, it was not always borne out in the treatment of individual teachers.

EXPERIENCE

When Gideon Murray first raised the question of an oath of allegiance in the Commons in 1922, Fisher had replied that he 'did not know of any facts which would justify the adoption of the Hon. Member's suggestion', prompting Murray to complain of one teacher in particular,

Mr H. Moore, a teacher at Isleworth County School. Murray made allegations of anti-patriotism against Moore which were to become the classics indicators of subversive tendencies: he was alleged to walk out of the room when the National Anthem was played, he would not permit pupils to use capital letters for King or Empire, and he even asked pupils whether they themselves were socialists (*Hansard*, 1922, vol.154, col.793). There is no evidence that any action was taken against Moore on this occasion. A similar campaign was waged against Mr D. Griffiths of Llanelli, who was charged in October 1921 with taking 'unsuitable literature' into school (i.e. the *Daily Herald* and the *Communist*), with 'neglecting to give morning prayers', and with 'wilfully' neglecting school rules'. In this instance, there is one additional known detail, in that his case was thrown out by the education committee of his local authority, who expressed satisfaction at his efficiency (Starr, 1929, p.88). This is significant, as it indicates at least that this was within local government power. What we cannot tell is the degree to which the balance of power and characteristics of the particular local authority might have affected the outcome, and what might have happened had its decision been less favourable.

Similarly, attacks on Miss K. Spurrell, beginning in 1925, might have damaged her reputation but did not end her career. Spurrell had been a teacher for 21 years and was the Labour Party candidate for Totnes when she was accused in a letter to the *Kingsbridge Gazette* of teaching atheism, revolution and communism (Lawn, 1987, p.130). Spurrell was in fact not an atheist, but a Christian Socialist, and although one of her election addresses included the inflammatory declaration, 'We are out to make rebels; we are a revolutionary party, do not forget it', there is no evidence that she was a communist. A writ for libel was issued against the letter-writer, and the case went to court. From her testimony, it was clear that Spurrell was politically radical and actively working for a fundamental change in society through the Labour Party but her headmistress testified that she was, nonetheless, a devout Christian and an excellent teacher, whose socialist beliefs and membership of the Labour Party did not interfere with her work. By way of proof, the headmistress cited Spurrell's participation in every Empire Day celebration during her time at the school. Empire Day (24th May) was introduced in Britain in 1904 as a celebration of the British Empire and Jim English (2006, p.248) has noted that it was intended to 'nurture a sense of collective identity and imperial responsibility among young empire citizens'. English (2006, p.275) has argued that the Conservatives used Empire Day as a political tool during the interwar years, giving rise to a 'significant movement of opposition' from those with Communist or socialist sympathies.³ In light of this, Spurrell's compliance with the ritual was perhaps unexpected and quite persuasive evidence of a separation of her political views from her educational duties. The Lord Chief Justice was, at any rate, satisfied, and compelled the publisher of the *Kingsbridge Gazette* and the letter-writer to pay £200 damages and £800 costs (Starr, 1929, p.88; Lawn, 1987, pp.129-30). Two further attempts were made in 1926, after the General Strike, to dismiss Spurrell on account of the content of public speeches in which she was alleged to have said, "Thank God for the strike" and to have referred to "the cant and hypocrisy of Armistice Day"⁴, but the Education Committee declined to take action (Starr, 1929, p.89). Nonetheless, Spurrell's case illustrates how vulnerable to attack Labour or socialist teachers were, even if they did not bring their politics into the classroom. Although the absence of any evidence of classroom misdemeanour seems to have been what saved her from dismissal, we cannot establish from this evidence how much it might owe to Spurrell's sheer good fortune in having the support of her headmistress and in being brought before a sympathetic judge. There is no evidence that Percy's line on the separation of the private and the professional was consciously followed in her case, and there

are certainly occasions in the latter half of the 1920s when teachers similarly accused were far more harshly dealt with.

The case of Mr E. R. Brown was reported in the socialist weekly newspaper, *The New Leader*, on 23 July 1926. In his own words, he was

...dismissed from Blackburn Grammar School simply for *being* a Communist. A few months ago a parent discovered that I was a Communist and wrote to the head-master; the latter told me that...no schoolmaster had any right to have any political opinions... My headmaster also said that although the Governors would not refuse to confirm my appointment (the first year in a new post is probationary) on the grounds of my being a Communist, "other reasons could be discovered". I took no part in public propaganda but that did not save me. "Other reasons" were invented. The incorporated Association of Assistant Masters took up the matter, but failed to do anything; Labour Councillors tried to get a motion at the Education Committee, but the Clerk told them that it would be ruled out of order (correctly). My wife was fined £10 under E.P.A.; the prosecutor is a Governor of the School, and I was dismissed the day the summons was served. There is no suggestion that I have introduced Communism into the school, and the headmaster told me he had no hope of obtaining anyone for the post with anything like my ability.' (Starr, 1929, pp.89-90)

Brown's wife, Nora, had addressed a crowd of c.500 people on the subject of the TUC's betrayal of the miners and had been fined, under the aegis of the Emergency Powers Act (1920)⁵ as likely to 'cause disaffection amongst the civilian population' (Lawn, 1987, p.131). Undoubtedly, Brown's association with her weakened his position and, had she not been in the public eye, he might have escaped dismissal. But it seems likely that he was also a victim of the volatile political situation created by the General Strike.⁶ In the aftermath of Brown's dismissal, a local parent, Mr Hargreaves, wrote to the *Blackburn Times*, enquiring whether a teacher had been found guilty of 'teaching communism' and suggesting that school governors should concern themselves with the 'character' as well as with the qualifications of their teaching staff. In the ensuing correspondence between Brown and Hargreaves, the latter was supported in a letter from the secretary of the Primrose League⁷, which railed against Bolshevik infiltration of elementary schools and encouraged parents to discover actively communist teachers (Lawn, 1987, p.131).

In other cases, in addition to dismissal from their post, teachers also had their teaching certificates withdrawn, permanently barring them from official teaching work and removing their salary and pension rights. One of the most high-profile, being reported on several occasions in *The Times* in 1921, was that of Marjorie Pollitt, the wife of Harry Pollitt, then Secretary of the Communist Party. Mrs Pollitt, who was assistant mistress in the girls' department of St. John's Road School, Hoxton, had her teaching certificate withdrawn following her arrest in 1926 under the Emergency Powers Act (1920) (Lawn, 1987, p.131). In her memoirs, Pollitt recalls the events leading up to her dismissal.

The indirect cause for my arrest was the fact that the journalists and printers had closed down the newspapers, to their great credit refusing to write and print the most frightful lies about the striking miners as ordered by the newspaper magnates. Their unions instructed them not to publish these falsehoods, so no newspapers appeared during the General Strike, except for the *Government Bulletin* produced by the Tory government,

a little four-pager printing Tory propaganda and attacking the miners. In reply, the mainstream labour movement produced a paper, the *British Worker*, to give their side and the Communist Party produced another, the *Workers Bulletin*. The twelve were in prison, the radical wing of the labour movement had been beheaded, it was difficult to find enough experienced and principled people to carry out the work. We needed a name to use as publisher of the *Workers Bulletin* to give it a semblance of legality, but whose? Harry was in prison but his name was widely known, so they came to me, asking if it would be all right to put my name on as publisher. Sure, I said; in retrospect, it was a mistake, they shouldn't have used a teacher's name, there were plenty of good comrades unemployed who would have been quite willing for their names to be used. But anyway my name appeared and I went on teaching. Then came my arrest...under the Emergency Powers Act... (Pollitt, 1989, p.16)

In court to answer the charge, Pollitt maintained that she had committed no crime and had been within her rights to do what she had done, but she was nevertheless found guilty and fined fifty pounds. Unable to afford the sum, she only escaped jail because a fellow member of the Communist Party paid on her behalf. Pollitt was then summoned before a London County Council Committee of Inquiry and asked to show cause why she should not be dismissed from the teaching service. It can only be assumed that the outcome was a foregone conclusion, as her witnesses could hardly have made a better case. Despite their lukewarm relationship, Pollitt's headmistress confirmed that she had never known her to bring politics or any communist literature into the school; the principal of the Teachers Training College Pollitt had attended described her as 'one of the best students I've ever had'; and the District Inspector 'really lashed out', telling the Inquiry that, 'If you punish this woman, if you dismiss her, you'll be dismissing one of the best teachers I've ever had in my area...I would have no hesitation, in a few years time, in recommending her for a headship...'. But their words were to no avail: Pollitt was sacked from teaching and her Certificate withdrawn. Following the verdict, she wrote to the Board of Education, highlighting the fact that the witnesses' evidence had proven that 'there was not the slightest ground for suggesting that I had ever introduced my political views into my work' and that she was therefore compelled to believe that her dismissal was 'actuated by political bias'. But her protest was turned down and the Board upheld the decision to suspend her recognition as a Certificated teacher (Pollitt, 1989, pp.18-21).

The story of Margaret Clarke has many parallels. Miss Clarke was also arrested and fined under the Emergency Powers Act, in this case for typing material that appeared in the *Birmingham Worker*. She was suspended on 10 May, 1927 and despite a memorial, signed by sixty captains and vice-captains of the school in which she was teaching, stating that they had not known her political opinions until she was arrested as well as a letter of protest from the school staff, Clarke received a request from the Board of Education on 5 July for the return of her teaching certificate. Clarke maintained that her dismissal and the withdrawal of her certificate were gross political persecution and that a teacher, like any other citizen, had a right to hold and give expression to any political opinion outside the school (Starr, 1929, pp.91-2). As she refused to accept the form of apology suggested by the NUT – which would have amounted to an apology for her political opinions – they did not formally support her case and, although her reinstatement (albeit in a lower grade post) was secured in April 1928, the Union executive ignored a recommendation made by its Tenure Committee that Clarke be granted sustentation for the interim period. In addition to being evidence of the state's victimisation of

socialist and communist teachers, her case also became a symbol of the backward policies of the Union executive (Lawn, 1987, p.132). These latter three cases, of Brown, Pollitt and Clarke, have in common their association with the contemporaneous industrial conflict, and this association might provide a partial explanation for their rather more harsh treatment but, with so little evidence, this is only tentative speculation.

CONCLUSIONS

In his 1929 publication, *Lies and Hate in Education*, Mark Starr undertook to demonstrate the ways in which governments use education to perpetuate the social and political *status quo*, remarking that, 'In France the pre-War Hervé was publically dismissed from his school. In Spain the teacher Ferrer was juridically shot. In Britain control works none the less effectively because of the general secrecy of its operation' (p.24).⁸ However, it is the conclusion of this paper that control in British educational policy in the 1920s did not really operate in secrecy, as Starr claimed, but rather that historians have thus far looked for evidence of control in the wrong place and have not convincingly reconstructed either its locus or exercise within the education system. The NUT Conference of 1928 advocated the setting up of an appeal court 'to curb the autocratic power over professional life and death wielded by the Minister of Education' and this preoccupation with the relationship between the President of the Board of Education and the teaching profession has been reflected in historical scholarship. But, as an obvious consequence of the strategy of 'indirect rule' adopted by Percy, this relationship was also indirect, and was mediated – subtly and inconsistently – by local education authorities. The experiences of the individuals discussed above clearly demonstrate the fallacy of the Board of Education's professed tolerance of private political radicalism amongst teachers; their treatment was often more closely aligned with the attitudes of those Conservatives who opposed Percy's approach, which suggests that these oppositional views were dominant in local government. It is this mediating agency's relationship with teachers, and with the Board of Education, on which historians should focus their future attentions.

The failings in the historiography thus far are largely explained by the absence of overt statements or policies of control in the most widely used and accessible source materials and, given these silences, future historians in this field must consider new approaches. An obvious one would be the pursuit of further evidence of *experiences* of being controlled, an approach which, by its nature, might suggest an auto/biographical methodology. There is no doubt that the use of anything in historical writing that might be even remotely thus described is contentious and the recommendation to systematically use such sources to deepen our understanding in this area is not without acknowledgement of their limitations nor without the proviso that valid conclusions could only be drawn in triangulating the evidence with the findings of existing scholarship. It is proposed that auto/biographical evidence might be used, to borrow Barbara Tuchman's phrasing (1981, p.133), as a 'prism' of history, and in the hope that it might help to illustrate the impact of the actions of the various agencies of the state in relation to teacher politicization.⁹ The few individuals' experiences described above tend towards the conclusion that the experiences of political teachers varied widely and that their fate rarely had anything to do with central state 'policy', being instead subject to the unpredictable whims of local education committees, headteachers, and even parents.

The 1920s have been out of vogue in the historiography of education since the late 1980s, when the questions being asked, of curriculum control and the nature of teacher professionalism, had particular contemporary significance, and it is a period relatively little researched and even less understood. As Hilda Kean (1990b) has done for suffragette teachers, and as Peter Cunningham (2001) has advocated for progressives, there would surely be some value in attempting a more extensive prosopography of socialist and Communist activist teachers in the interwar period, in searching for patterns of gender, class, educational background and geographical location, in comparing their movement in, and exploitation of, social and professional networks and structures, and in examining the manner of and motivations for the subsequent recollection or reconstruction of their experiences.

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¹ Yate had retired from Parliament in 1924.

² Lugard's model in fact owed much to the Indian princely states and the residential system in Malaya (Cannadine, 2001, pp.62-4).

³ For a comprehensive discussion of the origins, reception, celebration and politicization of Empire day, see English (2006), *passim*.

⁴ Armistice Day, the anniversary of the ceasefire marking the end of the First World War on 11 November 1918, has been commemorated in Britain since 1919. For war commemoration as a reflection of the inter-war socio-political climate, see, for example, Gregory (1994) and Moss (1991).

⁵ The Emergency Powers Act (1920) was intended 'to make exceptional provision for the Protection of the Community in cases of Emergency'.

⁶ On the General Strike, see, for example, Phillips (1976).

⁷ On the Primrose League in the 1920s, see Hendley (2001).

⁸ Gustave Hervé, a French revolutionary anti-militarist, was dismissed from a teaching post in 1901 (Heuré, 1999, pp.9-21). Francisco Ferrer y Guardia, a Spanish educator and founder of rationalist schools, was executed after a mock trial in Barcelona in the 'Tragic Week' of 1909 (Avrich, 1980, pp.3-33).

⁹ Tuchman (1981) advocates the use of a biographical method in historical scholarship as 'a form that can be used to encapsulate history' and argues its value lies not in illuminating the life of an individual subject for its own sake, but in 'exhibiting an age, or a country and its state of mind' (p.133).