

1945 – 1965: The Long Road to Circular 10/65

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ABSTRACT

Current debates around diversity of provision and schooling often overlook the extensive and persuasive criticisms levelled at the system of academic selection that prevailed following the Second World War; by the 1960s the eleven plus was variously accused of being inaccurate; emotionally destructive; unfair and detrimental to democracy. The individual's emotional and intellectual engagement with their own schooling, and the attitudes towards education it effects, are at the heart of this paper; which explores the ideas around selective versus comprehensive education in the period between 1945 and 1965, through the biographies of three Secretaries of State for Education. It examines the interaction between the (increasingly strong) evidence against academic selection, the growing political will to introduce comprehensive schools, and the prevailing educational and political discourse which was fiercely protective of the grammar schools.

INTRODUCTION

Not everyone wants an academic education. After all, coal has to be mined and fields ploughed, and it is a fantastical idea that we have allowed, so to speak, to be cemented into our body politic, that you are in a higher social class if you add up figures in a book than if you plough the fields and scatter the good seed on the land (Education, 21 June 1946, quoted in Rubenstein and Simon 1973:38).

These were the words of Ellen Wilkinson, daughter of a textile worker from Manchester and Secretary of State for Education in the 1945 Labour Government, in a vigorous and heartfelt defence of the tripartite education system introduced with cross party support after the Second World War. Just two decades later her successor, Anthony Crosland (himself educated at Highgate School), issued Circular 10/65, effectively ending the tripartite settlement and asserting the Labour Party's support for the comprehensivisation of the education system in England and Wales. Crosland's predecessor in the post, Conservative Edward Boyle (Eton College), claimed credit for much of the 'spadework' leading up to the Circular. 'One of the historical myths is that comprehensive reorganisation all started with *Circular 10/65*. It didn't' (Boyle, quoted in Kogan, 1971:76).

Boyle and Crosland, the two Secretaries of State for Education who, arguably, did most to entrench the notion of comprehensive schools in British politics were unlikely heroes; as Maurice Kogan Boyle and Crosland, the two Secretaries of State for Education who, arguably, did most to entrench the notion of comprehensive schools in British politics were unlikely heroes; as Maurice Kogan (1971: p. 20) who interviewed both about their role in the Department commented, 'Boyle was a reluctant Conservative and Crosland a cautious revolutionary'.

This paper will consider the period following the introduction of the tripartite education system, until its *de facto* abolition in 1965, when comprehensivisation became the common policy approach across the political spectrum; in June 1967 Conservative Leader, Edward Heath made a statement which implied ‘general acceptance of the comprehensive pattern, whatever differences might remain on particular points’ (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973, p. xi). What happened between the end of the Second World War and 1965 to alter public attitudes towards the organisation of secondary education?

Through the views of pioneering Education Secretaries - Ellen Wilkinson, Edward Boyle and Anthony Crosland, this paper will examine the way that Conservative and Labour Education policy came to overlap. It will argue that the temperaments and attitudes of Boyle and Crosland were highly influential in the evolution and spread of comprehensive schools and, through consideration of their motivations and limitations, consider the legacy of their actions in relation to comprehensive education in England and Wales.

It will explore why a selective system which greatly favoured the middle classes, ‘a system that labelled over two thirds of children as failures at the age of 11’ (Benn and Miller, 2006, p. 10) was defended by Wilkinson, a founder member of the British Communist Party, while post-war events convinced Edward Boyle, whose curriculum vitae (Eton and Oxbridge) was that of a stereotypical Conservative, of the folly of academic selection at age 11, commenting, ‘the pool of potential ability was deeper than we’d thought’ (Boyle, quoted in Kogan, 1971, p. 91). Key events in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, will be considered at local, national, international and party political level. In these years, education became an issue that pitted national against local government, and led to some unlikely political alliances. It became an issue that transcended traditional party lines; with Labour politicians who were enthusiastically pro-selection and Tories who wanted to abolish the eleven plus.

WILKINSON, BOYLE AND CROSLAND

Speaking in 1962, R. A. B. Butler commented ‘We can look back with pride today to the work Ellen Wilkinson did for Education’ (Butler, 1962, p. 4). The daughter of a textile worker, from Manchester, Ellen was able to progress her education beyond elementary school though a series of scholarships, before entering Manchester University. An active socialist from an early age, she was a founder member of the Communist Party; her support for the tripartite system reflected her ideas on equality, as exemplified by the above quote. She believed her duty as Education Secretary was to convince parents ‘that a grammar school is now specialised type of secondary school, and not the *real* thing, any other being substitutes.’ Wilkinson’s policy preoccupations reflected the struggle that she herself faced in accessing education, which may explain why she had a ‘tendency to focus on the question of access for working class children, to be achieved via the abolition of secondary school fees, and neglect the question of what they were getting access to’ (Martin, 2006, p. 16).

Edward Boyle was the son of a Baron who was educated at Eton and Oxford, traditional social background of a Tory Grandee. He took over the Department for Education in 1962. Boyle’s commitment to education stemmed from a belief that ‘it is the shared sense of

humanity and that alone which can provide the basis for civilised existence' (Boyle, quoted in Kogan, 1971, p. 18). He was explicit in his willingness to rise above party differences and recognise the intrinsic worth of an attitude on its own merit. 'Society can do with a certain amount of cross-grain in theory; such as Conservatives who don't like capital punishment and Socialists who don't like comprehensive schools' (ibid). In 1968, Boyle risked the wrath of the Conservative Party Conference when he warned delegates,:

I will join you in the fight against Socialist dogmatism wherever it rears its head.
But do not ask me to oppose it with an equal or opposite Conservative dogmatism,
because in education, it is the dogmatism itself which is wrong (ibid).

When Anthony Crosland published *The Future of Socialism* in 1956, he confirmed himself as a Fabian socialist, with a deeply held belief in equality. The book promoted a society that was both more just and more efficient. In it he argued that 'as an investment, education yields a great return' (Crosland, 1982, p. 37). Crosland had long expressed his commitment to social justice, his opposition to selection and his wish to abolish the public schools (Kogan 1971).

When Crosland became Education Secretary in 1965, the prevailing political atmosphere was not conducive to radical reform. Comprehensive schools were a sensitive political issue that did not divide neatly along party lines. On the one hand, taking a lead from Boyle, some Tories had expressed their dissatisfaction with selection at eleven. Many of them had 'experienced at first hand the frustration and anger of parents whose children had failed the 11+' (Fogelman, 1999, p. 8). On the other, there were those on Crosland's own side who remained deeply committed to the grammar schools that had, in many instances, facilitated their own social mobility.

Crosland himself was a product of the public school system and did not feel the personal gratitude and allegiance to grammar schools felt by some of his colleagues. His wife famously quoted that he had pledged 'to close every f*****g grammar school in England' (Crosland, 1982, p. 142). However, he did not enact legislation to compel local authorities to introduce a comprehensive system. Neither did he tackle, head-on, the issue of the independent sector, despite recognising that it had a damaging effect on the potential to create a school system that was truly comprehensive, with children of all abilities taught under one roof.

POST-WAR SETTLEMENT

The 1944 Education Act was introduced in response to growing pressure for all children to be provided with a secondary education. The highly influential Spens Report proposed a tripartite educational system that would include grammar schools, technical schools and secondary-modern schools. 'Each type of secondary school will have its appropriate place in the national system with its educational task clearly in view' (1938, p. 376). The Spens Report stated its explicit commitment to the equal status of different types of school, stating that 'If schools providing secondary education of different types are to be made equally acceptable to parents.....the establishment of parity between all types of secondary school is

a fundamental requirement' (bid). The 1944 Act was intended to introduce this system, but the implementation of the Act was rather different in practice. Technical schools were introduced in a very small number of local education authorities, and the system that developed was, in effect, a bi-partite one, with grammar schools for those children who passed the 11+ examination (percentages varied from area to area, but approximately 30% of children received a grammar school education between the ages of 11 and 18); and secondary modern schools for the rest. The majority of secondary modern pupils left school at the end of compulsory schooling: set by Wilkinson at fifteen years of age.

The 1944 Act asserted that all post-11 provision would be secondary in character, with a broad balance of staffing and funding, supporting its commitment to parity of esteem across different types of school. Educationalists on the left (Benn and Simon, 1972; Pedley, 1969) suggest that what was presented as 'education policy' was, in fact, 'social policy', with the British educational system of the 1950s and early 1960s reflecting the traditional notions of a class governed society. What Pedley (1969, p. 19 refers to as 'the hard outlines of a three-class system of education'. In retrospect, the hope of equivalence in educational status between those who were selected at 11, and those who failed, proved naive and disingenuous. However, the selective, grammar school system was defended and promoted by successive official reports (the Hadow Report, 1926, the Spens Report, 1938, the Norwood Report, 1943) which suggested that the eleven plus examination could recognise and assess innate ability and was therefore blind to class. In the post-war period the Ministry of Education suggested that the image of children born with an academic, a 'technical', or a 'modern' cast of mind, was scientifically proven.

The 1944 Act was vague in its wording regarding the structure of schools in a given area; stating only that 'schools available for an area shall not be deemed to be sufficient unless they are sufficient in number, character and equipment to afford for all pupils opportunities for education offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes' (1944, 8, 1c). The Act was administered by the Department for Education, which was responsible for the approval of all the local development plans submitted. The Department held the view that in order to meet the obligation to provide education according to age, ability and aptitude, separate schools should be established, providing differentiated programmes, and children should be selected for admission by means of a selective test.

It is worth noting that the Labour Party had committed itself to supporting the common secondary school through a number of Conference resolutions dating back as early as 1942, when the National Executive Committee moved a resolution stating 'we believe that it is sound that every child in the State should go to the some kind of school' (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973 p. 24). In spite of this, and resolutions from others, including the National Union of Teachers, the lack of political will and the power of the Department, coupled with an ambivalence towards differentiated schooling amongst ministers, meant that selection continued in the vast majority of areas. Though there were limited movements to introduce some comprehensive schools in the intervening period, by 1961, 54% of children attended secondary modern schools, 22% were at grammar schools, and just 4.5% in comprehensive schools; the majority of the remainder were in independent or grant-maintained schools (Benn and Simon, 1972, p.42).

Ellen Wilkinson herself personified the confusion felt on both sides of the House towards multilateral education and selection. Her own educational experience in elementary schools, before winning a pupil teaching bursary in 1906, had given her both a passionate belief in the rights of *all* children to a good education, while also instilling a respect for the status and excellence of the grammar schools. Consequently, the 'parity of esteem which the Labour Movement demanded and Ellen sought to effect was at that time largely an empty dream' (Vernon, 1982, p. 219). Despite the small number of comprehensive schools, the innovative schemes in places such as Leicestershire and Manchester would later serve as models which opponents of selection could cite as workable models offering an alternative to the fixed grammar/secondary modern dichotomy and the eleven plus examination.

THE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE

Educator activists like Robin Pedley pointed to the education system in the world's two great super-powers to support their arguments for comprehensive schools. The USA and the USSR both operated school systems organised around common schooling, rather than early selection. These countries represented not only power and modernity in the post-war world, but also provided models for economic success.

Pedley attributed Britain's relative economic decline to selective education. Claiming that in North America 'the common school is an obvious and necessary part of a democratic society', he goes on to assert that 'from a materialistic point of view, the deeply pessimistic belief in a limited pool of ability caused us rapidly to fall behind in the march for progress' (Pedley, 1969, pp. 30-31). This view was supported by others influential in the field of education including the editor of the *Times Educational Supplement*, H. C. Dent, who expressed deep opposition to the tripartite system, asserting with 'certainty' that it 'cannot adequately meet the requirements of secondary education for all' (Dent, 1949, p. 116). Reflecting on the purpose of education for all, he insisted that it must be 'entirely relevant to our particular form of democratic society..... We have to educate for life in that changing society, not for life in one that is past and gone or in some ideal form of society which exists only in the minds of visionaries' (op cit, p. 117).

There was increasing evidence of a relationship between non-selective, or 'open' provision at secondary level and industrial growth (Benn and Simon, 1972, Servan-Schreiber, 1967) from commentators who went on to blame the inflexible and stratified educational system that prevailed in Western Europe during the post-war period for the lack of economic growth and the maintenance of social barriers and lack of social mobility. British society was itself making the transition from imperial power to medium sized European state *and* trying to meet the new demand for skilled workers. By the mid 1950s, Britain was a 'country that must in future, in a way that it has not had to do in the past, live by its brains' (Benn and Simon, 1972, p. 39). Opponents of selection claimed that Britain's segregated education system left it poorly placed to meet the scientific and technological challenges of the modern world.

The movement towards comprehensive education is not, then, peculiar to Britain alone; it is part of a world-wide movement concerned to adapt the structure of secondary education to the new demands of scientific, technological, social, racial and cultural progress (op cit, p. 36).

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ELEVEN PLUS EXAMINATION

Opposition to the process of selection at 11 grew during the period between 1945 and 1965 for a number of reasons. These included, growing evidence of the unreliability of the test in terms of predicting future performance; the psychological and emotional effects of being branded a failure at such a young age; decreasing confidence that the test could measure innate ability rather than the effect of home environment; and the recognition that early selection resulted in a wastage of ability and frustrated parental aspirations for their children.

One of the architects, and main proponents of the validity of the eleven plus examination, was Cyril Burt. A man credited by adherents as 'the outstanding figure who did most in Britain to establish a psychology of real human beings (especially children) on a sound scientific foundation' (Vernon, 1972, p. 1). However, Burt's extensive influence on the test's design, coupled with 'his strong emphasis on genetic factors' (op cit, p. 4) confirmed fears that the test evaluated a child's home environment, rather than their innate level of ability. That Burt's research was later discovered to have been falsified validated these suspicions. The inability of the test to distinguish between innate ability and home environment was criticised by Edward Boyle in 1962, when he expressed the view that 'one of the most important aspects in the education system is to try to compensate for the inequality of home environment for children all over the country' (quoted in Kogan, 1971, p. 18).

The evidence underpinning many of the criticisms of the test became overwhelming in the period under consideration and the environment changed from one where 'the fatalistic ideas which had dominated educational thinking and planning for a quarter of a century now met with strong criticism and attention turned from psychological justification of the existing system to sociological investigation of its effect' (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973, p. 52).

The Test as a Predictor of Future Performance

The tests were intended to measure innate ability or I.Q. In the 1950s, the Central Advisory Council for Education aimed to assess whether the eleven plus was a reliable measure of intelligence and future attainment by tracking children who had passed or failed the test for a number of years. Disturbingly, results suggested that 22 per cent of army recruits to national service, and 29 per cent of R.A.F. recruits had been assigned to the wrong type of school (Crowther Report, 1959, p. 119). They also collated official figures on the number of secondary modern children being awarded General Certificates of Education (G.C.E.s). At the time it was commonly assumed that only children with an I.Q. exceeding 115 could benefit from a grammar school education, (though, of course, the proportion of places

available locally meant that this figure varied considerably) but statistics showed that children who had been to a secondary modern, having recorded an IQ of less than 100 at age 11, were gaining five or six passes at G.C.E. at the age of 16.

I.Q. tests were defended on the grounds that I.Q. is unchanging, but by the mid 1950s this assumption had been challenged by studies showing that the I.Q. of pupils who passed the eleven plus rose, on average, by 4.9 points in four years, while the I.Q. levels of children who had failed the test fell by an average of 1.9 points.

Emotional Impact of the Test

‘Success bred success and failure bred failure’ commented Pedley (1969, p. 24), recalling a child who had increased his score on an I.Q. test by 23 points after transferring from secondary modern to grammar school. Teachers were increasingly taking the attitude that children labelled as inferior would not only have their self-confidence negatively affected, but that the label itself inhibited future progress.

The eleven plus was regarded as inconsistent with evolving notions of child development, which asserted that different children develop at different rates and a blanket exam at a fixed age resulted in huge ‘wasted of talent’; a theory strongly supported by J.W.B. Douglas’s (1968) longitudinal study of children born in 1946. In 1965 the Director of Education in Leicestershire, Stuart Mason, eloquently described the damage done to individual children and their families by the selective process.

A sense of success in a few is being paid for by a sense of failure in many; primary school friendships were severed, brothers and sisters artificially separated. A sense of social injustice was being engendered while reservoirs of talent were doomed to remain untapped. More and more people were coming to see that the 11+ reflected an outmoded we/they society (quoted in Fogelman, 1999, p. 13).

Did the Test Measure Ability or Background?

Wilkinson’s dream that *different* types of secondary school should be just that and not a *hierarchy* of schools was not shared by many parents. Wilkinson may not have been convinced by the notion of ‘the “cream” going to one type of school while the “rest” went to another’ (McCulloch, 1998, p. 63), but the grammar and secondary modern schools intake largely reflected the class structure of society.

Despite claims that the eleven plus was a blind test that measured in-born ability, it became increasingly apparent that schools were divided along class lines, with the majority of children in secondary moderns coming from working-class homes with fathers in manual occupations, and the middle-classes being significantly over represented in grammar schools. In a 1953 study of four grammar and five secondary modern schools in London, research found that in one secondary modern, just 6.9 per cent of pupils came from manual working class backgrounds. The study concluded that the crucial role in the selection

procedure was played by intelligence tests which, they argued, favoured the middle class child (Halsey and Gardner, 1953).

The findings of the London study were supported by other sociological studies (Haim, 1954, Simon, 1953) which suggested that the I.Q. tests discriminated against working class children, and there was a growing acceptance that the tests 'inevitably reflected to some extent the child's environment' (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973, p. 63). Others argued against early streaming at primary level, on the grounds that middle class children often read early due to parental support, rather than innate ability (Vernon 1957).

Frustrated Parental Aspirations

Evidence of the lack of parity of esteem for the different types of schooling was reflected in the wishes and aspirations of parents. An enquiry in Hertfordshire in 1952, found that just 16 per cent of parents favoured the secondary modern school for their child, compared to over 70 per cent who aspired to send their child to the grammar or technical school: 'Parents who wanted their children to have a good education, to get on in life, were determined to get them into grammar school' (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973, p. 59). A place at a grammar school was seen as the beginning of a path leading to university and the professions, and it was seen by working class parents as a route to social mobility and white collar employment.

Although most children who attended grammar schools were middle class, a review of research on selection showed that 55 per cent of middle class children did not pass their 11+ and ended up in secondary moderns (Crook, Power and Whitty, 1999). From the middle class perspective, the system was not only unfair, but dangerously unreliable (Power, Edwards, Whitty and Wigfall, 2003). A combination of 'personal anxiety and fear made them grasp the destructive nature of [the] system' (Benn and Miller, 2006, p. 10). Another by-product of the test, which is particularly pertinent today, is the notion that primary teaching was being adversely affected by the fact that all children sat the 11+ - that schools were 'teaching to the test' with the effect that the range of the curriculum was being narrowed.

Due to the issues outlined above, there was growing parental pressure to change the selective system and introduce something more flexible that better served the interests of the wider population. This pressure was a major component leading to political will to change the selective system.

EDWARD BOYLE AND THE CONSERVATIVE VIEW

By the early 1960s, Conservative ministers were aware of the growing levels of dissatisfaction with the 11+, and 'probably more sympathetic to change than the majority of their party members' (Fogelman, 1999, p. 7). Legislation to remove the compulsory requirement for school transfer at 11 was introduced by the Conservative Government in

late 1964, under the direction of its progressive Secretary of State for Education, Edward Boyle.

The 1964 legislation gave the green light to local authorities wishing to pursue an alternative secondary structure, which some had been arguing for some time, such as the introduction of the middle-school for children aged nine to thirteen. The attraction of this option was that it could be achieved with minimal disruption, and without school closures, in addition to the fact that it allowed grammar schools to retain their academic courses and sixth forms.

Many Local Authorities took this opportunity to introduce some element of comprehensivisation, but usually only on a small scale and in a certain area. The number of comprehensive schools in England and Wales rose from 130 in 1960 to 262 in 1965; though, despite this expansion, they still accounted for only 8.5 per cent of the secondary population (Fogelman, 1999). There was a general feeling that the tide was turning away from selectivity and towards the comprehensive school, and the NFER found that by 1964, 71 per cent of Local Authorities had established, or intended to establish, some comprehensive schools (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973).

Previous Conservative Education Secretaries had assumed a defensive position towards proposals for comprehensive schools. For example, a Manchester plan to open three comprehensive schools in 1955 was vetoed by the Department four days before the beginning of term, causing considerable local anger and disruption. The Minister rejected a move in Swansea to merge existing provision into 'multilateral' schools, on the grounds that the existing grammar schools 'were too precious to be endangered' (Rubenstein and Simon, 1973, p. 73).

By 1962, London had the highest proportion of children in comprehensive schools – some 53 per cent, but, even in this area, selective schooling persisted. Despite the numbers in comprehensive schools increasing, the majority of the most able children still went to grammar schools, meaning that large comprehensives which should have been able to experiment with new educational approaches due their scale did not have a representative intake.

Boyle was the first Education Secretary who made it known that he would not stand in the way of plans for local comprehensive systems; in contrast to the rather mealy mouthed approval for individual comprehensive schools expressed by his predecessors. In October 1963, Bradford City Council resolved to remove selection at 11, and introduce a two tier system (with parental choice at thirteen), moving incrementally towards a wholly comprehensive system. Edward Boyle waived a statutory instrument in order to facilitate the Bradford plan.

While the patrician Boyle was not as obstructive towards the establishment of comprehensive schools as his Conservative successor, Margaret Thatcher, some argue that he 'has been widely give credit for being far more pro-comprehensive than he ever really was' (Benn and Simon, 1972, p. 89). Although Boyle would reject this view in an interview with the scholar and author Maurice Kogan:

[Comprehensive reorganisation] started a number of years before [circular 10/65]...It became perfectly clear that we would have to have some changes in the law to allow middle-schools, so that you didn't have to change from primary to secondary at the age of ten or eleven...I knew that the spadework leading up that circular [10/65] was the result of the replies to an enquiry that I had sanctioned in 1963 (1971, p. 78).

ANTHONY CROSLAND AND THE PATH TO 10/65

One explanation proffered as to why *Circular 10/65* 'requested' rather than 'required' Local Authorities to submit plans for reorganisation along comprehensive lines was Labour's tiny parliamentary majority of six (though there were no efforts to strengthen the wording after the 1966 general election which increased Labour's majority.) Anthony Crosland was a believer in the power of persuasion, rather than an arm-twister, and he was part of a Cabinet which felt distinctly ambivalent towards the comprehensive ideal, particularly if it meant abolishing grammar schools: 'It was fundamental to his view of democracy that reform would 'stick' better *if* it could be achieved voluntarily' (Crosland, 1982, p. 144). In addition, Cabinet members did not wish to 'be seen to be disrupting the traditional relationship with local authorities' (Fogelman, 1999, p. 9).

10/65 was a pragmatic document. It stated that it was the Government's declared objective to end selection at eleven and to 'eliminate separatism' (DES, 1965) in secondary education. The Circular was mindful of the need to promote fairness in the school system and stressed the importance of informing and involving those 'from less educated homes' (ibid). Though it avoids explicitly mentioning *equality*, the circular went on to state that the Government believed that the separation of children into different types of secondary schools impeded the raising of educational standards, and that all secondary provision should be reorganised along comprehensive lines, so that all children could receive the education then only available to grammar school children.

Considerable discretion was given to Local Authorities on how to implement the Circular, though a number of models were suggested which would indicate compliance with the Government's policy. These ranged from the 'orthodox: all through comprehensive schools 11 – 18, to 'two-tier' schools with children transferring from junior comprehensive to senior comprehensive at 13 or 14. The Circular warned against concentrating too vigorously on external examinations, claiming this would lead to an unhealthy narrowing of the curriculum.

The ethos of community was strongly promoted, as was the socially comprehensive aim of the policy. Comprehensive schools were intended to include pupils from a whole range of abilities and backgrounds. It was assumed that mixing children together in one community would enrich the lives of all, as well as promoting tolerance and respect. It was suggested the LEAs manipulate catchment areas to ensure a social mix. Writing in 1969, Pedley outlined the educational utopia envisaged by the left.

Comprehensive education does more than open the doors of opportunity to all children. It represents a different, a larger and more generous attitude of mind...the forging of a communal culture by the pursuit of quality with equality, by the education of their pupils in and for democracy, and by the creation of happy and vigorous local communities in which the school is the focus of social and educational life (Pedley, 1969, p. 4).

However, commitment to the grammar school system was strong. Crosland expressed his frustration with those who supported comprehensives, while hesitating to abolish grammar schools; whom he perceived as dishonest because the grammar schools ‘creamed off the more gifted children’ (Crosland, 1982, p. 148). Crosland recognised that selection must be eradicated in order for comprehensive schools to work. He was deeply opposed to private schools and stated ‘we must either have radical reform or none at all’ (ibid).

Due to the continued existence of selective schools, it was very difficult to accurately assess the successful impact, or otherwise, on the ‘comprehensive’ schools. Comprehensives and selective schools co-existed in the same area, with the result that the most able were under represented in the comprehensive school.

CONCLUSION

The rapid pace of change in education in the post-war period lends itself to a biographical approach to history, since it is only through the prism of individual action that we can understand how and why the post-war settlement was abandoned. Education is an area of public competence of which all law-makers have direct experience. To a woman born into Ellen Wilkinson’s circumstances, education was a privilege; while men like Boyle and Crosland grew up with an expectation that they would receive a long and privileged schooling. Inevitably, their views and attitudes were shaped by their own experience. To reflect on aspects of each individual is to provide a valuable insight into the motivation behind significant policy decisions – that is not to suggest a direct *causal* link.

The sources cited in this paper each have their own agenda and perspective. Susan Crosland’s engaging and thorough book about her beloved husband is far from an objective, critical account of his life, while Maurice Kogan’s interviews (the main primary source for Edward Boyle) are selected passages from many hours of interviews. The contrast in shelf space taken up by Crosland biographies, compared to those on Boyle may suggest that Crosland is perceived as a more significant figure. Regarded by some as the greatest British socialist thinker of all time, it was his belief in the principle of equality that lay behind his enthusiasm for education reform and he is widely credited with ending academic selection at eleven for most children. Wilkinson has attracted attention from a number of women writers (Vernon, 1982; Martin, 2006), but in common with Boyle, enjoys a far lower level of name recognition than Crosland.

Boyle clearly saw himself as a man of opportunity, telling Kogan, ‘I assumed, perhaps too readily, that if I wanted to get into the House of Commons I would be able to do so’ (1971, p. 69). He was rather admired by his Labour successor as Secretary of State for Education

and Science, Anthony Crosland. In her diaries, Susan Crosland (1982, p. 143) suggests that Boyle was 'one of the few Tories for whom Tony had any time'. This may have been for the qualities of irreverence and honesty shared by the two men: when becoming members of the Privy Council, Boyle and Crosland were united in their refusal to swear an oath on the Bible; as Boyle put it 'I think one's word alone should be sufficient' (ibid).

Reflecting on his legacy in 1967, Secretary of State Anthony Crosland commented with satisfaction that "his policy on comprehensives had gone so far as to be irreversible" (Crosland, 1982, p. 182). Indeed, ten years after his tenure at the Department for Education, the majority of secondary school age pupils in England attended comprehensive schools.

However, secondary education remains almost as contentious a topic today as it was in the 1960s. Successive governments since the 1970s have tampered with the comprehensive system and introduced a range of initiatives, including 'opting out', 'diversity of provision' and 'selection by aptitude' in an attempt to convince parents that their child will be able to go to a 'different' and 'better' school. Opponents of academic selection should, though, take solace from the fact that the arguments that won-over in 1965 are still convincing enough that in 2010 no mainstream British political party will publicly endorse a return to the eleven-plus examination.

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