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ENGLISH SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:
A MOVEMENT PRELUDED BY ENGLISH EDUCATION
(1851-1910)

Ouachita Baptist University

Special Studies

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By Peggy Woodruff

The last half of the nineteenth century in England was marked by continued industrialization of the country, liberalization of the education system, a growing social conscience, and a profusion of social legislation. All these factors, of course, contributed to the improved way of life of Englishmen during the early twentieth century. Each factor is closely related to all other factors, and each one could be substantiated by excellent sources as a major contribution to the improved conditions of the life of Englishmen. This paper, however, will be limited to discussing the improved education system and the resulting social legislation.

In the 1860's when the trade unions actually had their first working class leadership, the unions began to agitate for the passage of a reform bill which would enlarge the franchise. Gladstone pointed out to the working classes that "they had "five-twelfths of the income of the country, and only one-seventh of the electoral power, and with their working class organization, power of agitation, skill in presenting their case, and above all their new wealth, they could not be refused."¹

When Russell's reform bill was defeated in 1866, a group organized a demonstration in Trafalgar Square in London. When

they were refused admittance, the organized part of the demonstrations withdrew, but the crowd that it had attracted removed some bars in the fence and entered the square. Foot Guards and Life Guards had to be called out to quell the demonstration. The events at Trafalgar Square convinced Parliament of the necessity of reform, and thus after much debate concerning the content of the bill Parliament passed the Reform Act of 1867.

After the reform bill passed, Robert Lowe, who had encouraged the plan of "payment by result," remarked that "we must now set to work to educate 'our future masters.'"² England had not developed a national system of education because no one could propose a bill that would be satisfactory to both the Established Church and to the Dissenters. In order to teach their religious beliefs, both groups had established schools throughout the country. Eventually, a network of voluntary schools, which were paid for by private subscription, spread over the country. The great majority of voluntary schools were owned and controlled by the Established Church and were called national schools because they were formed by the (Anglican) National Society.³

The education bill of 1870, the work of W.E. Forster, provided for a double state grant to existing Church schools and Roman Catholic schools to enable them to become a permanent part of the system. Publicly controlled schools were to be established to fill in the gaps which the voluntary schools left. The new schools, which were called board schools, were to be paid by local rates and governed by popularly elected

school boards. In most voluntary schools church teaching was to be continued, but in board schools, the Bible was to be taught without denominational comment. The religious instruction that was provided was to be either at the beginning or the close of the day so that parents who did not want their children to receive the instruction could take them home.

The Bill required parents who could pay for their children's education to do so, but those who could not were excused from payment. The act further introduced the principle of compulsory attendance and gave local authorities the right to enforce attendance if they so desired.⁴

The major complaint of the Dissenters was that the children in the villages had only one school to attend--the voluntary school. Another defect which was discovered a few years later was that the bill provided only for primary schools; this was ruled in the Cockerton case which stated that ratepayers' money could not be used for any form of secondary or higher education under the terms of the 1870 act.⁵

The education measure provided education for a greater number of children than the voluntary system did. Between 1870 and 1890, the average attendance rose from one and one-fourth million to four and one-half million while the money spent on each child was doubled.⁶

While the Education Act of 1870 cared for primary education, no provision was made for improving the secondary education system, or for establishing a national system of secondary schools.

The secondary system of schools had slowly become outdated and inefficient. In 1861, Lord Clarendon's commission investigated seven endowed boarding schools: Winchester, Eton, Shrewsbury, Westminster, Rugby, Harrow, and Charterhouse. Their report, which was issued in 1864, led to the passage of the Public Schools Act of 1868. The bill provided for the appointment by the schools of new governing boards. With the exception of the required removal of certain narrowing restrictions and the required approval by the Privy Council of all measures, the governing bodies were left with a free hand.⁷

These so-called public schools were actually private schools. The middle classes saw in these schools an excellent opportunity for their sons to enter the governing class. Thus the old landed gentry, members of the new industrial class, and the professional men were educated together. This enlarged the aristocracy while at the same time it separated further the aristocracy from the rest of the nation. However, the expenses of the public school were so high that the number of children decreased greatly in some of the best sections of the city.⁸

A few years later the Taunton commission examined all other secondary schools. The commission found that one hundred towns with a population of five thousand or more were without a grammar school. Grammar schools were a part of the secondary system. It further stated that (1) Very few changes had been made to include non-classical subjects in the curriculum of existing schools. (2) Schools that were not connected with universities

seemed to be in chaos. (3) Those schools which were designed for the low classes seemed to be doing the best job.⁹

Because of the way the grammar schools were constituted, they were immediately faced with problems. Laws one hundred years old set the teachers' salaries and determined the curriculum they were to follow. Additional problems developed because many middle class families began to send their sons to private schools which were designed for their class and showed a willingness to try new subjects. Learning in grammar schools was hampered by out-of-date text books, a poor student-teacher relationship, and discipline governed by terror.¹⁰

Causing secondary schools to be even less effective was the problem of endowments. Many schools had only a small sum on which to operate, and this money was frequently mismanaged. Thus one could find a school which had two teachers and one pupil or a school which had no pupils at all.¹¹

Although the secondary education system was not completely reformed and enlarged until the Balfour Act of 1902, many of the schools slowly began to make internal improvements which rendered secondary education more effective. Many of these changes were due to the work of Thomas Arnold, the headmaster of Rugby. When he went to Rugby, discipline among the boys was almost non-existent. By winning the respect of student-selected monitors or prefects he was able to develop good discipline.

Arnold's approach to learning was revolutionary for his time. He improved the appearance of the classrooms with the

use of pictures and good desks. The educator made learning less mechanical by asking thought-provoking questions; he updated the curriculum by including math and French. Arnold did not trust the training of secondary teachers; he, therefore, encouraged them to work out their own methods.¹²

In the mid-1800's change was not only necessary in secondary education for men but also in secondary education for women. For years a woman's education was sacrificed so that her brother could continue his.¹³ Her training was dominated by the idea that every girl was a prospective wife and that if she did not marry, she would be supported as a governess, servant, or companion. Therefore, her education consisted in grounding her in morals, in training her how to catch a man, and in teaching her how to support herself should it be necessary .

Soon after the middle of the century women began to shed their fragile, dumb image.¹⁴ They started to agitate for the woman's right to vote, the privilege to dispose of her own property after she married, the right to graduate from a university. With the changed concept of women came the demand from them for more education.

Taking the lead in creating reforms in women's education were Maurice and Kingsley. Maurice's sister interested him in establishing a school for training women teachers. Miss Murray, one of Queen Victoria's two maids of honor, planned a college for women. These two ideas were incorporated into Queen's College.

Many girls had left school before they could take exams; however, many had had time to continue their reading. Arthur Hugh Clough's sister therefore suggested that courses of lectures be begun for them.

With the extension lectures and Queen's College women began to demand admission to university examinations. They realized that if they could pass the exams, they could also demand a university education. The universities rejected these demands until 1868 when Cambridge allowed them to sit for the local examinations.¹⁵

The universities had stricter laws and traditions governing them than any part of the English education system. These old statutes made them highly selective in their admissions and quite narrow in their curriculums. Oxford and Cambridge were opened to only one-half of the nation; the rest of the population were excluded by religious tests which were imposed in the interests of the Established Church.

Internally, things were made complex by privileges, exemptions, distinctions, and fellowships which were restricted to the founder's kin. However, as a result of the Reform Bill of 1867 and the election of 1868, it was possible to open College Fellowships and University posts to men of all religious denominations.¹⁶

In 1873, the universities started a new movement that had far-reaching effects. They began to send out their best men to lecture to audiences away from the university. The extension program led to local demands for higher education, stimulated the

establishment of local university colleges, and assisted in founding new universities in great industrial centers. These universities stressed math and the sciences and were definitely secular. The extension lectures also led in the twentieth century to the further development of tutorial classes for working men.¹⁷

Closely related to changes in the universities was the Civil Service Act of 1870. The act abolished patronage in almost all public offices and made entrance to a public office competitive. Selecting men for practical careers on the report of examiners showed a belief in higher education and had the effect of connecting university men with public life. After the Civil Service Reform Act a trained intellect instead of social patronage became the best method for a young man to obtain success.¹⁸

As all parts of the English education system were changing, a series of laws was passed which made education for the masses more effective. The dates and provisions of these laws were as follows:

- 1876 The authority to make school attendance laws was extended to school attendance committees with no school board.
- 1880 A law required school boards and school attendance committees to make compulsory school attendance laws and to provide for their enforcement.
- 1890 A revised code made payment of a grant dependent on the inspector's estimate of the school's effectiveness, not on the number of children passing exams. it abolished payment by result.
- 1891 A bill provided for an extra grant of 10 shillings per capita of average attendance . In effect it made public education free.

- 1893 & 1890 Laws raising the minimum age for leaving school to 11 and 12 years respectively.
- 1894 A new code for evening continuation schools made them more useful.
- 1897 In a radical departure from the Law of 1870, voluntary schools received 5 shilling per capita of average attendance.
- 1898 Teachers were enabled to retire at 65 by a pension. Part of the funds came from the teacher's salary, part from the government.
- 1899 The Central Education Authority was created. The functions of several education bodies were transferred to it. It was not limited only to elementary schools.
- 1902 The Balfour Act. Schools boards were abolished and authority was given to civil councils of counties and county boroughs. These councils were given the right to regulate primary, secondary, and scientific education. They were given rating powers. Voluntary schools were admitted to share local taxes but without local control.

Some of the results of the education system can be seen in the labor movement of the period. Between the 1860's and 1870's, the unions continued to be regarded as a potential threat to law and order. The large trade unions wanted to win a respectable place for unions in the English society. The union leaders thus used a cautious policy; they learned to negotiate effectively, began to breakdown the jealousy among the unions themselves, and brought men to the front with good administrative ability. Because of the comparatively high literacy rate among the workers, they began to regard a strike as a last-resort measure.²⁰

During this time new union leader began to work with the unskilled laborers. In 1886, Benjamin Tillet tried to organize

the dock workers but failed. Three years later John Burns, Tom Mann, and Tillet formed a Gas Workers and General Laborers Union which was successful in securing its demands. Tillet then reorganized the dockers and succeed not only in obtaining demands but also in capturing public sympathy.

Organized labor, composed of ten per cent of all labor, opposed any effort to extend unions to less skilled workers for fear that they would lose their privileged position.²¹

The men who led in the new union movement were all from the working class. Benjamin Tillet had worked as a bricklayer, bookmaker, and sailor before he organized the dockers' strike. Tom Mann began work when he was nine; he became a journeyman engineer, a position which required some education, and joined the socialist movement in 1885. John Burns went to work when he was ten, and was an apprentice engineer at fourteen. He supplemented his meager education by attending night school and doing extensive reading. Burns did more than organize labor; however; he was elected to Parliament and in 1914, he was selected as the first cabinet minister from the working class.²²

Another movement show leaders were products of the English education system was the socialist movement. Although skilled workers were benefitting from reform measures of the mid-Victorian period, the semi-skilled were living in miserable conditions. Few people even recognized the existence of this segment of the population until 1883, when Bearney published the Bitter Cry of Outcast London, a pamphlet depicting the conditions of the lowest classes of society.

Six years after the pamphlet was published, Charles Booth and Seebohm Rowntree made studies of the life of the working classes in London and York, respectively. They concluded: (1) that the unskilled worker received wages insufficient to maintain himself and his family in a state of efficiency, (2) that he worked too long, and (3) that he lived in an unsanitary house. Booth further avered that one-third of the population lived on or about the line of poverty, that another third made an additional ten shilling weekly, and the final third of the population included all those who had a higher income.

From 1880 to 1890, several socialist parties were formed. The three major parties were the Fabian Society whose members included George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, and Ramsay MacDonald; the Social Democratic Federation which was headed by H.M. Hyndman; and the Independent Labor Party whose leader was James Keir Hardie. Each of these groups worked independently to obtain legislation, and each made little progress in obtaining their goals.

At the suggestion of the Trade Union Congress of 1899, a conference of labor union representatives and socialist party delegates met to discuss the question of direct labor representation in Parliament. The conference decided to form a separate political party called the British Labor Party. The group would be willing to work with either party for social legislation for the working class. The Labor Party assumed immediate importance because of the need to pass certain laws necessary to the work of trade unions.

The party ran its first candidates in 1900. Out of the fifty-one nominees for office, it sent twenty-nine men to Commons. Four years later it increased its number of seats to forty.²³

The leaders in the socialist movement came from two extremes. Hyndman and Shaw were from well-to-do homes and were able to attend the best schools. Wells and Hardie, on the other hand, grew up in poverty. Hardie received his education in night school, and Wells, who found an opportunity to read extensively while he worked as an usher at a grammar school, won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in South Kensington, London.²⁴

With an enlarged franchise and a new awareness of the living conditions of many of the people in England, Parliament passed a series of laws designed to improve the conditions of the people. A particularly outstanding feature of social reform legislation was the close relationship between education acts and factory legislation. Raising the age at which children could be employed came after the Education Act of 1870. People slowly began to believe that the place for a child was in school, not in a factory. It has been pointed out that the lack of an education act kept back factory legislation with regard to children. In a broader sense, though, it retarded factory legislation in all areas. As Parliament passed laws regulating children's work, it also began to regulate women's work, and slowly it was able to enact laws governing the working conditions of men.²⁵

The Education Act of 1870 was a prelude to social reform legislation during the decade. The Ballot Act of 1872 provided

for the right of secret ballot; it thus became possible for those who depended on others for their livelihood to vote as they chose. Three years later Cross' Public Health Act consolidated and clarified over one hundred measures; while the Artisans Dwelling Act enabled towns with a population of more than twenty thousand to acquire by compulsory purchase buildings condemned by medical health officers for the purpose of improving them. The Merchant Shipping Bill, improving the conditions of sailors, was also approved in 1875.

The women not only succeeded in gaining the right to sit for university examinations, but they also gained the right in 1882 to be considered equal with men in matters concerning their private incomes, earnings, and inheritances.²⁶

Chamberlain proposed a program of legislation in 1885, which he called the "Unauthorized Program." He used this term because his party, the Liberal party, did not approve it. The program included the following points:

1. An increase in the number who had direct access to the soil by allowing local authorities to buy land and rent it in small holdings at fair prices.
2. Abolition of fees in schools provided for the working classes.
3. Graduated income tax.
4. Greater democratization of local governments.²⁷

When these measures were not passed, Chamberlain resigned from the Liberal Party.

In 1891, Parliament approved a comprehensive factory act dealing with the work of women and children and with the condi-

tions of the factories. The bill limited the hours women could work to twelve a day with an hour and a half for meals; it raised the minimum age of working children to eleven. The bill also enforced various sanitary regulations and dealt with some of the evils of subcontracting and "sweating".²⁸

Parliament continued to pass social legislation during the first decade of the twentieth century. The social measures approved during this period may be divided into several groups:

1. Laws to regulate newly freed land. Very little land was actually freed; therefore, the law was unimportant.
2. National Insurance Act. Introduced socialized medicine. Everyone with a salary less than \$160 was required to participate.
3. Series of laws dealt with unemployment and under-employment. They established labor exchanges where a worker could get information on where jobs in England were available. They also introduced unemployment insurance on a limited basis.
4. Provided for the welfare of children. These laws made it possible to extend the number of months a nurse visited the home after a baby was born, established kindergartens, provided meals for undernourished children, required children to attend school until they were 14, and established juvenile courts.²⁹

A significant feature of this program was the growth of stateism: the numbers of state officials and bureaus increased notably. Through the social measures the power of the government over the individual was also increased.³⁰

After the election of 1906, when twenty-nine Labor party members were elected to Commons, several bills which were particularly advantageous to the working class were passed. After

the courts ruled in 1906, that labor unions could not support labor representatives, a bill providing for payment of members of Commons was passed. In the same year a Workman's Compensation act was approved. The 1908-09 Old Age Pension Law provided for a pension of five shillings a week for everyone over seventy who met certain qualifications.

In 1911, Parliament approved one of the most important acts in its history. This bill took the power to veto a bill from the House of Lords. This made Parliament a much more democratic institution.³¹

The English education system was forced to improve by the change of attitude toward education and, largely, by the acts passed by Parliament. As the system improved, the curriculum of the schools was up-dated, making the subject matter studied much more useful to the pupil. It was continually enlarged until people of the unskilled working classes could receive an education. As this paper has indicated, many of the leaders of social movements were from the working classes and had been educated by the public school system: Burns and Hardie received their training in evening schools, Mann as an apprentice, and Wells, first working in a grammar school and then on a scholarship to a school of science.

The cautious policy used by the leaders of the large unions to gain the conditions they wanted and to secure a respectable place for unions in English society indicated that the leaders

had received some education and learned either through reading or by experience the value of patience.

The socialist parties were formed as a result of the new awareness of the living conditions of the working classes. This awareness was made public through pamphlets and other printed materials. The ability of the public to read these materials is an implication that education was widespread throughout the population.

The combination of the trade unions and socialist parties to form the Labor party marked the beginning of a formidable political power in English politics. Both the Liberal and Conservative parties tried to stop the movement before it became widely accepted, but neither was successful. By 1910, the Labor party and the Irish Home Rule party held the balance of power in Commons.³² The party continued to grow in strength and numbers until it replaced the Liberal party in the 1920's.

NOTES

- ¹ Frederick Dietz, Political and Social History of England (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947) p. 571.
- ² William Hunt and Reginald Land Poole, eds., The Political History of England (London: Longmans, Green and Company Ltd., 1926) XII, p.207.
- ³ George Macaulay Trevelyan, English Social History (London: Longmans Green and Company, 1942) p. 580.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 580; E.L. Woodward, The Age of Reform, 1815-1870 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949) p. 469; Paul Monroe, A Cyclo-pedia of Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925) I, p.474.
- ⁵ Trevelyan, Social History, op. cit., p. 581.
- ⁶ Ibid., p. 581.
- ⁷ Monroe, op. cit., p. 581.
- ⁸ Trevelyan, Social History, op. cit., p. 520.
- ⁹ Woodward, op. cit., p. 469.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 465.
- ¹¹ G. M. Young, ed., Early Victorian England, 1830-1865 (London: Oxford University Press, 1951) II, p. 342.
- ¹² Woodward, op. cit., pp. 467-68.
- ¹³ Trevelyan, Social History, op. cit., p. 521.
- ¹⁴ G.M. Young, Victorian England, Portrait of an Age (London: Oxford University Press, 1953) p. 491-93.
- ¹⁵ Woodward, op. cit., p. 477.
- ¹⁶ George Macaulay Trevelyan, British History in the Nine-teenth Century (1782-1901) (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1942) p. 55; Young, op. cit., p. 493; George Macaulay Trevelyan, Illustrated History of England (New York: David McKay Company, 1962) p. 683.

- 17 Trevelyan, 19th Century, op. cit., p. 355.
- 18 Ibid., p. 357; Trevelyan, Social History, op. cit., p. 355
- 19 Monroe, op. cit., p. 463.
- 20 Woodward, op. cit., pp. 590-93.
- 21 Dietz, op. cit., p. 695.
- 22 William Geddie and Liddell J. Geddie, Chamber's Biographical Dictionary (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960) pp. 156, 918; Walter, Yust, ed., Britannica Book of the Year, 1942 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1942) p. 413; encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1960) II, p. 454.
- 23 Dietz, op. cit., p. 613.
- 24 Encyclopedia Britannica, IV, op. cit., p. 477; Encyclopedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1949) XII, p. 220; Stephen and Lee, V, op. cit., p. 239.
- 25 Charles W. Ripkin, Social Politics and Modern Democracies (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931) I, p. 68.
- 26 Hunt and Poole, op. cit., pp. 276, 344.
- 27 Dietz, op. cit., p. 617.
- 28 Hunt and Poole, op. cit., p. 414.
- 29 Dietz, op. cit., pp. 629-31.
- 30 Ibid., p. 631.
- 31 Ibid., p. 625-29.
- 32 Ibid., p. 628.

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