

I

Post-War Settlements

Contexts of Reform

Between 1943 and 1947, the coalition government led by Churchill and the Labour government of Attlee committed themselves to full employment, instituted a more effective system of social security, and – in Labour’s case – constructed a National Health Service, freely available. Central among the motives for these reforms was a political recognition of the strength of the demand for change, a strength expressed by Labour’s overwhelming victory in the general election of 1945. The effects of reform were many and enduring. The lifting of the threat of unemployment and dire poverty greatly strengthened trade-unionism. The creation of new and massive institutions of health and welfare brought into existence a large professional or semi-professional class, which developed policies and interests of its own. At the same time, the fact that reform was the result of decisive action at the political centre served to cement the support of the majority of the Welsh and Scottish populations for the British state. The depression of the 1930s had devastated the Welsh and Scottish economies – Wales had lost one-fifth of its population. The creation of the welfare state, ‘the most important reform for raising the quality of working-class life in the twentieth century’, was manifestly the work of national government, which possessed a ‘capacity for regeneration’ which no individual polity could match (Morgan and Mungham 2000).

But this capacity was limited, first of all, by economic circumstance. Impoverished by war, Britain was able to fund the welfare state only with financial aid in late 1945 from the American government. Resolving a further financial crisis in 1947 likewise required US

assistance, in the process of which Britain ran up political as well as economic debts. Problems at this level were increasingly bound up with global shifts in the military and political balance. As the USA, supported by Britain, worked to create a world order based on the rebuilding of war-torn capitalist economies, hostility grew between the Western supporters of this project and the non-capitalist powers of the Soviet Union and China. The resulting Cold War, which reached an early peak with the Korean conflict of 1950–3, had a substantial impact on economic and social life: in its early stages, it demanded levels of spending which further limited welfare provision, and at the same time served to stimulate an intense domestic politics of anti-communism, which muted the radical ideologies that had accompanied earlier demands for social change.

Ultimately, as Andrew Gamble points out, many British companies – multinationals – benefited from British commitment to an American-sponsored world order, based on more open trading arrangements than had existed in the protectionist 1930s (Gamble 1981). Important sections of the British economy, however, did not. Manufacturing and extractive industries – including steel, coal, ship-building and engineering – experienced some limited post-war growth, as other still more damaged national rivals took time to renew their economies. But the overall failure of industry to invest in new capacity was striking, as was the inability of the Attlee government to direct them. The historian Eric Hobsbawm, comparing the ‘enthusiastic planned modernization’ undertaken by French governments in the post-war period with the British record, suggests that the Labour government, despite its nationalization of several large and inefficient sectors, ‘showed a lack of interest in planning that was quite startling’ (Hobsbawm 1994: 272).

In central economic respects, then, post-war society was not remade to anything like the depth that the more heroic accounts of 1945–51 would suggest. The radicalism that accompanied demands for extended welfare provision was to this extent defensive. To use Aneurin Bevan’s phrase, it had established ‘in place of fear’ a set of institutions that provided a safeguard against ill-health and poverty; but it had not gone on to achieve a more substantial economic redesign. The same story can be told of other, social and cultural, spheres. In many cases, not least in education, the reforms of 1943–7 had been supported – outside government circles – in terms which were explicitly egalitarian as well as modernizing. They thus posed a challenge to institutions, administrative systems and ideologies which had been created by old elites, in the interests of dominant classes. But in practice these radical impulses did not prevail. The economic stringencies of the period,

combined with the resistance of elites, worked to nullify or deflect their impact, so that in social and cultural terms the immediate post-war years had a relatively conservative character.

But this does not mean that demands for more substantial change than that engineered by a cautious government had disappeared. 'I dreamed that life was over,' said Churchill to his doctor on the eve of the 1945 election, and in the immediate panic of defeat many Conservatives imagined that the hour of radical change had come (Schwarz 1991: 148). It had not, but 1945 nevertheless marked a phase in the cultural defeat of the traditionalist right. The very fact that new institutions had emerged, charged with the welfare of the mass of population, and staffed by professional groups committed at least to some extent to ideas of the public good, meant that the ground had been prepared for a slow shift of cultural power, in which the meanings and values treasured by conservatives were placed under siege. Right-wing thinkers were more alert to this development than those on the left, and predicted the most awful consequences for a society in which social hierarchies and cultural and moral authority were no longer taken for granted. 'What we are witnessing now', wrote the politician Richard Law in 1950, 'is something more terrible than the collapse of a civilisation.... It is the collapse of all absolute and social values, the end of man as a moral being' (1950: 29). This was hyperbolic, to be sure, but not untypical. Like the novels of Evelyn Waugh or the cultural commentary of T. S. Eliot, it represented a perception that something important had changed, and that the dynamic of post-war society centred on a relationship between the new, enlarged institutions of the welfare state and the interests, needs and cultures of the mass of the population.

Reshaping Schooling

Between 1944 and 1947 the education systems of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were substantially changed, via a series of Education Acts – in England and Wales in 1944, Scotland in 1945 and Northern Ireland in 1947. The initiative for legislative change was taken in England and Wales. It was there that conflicts between different interest groups were at their sharpest and most multi-faceted, and there that the negotiating capacities of the governing class were most called for. In Scotland, politicians and civil servants were convinced both that there was a broad national consensus in favour of change, and that policies were already in place to effect it. In Northern Ireland, there was a similar commitment to change,

though an awareness that its patterning would be determined as much by religious factors as by the classic themes of educational reform (Akenzie 1973: 163).

The Acts, and the debates that led up to them, were complex and fundamentally contradictory events. On the one hand, they provided the focus for pressure, especially from labour movement organizations, for fundamental change. In Northern Ireland there were calls, across religious and political divides, for social reform (Bew et al. 1995). In England and Wales, campaigners claimed there was 'real evidence of a popular demand for a democratic system of education', a demand expressed through alliances between the main teachers' union, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) (Giles 1946). In Scotland, the widespread desire for a system more democratic and more egalitarian than its predecessors, which would 'suit the many as well as the old fitted the few', was given voice at the centre of educational discussion, through the work of the advisory committee appointed by the Secretary of State (Scottish Education Department 1947: 4). On the other hand, however, the ways in which the Acts were interpreted by administrative elites, endorsed by the Labour leadership, worked to support existing patterns of privilege and class advantage, and selective mechanisms remained at the heart of the system. Despite the radical clamour which accompanied the passing of the legislation, notes Gareth Elwyn Jones, the 1944 Education Act as it was applied in Wales was faithful in essence to the blueprint drawn up by civil servants in 1941 (G. E. Jones 1990: 45). Likewise in Scotland the 1945 Act did no more than codify changes that had been agreed on in the years before the war, and attempts to extend policy in ways that would achieve more fundamental change were defeated (Lloyd 1983).

'What does the Act promise?' asked the communist and teachers' leader G. C. T. Giles of legislation for England and Wales. 'Does it wipe out . . . class discrimination? Does it promise for the average child something better than the disgracefully low standards of the ordinary elementary school? Does it contain any advance towards equality of opportunity?' (Giles 1946: 20). He turned for his answers to the text of the legislation, and found there a 'drastic recasting of our educational system' (1946: 21). In place of the divide between mass elementary education and a secondary system resting on selection and fee-paying, he identified a commitment to organizing public education in three stages – 'primary education', 'secondary education' and 'further education', with the school-leaving age raised to 15 by 1947, and to 16 as soon as practicable thereafter. It mandated local authorities to provide nursery education, to expand provision 'for pupils who suffer

from any disability of mind or body', and it envisaged compulsory part-time education for 16–18-year-olds. 'Not less important', wrote Giles, 'is the extension of provision for the physical welfare of the children' (1946: 22). Local authorities were now obliged to provide free medical treatment, as well as milk and meals for all who wanted them.

Thus far, the concerns of Giles, and of thousands of reformers like him, were satisfied: the Acts seemed to promise a free and universal system of education that involved students of all ages up to 18 in a common system, based on the idea that the 'nature of a child's education should be based on his capacity and promise, not by the circumstances of his parents' (White Paper 1943: 20). But, as Giles acknowledged, this picture was more an ideal than a working model. Responding to the economic climate of the late 1940s, the Labour government made short-term choices that turned out to have longer-term consequences. The provisions of the 1944–7 Acts for compulsory part-time education after the age of 15 were never implemented. Restrictions on capital spending helped ensure that technical schools were left unbuilt. Nursery education declined from its wartime peak, as financial arguments combined with a belief in the necessity of domestic maternal care to stop its growth (David 1980). The integration of students deemed to have special needs into the mainstream of the system was not pursued even to the limited extent envisaged by the designers of legislation. At the time, these failings were explained in terms of the constraints of a 'war-crippled economy': 'the facts of the nation's situation did not allow it,' wrote one commentator of the non-emergence of the post-15 county colleges planned for the late 1940s (Dent 1954: 148). But it is difficult to see finance as the only factor involved. In practice, the Act was blurred, contradicted and compromised not only by the effects of economic crisis but also by its encounter with a variety of vested interests.

Private schooling

First among these was private education, which included schools of both lowly and elevated status. It is the fate of the high-status schools – the public schools – which concerns us here. During the war, public schools considered themselves a threatened species: teacher unions and the TUC had called for their abolition and headteachers had feared for their survival. But in fact the Acts of 1944–7 left the public schools untouched, and the notion of a universal system of state schooling was thus compromised from the first. R. A. Butler, the Conservative

politician whose skill in reconciling different educational interests was celebrated and revered on all sides of the House of Commons, manoeuvred to keep the public-school question out of parliamentary debate, and neither the Education Acts nor any other subsequent post-war legislation addressed them. As a result, there remained alongside the state system an elite, private, fee-paying form of education that continued to dominate university entrance and access to positions of social and political power. Under Attlee's government, its position was secure. George Tomlinson, Attlee's Minister of Education from 1947 to 1951, urged upon public-school headteachers a batch of explanations as to why the government would not move against them:

My party has issued a statement of policy in which it looks forward to the day when the schools in the state system will be so good that nobody will want their children to go to independent schools. It is obviously going to be a great many years before such consummation is achieved. At present our hands are full enough coping with the increase in the birth-rate and the movement of population to new housing estates. . . . Personally I do not see the sense in getting rid of something that is doing a useful job of work, or making everything conform to a common pattern. (Blackburn 1954: 193)

Postponing, thus, any reform of private education to the distant future – and compromising even this position with the suggestion that creating a 'common pattern' of education was undesirable, Labour's Education Ministers also endorsed, throughout Britain, the continued existence, under various names, of 'direct grant' secondary schools. These were self-governing institutions partly supported by the state in return for offering a percentage of their places free to holders of local authority scholarships. Academically very successful for more than three decades after the war, the schools served as a kind of top layer of the state secondary sector, and provided another element in the diversity so much appreciated by Tomlinson.

Religion

The second set of interests with which the makers of the Education Acts had to deal were religious ones. In Wales, Anglicanism was not the established church, nor a powerful force in education. Scotland had already seen a religious settlement in 1918, in which Catholic schools, particularly, gained state funding while retaining control over the appointment of teachers and institutional ethos. But in England and Northern Ireland religious questions expressed themselves with

particular force. In England, since the 1870 Education Act, the Anglican Church had controlled the great majority of rural elementary schools, as well as many in urban areas. They were in many cases the epitome of low-level mass education. As Butler pointed out to the Archbishop of Canterbury, 90 per cent of them were housed in pre-1900 buildings, and were 'appallingly old and out of date' (Butler 1971: 98) – 'pigsty schools', as Giles called them (Giles 1946: 35). The church could not afford their upkeep, and, if government attempted simply to subsidize the church in its running of the schools, the political costs would be unsustainable – there was already a long history of nonconformist and secular opposition to the financial links between public funds and the church sector.

Butler's solution was to trade influence for cash – public funding of church schools in return for majority local authority representation on governing bodies. At the same time, he pledged that religious education and religious worship, organized on non-denominational lines, would be at the centre of state schooling. (Even so, there remained many Church of England schools that chose to be funded less generously, so as to retain greater control over appointments and curriculum.) Catholicism, in England and Northern Ireland, presented a different set of issues, ideological as well as financial. The Catholic Church demanded the right to control children's education, and sought theological justification for doing so. As the Catholic bishops in Northern Ireland put it, 'it is necessary that all the teaching and the whole organisation of the school and its textbooks in every branch be regulated by the Christian spirit under the direction and material supervision of the Church' (Akenside 1973: 170). From this position, there were no grounds on which the state could legitimately claim educational influence over Catholic schooling, and the Catholic hierarchy in England rejected Butler's compromise. Catholic schools therefore received a lower level of state funding, with the difference being made up by intensive money-raising campaigns that served among other things to strengthen the bond between Catholic communities and the church.

In Northern Ireland, the religious question was more closely tied to the very existence of the state. The Catholic hierarchy regarded the Unionist regime at Stormont as, in its own words, an 'oppressor state'. It had opposed wartime conscription, because Catholics had no interest in 'fighting for our oppressor' (Akenside 1973: 170). It was hence little inclined to compromise with state authorities offering extra funding in return for greater state influence. At the same time, Protestant churches and the Orange Order pressed the Unionist government not to resource Catholic education. 'Institutions are being set up', warned the working-class Protestant politician Harry Midgley,

‘which will be seats of power in the future, and now they are increasingly looking to public funds for the support of these institutions’ (Farren 1992). Organized grassroots Unionism welcomed educational reform as an extension of opportunity, but at the same time it was determined to limit the operation of that opportunity so as largely to exclude Catholic-run schooling. State-provided schools remained *de facto* Protestant schools. Catholic schools ‘were firmly outside the system’, enjoying only modest support from state funds (Cormack and Osborne 1995), and educational expansion was organized in ways that favoured Protestant/Unionist interests: there was an under-provision of grammar schools in Catholic areas; new secondary modern schools were located, overwhelmingly, in Protestant rather than Catholic areas; and the travel and boarding costs of children at Catholic grammar schools were not subsidized (Farren 1992).

Diversity

Writers on social policy often emphasize that the post-war settlement involved a much greater role for the state, at the expense of the private and voluntary agencies which before the war had organized a great deal of health, welfare and education (Glennerster 1995: 7); the result of this shift is said to be a greater uniformity of provision. But this generalization is only partly true of education. The Acts of 1944–7 did envisage a strong role of local state agencies – the elected local education authorities – in planning and managing provision. But what was established, between 1944 and 1947 over a large part of Britain, was less a system characterized by uniformity than one which was institutionally diverse and divided, with the lines of division corresponding especially to class and religion, and with the further complication that secondary education in both public and private sectors was liable to institutional separation on grounds of gender. The settlement of the post-war years was not a replacement of an earlier hierarchical system but rather something grafted on it. And, as Richard Johnson has pointed out, the ‘multiplication of institutional differences’ which resulted from this mode of development offered ‘maximum opportunities for social division and exclusiveness’, especially in England (Johnson 1989).

The post-1944 system was diverse, then – but not all aspects of diversity related to inequality. In terms of governance, education was a national service, locally provided. Local authorities had the duty to produce plans for the local development of education, which the Ministry of Education could and sometimes did veto in the light of

what it took to be national policy: advocates of the non-selective school were to have bitter experience of the use of these powers. Some historians have seen in the 1944 Act a strengthening of the centre against the locality, and in some respects, especially perhaps in Wales, this was true. But to stress centralization too strongly is to miss something about the dynamic that 1944 in effect encouraged. Local authorities had some power to organize and reorganize schooling. In addition, because the Act made no stipulations about curriculum and pedagogy, teachers had considerable capacities to initiate school-level change. As future chapters will suggest, these capacities were often under-used, but none the less the elements of decentralization built into the Act were later the basis for significant initiatives of local curricular reform.

Secondary Education for All

The main reason that the legislative provisions for inequality survived political scrutiny so easily – Butler noted the absence of any sharpness in parliamentary debate about the 1944 Act – was that the new laws delivered that for which reformers had long been pressing, secondary education for all. This had been the Labour Party's objective since the 1920s, and had increasingly been advocated by official reports. In 1926, the Hadow Report had called for the raising of the school-leaving age to 15, and the general establishment of post-primary education. At the end of the 1930s, repeating the call, the Spens Report had argued that 'the existing arrangements... for... education above the age of 11+... have ceased to correspond with the actual structure of modern society and with... economic facts' (Spens Report 1938: 353). The legislation of 1944–7 was a belated response to these long-held positions. It claimed to shift British schooling from a nineteenth-century system in which secondary education was available only to a minority, to one in which it would be the birthright of all children, the means for securing economic advance and a way of building an inclusive national community. This was its central promise, and the basis of its mass appeal. It was also the locus of its ambiguities and the source of the conflicts which later came to surround it. Understanding the 1944–7 settlement, therefore, requires analysing what was involved in 'secondary education for all', both organizationally and in terms of the kinds of learning it sought to promote.

In establishing secondary education for all, neither the 1944 Act nor its Scottish and Northern Irish counterparts specified the institutional forms that secondary schooling should take. It was the duty

of every local education authority, according to the Act, to ensure that schools existed in their area 'sufficient in number, character and equipment to afford all pupils opportunities offering such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities and aptitudes'. Beyond this, it was silent. However, there already existed policy resources, ideological positions and administrative preferences strong enough to stipulate with great clarity the institutional character of the new system. The Spens Report had sketched a system based on a tripartite division into modern schools, grammar schools and technical high schools. The Norwood Committee in 1943 had decided that these distinctions corresponded to the facts of social existence. Individuals had 'enough in common as regards capacities and interests' to justify the separation of individuals into 'certain rough groupings' (Norwood Report 1943: 1). In first place, here, there was the type of student 'who can grasp an argument or follow a piece of connected reasoning', who was 'interested in causes', 'sensitive to language as expression of thought' and perceived 'the relatedness of related things, in development, in structure, in a coherent body of knowledge'. This was the kind of student suited to, and developed by, the grammar school. Second came the pupil 'whose interests and abilities lie markedly in the field of applied science or applied art', and destined therefore for the technical school. Then came a third grouping, composed of students who 'deal more easily with concrete things' rather than with ideas. Into this group fell those who were 'interested in things as they are'. The report imagined such a student in these terms:

His mind must turn its knowledge or its curiosity to immediate test; and his test is essentially practical. He may see clearly along one line of study or interest . . . but he often fails to relate his knowledge or skill to other branches of activity. Because he is interested only in the moment he may be incapable of a long series of connected steps; relevance to present concerns is the only way of awakening interest; abstractions mean little to him. (Norwood Report 1943: 2–15)

Norwood thus imagined an entire mental and emotional universe for its groupings, each of which as it were lived on different worlds, inhabiting different subjectivities. Plainly, then, far more was involved in the reconstructions of 1944–7 than the setting up of an institutional system: what was also at stake was the role of education in forming particular types of individual, imbued with particular intellectual and affective capacities. The civil servants who shaped the thinking of the Ministry of Education had a similar tripartite view of the child

population, but their vision was a harsher one than Norwood's. Deriving their authority from classical philosophy – in particular, from Plato – they referred habitually (Ozga and Gewirtz 1994) to the divisions of humanity established by Socrates, in Plato's *Republic* (c. 380 BC). 'You are all of you in this land brothers,' he wants to tell the citizens of his imagined society, using terms perfectly compatible with wartime rhetorics of community. 'But when God fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those who are qualified to be Rulers; he put silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and the rest' (Plato 1955: 160).

Plato's myth, of course, involves not just the identification of particular almost-fixed types of human being. It also attempts, by naturalizing difference, and suggesting that it is an intrinsic feature of the social order, to strengthen social unity. From this angle, there was no contradiction between appealing to social unity and identifying fixed differences. Harold Dent, editor of the *Times Educational Supplement*, who demanded 'radical changes in the social order', based around 'a planned society infused with a democratic spirit', managed to reconcile his democratic impulses with support for Norwood, in which he found a 'reasoned philosophy of education' (Simon 1991: 54).

In this perspective, reform appeared not as a matter of fundamentals. It became – as Sir Maurice Holmes, Permanent Secretary to the Board of Education put it in 1943 – a matter of 'tempering and blurring' class distinctions which had otherwise lost none of their force or authority (Thom 1986: 101). Yet, clear-headed though it was as an account of policy-making intentions, Holmes's approach contained little that was in popular terms persuasive, either to educationalists or to parents. Norwood, from this point of view, provides a much better sense of the justifications which surrounded and dignified selective arrangements. For, during and after the war, measures of differentiated expansion were combined with a heavy ideological investment in justifying the appropriateness of the separate types of education in terms of the ways in which they corresponded to the interests and capacities of different groups of students. In this context, two types of discourse became important. The first was that of 'intelligence'. Selection for the tripartite system took the form of tests in reading, writing and 'aptitude', the last of which trivium owed its place to the pre-war development of techniques of testing for IQ. By the end of the 1940s most local authorities used IQ tests, on the grounds that they provided a fair means of selection for secondary school and an accurate identification of those children who would benefit from a grammar school education (Thom 1986). Accompanying this scientifically underpinned but empirically unvalidated discourse of fairness

was another kind of justification, which took on a passionately child-centred tone. It is this second discourse which is key to understanding how Labour politicians were able to reconcile themselves to the limitations, from the point of view of equal opportunity, of a tripartite system.

Tensions

Lecturing at Cambridge in 1949, the sociologist T. H. Marshall contrasted education in the early part of the century with the system envisaged by the Act of 1944. Before the war: 'The state decided what it could afford to spend on free secondary and higher education, and the children competed for the limited number of places provided. There was no pretence that all who could benefit from more advanced education would get it, and there was no recognition of any absolute right to be educated according to one's capacities' (Marshall 1963: 112). Turning to the 1944 legislation, Marshall observed the emergence of a different principle – the passage (quoted above) 'which says that the supply of secondary schools will not be considered adequate unless they "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"' (1963: 112).

Respect for individual rights, he noted, could hardly be more strongly expressed; 'yet I wonder whether it will work out like that in practice.' For Marshall, there was an irresolvable tension between the language of rights and individual development on the one hand, and the occupational order on the other: he saw 'no relaxation of the bonds that tie education to occupation', and observed on the contrary 'the great and increasing respect' which was paid to 'certificates, matriculations, degrees and diplomas as qualifications for employment' (1963: 113). These bonds demanded a balance between occupational demand and educational supply, and would therefore set limits to the number of places at grammar and technical schools. The future of schooling would not be one in which 'the pupil would be treated entirely as an end in himself'; the school was an instrument of social stratification in a necessarily unequal society, and the educational right it conferred on the citizen was not absolute – the fullest possible development of the individual – but qualified, 'the equal right to be regarded as unequal' (1963: 114).

Marshall's clarity was apparently at odds with the purposes ascribed to education from other positions. The reforms of 1944–7 were attended by a discourse of hope, in which education came to

stand for the development of a different kind of human being, embedded in a national community organized around values of democracy and citizenship. Ellen Wilkinson, Minister of Education, wrote of the new kind of schooling that would be created, with 'laughter in the classroom, self-confidence growing every day, eager interest instead of bored uniformity' (Wilkinson 1947: 5). The *Times Educational Supplement* imagined children as 'wards of the state', each of whom would be given by benign authority 'the fullest opportunity to develop every innate power' (Thom 1986: 102). The London County Council (LCC), probably the most innovative of local authorities, envisaged education as 'a matter of all-round growth and development' and thought it 'indefensible to categorise schools on the basis of intellect only' (Giles 1946: 77). Texts used in the education of primary teachers imagined how this principle could be realized by the close aligning of children's school lives with their presumed interests outside the school, so that their 'vigour and delight in activity, natural curiosity and desire for experience' could be harnessed to educational goals (Daniels, quoted in Cunningham 1988: 40). Documentary films of the period present a similar investment of hope: the government-sponsored *The Children's Charter* of 1945 depicts children running free in fields, embodiments of a future from which war, poverty and illness have been eradicated. These free individuals were to become what Wilkinson called 'the citizens of the future', the 'Britons' who will 'stride high' into the 'new scientific age'. A burgeoning individuality was in this way linked to a national community in which social bonds were stronger and class divisions weaker: R. A. Butler imagined that it had created one nation, not two (Butler 1971: 96). The LCC wanted schools to promote 'a feeling of social unity among adolescents of all kinds and degrees of ability'. Tom Johnston, Secretary of State for Scotland, concerned for the 'future generation of the race', considered it 'most urgent' to promote in schools a sense of common citizenship (Lloyd 1983: 108–11). Finally, if we believe Harold Dent's account of the 'tremendous spiritual uplift' that teachers experienced with the abolition of the elementary school in 1945, and the establishment of a common pay scale for teachers in all types of school, then they too had solid grounds for sharing in the jubilation of the epoch (Dent 1954: 69).

Within such a context, there was a concerted attempt by politicians to mediate between the irreducibly selective and segregated nature of institutional arrangements noted by Marshall, and the hopes that accompanied the extension of mass education. Marshall's interest lay in the possibilities of citizenship – shared social rights, such as those embodied in the welfare state – as a means of offsetting the

inequalities of market society. Less explicitly than him, some political voices talked about the same tensions, and saw in the new school system a way of reconciling them. Much here turned upon the ways in which the possibilities of mass secondary modern education were interpreted. Formally speaking, secondary modern education was introduced in 1945, and the school-leaving age everywhere except in Northern Ireland was raised to 15 in 1947. This did not mean, of course, that 'all-age' schools immediately disappeared – in fact, they lingered on, especially in rural areas until the early 1960s. Nor was the new type of mass school suddenly made free from the physical constraints of the old. Rather, they inherited a legacy of poor building and unprepared teaching staff, such that in all material terms their status was evidently an inferior one. Yet the expectations placed upon them were, at first, immense, and widespread – even R. H. Tawney, one of the main instigators of Labour's commitment to secondary education for all, thought that the secondary moderns 'if wisely planned' were 'likely to provide the education best calculated to give the majority of boys and girls a hopeful start in life' (Barker 1972: 80).

Labour's first Education Minister was Ellen Wilkinson, who had in her own words 'fought her way through to university from a working-class home' (Barker 1972: 89) and in the process developed strong loyalties to the selective secondary education which had helped her to do so. Wilkinson's political background was in the socialist education movements of the 1920s and the hunger marches of the 1930s, and she brought from this experience a passionate if not always convincing belief that the road to educational improvement lay through a revaluing of the dignity of labour, via the work of the secondary modern. With her Parliamentary Secretary, David Hardman, she sought to convince public opinion, against the grain of popular perception, that all secondary schools, of whatever kind, now enjoyed parity of esteem. Parents must be convinced, she reminded her civil servants in 1946, 'that the grammar school is now a specialised type of secondary school and not the real thing, any others being substitutes' (McCulloch 1998: 62). This was not a view that was universally shared. It was challenged in Parliament by the Labour left, and by evidence to the government's Central Advisory Council on Education, which suggested that the new system was not based so much on parity as on 'three social grades, arranged in . . . order of prestige and preference' (McCulloch 1998: 70). One of Wilkinson's last acts before her death in 1947 was to compose an eloquent foreword to the Ministry's pamphlet on *The New Secondary Education* in which she attempted a socialist defence of the tripartite system, based on an attempt to value

all forms of education, like all forms of labour, as contributions to the social good. She linked the existence of different types of school to an argument about the uniqueness of the individual child, and the necessity of developing forms of education that could relate to individual needs and interests. 'These plans', she wrote, 'put the child first... Their variety is designed to suit different children, not different income groups' (Wilkinson 1947: 3). Wilkinson contrasted this approach with the demand put forward by her critics in the National Association of Labour Teachers, who were demanding at the time a 'grammar school education for all' (Hansard 1946c). 'No child', she argued, 'must be forced into an academic education which bores it to rebellion, merely because that type of grammar school education is considered more socially desirable by parents' (Wilkinson 1947: 4). She went further, to call not just for a revaluation of types of education, but also for a revaluation of the hierarchies of the labour process – the hierarchies which underpinned differentiation in schooling. Manual work, in this perspective, took on a new meaning: in the war and amid the difficulties of post-war reconstruction, the 'British people are learning the hard way how dependent is a civilised community on its farmers, transporters and miners, its manual and technical workers' (1947: 4).

The rest of the pamphlet, composed by civil servants, reiterates Wilkinson's personal concerns at greater length, basing itself on the one hand on a commitment to differentiation, and on the other to the kind of child-centredness long associated with the progressive movement in education. The first involves a Norwood-like belief that, while 'some are attracted by the abstract approach to learning', others, the majority, 'learn most easily by dealing with concrete things' (Ministry of Education 1947: 23). The second reveals something of the complex dynamic of post-war mass education, in which differentiation is combined with claims about the needs of the individual, the full development of the student's personality and the freedom of the teacher. The focus of the secondary modern, the pamphlet asserts, should be 'the development of the whole child', and 'everyone knows' 'that no two children are alike' (1947: 31, 22). Consequently, 'the curriculum must be made to fit the child, not the child the curriculum.' The pamphlet thus announces a break with a past that is imagined as being dominated by desk-bound, rote learning. Secondary moderns must not be pale shadows of the grammar school, and must break from academic models of learning: 'lacking', as the Ministry of Education put it, 'the traditions and privileged position of the... grammar school their future is their own to make' (White Paper 1943: 29). From now on, experimentation, guided by teachers

enjoying an autonomy in curriculum development, and encouraged to approach learning through activity rather than through books, will be the norm. As the modern schools develop, promises the pamphlet, 'parents will see that they are good' (Ministry of Education 1947: 47).

Thus the mass school began its development as an institution both segregated and experimental, second-grade and 'free'. It was not a type of education aiming to communicate universal or high-status forms of knowledge – nor even to encourage the acquisition of formal qualifications, since until the early 1950s its students were not allowed to enter public examinations – but rather one in which teachers were encouraged to stay close to the local, the experiential and the practical. In proceeding thus, the Ministry was launching a complex dialectic. On the one hand, it was linking a movement – progressivism – that had radical credentials, to a process – segregated education – which many felt, *pace* Plato and Marshall, was socially retrograde. On the other, it was encouraging an approach to education, based on dialogue between teachers and students, outside established curriculum frameworks, that would ultimately, in some patchy sort, result in a challenge to the curricular norms which were installed at the apex of the state system, in the grammar schools.

The Ministry, in keeping with the doctrine of local autonomy in curricular matters, did not seek to lay down any definite guidelines. But its pamphlets did try to establish a broad set of purposes for mass education, based on a particular interpretation of social change. 'The rapid industrialisation of the last century', it noted, 'has brought with it many material benefits' (Ministry of Education 1947: 31). But at the same time it was a process that provoked trepidation. 'For the town-dweller' it entailed a loss: of standards of craftsmanship, of 'directness and simplicity' in social relationships and of a 'sense of community'. The 'closeness of nature' enjoyed by those brought up in traditional communities had been lost. It was education's job to 'give back' to the student some of these 'good things that had been lost' (1947: 31). It could do this by concentrating its attention on a 'balanced and harmonious development' in children, in which intellectual growth was seen as just 'one facet' of the whole child. Equally important here was the role of the school in creating community, in a world that was dominated by those disintegrative processes that were understood as 'industrialism'. To this end, Dean notes, the Ministry of Education encouraged schools to create within their walls an image of the idealized home, as a haven from the pressures of society (Dean 1991). Education was assigned a role in relation to industrialization and economic development – the 'deadening routine of much industrial work' is how one Ministry pamphlet described it

(Central Advisory Committee – England 1947:58) – that was both critical and compensatory. The antipathy noted by Hobsbawm, towards any deep involvement with questions of modernization, applied not just to the reluctance to invest in the forms of industrial training that compulsory education after 15 would have generated, but also to the deepest and most extensive levels of ethos and motivation in the new system. Behind the new secondary school stood the lost village. Or, to put it another way, the school was encouraged to turn its back on the industrial world and the forms of occupational preparation it required.

Discontents

Tripartism brought together an institutional form and a variety of justifications for educational division. In England and Wales it was pervasive, but not completely dominant. The Labour Party had been committed to ‘multilateralism’, a form of comprehensive secondary organization, since 1939. After the war, some local authorities, including Swansea, Middlesex and the London County Council, drew up educational development plans based on this principle. Their progress was fraught. The Swansea plan, for instance, was opposed by the Welsh Department of the Ministry of Education and by the Welsh Inspectorate. To this latter body, as to many other educationalists and politicians in Labour-dominated Wales, comprehensive education seemed an unnecessary and damaging experiment. Wales, during the 1930s, had built up a grammar school system which admitted a greater percentage of the age-group than that of England. Its generous provision of non-fee-paying places had been tenaciously defended by Labour councils against central government attempts to reduce it. In the process, the grammar school had become a focus of deep and popular loyalty. In a society marked by poverty, emigration and industrial decline, it seemed to offer a means of advance and, literally, escape, for the most talented sections of the Welsh population. HMI J. E. Daniel’s criticism of the new proposals in the name of tradition and established loyalty, therefore, had a wide resonance: ‘What is gained by substituting for the sound traditions of those well-run and successful schools which have established themselves in the lives and affections of their localities a new and untried system whose losses are manifest and whose gains are problematical?’ (G. E. Jones 1990: 83).

Thus there were many local interests favouring the grammar school, often in the name of equal opportunity. From this Welsh

perspective, the grammar school was a people's school. It was not so much the creation and the preference of a Civil Service elite, but the result of a process whereby localities had tried to open up secondary education to the widest number. The grammar school had therefore to be defended – against both 'multilateral' and technical alternatives. This was the pattern, too, of Scottish attitudes from the 1940s to the 1960s, and helped ensure that in both countries the building of technical schools was still more of a rarity than it was in England. Even the position of a multilateralist reformer like W. G. Cove, an MP and long-time Rhondda-based teacher union activist, paid homage to this tradition when he declared that he wanted the benefits of grammar school education to be available to all, distrusting all forms of schooling, including technical education, which – neglecting a 'liberal education' – led only to 'menial jobs' (Cove, in Hansard 1946c: col. 2233).

Nevertheless, Cove, like a few other Labour MPs, was a powerful critic of tripartite education. The official attitude of the Ministry of Education, he told the House of Commons, was 'that the vast mass of children have not the capacity to benefit from the development of their talents' (Hansard 1946b: col.2232). He was joined by the feminist Leah Manning, who attacked the Civil Service assumption that children had fixed and natural capacities. The result of such a belief, she pointed out, could be found 'in the prospectuses of some technical schools, [where] one sees offered to . . . girls cookery, laundry, millinery and embroidery – all those arts in which women are supposed to surpass men but which really are intended to give women the components with which to make men happy and comfortable' (Hansard 1946a: cols 2196–7).

Criticisms like these were tenacious but had no immediate effect on government policy. Local antipathies to multilateral reform were reinforced by the rigorously enforced preferences of civil servants at the centre of the system for selective education. Although in curriculum matters the English ideology of education stressed autonomy and teacher discretion, at the level of structure there was no such latitude. Swansea's reorganization scheme was delayed and eventually rejected, as was that of Middlesex, with considerations of cost being less important than the Civil Service's principled hostility to more radical kinds of reform. Denied advance through the normal channels of due process, reformers took their protests to the Labour Party conference. Repeatedly, in the late 1940s, the conference – against the arguments of Wilkinson and Tomlinson – reiterated its commitment to multilateral reform. Thus, in 1947, it warned against the perpetuation via tripartism of 'the undemocratic tradition of English secondary education,

which results in all normal children born into well-to-do homes being educated together in the same type of school, while the abler children in working-class families are separated at the age of 11 from their less gifted brothers and sisters' (Craig 1982: 184). Ministers responded to these complaints with statements couched in the language of priorities. The vital tasks were to build new schools and to train teachers to work in them. Questions of organization came second, and, in any case, the secondary modern was, as Wilkinson said, an achievement to be defended, not a liability to be attacked (Hardman, in Hansard 1950: col. 1871–2). These arguments, especially the first, were respected by Labour activists, but were not finally persuasive. They not only ran counter to a powerful current of Labour opinion, but also were contradicted by an emergent mass experience of secondary modern education. The reality of secondary modern schooling – without curricular pattern, without hope of qualification – created a permanent substratum of student discontent. The North London students of the late 1940s about whom Edward Blishen wrote in *Roaring Boys* felt that the raising of the school-leaving age 'amounted to a year's malicious and probably illegal detention' (Blishen 1955: 6). Their parents were likewise discontented: as Giles commented, it was difficult 'to sell the secondary modern school to parents because it does not appear to them to lead anywhere' (Giles 1946: 71).

Discontents were well founded. Sociological research carried out in the early 1950s demonstrated a continuing pattern of class-based advantage and disadvantage that 'secondary education for all' had not very much disturbed. In 1953, Floud et al., investigating grammar school admissions in two parts of England, found that the son of a 'skilled manual' father had a 14–18 per cent chance of entering grammar school, compared with the 59–68 per cent chance enjoyed by the son of a professional/managerial father (1956: 42–3). Himmelweit, researching London schools in 1951, reached similar conclusions: the proportion of working-class students in grammar schools had risen, but in absolute terms their numbers were small; the middle-class 'continues to be over-represented' (Himmelweit 1954). Whereas Marshall, like many others, had assumed that the new secondary system would break down old inequalities of class by rigorous selection on grounds of merit, the post-1944 experience suggested otherwise; class continued to influence the allocation of educational opportunity, and the supply of places was by far exceeded by the scale of demand.

Discontents and criticisms like these eventually found political expression, and were increasingly, in the 1950s, the subject of media coverage. Other grievances and inequalities were more hidden. There existed a further dimension to education provision, related to special

educational needs, that in effect rendered it a quadripartite system. Tawney, in his original call for universal secondary education in 1922, had imagined that it would include 75 per cent of the age-group, 'all normal children' (Tawney 1973a). Reform, seen in this light, was hardly based on an aspiration of total inclusion. The 1944 Act was an advance on Tawney. According to Warnock, 'modest attention' was given to special education in the consultation which preceded the 1944 Act, and the view that 'provision for handicapped children' should be regarded as an aspect of ordinary education 'exactly accorded with the spirit of post-war reconstruction' (Warnock Report 1978: 19). The Act, and its 1945 Scottish counterpart, thus extended the categories of children for whom special provision was made, beyond the former designations of 'blind, deaf, defective and epileptic'. The proportion of children thought likely to have special educational needs was estimated to be between 14 and 17 per cent of the school-age population; most of these, it was thought, would be educated in ordinary schools. But it was here that inclusion began to meet its limits. The secondary moderns were ill prepared to meet the needs of any section of the school population: large classes and under-trained teachers presented extra problems for children deemed to be educationally subnormal (Dent 1954). Facilities outside the 'ordinary' school system were slow to be built, and, at the same time, the rigid categories introduced by the Act – 'defective of speech, blind, partially sighted, deaf, partially deaf, delicate, diabetic, educationally subnormal, maladjusted and physically handicapped' – tended to locate the source of problems firmly and permanently in the nature of the child, rather than in factors pertaining to the relationship between the child and the world. Children were to be diagnosed, principally by medical authorities, and then assigned to particular disability groups with which particular institutions and curriculum forms were associated. One group of children, those with a measured IQ of below 50, were placed entirely outside the scope of local authority institutions, in training centres under the control of health authorities. Intelligence testing and medical examination were thus crucial to the workings of special education, and – just as in the tripartite system – inclusion was a heavily qualified principle, while exclusion was justified on quasi-scientific grounds (Daniels 1990; Wedell 1990).

Scotland

In Scotland, the overall situation was in some important respects different. The (Scottish) Education Act of 1918 had been based on

the principle of free secondary education for all, in schools of a common type (Paterson 1996). Practice did not match principle: the Scottish Education Department organized its schools on a largely bipartite basis, providing a full course of secondary education for the academically able and lower-level vocational work for the majority. Even so, despite this rigid segregation, Paterson points out, the very assertion of inclusiveness was important. It provided a starting point and a rhetoric for further reform, and contributed to what has often been called the myth of Scottish education (McPherson and Raab 1988) – a myth which among other things served to distinguish in the minds of Scottish educationalists the features of Scottish education from those of England. ‘Myth’ does not indicate here a purely fabricated or fictional account. It is selective, of course, in ways that tend to omit from its repertoire of stories any elements that contradict its central motifs. But it has nevertheless a strong basis in historical experience, and constitutes the way in which that experience is imagined or relived by present generations. The material basis of the myth of inclusive Scottish education lay in a history that involved greater public access and a greater uniformity of practice than in England (McPherson and Raab 1988: 29). The centre of the system, the Scottish Education Department, was created in 1872, and its powerful centralizing influence allowed subsequent development to occur along distinctively Scottish lines. There was less diversity and institutional separation than in England, with a smaller private sector, and a large number of rural secondary schools – omnibus schools – that already, before 1945, admitted students of all abilities and aptitudes.

The Scottish myth was non-Platonic: it imagined a system that was open to students from all classes, and that organized teaching and learning on the basis of liberal academic values of open debate, classical tradition and intellectual rigour. The figure of the ‘lad o’pairts’ – the talented boy from a humble background – was its chief protagonist, a character very different from the students conjured up by Norwood. In reality, the system was less democratic, less egalitarian than those who ran it imagined. It rested, just like the English system, on strong boundaries of academic/vocational difference. But in the post-war years it experienced for a time a far more radical challenge to this division than anything that occurred in England. Tom Johnston, Secretary of State for Scotland in the wartime government, had been permitted by Churchill to create a Scottish Council of State, which Johnston used as a vehicle to investigate aspects of economic and social policy and to make planning proposals for post-war reconstruction (Harvie 1999: 135). Johnston was determined that Scotland should have an educational system in keeping with what he saw as

its radical tradition, and inclusive in ways that responded to the experience of national unity in wartime (Lloyd 1983: 198). In pursuing these objectives he attempted to circumvent the influence of the Scottish educational bureaucracy, which was strongly committed to bipartism, by setting up an advisory committee, drawn to some extent from among teachers, which would as a 'parliament' on education freely debate questions both of organization and of curriculum. One of the first results of the committee's work was its 1947 report on secondary education, a document that in the view of McPherson and Raab was key to the post-war renewal of the myth of Scottish education.

The Scottish Education Department had established over the previous fifty years a system based on clear differentiation between different types of secondary course. 'Senior' secondary students followed a predominantly academic line of study and took examinations at 17–18 that enabled access to higher education. The rest – the 70–80 per cent who were designated 'junior' secondary students – took no national examinations (McPherson and Raab 1988: 248). The advisory committee challenged this time-honoured division, just as it took its distance from the English view that children 'sorted themselves out neatly into three categories'. It argued for omnibus (comprehensive) schools and for a common, non-vocational curriculum for all students. National certification should be open to all, at 16+, and would no longer be linked solely to the requirements of university entrance. This was its 'education for the many', and in devising it the committee was inspired by 'the complex of feelings and ideas born of the war itself' – unity, community, democracy. In England, of course, a similar set of values was appealed to. The difference in this Scottish document was that the disparity between rhetorics of hope and institutional forms was very much less. In Wilkinson's efforts to reshape perceptions of the value of manual labour and of the kinds of schooling that were linked to it, there was a certain desperation, born of a tacit recognition that real distinctions in status and material reward could not so easily be wished away. The advisory committee was much clearer about the ways in which selection for secondary school created 'roots of bitterness' (Scottish Education Department 1947: 33). It doubted whether 'the best type of working-class parents, earnest, provident, and properly ambitious, would readily acquiesce in what they regard as a slamming of the door of opportunity at the very outset' (p. 33). Much more fitting was the generalization of the omnibus school, 'the natural way for a democracy to order the post-primary schooling of a given area' (p. 36).

The committee was more willing than its English counterparts to specify the curriculum of such a school, and did so in explicitly Scottish

terms. It listed, in an appendix, 'moral and intellectual characteristics which have been identified as typically Scottish: pride; national liberty; integrity of thought and character; personal and intellectual independence; generosity and kindness; adventurousness; freedom from class-consciousness' (Scottish Education Department 1947: 179). These qualities, it declared, 'must be in the air of a school', so that schools would no longer be places where 'uninterested, restless boys and girls, drifting or muddling through years of schooling, carrying away at the last little more than gobbets of ill-digested knowledge and a distaste for what was yielded so little' (p. 25). The curriculum must relate to emotional and aesthetic life, as well as to academic knowledge; it must be 'realistic and relevant', base itself securely on the distinctive features of Scottish culture, and aim always to further the 'progress of the young towards social selfhood (p. 12).

The committee's vision was not a revolutionary one: it did not envisage overturning existing social hierarchies, or reordering the division of labour or the collective sharing of society's wealth. It expressed itself, rather, in explicit 'Christian Democratic' terms. It sought to create a more inclusive society, in which the education available to the mass of the population was better than before, in which education tried to develop new, more rounded types of individual, and in which it served as a means of promoting social concord rather than bitter division. To these extents, the committee's work, just as much as that of its English counterparts, was preoccupied with the role of mass education in a society damaged by industrialization, by the 'vast incoherent complex' (Scottish Education Department 1947:11) of urbanization and the new kinds of culture it promoted. If the social preferences of English educationalists were for the country village, then those of the advisory committee were for settlements which preserved something of the 'simple and stable community life of earlier times' (p. 11). It celebrated the 'natural and pithy speech of country and small town folk in Aberdeenshire and adjacent counties' and in other parts 'outside the great industrial areas'. It deplored the cultural life and linguistic habits of these areas where language had 'degenerated' into a 'worthless jumble of slipshod ungrammatical and vulgar tones, still further debased by the less desirable Americanisms of Hollywood' (p. 181). And just as sternly as the reports of the early part of the century (Newbolt Report 1921) it demanded that schools 'war unceasingly against' the mass of 'debased and incorrect speech', in a 'campaign against the speech of the street, the cinema and the illiterate home' (Scottish Education Department 1947: 63). As McPherson and Raab suggest, Scottish reformers were motivated by a vision of a particular imagined community, located far from Clydeside or the

coalfield of West Fife: they sought to reshape Scottish education in the image of the Scottish small town, with its 'homely' culture, and its common institution – the omnibus school. Arguably, this sort of social vision was almost as limited as its English counterpart: neither provided a strong basis for addressing the specific issues of mass education in urban contexts.

Nevertheless, the advisory committee's report represented the most coherent and articulate alternative to the tripartism, or bipartism, that lay at the heart of post-war educational policy. In the short-term, its effect was limited. Johnston had ceased to be Secretary of State at the end of the war, and had no comparable successor. The report's ideas for comprehensive restructuring appeared unnecessary to those who believed that Scottish senior secondary education was already inclusive enough, especially in comparison to England. In the absence of effective political pressure, the Scottish Education Department was able to wait for five years before responding and then to ensure that none of its major recommendations, whether concerning organization or curriculum, was implemented. But in the longer term, its effects were more strongly felt. Because it had paid as much attention to curricular as organizational aspects of reform, and because it considered questions of educational purpose as well as institutional form, it helped render Scottish reflections about educational restructuring a great deal more detailed and far-reaching than anything that occurred at official level in England. It became an authoritative source for curriculum rethinking, and a justification for linking questions of educational organization to those of social good. The result, according to McPherson and Raab, who perhaps share something with the myth they deconstruct, was that the emergent shape of Scottish education in the final decades of the twentieth century 'bore some comparison with the model proposed in 1947' (1988: 48).

Conservatism and Tradition

There were thus attempts of several kinds, from within the system and from political organizations operating outside it, to modify the 1944–7 settlements in what were seen as more egalitarian directions. But arguments about the problems of the settlements were not confined to the left, and were not fuelled only by progressive educational thinking. Consistently in this period the settlements were subjected to both economic and cultural critique from the right. Many Conservatives thought the welfare state was ruinously expensive. Angus Maude and Roy Lewis thought that 'wartime planners' had completely

miscalculated both the ‘future economic situation’ and ‘the costs of individual services’ (Maude and Lewis 1952: 202). Others launched attacks on the cultural decline that they thought integral to educational expansion. The most influential of these was the poet and literary critic T. S. Eliot, whose *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* shaped the thinking of many who staffed the grammar schools of the next two decades. ‘In our headlong rush to educate everybody,’ wrote Eliot, ‘we are lowering our standards, and more and more abandoning the study of those subjects by which the essentials of our culture...are transmitted; destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in the mechanised caravans’ (1949: 111). Likewise the headmaster of Manchester Grammar School criticized the ‘over-optimistic belief in the educability of the majority’ and the ‘willingness to surrender the highest standards of taste and judgment to the incessant demands of mediocrity’ (James, cited in Young 1958: 40). Others thought that the welfare state was complicit in ‘the increasing mechanisation of life’ and the ‘impersonality of human relationships’ (Bantock 1947: 171); the political philosopher, Michael Oakeshott, wrote in *The Cambridge Review* of the dangers of a ‘rationalism’ which uprooted tradition and dissolved communities of knowledge in the name of abstract programmes unrelated to the organic life of society, and in the process created institutions that were unworkable, politically driven monstrosities, that lacked all contact with the deeper levels of social experience.

This note of disillusionment is one that is regularly struck in the writings of post-war conservatism, nowhere more strongly than in the work of Richard Law, who was briefly a Minister of Education in the wartime government, later ‘one of the most influential back-bench MPs of the forties and fifties’ (H. Jones 1996: 6) and later still a figurehead of the right-wing revival of the 1970s. It is in his work that economic and cultural themes are most strongly related. Leaning on the work of the economist Friedrich von Hayek, Law argued that market arrangements were both efficient and inherently non-despotic. Interference with them necessarily involved both the suppression of freedom and the importation of inefficiency. The welfare state combined both evils. It ‘subordinated economic policy to a social revolution’ and as economic difficulties increased ‘the revolution was fulfilling itself in frustration and disillusionment’ (Law 1950: 42). It embodied ‘the right of the majority to impose its will, as interpreted by a ruling caste’ of politicians and administrators (p. 29). It corrupted, as any large-scale system of state provision would, ‘the sense of personal responsibility and personal initiative which is the main-spring of social and economic activity’ (p. 37). Hence the apocalyptic

judgement that 'what we are witnessing today is something more terrible than the collapse of a civilisation. . . . It is the collapse of all absolute moral values, the end of man as a moral being' (p. 29). As an evaluation of the Attlee government, this lacked persuasiveness, but as evidence of a Conservative frame of mind it is more significant. For what impelled sections of Conservatism throughout the post-war period, as a kind of stream of opinion that went underground in the face of the popularity of the 1944–7 settlement, and resurfaced later at the welfare state's moment of crisis, was this conviction that there were worms – of tyranny, inefficiency and cultural degradation – in the bud of post-war reform.

Law and his co-thinkers produced no plans for change. Present decadence, in his perspective, was most clearly grasped not in relation to the possibility of a better future but rather in contrast to a past that rested securely on different values. Hence, for Law as far so many other Conservatives, the importance of nostalgic comparison, between the 'amplitude and power of the early years of the century' and the 'shadows of evening' that were now setting in. A key reference point in this structure of juxtaposition is provided by Law's own (public) school days, which stand for a lost ease and certainty, juxtaposed with contemporary anxiety

Much that has happened in the forty years that have passed since I used to lie on my stomach in the lee of the pavilion, reading Scott and listening to the click of bat and ball in the distance, has been for the good. . . . The improvement in what used to be known as the condition of the people has been remarkable. . . . But for the first time for 300 years a popular movement in England has produced an impulse to suppress personal liberty rather than to assert it. . . . If we have traded our freedom for the material advantages of democracy we have made a bad bargain [for] there is plenty of evidence that democracy is incompatible with freedom. (Law 1950: 180–4)

Law, later Lord Coleraine, had Northern Irish as well as English connections, but his summoning up of public school days to connote a vanished ease develops a motif that is central to a specifically English myth of education. Whereas in Scotland the dominant myths had to do with opportunity and a certain egalitarianism, in England they centred on nostalgia for the experience of an elite education – its sights, sounds and melancholia – against which the present, the era of the masses, is judged and found wanting. Particularly galling, from this point of view, is the intrusion of 'government' ever more widely into 'the daily life of the people' and the consequent narrowing of political and personal freedoms. This connection of social democracy

with attacks on freedom, presented often in ways that were linked to yearnings for past glory and polemics against present-day mediocrity, provided the dominant tone for a popular conservative critique of the welfare state. It also provided a rationale for rejecting any modification of the 1944 settlement in a more radical direction, and in this sense offered a perspective from which to denounce threats against public schools, comprehensive reorganization and professionally driven curriculum change. The existence of such a privileged-libertarian mindset did not mean that Conservatives tried to unravel the settlement, but consistently expressed at party conferences (Gamble 1974) and voiced by Conservative intellectuals such as Angus Maude, it meant that attitudes towards the welfare state were never entirely consensual. Leaders like Macmillan may have supported post-war reform, but in the commitments of the Conservative Party rank and file and of part of its intellectual cadre a different passion was at work. Here there remained a deep residuum of scepticism, and a conviction that expansion and a decline in standards were closely linked. Certainly, the Conservative hope, expressed in a 1945 party conference resolution, that secondary modern schools would become places of experiment, did not survive the 1940s.

To one aspect of the 1944–7 settlement, however, Conservatives were swiftly and *en masse* converted: the grammar school. The establishment of free, local-authority-supported selective secondary education benefited middle-class children. As McKibbin puts it, ‘denied the right to buy places at grammar school by the 1944 Act, the middle class won them instead by examination’, so that the proportion of ‘free places’ won by working-class children was no higher in 1950 than in 1914 (McKibbin 1998: 260–2). In relation to both primary and secondary education, middle-class parents swiftly proved adept at working the post-settlement system to their children’s advantage. Jackson and Marsden describe a Yorkshire middle-class community secure ‘in their command of all ranges of state education’, able to make informed and accurate judgements about which state schools would best advantage its children, and in the process abandoning the private schools of which an earlier generation had made use (Jackson and Marsden 1962). Grammar schools had become the jewel in the middle-class educational crown. They came to represent not just avenues of educational opportunity but ideal, well-ordered communities and were by the early 1950s being fiercely defended against reform. By 1951, by which time the Labour Party had shifted to a position in favour of the multilateral schools, Conservatives were ‘deploring any attempt to replace the tripartite system’ (Craig 1982: 184).