

BARNETT HOUSE PAPERS. No. 2

Development of the Education
of Wage-earners, with special
reference to the Education
of Older Boys and Girls

BY

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DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, MANCHESTER

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATION OF WAGE-EARNERS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE EDUCATION OF OLDER BOYS AND GIRLS

INTRODUCTION

FOR some time before the outbreak of war the problem of the education of young wage-earners had been exercising the attention of educationists and social workers, but the changed conditions of industrial and social life during the war have stood in the way of instituting legislative changes. The great increase during the war of the number of children partially or totally exempted from school, and the abnormal character of the employments which young wage-earners have been allowed to take up, tend to increase the importance of the problem ; and yet the period of suspense in educational progress has afforded an excellent opportunity for review, for the revision of preconceived ideals, and for reconstruction. A new Education Bill was in prospect before the war broke out—the progress of events has immeasurably increased its necessity. A Reviewing Committee will submit to the Prime Minister's Reconstruction Committee recommendations based partially upon the reports of departmental committees which are at present in session, of which committees one is considering especially the problem of the education and employment of wage-earning children. It is proposed to deal briefly with this problem under the following heads :

- I. The Present Position.
- II. The Existing Means to Meet this Position.
- III. The Urgent Necessity.

The general purpose of this paper is constructive in tendency, but it is a natural corollary that the suggestions put forward here are destructive of some existing

agencies in their present form. It should be added that the term 'education' has been used throughout in its broadest sense.

I. THE PRESENT POSITION

It has been thought advisable to outline the position in which *L.E.A.'s are placed from the legislative point of view in respect of the education of children and young persons. The cumulative effects of the various legal aspects are of great importance, and they are here recapitulated briefly in order to emphasize the limitations they impose on L.E.A.'s. The symptoms of a disease must be recognized before the disease can be diagnosed and the remedies applied.

(a) *School Attendance.*

The maximum legal extent of compulsory school life is nine years—from 5 to 14 years of age. The Education Acts make it incumbent upon L.E.A.'s to form by-laws in order to enforce attendance at school, but there is great diversity in the terms of the by-laws adopted by different L.E.A.'s. Without going into the matter of special clauses for particular districts, and retaining the view of main principles only, a rough classification of so many as twelve different groups may be made of the attendance by-laws passed by Local Education Authorities.

(b) *Exemption from School Attendance.*

Children may be either partially or totally exempted from school at any age between 12 and 14; and in some agricultural districts at 11 years of age.

Children may be exempted from school:

- (i) On attendances made.
- (ii) On passing the Labour Examination Certificate.
- (iii) On being granted exemption by the L.E.A.

The diversity of standard amongst the various L.E.A.'s in granting exemption, and the extent to which young

* Local Education Authorities.

wage-earners may, and do, escape the discipline of the schools before 14 years of age, is indicated below:

There are about 320 L.E.A.'s in England and Wales.

- (i) Many allow children to leave on attendance at the age of 13 years.
- (ii) Many make provision for partial exemption.
- (iii) An appreciable number have so low a leaving standard of exemption as Standard V.
- (iv) In view of (i), (ii), and (iii), it will be readily inferred that an appreciable percentage of children aged 12 to 13 do not remain at the elementary schools till they are 14 years of age.

Factory and Workshop Acts.—The attendance by-laws of L.E.A.'s are subject to the Factory and Workshop Acts, and these may, and do in some districts, vitiate the work of progressive L.E.A.'s. It would appear that, under these Acts, a child may lawfully go into factory or workshop employment at 12 years of age, even in areas where the L.E.A.'s make no provision for partial exemption.

Employment of Children outside School-hours.—The Employment of Children Act (1903) empowers L.E.A.'s to enforce by-laws prohibiting or restricting the employment outside school-hours of children of school age; but many L.E.A.'s have failed to make such by-laws. Children may trade in the street under regulations approved by the local Watch Committees.

Evening Continuation Schools.—Children who have left the elementary schools cannot legally be compelled to attend evening schools, or further instruction of any kind.

Juvenile Employment Committees.—It is not legally compulsory for L.E.A.'s to establish *J.E.C.'s, nor for the Board of Trade to set up †J.A.C.'s.

School-care and After-care Committees.—It is not yet compulsory upon L.E.A.'s to appoint School-care and After-care Committees, and such organizations are in process of very slow development.

* Juvenile Employment Committees.

† Juvenile Advisory Committees.

Training for Leisure.—There is a shortage of provision for entertainment of the right type for young people, such as Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Scout and Brigade Organizations, Recreative Evening Classes Associations, and kindred institutions.

Common Effects of this Position.—Young people of to-day have much more liberty than was accorded to previous generations, and it is probable that this is the main cause of the increase in juvenile indiscipline. It is apposite to point out here that about 90 per cent. of the children in England and Wales are governed by the conditions outlined above. Teachers and social workers agree that the immunity of children from the discipline of the schools at so early an age as 12 to 14, together with a non-compulsory continuation school system and the shortage of provision for suitable entertainment, has certain anti-social results. The sequence may be stated briefly as under :

- (a) Casual or unskilled employment.
- (b) Disinclination to enter a settled trade.
- (c) Personal unrestraint.
- (d) Distaste for the discipline of continued education.
- (e) Physical, mental, and moral deterioration.
- (f) (In the bulk) Uneducated workers—tending to lower the standard of living and of industrial and commercial progress.

II. EXISTING MEANS TO MEET THE PRESENT POSITION

Generally speaking, English elementary schools are probably the most efficient in the world, from whatever standpoint they are regarded : it is the post-elementary stages of English education which need reconstruction. After a child has left the elementary school, the avenues of education are :

- (1) Evening Continuation Schools.
- (2) Boys' and Girls' Clubs and kindred organizations.
- (3) Works' Schools. (Very few in number.)

No boy or girl, at whatever age he or she may leave the elementary school, can be compelled legally to attend any of these institutions. With respect to the voluntary attendance at evening continuation schools, it may be pointed out as an example that in Manchester, in 1915, 53 per cent. of the children finally leaving the elementary schools ceased (so far as the L.E.A. know) to receive school instruction : and 13 per cent. of these children were between 12 and 14 years of age. It may be assumed that this experience is typical of other large centres of population, whilst it is conceivably better than that of less populous districts.

Works' schools cannot, in general, be considered in the best degree educational :

- (1) They cannot have a thoroughly educational atmosphere, such as is found in a well-disciplined and well-organized school.
- (2) From their nature, they must be largely vocational, with the additional drawback that the vocational aspect is accentuated in the direction of the firms' particular types or branches of occupation or trade.
- (3) They may be quite independent of the L.E.A.

III. THE URGENT NECESSITY

Immediate Reconstruction.—Immediate steps should be taken to reconstruct the post-elementary educational structure. It should be remembered that every year about 200,000 children leave the elementary schools entirely at 13 years of age, and that many of these enter blind-alley employment. From this beginning the likelihood of entering a trade or a commercial occupation is small. Doubtless, a good deal depends on the individual child, but legislation, which would deal with children in the mass, should level as far as possible inequalities arising from environment and late development. Admittedly, at present, the English higher educational system is somewhat haphazard in character, and the

community is losing largely in efficiency as a result of the cessation of instruction in the case of such a large percentage of elementary school-leavers.

Voluntary Social Workers.—The workers in connexion with the various voluntary agencies which have for their main object social betterment, and which include in their operations means for the educational improvement of young wage-earners, consist, without doubt, of earnest and devoted groups of men and women; but it is unreasonable that great communities should be entirely dependent upon the self-sacrifice of individuals who may often be put to great inconvenience to maintain a satisfactory standard in their self-imposed task.

Day School Teachers in Evening Schools.—At present, voluntary evening schools are staffed largely by teachers who are engaged in the day schools, and there are great advantages accruing from this arrangement, such as the knowledge of teaching-practice possessed by day teachers, their possible former knowledge of pupils, and their general adaptability to school 'atmosphere', routine, and discipline. There is to be considered, on the other hand, the lack of freshness and enthusiasm in attack under which the most conscientious teacher must suffer after a day's work in a day school.

Subnormal Children.—The Chief Medical Officer of the *B.O.E. states in his last report that one elementary child in six is unable, either because of physical or mental defect, to benefit from the instruction provided. Without fully accepting this statement, it is evident that there is a considerable number of children, suffering from mental deficiency in different degrees, who may escape instruction entirely at 13 years of age under present conditions, since there is a shortage in the necessary special facilities for the education of subnormal children. It is obvious that many of these children leave school at the earliest opportunity, ill equipped for any kind of labour. The same is true of many physically defective children.

* Board of Education.

Freedom from Parental Control.—Much has been done to transform the child into a real asset of the State, and the physical, mental, and moral development of children is becoming increasingly the duty of Local Education Authorities. A certain type of parent acquiesces easily to the surrender of the old parental authority. The lack of parental control is a very serious development recently much accelerated, and the position will become doubly serious if the State continue to allow elementary school-leavers legally to throw off entirely the discipline of the schools also.

The Basic Principle of Reform.—The greatest good to the community will accrue from the bringing of every adolescent within the circle of educational influence, and the conditions of modern-day life make this impossible without the adoption of compulsory measures. It is a corollary to the discussion of the various educational reforms indicated in the following Scheme that the introduction, emendation, or rescission of legislation is necessary in order to make the reforms operative.

A SCHEME IN OUTLINE

1. *Compulsory full-time attendance for all children up to 14 years of age.*

L.E.A.'s should have power to extend the leaving age to 16.

This change alone would necessitate (a) the emendation of the Factory and Workshop Act; and (b) the abolition of partial exemption (half-time), the Labour Examination Certificate, and exemption under L.E.A. by-laws.

It is clearly desirable that the Factory and Workshop Act should be amended. Children of elementary school age who are employed in a workshop or a factory do not in many cases develop into skilled workers, and every child so employed increases in degree the difficulty of the

problem of creating an educated democracy. Medical testimony has shown that children so engaged deteriorate physically and mentally: and it is also true that they assume undesirable adult practices and form an inflated idea of their own importance. In after-work hours they are, under the present system, free to their own devices.

2. *A largely increased number of Higher Schools of various types.*

These schools should be centrally situated: and should be Trade, Commercial, Domestic, Technical, and Art Secondary Schools.

A large number of scholarships and grants for maintenance would be required. This would undoubtedly cost the country a huge annual sum, but it would be less costly than the waste of brain-power which the present system allows. The interim report of the Consultative Committee on Scholarships for Higher Education advocated an additional expenditure on scholarships of £339,500. The sum is quite apparently inadequate, and the country cannot afford to think in parsimonious terms in the matter of education, since education is the root of all development—industrial, commercial, social.

3. *Compulsory Day Continuation Classes (for all not covered by (2)) up to 18 years of age.*

The Education Act of 1902 attempted to regulate the chaotic position of evening schools by regarding them as part of the system of higher education, and although they thus became more co-ordinated with the general educational structure, the evening schools have not been entirely successful. Excellent work stands to their credit, but the measure of their success has been restricted owing to their non-compulsory character. The hours of work and the character of juvenile employment create in young wage-earners that desire for freedom which, at present, it is impossible to bring into conformity

with the routine of evening schools. A further cause of the failure of the voluntary system is the short-sightedness of many employers who are unable to appreciate the fact that the better educated their employees are, the better will be both the quantity and the quality of their output. Some of the more enlightened employers co-operate with the L.E.A.'s with regard to their employees' attendance at evening schools; but very often juvenile wage-earners are engaged in unskilled work, and are often detained late at their employment. They are thus precluded from taking advantage of the voluntary evening school system, and their prospects of ultimately taking up some standard occupation are thus low. The short-sightedness here commented upon is not peculiar to employers. Many parents also are content to sacrifice their children's chances of ultimate steady employment for a small immediate return in wages.

The State must not allow the entirely voluntary nature of continuative education to persist, since it is increasing the class of unskilled and uneducated workers. It is necessary, in preparing for the years to come, to have a democracy educated in technique and equipped for the intelligent disposition of its leisure hours; and the rate of industrial, social, and economic progress will largely be measured by the degree of success or failure in attaining this object.

The introduction of compulsory day continuation schools would also be an increased public charge—but, again, a system which allows (as does the present) a large percentage of children to escape completely the discipline of the schools at so early an age as 12 to 14, must be, in the broadest sense, relatively much more costly.

4. *Wage-earners under 18 years of age must not be required to work more than 48 hours per week.*

Considering the physical aspect of maintaining compulsory instruction in connexion with employment, it should be insisted upon that no adolescent should work for more than 48 hours in the week, and that out of this

a minimum of 8 hours should be devoted to general, physical and vocational instruction. Classes should not continue later than 7 p.m. A further point arises in consideration of the conservation of youthful energy. It has become increasingly common for school children to be employed for wages out of school hours. More than 6,000 school children, 75 per cent. of whom were boys, were employed in this way, in Manchester alone, in 1915. The evidence of the teachers as to the physical effects upon the children points directly to the necessity for the restriction of this form of employment; for the great majority of children so employed show signs of over-strain. It is useless to set up an efficient system of elementary education and at the same time to limit its utility by allowing obstacles to be placed in the way of children at an age when they are completing their elementary school course, and when they should be deriving the most benefit from the continuance of instruction.

L.E.A.'s must exercise their powers under the Employment of Children Act (1903) and must take steps to obviate such exploitation of children as, in the first instance, is making for physical defect, or is retarding natural physical development. No child in attendance at school should be systematically employed for wages out of school hours; but, pending the legislation necessary to enforce this, L.E.A.'s should be compelled in respect of such employment to enforce regulations as to the

- (a) minimum age of child-workers;
- (b) number of hours employed per day, week, year;
- (c) working times in the day;
- (d) type of employment.

5. *Scholarships after 18 years of age.*

An educational system which allows large numbers of suitable students to be deprived of a university training because of lack of means, cannot be considered satisfactory, and one of the great weaknesses of the British educational system is the lack of co-operation of various

educational institutions with the universities. There must be a linking-up of the various types of higher schools with the universities and a very largely increased number of humanistic, commercial, technical, and travelling university scholarships must be available. The present great and constant sacrifice of the country's brain power must cease. England cannot afford, in the stern commercial competition which is pending, and which will probably continue with increasing intensity during the coming years, to be content to continue her haphazard method of mobilizing and putting to the best use the brains of the country.

6. *Development of organizations influencing operations of (1) to (5).*

(a) *School-care Committees.*—Keeping in view the subject of this paper—the education of young wage-earners—it may be mentioned under this head that such committees, acting under, and responsible to, the L.E.A., would endeavour to keep in strict observance such legislation as may be introduced to bring about the changes here outlined.

(b) *After-care Committees.*—These committees would deal with young wage-earners up to 18 years of age. It should be made compulsory for every L.E.A. to set up and to maintain efficient After-care Committees, more particularly in view of the fact that more freedom will fall to many young wage-earners after 7 p.m. at the latest. The educational supervision of certain types of young people is imperative. Such types are:

- (i) Those living in crowded areas.
- (ii) Those who, from the observation of teachers, show a tendency to lead their companions.
- (iii) Those who are subnormal in intelligence.
- (iv) Those 'placed' by the Juvenile Employment Bureaux.
- (v) Those who appear to be neglected.

Schemes approved by the B.O.E. under the Education

(Choice of Employment) Act, 1910, provide for the formation of After-care Committees, but in some areas such committees are not as yet in operation. A great deal of after-care work has been done in the past by the various religious organizations, by Boys' and Girls' Clubs, and by other bodies; but it is desirable to organize these social forces into one co-operative whole. It is clear that there is much work to be done in the way of helping and guiding the adolescent, and that a well-organized system is necessary. Despite the obligation on L.E.A.'s to set up committees, there must be no compulsion applied to young wage-earners in connection with after-care, for it is essential that young people should have the opportunity of learning to discipline themselves. Over-organization defeats its own purpose.

(c) *Clubs and Recreative Evening Classes.*—The setting up of compulsory Day Continuation Classes will not release L.E.A.'s from the obligation of providing suitable evening classes, but these institutions must, for the present, be on a voluntary basis, and should work in the closest co-operation with School-care and After-care Committees. Clubs must make the right type of appeal to young people, and the best results would be achieved if the persons at the head of such clubs were paid organizers with suitable qualifications. There is no reason why such clubs, eventually, should not be both numerous and successful, and the truly educational force of such a system would, in time, be inestimable.

The difficulties with which L.E.A.'s will have to contend in introducing such recreative evening classes, will include a period of observation to decide upon the best type of class to meet the new conditions. Modern educational thought tends wholly in the direction of constant supervision of adolescents; but young wage-earners who attend day classes in connection with their daily work, should not be expected to take up evening classes of an instructional nature, and it will probably be found necessary to set up in conjunction with recreative evening classes a large number of Boys' and Girls' Clubs.

Doubtless, in the beginning, difficulty will be experienced in securing the right type of paid organizer for these particular activities, but this difficulty will adjust itself in course of time.

(d) *Juvenile Employment Bureaux.*—It must be obligatory on every L.E.A. to set up a J.E.C. The position at present is that many L.E.A.'s have, as yet, neither a working J.E.C. nor do they co-operate with a J.A.C., and even in areas where such committees are in being, neither children, parents, nor employers are under obligation to report to them. In such areas, young children seeking employment are deprived of the information, advice, and assistance which the J.E.C. is able to give. In the interests of commercial prosperity and social betterment, technical skill must be fostered and developed, and a powerful means of achieving this is the erection of efficient district J.E.C.'s. The selective methods of these bureaux, both as regards employments and juveniles, must make for the better social welfare. The schemes approved by the B.O.E. apply to Elementary Schools only, but there is no reason why this limitation should not be removed. In Manchester many Higher School pupils apply at the Bureau for assistance in obtaining suitable employment; on the other hand, there are many parents who prefer to arrange privately, and are able to do so to the best advantage, the type and location of their children's employment.

It would seem desirable to extend the powers of Choice of Employment schemes to 18 years of age in order to synchronize with the age of leaving the Day Continuation School, and further, to cut the connection between pupils of 16 to 18 years of age, in insured trades, with the Labour Exchanges.

(e) *'Labour' Classes for Unemployed Young Persons.*—Under any system there will always be, however small, a percentage of unemployed amongst young people, and deterioration in young wage-earners during a period of unemployment is marked. It is desirable that young people, if unemployed, should attend what, for the want

of a better term, are here called 'Labour' Classes. These classes might be held in the immediate neighbourhood of the J.E.C. There would inevitably be the difficulty of diversity of type of pupil, but this is a matter of organization only and does not affect the principle here submitted.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented in outline form a system which increases the powers of L.E.A.'s, and it might be well to suggest definitely that all questions of decision relative to the social, as well as to the educational, side of the development of young people should be vested in the L.E.A. Of late years the B.O.E. has, by a process of devolution, vested much of its former authority in L.E.A.'s; and, in the great majority of cases, this confidence in the will of L.E.A.'s to adopt progressive measures has not been misplaced. But it is conceivable that the pace may be too quick for some retrograde authorities, and it must be agreed that compulsory measures should be adopted in such cases.

Finally, it is hoped that the will to develop social betterment and industrial and commercial efficiency may result in the acceptance in principle, if not in detail, of this outlined scheme by the general public. It would seem desirable that definite steps should be taken to prepare public opinion for impending educational reforms, and the pioneer work of arousing the interest of the wage-earners, of directing their attention to existing facilities, of finding out their needs and opinions, might be conducted by organizations which have, in the past, interested themselves in educational propaganda work. The attack must be precise, enthusiastic, and sustained.

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