

SYMPOSIUM ON WHITE PAPER ON EDUCATION

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ACCOUNTABILITY, RATIONALISATION AND THE WHITE PAPER ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

In his Foreword to the White Paper on Educational Development, the Minister stated that despite the fact that no Green Paper was issued, the issues dealt with are very much open for discussion and the Government's position is not inflexible. It is in this spirit that the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society has organised this symposium. I hope that my paper, and those of my colleagues, will contribute to a public debate, not alone on the issues raised in the White Paper as the omissions are so important, but on all the questions pertaining to the organisation, financing, and curricula of the Irish system of education.

I have been asked to deal with questions of organisation and administration. Four years ago, when I was drafting my report on Irish educational expenditures (Tussing, 1978), I carefully avoided these questions. It may amuse some to learn that I did so in order that my report be non-controversial. I labour under no such delusion tonight.

Anyone who has read that report knows how much I admire the contribution of the Church, and the religious in particular, to the development of the Irish system of education. It is a central theme of that paper. Tonight I must be more critical of the role of religious organisations, but I hope that their immense contributions will be borne in mind.

The most salient characteristic of the White Paper seems to be its failure to discuss the major issues facing Irish education. The central point or theme running through the paper, in the text and between the lines, can be summarised, I believe, in the following words, which are, I should emphasise, my own and not the White Paper's:

The educational system in this country is essentially a good one and is not in need of alteration. The period of change is ended. Enrolment growth is slowing. There is no public pressure for innovation. The issues most discussed by educators and the community are not worthy of mention. And the money is not there for new departures anyway.

If there is to be a public debate on the White Paper, it is this proposition, rather than the mainly minor and routine changes proposed, which should be the principal topic of discussion. While the proposition advanced in my paraphrase has some truth in it, my own opinion is that it is a fundamentally incorrect characterisation of the situation facing Irish education. While I agree that the system is essentially a good one, it falls down significantly in a number of areas, such as accountability, decentralisation, planning, organisational rationality, the relative weight of the three levels, denominational segregation, and class stratification. If it is true that money for new departures in education will be lacking in the coming decade (and on that point I defer to Tony Barlow), then it

might well be argued that the same period is an ideal time for tackling some of the structural anomalies and curiosities which the present generation is heir to – that accumulation of decades' and even centuries' *ad hoc* solutions, political compromises and unplanned-for developments in the growth of the nation's educational system. I would like to discuss as many of these as I have time for. In so doing, I cannot always refer to a discussion in the White Paper, for the reason already cited, that the White Paper avoids discussion of so many of these main issues. I will first deal with the question of accountability; I will then address, in turn, the subjects of planning; the relative weight of the three sectors; and separation by sex, religious denomination, and social class. Though these are rather diverse subjects, one or two common themes will be seen to run through the discussion.

2. ACCOUNTABILITY

In my opinion, the next major change in the Irish educational system will involve the development of structures to provide accountability. One can infer that tendency by extrapolating existing trends by reference to educational systems in other countries, and on the basis of the kinds of debates which are now going on, such as those concerning the roles of the different parties on Boards of Management of National Schools.

By accountability we refer to arrangements by which the schools and colleges, and their associated bureaucracies, must answer for their actions to students, parents and the community at large. It is a quality notably lacking in the present system. Let me review the present position in so far as accountability is concerned.

The Irish system of education is perhaps the most centralised in Europe. The primary sector is certainly the most centralised, or, as the White Paper calls it, "administratively uncomplicated" (4.21); and the rest of the system is only somewhat less so. There is some *appearance* of accountability at both local and national level. At the local level, there are the Boards of Management of National Schools and the Vocational Education Committees (VECs). Whatever the Boards of Management are, they are not LEAs. LEAs are local education authorities, and they exist in many other countries as the regional bodies exercising control over the schools. Normally, school funds come from, or through, them; they build and own the schools; they hire and employ the principals and teachers; they have staffs of their own; and, ideally, they exercise some influence as well over curriculum and teaching methods. They are, in turn, responsible to local government, or to the voters directly. National School Boards of Management are legally accountable to the Department of Education. They are appointed and draw their authority primarily from the Patron, normally the Bishop of the diocese. They are secondarily answerable to the teachers and to parents in the particular school. They are not accountable at all to the general public. Their authority pertains to the running of the school at ground level, and not to the making of educational policy – the design of the curriculum, teaching methods, the planning and building of schools, and so forth. In the words of the White Paper,

The Board of Management is concerned with the disbursement of funds at its disposal and with the appointment and removal of teachers according to specified procedures, subject to the Minister's approval. It conducts the necessary correspondence and, in general, ensures that the Rules and Regulations for National Schools are observed. (5.4)

Indeed, members of Boards of Management are required to sign a statement to the effect that they will observe the rules and regulations governing National Schools laid down by the Department of Education; and the Department evidently feels that it can alter these

rules and regulations *after* signatures are obtained.¹ Obviously, the powers of the Boards are narrowly circumscribed. The area of jurisdiction of each Board is too small for Boards of Management to evolve into policy-making LEAs, which ideally should comprehend whole counties, or, as with Health Boards, groups of counties. Finally, real accountability is precluded by the rule of total confidentiality under which the Boards operate.

The VECs *are* LEAs, albeit of a limited sort, and as such are the only examples in Ireland. Indeed, they are the only existing accountability structures. Their ability to function as accountability structures is limited, however, both by the circumscription of their powers, and by the fact that the vocational sector, including the regional technical colleges (RTCs), is a small piece of the system, enrolling only about 10 per cent of the students in full-time education. A fully-fledged LEA would have some jurisdiction over all of first and second levels, and not only over one type of school. The experience of VECs, incidentally, may illustrate some of the potential drawbacks of LEAs – their involvement with politics at the local level, for example, and their vulnerability to local interest groups.

In Dublin and Cork there are second-level Advisory Councils. These are not accountability structures, but rather bodies in which those who own and manage the schools can meet and among them plan the growth and development of the system locally.

Is the system of education accountable at national level? The Department is under a Minister who, in turn, is a member of a Government answerable to a popularly-elected Dáil. Indeed, it is true that the Minister is regularly called upon in question time to account for educational policy judgements ranging from the minute to the major. The parliamentary system, however, even when it works well, is not designed to provide accountability for systems of education, as is evidenced by the fact that other parliamentary systems have chosen to adopt one or another structure for local accountability. In Ireland, it does not in fact work well as an accountability structure in the area of educational policy. The tradition is that major structural innovations are developed by the civil servants in the Department, sometimes after consultation with important interest groups, but often without public debate or discussion. A major exception, the free scheme in second-level education, is said to have been an apparent surprise to senior civil servants in the Department.

To say, however, that control of the system is centralised in the Department is to ignore the crucial role of Church bodies. Indeed, it is fair to say that while the Church and the Department are engaged in a more or less continuous struggle for power over the schools, at the same time they seem scrupulous to avoid their joint control over schooling being significantly diluted by community influence or accountability in the traditional sense. The teachers, through their unions, are quite prepared, it seems, to play the same game. Consider the following, at primary level:

1. There are, as noted, no LEAs at first level. Power is reserved, then, to the Department, the Church and the teachers – the organised parties, who share it and struggle

1. A current controversy concerns the employment of substitute teachers. The Department has agreed with the INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation), the recognised Managerial Associations (organisations of chairpersons of Boards of Management, principally clerics), and other Government agencies to require the Boards of Management, rather than as previously the teachers themselves, to take responsibility for appointing and compensating substitute teachers. The Council of Parents' Elected Representatives on National School Boards of Management have objected, both on the grounds that they were not consulted and on the grounds that this duty was not part of the responsibilities they had agreed to undertake when they signed a document to abide by the Rules for National Schools. Some Boards of Management have refused to implement the new procedures.

over it in a bargaining process which has thus far, to my knowledge, not been studied by political scientists or sociologists.

2. Boards of Management are dominated through the selection process by the Patron, i.e., Bishop, on the one hand, while their powers are circumscribed by the Department on the other. As is well known, INTO (the Irish National Teachers' Organisation) are demanding that parent members of Boards of Management be excluded from Boards for assessing assistant teachers, on the grounds that parents have no particular expertise or experience which qualifies them for such a role – a demand they seem never to have made regarding the clerical Chairman of the Board, or, in fact, regarding the clerical Manager under the old system, whatever may have been *his* expertise or experience.

3. Existing financing arrangements make it extraordinarily difficult for any group apart from Church sponsorship to organise a National School. The local group must supply the site, and its share of building costs² must be paid at the start. Often the Church has its own land available, or receives donations of land. Other organisers would have to pay large amounts of money. Church-related school organisers can get bank loans with the co-signature of the Patron. Others find it next to impossible to obtain bank loans. One-fifth, at least, of running costs of schools must be raised locally – and not as levies on parents of children attending the school. These financing structures, whatever be their intent, clearly keep local control and operation of schools securely in Church hands.

4. Primary schools are organised, by implicit mutual agreement between the Catholic Church and major Protestant denominations, on denominational lines, a point to which I will return later. Denominational organisation seems to imply church control, which runs counter to accountability. Denominational organisation and lack of community accountability then, reinforce one another enormously.

Does the lack of accountability in the first-level system affect the quality of education? One cannot be sure, but my suspicion is that there is a relationship between the low level of finance of first-level education – £303 per pupil in 1979 – and the lack of community involvement in its governance. First-level education, for a variety of reasons, is far less influential in the Dáil, the Government and the Department, than are the other two levels. Community involvement in governance might develop networks of support which could be mobilised effectively to help redress the current imbalance of resources.

The structure is more complex at second level. Yet it is fair to say that that system is dominated by the secondary school, which is firmly in Church hands and which is not required to account to the community at large for its trusteeship of the education of Irish adolescents. Parenthetically, let me comment that one of the most serious problems facing the Irish system of education is the extraordinarily high drop-out rate at second level, after the age of compulsory attendance is passed. In 1979, only 68 per cent of 16 year olds were in full-time education, only 48 per cent of 17 year olds and 27 per cent of 18 year olds. It is a serious problem – one of many – not adequately addressed in the White Paper. I do not pretend to have investigated it, and can only offer an opinion that it relates, at least in part, to the essentially academic nature of the second-level cur-

2. While a local contribution to the capital costs of new National Schools is required, it is a matter for the Minister's discretion what percentage of the total capital costs that contribution will be. These local contribution percentages are completely confidential and the Minister refused even to disclose their maximum and minimum amounts. (Dáil Proceedings, 29 January, 1981).

riculum, which is irrelevant to the needs of a large fraction of the age group.³ Let me venture further into the domain of opinion by adding that it seems to me that the nature of the curriculum is related to the structure and organisation of second-level schooling – the domination by secondary schools operated by religious orders, a system not essentially altered by the addition of community schools, or by the addition of Leaving Certificate programmes in vocational schools. The under-supply of technically-qualified school leavers arises, in part, from the same organisational characteristics, I would submit. Again, it appears that the lack of accountability may have affected education itself.

It seems unlikely that accountability structures for first- and second-level education will soon be developed in Ireland through the introduction of wholly secular LEAs based on expanded VECs or patterned after Health Boards. Instead, it appears more likely that institutions uniquely adapted to this country, which somehow meet the legitimate claims of the community without completely displacing the Church – or the Department, or the teachers for that matter – will grow up in the remainder of this century. This is not to say that there will not be conflict, however. That seems inevitable.

The nature of the problem is different at third level, where local accountability is less of a desideratum and organisational rationality is more of a problem. I will consider this question within the context of the subject of planning.

3. PLANNING

Planning is a weak point in the Irish system of education. It is an elementary proposition that planning is a requisite for orderly, coherent, and rational development of any system of education. What planning takes place within the Department of Education is not known, of course, but the public output of the Department in the form of plans, projections and predictions, is meagre indeed. In the White Paper, the Department publishes enrolment projections through 1990/91. This appears to be the first time the Department has ever published enrolment projections *per se*. The Department should routinely publish at least five-year enrolment projections, and extend and correct them annually.

While much of the power in education is centralised in the Department, the initiation of decisions which are the most dependent on planning information – in particular, the building (and closing) of schools, the construction of additions, etc. – is left in the hands of localities. In order to make intelligent decisions, these local decision makers (the schools themselves, the parish and diocesan officers, and, in Dublin and Cork, the various interest groups represented on the Advisory Councils which plan second level schools) need to know about local and regional demographic trends. So far as is apparent, they are not provided with such information by the Department. On the contrary, it is the Department which learns of local and regional trends from the local sources. Localities, in general, learn about the relevant trends in the demand for places in a variety of ways. They will be aware of prospective population upsurges on the basis of planning permissions for construction of housing. They will monitor the parish baptismal register. Second-level schools will have the additional advantage of seeing local trends in being in National Schools. Beyond these, schools have to discover the relevant demographic trends by

3. In a paper on third-level enrolment projections, Sheehan (1979) states, "... While there may seem to be considerable scope for increases at the [Leaving Certificate] senior cycle, it must be remembered that a considerable number of sixteen to eighteen year olds will never adapt to the existing second level system. Given the present largely academic second level curriculum and considering the number of potential pupils who are unwilling, not able enough, or socially disadvantaged, the 'saturation' level for Leaving Certificate courses must be well short of 100 per cent of an age group ..."

waiting to see the numbers of actual applicants, which means not planning at all.

The lack of planning information at local and regional level constitutes a powerful argument in favour of the regionalisation of education, whether in LEAs or in decentralised offices drawing their power from Marlborough Street. Regional offices should be charged with responsibility for projections and planning in their areas, relying in part on national figures put out by the Department.

It is well known that there are, in the words of the White Paper, "serious shortages of highly qualified and skilled craft, technician, engineering and computer manpower . . .", (10.18), and that these shortages constitute a significant bottleneck in the economic development of the country. The Department and the Higher Education Authority are embarked on a vigorous programme to accelerate the output of students with these specialities. The shortfall itself must, however, be seen as a failure in planning and as the consequence of a lack of adequate communication among agencies, such as the Department of Labour, the IDA (Industrial Development Authority), and AnCO (The Industrial Training Authority), as well as the Department of Education. Second-level schools also need some local or regional input regarding occupational opportunities in their own areas, a task better achieved through decentralisation, such as by means of regional LEAs. Curriculum choice by second-level students needs to be informed by both national and regional career information, which means that guidance teachers need the aid of national and regional planning.

The same is true at third level, except that the required mix of information has a larger national and a smaller regional component. It is difficult to plan for the appropriate numbers of places in the various faculties and specialities in third-level institutions when the responsibility for the third-level system is divided as it is today. One of the major anomalies in the Irish system of education is the organisation of third-level education. The five principal types of third-level institution – the universities, the NIHEs (National Institutes of Higher Education, in Dublin and Limerick), the colleges of education (for teacher training), the RTCs (regional technical colleges) and the Colleges of Technology (in Dublin) – can be categorised or classified in a number of ways. They can be divided into "designated" and "non-designated" institutions, the former funded by and under the aegis of the HEA (Higher Education Authority) and the latter funded in other ways, through the Department directly or through the VECs. They can be grouped into institutions empowered to award their own degrees and those whose degrees are awarded by the NCEA (National Council on Educational Awards). They can be grouped by curriculum specialisation, into technical education, teacher training, and arts, sciences, and business studies. Unfortunately, these methods of categorising the institutions yield wholly different groupings, which is another way of saying that the administrative and financing arrangements as between HEA and non-HEA institutions do not correspond to other major educational differences. There may be excellent reasons for attempting no rationalisation of the structure of third-level education at the present moment, but one would have wished that the White Paper had addressed this subject. In the meantime, the planning function for third-level education rests essentially in the HEA, though they lack the corresponding responsibility and authority for executing a plan.

I cannot leave the subject of planning without commenting, however briefly, on the enrolment projections made in the White Paper. I believe the projections at all three levels to be too conservative, as I hope to show in more detail at another time and place.⁴ I

4. In general, the method employed in the White Paper is to take the average of survival ratios from the latest three available years and project these through the decade of the 'eighties. (Survival ratios are the ratio of children in an age cohort in school in a given year, to the number from that age cohort in school in the previous year, e.g., the ratio of 16-year olds in school in 1980/81 to

want to call your attention in particular to what are called “projections” of third-level enrolment growth. Between 1980/81 and 1990/91, the White Paper projects a growth in third-level enrolment of 12.2 thousand, from 38.8 thousand to 51.0 thousand. By mid-decade, i.e., 1985/86, 6.8 thousand of that growth is projected to have occurred, giving an enrolment in that year of 45.6 thousand. That these projections are low is underlined by the fact that the 1985/86 figure is almost exactly the same one projected for 1981/82 in the Government White Paper, *National Development 1977-1980*. John Sheehan’s projections, made in his HEA paper on the assumption that Ireland will, by 1990/91, have reached minimal European participation rate standards of 10 or 12 per cent in the 20+ age group,⁵ yielded from 51.9 thousand to 65.2 thousand students, i.e., from only slightly more than the White Paper’s projections, to more than double that paper’s projected growth, (Sheehan, 1978). These projections were based on population projections developed before the 1979 Census.⁶ My mid-decade forecasts, of demand for places and not actual enrolments, were far higher – on the order of 20 thousand more (Tussing, 1978).

A major question not answered in the White Paper is what status exactly do enrolment “projections” have when they are published by the Department of Education? When one projects enrolments, one must state whether one is projecting the demand for, or the supply of places, or alternatively whether one is assuming that the two will be equal. In my own work, I specifically stated that the forecasts were of the demand for places.⁷ I think it is fair to say that current public policy is that places in first and second level should be provided for all who seek them – that is, that demand and supply should be equal. Thus, whether enrolment forecasts are taken by reference to predicted population and participation rates (as in Tussing, 1978, and Sheehan, 1978), by reference to survival ratios (as in the White Paper), or by use of an elegant multiple-equation econometric model incorporating prices, opportunity costs, unemployment rates, migration functions, etc., in first- and second-level, the results are all interpreted in the same way. Third level, however, is very different, in the sense that there has never been, there is not now, and there will not soon be, a public policy of providing places for all who demand them. Entry standards, fees, the grants system, and, in the end, the number of places made available all restrict entry. Since the Government determines the number of places (as well as the other rationing devices mentioned), and the number of places determines enrolments, it is fair to say that what are presented in the White Paper as “projections”

15-year olds in school in 1979/80). If survival ratios were, in fact, stable over the long run, as is implicitly assumed by this method, participation rates would tend toward stable levels themselves after a very short period of time, whereas we know that participation rates tend everywhere to rise over time. Hence, we would expect survival ratios themselves to rise, at least in the growing sectors. Participation rates and survival ratios also are subject to short-run influences, most notably the business cycle. During the three years which formed the basis of the White Paper projections, most post-compulsory survival ratios in Ireland were actually *falling*, reflecting economic expansion and declining unemployment. In four of the five age ranges used, extending the period over which the average was calculated backward by two years *raises* the survival ratio. For the oldest age group, between 19+ and 20+, the White Paper assumes that the survival ratio will rise during the 1980s from 0.703 (the three-year average) to 0.714, whereas the five-year average already attained in the mid-1970s was 0.723.

5. Enrolment of persons aged 20 and over as a per cent of population aged 20-24. Sheehan reports on estimated 1980 participation rates for 14 OECD countries, whose participation rates range from a low of 7 per cent (Australia) to a high of 26 per cent (Finland). Ireland at 8 per cent is the second lowest. Should the Irish rate rise to 10 per cent it would not significantly change the Irish ranking; in Sheehan’s table, the UK rate, at 10 per cent, is third lowest.
6. Using the 1979 census, the Irish rate in 1979/80 was 7.6 per cent in the 20+ group.
7. My third-level forecasts face a conceptual problem of their own, as they are estimates of future demand for places, whereas the present demand for places is not known.

are, in fact, *decisions*. The modest increases in third-level enrolments reflect a Government judgement that third-level enrolments will be permitted to rise by only 12.2 thousand.⁸

This may be inadequate growth in third-level enrolments to keep pace with the competition elsewhere in Europe, in and out of the EEC. The Irish third-level participation rate is already low by international standards, and other European countries have static populations in the relevant ages which permit them with minor effort to raise their participation rates (Sheehan, 1978), whereas the "projected" growth in Irish third-level enrolments provides for very little rise in participation rates. Thus, it is likely that Irish third-level participation rates will suffer a decline relative to the rest of Europe if the targets set in the White Paper are not altered upward. The number of students completing third-level courses is an important influence on the ability of the Irish economy to compete for industry and employment within the increasingly open economy of Europe in the 1980s and 1990s.

4. RELATIVE WEIGHT OF THE THREE LEVELS

I turn from the method of planning to its substance, the issue of priorities. One of the most important, and most controversial, issues facing Irish education concerns the relative claims to public resources of first, second and third levels respectively. The White Paper does not really address this issue. I had intended criticising the paper for this omission, and while drafting the present paper ran across the following, in the 1979 White Paper, *Programme for National Development 1978-1981*:

6.11 A White Paper on education, as promised in the Government's pre-election Manifesto, is being prepared for publication in 1979. This paper will deal, among other subjects, with the optimum use of resources available for education, including the priority to be given to each level in the allocation of available funds . . .

I will comment later on the reference to "the Government's pre-election Manifesto" and as well to the late publication of the paper relative to repeated promises. At this point I only wish to note that the subject indicated in the quoted paragraph as a major topic for the education White Paper is not, in fact, discussed in it at all.

According to statements in the Dáil, £303 in public funds is spent for each pupil in National Schools, £452 for each second-level pupil, and £1,343 for each third-level pupil, exclusive of the grants scheme, in addition to which there is spent £716 per grantee in the third-level grants scheme. University students cost the exchequer £1,756 each. (Dáil Proceedings, 4 February 1981, 12 February 1981). While third-level education necessarily *costs* more than second, and second more than first, it can be argued that the existing proportions lean too far in the direction of public support for higher schooling, in light of the fact that students at upper levels appropriate for themselves the main economic benefits of their schooling. (Barlow, 1979; Tussing, 1978).

Equality of educational opportunity is a subject often mentioned in the White Paper, and at least once the Paper appears to claim its achievement in the system's second level:

8. This interpretation of the third-level projection as a policy target rather than a prediction is supported by the following language found in the White Paper:

1.23. Student enrolment in institutions designated under the Higher Education Authority Act (excluding Thomond College) is expected to grow from 25,600 students in 1980/81 to 33,800 in 1990/91 – an increase of 8,200 or 32 per cent. About 3,000 places will be provided in the National Institute for Higher Education, Dublin; about 2,000 extra places are likely to be made available in the National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick, and the remaining 3,000 places will be provided in existing universities.

6.3 . . . From the standpoint of the individual, the key development at second level over the past fifteen years has been the policy of *providing* equality of educational opportunity, the basic purpose being to enable each pupil to identify and develop his talents and thus to help him realise his potential as a human being. (Emphasis added)

The data belie an assertion of equality of educational opportunity. I refer not only to the second-level drop-out rate mentioned earlier, but also to the studies of social class backgrounds of university students, which not only show them to come disproportionately from the upper social class groups, but perhaps more importantly show virtually no change between 1964/65 and 1978/79.⁹ The significance of this lack of change is all the greater, in that the free scheme for second-level education, the transport scheme, and the grants scheme for higher education were developed between those dates. How, then, do we interpret the lack of change in the social class make-up of university students?

In my opinion, the answer lies in large part in the fact that equality of opportunity denied in the early years of life cannot easily be restored later. The child who is unprepared by virtue of background and experience through fifteen years of life cannot be given "equality of opportunity" by the remission of fees in a Leaving Certificate course.

Instead, reasonable equality of opportunity requires that all children, even in their pre-natal months, be assured a healthy, nutritious, poison-free environment. There is now substantial evidence concerning the enormous and often irreversible consequences of undernourishment of foetuses and infants, of environmental poisons such as lead, and physical injury — all of which have disproportionate impacts on poor children. Reasonable equality of opportunity may require some enhanced early childhood learning experiences for many children of poor backgrounds, especially those in city centres, so that they may enter school on a more nearly equal footing with other pupils. Reasonable equality of opportunity, in so far as it involves schooling and school expenditures, almost certainly requires concentration on first level. The consequences of inadequate schooling at that level probably cannot be rectified, and certainly cannot be rectified at any reasonable cost, at later stages. And it is undoubtedly true that inadequate primary schooling, even if equally inadequate for all, has a more deleterious effect on the disadvantaged child than on others, since he or she must put more reliance on schooling, relative to other influences.

The White Paper gives little basis for optimism regarding heightening the relative claim of first level on educational resources. The Government has retreated from an earlier commitment¹⁰ to reduce class sizes to a maximum of 40. Indeed, there are no proposals dealing with class size in National Schools. As close as the White Paper comes to a commitment in the area is the following:

5.10. The Department has investigated instances of classes comprising over 40 pupils and the extent to which improvement could be brought about by re-organisation. It will continue to monitor the situation and will advise on class re-organisation so as to reduce where possible the incidence of large classes.

If I read this paragraph correctly, it is saying that classes over 40 will, in general, be eliminated only through re-organisation, which means that no money is allocated to the task. Certainly no statement with any stronger commitment appears anywhere in the White Paper.

9. This statement is based on a comparison of studies by M. Nevin (1966-7) and J.P. McHale (1979) as regards entrants to University College, Dublin, as cited in A.C. Barlow (1981).
10. Fianna Fáil Manifesto, 1977. Fianna Fáil will "... immediately set about reducing all classes to 40 with a final objective of 32".

Similarly, the White Paper promises “finance on a generous scale” to up-grade the environment and facilities of inner Dublin City schools serving disadvantaged children. While one must welcome the commitment, the relevant passage states, “The purpose of this scheme is to bring the standard of provision in these schools up to that of the newer schools being provided in the suburban areas (4.17).” In other words, what is proposed is not any extraordinary provision for equipping the schools of disadvantaged inner city children, but only to attempt to bring them up to parity with other schools.

The relative priority attached to second-level schooling may appear to be roughly appropriate as it stands today, in terms of per pupil averages, but one wonders at the distribution *within* second level, as the Department continues to provide generous aid to fee-charging institutions which amount to an elite class among secondary schools, and moreover among free institutions continues to provide aid on precisely the same terms to those schools which select their students on achievement, and social class, and those which accept all comers. The perpetuation through public aid of the highly class-stratified character of the second-level system may, as noted earlier, contribute to fundamental educational problems at this level. I will return to class stratification in the next section.

The main “priorities” questions facing third level has, for the last several years, concerned the fraction of the costs of this education which will be met from fees, as opposed to subsidies from the Exchequer, in the form of grants to institutions. Some (myself included), have argued that since the students at this level are a small fraction of the relevant age cohort, drawn in the main from the upper social groups, and since they are in a position to retain most of the economic benefits of their third-level education, it is appropriate to ask them to pay a much larger share of its costs than the roughly 15 per cent average they now pay. Note that this issue concerns grants to the institutions, whether through the HEA or not, and not the means-tested grants to students, which are the subject of another question altogether. The issue of the appropriate level of fees vs. institutional grants was so prominent in the 1979 White Paper on economic development that it was mentioned in two of the four paragraphs devoted in that Paper to education. The 1980 White Paper evades the issue entirely. Let me quote from the education White Paper again, from the section headed, *Student Support*.

10.29. Financial support for third-level students consists of (a) direct grants to the institutions concerned and (b) grants or scholarships, related to parents’ financial means, to assist students to defray the cost of fees and of maintenance (board and lodging, etc.). The following observations relate to the second form of student support.

There then follow seven numbered paragraphs concerned with the grants scheme. The subject of direct grants to institutions, i.e., part (a) in paragraph 10.29, is never referred to again, despite their far greater budgetary weight, despite their prominence in the 1979 White Paper, and despite the public discussion of them. My 1978 ESRI paper called for a national debate on the financing of education. The current Minister for Education shrinks from such a debate, which, however, goes on without him.

5. CLASS STRATIFICATION, SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLS AND DENOMINATIONALISM

A major issue concerning the Irish system of education, one not discussed in the White Paper and rarely mentioned in public discussions, is the extent to which the structure of that system serves to separate and divide people rather than to bring them together. As is well known, first and second level pupils are separated, *de facto* and *de jure*, on religious lines, third level, apart from training colleges, being the sector where the greatest progress

is being made in this area. And, as is also well known, most boys and girls are separated in first and second level institutions. Less frequently discussed is the fact of *de facto* separation of pupils along social class lines as well as at all three levels. Educators know that children are taught more by what adults do than what we say. One of the things taught in Irish schools and colleges by our actions, is that people belong apart, that their differences are more important than their similarities and that inter-group suspicions, fears, and antagonisms have an acceptable basis in reality.

The White Paper tells us,

10.15 . . . Facile distinctions between university and non-university institutions serve little purpose in face of the necessity to make provision for a widely diversified body of students whose varied qualifications the community sorely needs.

However much as we dwell on the similarities and differences in curriculum, financing, and administration, among the different types of third-level institutions, a dominating influence in their treatment by the Government is the social class differences among them, with the universities, of course, at the top. But class stratification in education is the most patent and the most articulated at second level. At the top are the fee-charging schools, both Catholic and Protestant, which in spite of the fact that they are selective in their admissions procedures and charge fees, continue to receive sizeable State grants.¹¹ Then come the secondary schools that pursue selective admissions procedures, which, perhaps surprisingly, are aided no differently from those schools accepting all comers. Below them come the rest of the secondary schools, with university graduates for teachers, still addressing a middle-class or aspiring middle-class clientele essentially seeking academic instruction toward desirable white-collar occupations. Most of the comprehensive and community schools fit into this stratum as well, taking their character from the dominant secondary school pattern. At the bottom, serving mainly the lower third of the income distribution, are the vocational schools. This discussion describes social stratification in second level only at its grossest and ignores the subtle differences within the various categories, e.g., as between Presentation and Christian Brothers' schools, on the one hand, and Loreto or Dominican schools, on the other, or as between the prestigious Dublin Protestant secondary schools and some of the more plebian Protestant schools around the country. It also ignores class division through streaming within schools. The Irish system of education, at all levels, is more effective than those in many other countries in replicating and reinforcing social class differences among children and perpetuating patterns of stratification for still another generation.¹²

Social class differences at primary level are principally two, one relating to the neigh-

11. Catholic secondary schools are eligible for four main types of State assistance: capital grants equal to 80 per cent of building costs; payment of so-called "incremental salaries" of teachers, which in fact are virtually the entire salaries of teachers; capitation grants; and supplemental grants in lieu of fees. Fee-charging secondary schools are eligible for capital grants but do not receive supplemental grants in lieu of fees. Payment of incremental salaries is the most important form of aid, and fee-charging institutions receive it on precisely the same basis as free secondary schools. Their schools are often ineligible for capital grants, since they frequently exceed maximum departmental specifications for grant eligibility. Their teachers' incremental salaries are paid by the State and the schools do receive capitation grants, just as do the Catholic schools. The major difference concerns the 'free scheme'. The Protestant schools all charge fees, but they receive the supplemental grant anyway, as a block grant, which they use to offset the fees of necessitous children. Thus, whereas among Catholic schools there are 'fee schools' and 'free schools' within the Protestant sector there are 'fee children' and 'free children'. (Tussing, 1978).
12. Rottman, Hannan, Hardiman and Wiley (1982), demonstrate how extraordinarily effective is the Irish system of education in social class reproduction.

bourhoods which form the effective catchment area of National Schools, and the other relating to private primary schools attached to selective secondary schools, to which parents who wish to assure them secondary places will send their children. The former seems all but inevitable without some traumatic adjustments, while the latter is only a reflection of social stratification in secondary schools.

Fewer than half of National School pupils attend mixed-sex schools. One reason for the persistence of single-sex National Schools is apparently the result of an unwritten agreement between the managers and INTO to provide for principalships for women. In second level, 60 per cent attend single-sex schools, but that is an average figure, concealing wide divergence among types. More than 80 per cent of secondary pupils attend single sex schools.¹³ It is clear that sex separation at second level is mainly a consequence of the dominance in this sector of secondary schools, and in turn of the dominance of religious orders within secondary schools.

There are arguments for and against sex segregation. Some argue that it provides a sheltered environment within which girls, in particular, can learn leadership and self-assurance without the need to compete with boys. My own opinion is that it contributes to the particular kinds of sexual and marital difficulties one finds in Ireland, where even long-married couples may not be at ease with one another. Moreover, I believe it contributes to sexual inequality. Whatever is true, it is an important characteristic of Irish education, and is long in need of ventilation.

Children *per se* are not separated by religious denomination, but school managements are and the children follow with only minor divergences. The denominational organisation of Irish education extends even into the public sector, to comprehensive and community schools. It serves the needs of the Protestant community, who would be swamped in a fully integrated system and who require some institutional arrangement by which boys and girls can meet, in order to provide for marriage and the survival of Protestants as a minority community.¹⁴ But sectarianism takes a toll as well. It emphasises and legitimates religious denomination as a characteristic which separates people and thus adds to the influences sustaining both sectarian bigotry and violence. It should be re-examined.

Taken together, sex segregation, denominational organisation and social stratification in Irish education not only reinforce the divisions among us, but they are costly as well. They require that we build and staff two, or four, or more schools, where one would do as well.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Each of us has his or her own list of concerns over the education system. There are concerns which relate to the system as a whole and those unique to a particular level. In my opinion, the most serious deficiency in first level is that too little money is devoted to it, for facilities, equipment, reduced class size and special provision for the disadvantaged; the most serious deficiency in second level is the drop-out rate after age 15; and the most serious deficiency in third level is that sector's inadequate projected growth. The first two of these are not really treated in the White Paper, while the third is a deficiency *in* that Paper.

The principal issues concerning the education system which are debated in the community at large are not dealt with in the White Paper. The most important long-run issues are, in my opinion, those of accountability, decentralisation and planning; of structural anomalies; of the relative priorities among the levels and among schools of different

13. Data are from Department of Education, *Statistical Report, 1977-78*.

14. Needless to say, Protestant secondary schools are not sex-segregated.

types; the effect of the education system on life chances; and the extent to which the structure of the system at all three levels divides its pupils by religion, sex, and social class. Other issues debated in the community, more particular than those I have dealt with, but also ignored in the White Paper, include the disputed role of elected parents in National School Boards of Management; Deeds of Trust in community schools; corporal punishment in the schools; sexism in the curriculum and in teaching materials; allegations of "discrimination" in the financing of second-level institutions; the means threshold and the size of awards in the higher education grants scheme; and others.

One cannot but wonder, then, as one reads the White Paper, why it was written. Ideally, White Papers are published to treat some important policy question, announce a new departure, or plot a new path; this White Paper seems instead to announce an absence of issues, of innovations and of change. Perhaps an answer to the question of why it was written is to be found in the following, from the Minister's foreword:

. . . This White Paper, promised in the Fianna Fáil Manifesto, offers guidelines for the development of our educational services over the immediate period ahead. The statement in the Manifesto proposed:- "to set out in a White Paper the lines for future education developments in Ireland".

I have earlier quoted the 1979 White Paper on National Development, to the effect that "a White Paper on education, as promised in the Government's pre-election Manifesto" was "being prepared for publication in 1979". The Government, as a party to the most recent national understanding, promised a White Paper on education for publication November, 1980.

Three noteworthy aspects of all this can be noted:

1. The main reason the White Paper was written and published appears to be that it was promised. No other reason is apparent.
2. There is in the 1979 reference to the "Government's Manifesto", and in the education White Paper's reference, in the Minister's Foreword, to the Fianna Fáil Manifesto, a confusion between party and State which one would associate with political and economic systems decidedly more eastern than that of Ireland.
3. That the paper was so often promised and so long delayed, together with the fact that it is silent on so many issues, leads one to speculate that it had a difficult passage within the Government and that its final version, upon which we comment tonight, is different from that intended by the Department and perhaps the Minister as well. Such speculation is, of course, in vain. But it is interesting.

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