

Secondary education and the British parties' ideologies

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The observations about British politics which occupy most of this article derive from a case study on the relations between ideology and policy on the national level in the debate about the comprehensive schools in Britain from 1944 to 1970. Because of the necessarily limited scope of the present article, only the principal conclusions of the case study will be presented here. Awareness of the limits of the general significance of any case study should, of course, underlie the conclusions drawn from it. Hence, certain implications with regard to the comprehensive schools' case which seem to repudiate some generally accepted assumptions about British politics actually only modify them.

Two concepts, often used in this article, require some clarification: ideology and professionalism. I use « ideology » in the sense of a set of action-oriented beliefs, whatever the orientation of the beliefs (conservative, reformist, radical etc.), and in my analysis I apply the recently introduced distinction between two dimensions of ideological argumentation: the fundamental and the operative (1). In the fundamental dimension, or in the fundamental ideology, the final goals and the ways and means of achieving them are prescribed. Operative ideology justifies actual policies whether or not they deviate from what is prescribed by fundamental ideology. In the fundamental dimension centrality is given to moral prescriptions (such as equality or justice), while in the operative dimension centrality is often accorded to technical prescriptions (deriving

(1) The case for the conception of ideology used here has been made out by M. Seliger. I also follow his distinction between the two dimensions of ideological argumentation and its implications. See M. SELIGER, *Fundamental and Operative Ideology: The Two Principal Dimensions of Political Argumentation*, in: *Policy Sciences*, vol. I, 1970; M. SELIGER, *The Concept of Ideology: The Case Against a Restrictive Definition*, Political Studies Conference 1971; M. SELIGER, *Ideology and Politics* (Manuscript, Jerusalem, October 1969).

from considerations such as utility or efficiency). Yet the technical prescriptions are always related, or an attempt is being made to relate them, to the moral prescriptions (2).

By professional arguments I mean all those arguments expressed by experts in education : educationalists, sociologists and psychologists. Using the term « professional arguments » does not imply that these arguments are devoid of ideological influence. The nature of the object of inquiry — man and his educability — makes purely scientific arguments almost impossible. However, professional arguments differ from ideological arguments in so far as there is no direct or conscious attempt on the part of the expert to connect the arguments to any specific party ideology.

The case study: the comprehensive schools debate.

The years from 1944 to 1970 can be divided into six periods, the criteria being the changes in the parties' policies and their relations to the parties' ideologies. In the first period, 1944-1951, Labour's policy was in conflict with the party's fundamental ideology, whereas in the Conservative party policies corresponded to the party's fundamental ideology.

It was possible to interpret those parts of the 1944 Education Act, which deal with secondary education, both on tripartite lines and on comprehensive lines (3). A tripartite system of secondary education involved an examination (I.Q.), achievement tests and teachers' evaluation at the age of eleven plus, and consequently the segregation of the children into three types of secondary school : grammar school, technical school and secondary modern school. Grammar schools were designed for those children who showed ability and aptitude for abstract learning, and provided O level and A level examinations. The pupil with a sufficient number of O and A level passes was entitled to apply to a university. The technical school put a greater emphasis on science and it also provided O and A levels. The secondary modern school was designed for the majority of children, who failed to pass the eleven plus examination in a satisfactory way. The aim of this school was to provide general practical education till the school leaving age (15 and later 16). Thus, for the majority of the children, that is for those who went to

(2) M. SELIGER, *Fundamental and Operative Ideology : The Two Principal Dimensions of Political Argumentation*, op. cit., pp. 326-327.

(3) Education Act. 1944, HMSO (London 1944), Clause 8(I) (b), p. 5. — Some points made here concerning Labour have been made in detail in my « Ideology and the comprehensive schools », *Political Quarterly* vol. 44 n° 2 1973, which deals exclusively with Labour.

the secondary modern schools, the doors of higher education were closed for a long period. The idea of a system of secondary education based on comprehensive schools differed basically from the idea of the tripartite system. A comprehensive school was to cater for all the children aged eleven plus in a certain area. That is to say, no examination at eleven plus and no segregation of the children into three different types of secondary education, but one secondary school, providing O and A levels, for all children.

From 1945 till Labour left office, the Ministers of Education — E. Wilkinson and G. Tomlinson — defended the view that the tripartite system was the right way to achieve equality of educational opportunity (4). Yet the Labour party at large was of a different opinion, and by 1951 the comprehensive principle became an integral part of the party's fundamental ideology as the only way of achieving equality of educational opportunity and thus of contributing to a more equal society (5). The criticism raised by the party conference on the Ministers' policies was sharp and constant (6). Yet the Ministers continued to pursue their policy of defending the tripartite system.

The Conservative view was clear: the educational system had to correspond to the moral principles of the party's fundamental ideology: elitism, tradition, diversity, freedom of choice, and inequality. Consequently, the tripartite system with its grammar schools was considered to be the norm, and comprehensive schools were regarded with great suspicion and at best as experiments suitable only for areas where there was no risk that the establishment of a comprehensive school will endanger a grammar school (7).

The result was that at this period there was a similarity between the policies of the two parties. However the consensus on the policy level was not accompanied by a similar consensus on the fundamental

(4) E. WILKINSON continued to circulate *The Nation's Schools* Pamphlet no. 1. Ministry of Education, H.M.S.O. (London, 1945), which interpreted the 1944 Education Act on tripartite lines. Also *The New Secondary Education*, Pamphlet no. 9 Ministry of Education, H.M.S.O. (London, 1947) outlined the case for the tripartite system. G. Tomlinson's opinion regarding the comprehensive schools can be seen in Circulars 142, 144. See also Hansard, vol. 424, cols. 1809, 1810, 1813; 1946 Labour Annual Conference Report, pp. 189, 194; Hansard, vol. 443, col. 1052; vol. 475, Col. 1373.

(5) See for example, 1947 Labour Annual Conference Report p. 198; 1948 Labour Annual Conference Report, p. 157; *Labour Believes in Britain* (The Labour Party, London, 1949); 1950 Labour Annual Conference Report, p. 223; The final authorisation to the comprehensive principle was given in *A Policy for Secondary Education* (The Labour Party, London, 1951).

(6) See for example, Hansard, vol. 424, col. 1833; 1946 Labour Annual Conference Report pp. 192, 193; 1947 Labour Annual Conference Report p. 198.

(7) See for example *The Nation's Schools*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 23-24, 15-16; *The Right Road for Britain*, Central Office (London, 1949); Topics for Today no. 25, *The Working of the Education Act of 1944*, Conservative Political Centre (London, 1951); *One Nation*, C.P.C. (London, 1950).

and operative levels of the parties' ideologies. The fundamental ideologies of both parties remained distinct and a conflict persisted between the interpretation of secondary education in each of the two fundamental ideologies. While Labour made the comprehensive principle a part of its fundamental ideology as a means to achieve equality, the Conservatives adopted the tripartite system because it served to safeguard their fundamental principles and in order to fight egalitarianism. Interestingly enough even in their operative ideologies, i.e., in the arguments used by the Labour Ministers on the one hand, and by the Conservative party on the other hand, to justify their policies, there was no consensus, despite the consensus between them concerning the tripartite policies themselves. The reason was that each of the justifications attempted to show the relatedness between the party's policy and its fundamental ideology. The Labour Ministers justified the tripartite system on the grounds that this system, with a parity of esteem between the three types of secondary schools, was the only one which could secure equality of educational opportunity, and because they saw in the grammar schools the gateway to further opportunities for working-class children (8). The Conservatives justified the same tripartite system but according to their fundamental ideology, i.e. because it preserved elitism, tradition and diversity (9).

In the second period, 1951-1958 a correspondence existed between the fundamental ideology and policy within each party. The gap between fundamentals and policy in the Labour Party diminished gradually as a result of the adaptation of the policies to the fundamentals formulated during the years 1946-1951. In opposition the party succeeded, on the national level, in rallying around the comprehensive principle (10). There was no change in the Conservative Party's defence of the tripartite system. From the time they returned to power, all their policies concerning secondary education were opposed to the comprehensive principle (11). The party conference asserted over and over again that only the tripartite

(8) See for example, Hansard, vol. 424, cols. 1809, 1813; 1946 Labour Annual Conference Report pp. 189, 194; Hansard, vol. 443, col. 1052; *ibid.*, vol. 475, col. 1373.

(9) See for example Hansard, vol. 391, col. 1867; *One Nation, op. cit.*; *The Right Road for Britain, op. cit.*; Hansard, vol. 466, col. 2062.

(10) See for example, *A Policy for Secondary Education, op. cit.*; M. COLE, *Education and Social Democracy*, in: R. CROSSMAN (ed.), *New Fabian Essays* (London, 1956), pp. 108-109; 1952 Labour Annual Conference Report p. 174; 1953 Labour Annual Conference Report p. 86; *Challenge to Britain* (The Labour Party, London, 1953); *Towards Equality, Labour's Policy for Social Justice* (The Labour Party, London, 1956).

(11) Till May 1953 not even one purpose-built comprehensive school was established. See also Hansard, vol. 498, col. 696; 1955 Manifesto *United for Peace and Progress*, Central Office (London, 1955), pp. 24-25.

system was right educationally, as it was suited to the different abilities and aptitudes of the children (12). While Labour was bringing forward the professional arguments of the environmentalists which opposed the idea of selection and segregation, the Conservatives continued to rely on the theories of the hereditary school. Consequently the consensus between the two parties on the policy level disappeared, and the conflict which existed in the first period only in regard to the fundamental and operative ideologies spread to the policies as well.

During the third period, 1958-1962, the overall picture was the same as in the second period: Conflict both on the ideological (fundamental and operative) and on the policy levels. Yet this time Labour reached congruity between its fundamental ideology and policies through the adaptation of the former to the change in policies which occurred in 1958. If formerly the party spoke about the eleven to eighteen comprehensive school as the only type of secondary school through which equality of educational opportunity could be realised, it now accepted that a two-tier system with a break at 15 was also compatible with the comprehensive principle. Consequently, the definition of the comprehensive principle was changed to mean every system of secondary education which succeeded in providing a real choice for its pupils (13). The reforms of secondary education, suggested by the Conservative party in these years, were all within the limits of the tripartite system, and the emphasis was on an attempt to improve the secondary modern schools (14).

During the fourth period, 1962-1964, there was a change in the general picture. While in the Labour Party the situation remained the same as in the previous period, there was a change in policies in the Conservative Party. The Conservative Minister of Education, Sir Edward Boyle, was much more flexible in his policies. He did not adhere to the Conservative's previous attitude to the tripartite system as the norm, and the comprehensive schools as exceptions suitable only to scarcely populated rural areas or to newly developed ones (15). However, this change of policy was not accompanied by a new definition of equality of educational opportunity in the Conservative Party's fundamental ideology, which continued to stress the important role played by the

(12) 1952 Conservative Annual Conference Report, pp. 93, 94; 1953 Conservative Annual Conference Report, pp. 37, 38; 1956 Conservative Annual Conference Report, p. 101; 1957 Conservative Annual Conference Report, p. 111.

(13) *Learning to Live* (The Labour Party, London, 1958), p. 26

(14) The main document is *Secondary Education for All. A New Drive*, Cmnd paper 604, H.M.S.O. (London, 1958).

(15) Sir Edwards' attitude to the comprehensive plans of Bradford, Leeds, Hull, Staffordshire and Derbyshire testify to this change.

grammar schools in preserving elitism, tradition and diversity (16). Consequently, there emerged for the first time a tension between fundamental ideology and policies in the Conservative Party itself. Thus the conflict between the fundamental ideologies of the two parties continued, but at the same time on the policy level consensus broadened.

In the fifth period, 1964-1968, developments inside both parties led to an even more substantial change in the overall picture. The Labour Party, which was now in office, issued circulars 10/65 and 10/66, using the « purse » to compel local authorities to adopt the comprehensive system. Thus the party went a step further in implementing the comprehensive principle. As for the Conservative Party, after it went into opposition, it presented its suggested policies as a critique of the way Labour intended to implement the comprehensive schools and not of the principle itself (17). As a result of this acceptance of the comprehensive principle by the Conservative Party, (perhaps not a sincere acceptance but at least a declared one), the degree of consensus between the policies of the two parties grew. As for the fundamental ideologies, the Conservative Party adapted to its policies certain of its moral principles, or their interpretation, and thus the tension of the previous period between the party's fundamental ideology and its policies diminished. The belief in the innate inequality of human beings had to be modified, and the traditional form of the grammar schools was sacrificed. To counter balance this change in the fundamentals, the principles of excellence, parental choice and the rights of local authorities were emphasized (18).

One would, therefore, expect some correspondence as regards the fundamental ideologies of both parties. However, this did not occur because Labour took the first opportunity that presented itself to revert to a reiteration of the orthodox definition of the comprehensive principle, i.e., no form of selection or segregation from 11 to 18 (19). Thus the conflict between the fundamental ideologies continued. As for the operative ideologies, as in 1945-1951, there remained a substantial difference between the arguments used by Labour and by the Conservatives in justification of their converging policies. Labour saw in the comprehensive

(16) *Educational Opportunity*, Central Office (London, 1963) ; 1964 Manifesto (London, 1964).

(17) 1965 Conservative Annual Conference Report, p. 51.

(18) Notes on Current Politics 1965 no. 3 Research Department (London, 1066) ; *Educating the Individual Child*, Pest Education Series no. 1, C.P.C. (London, 1966) ; E. HEATH speaking to the National Advisory Committee On Education 17th June 1967, News Service Central Office (unpublished).

(19) See Circular 10/65 Ministry of Education, H.M.S.O. (London, 1965).

schools a means of achieving a more equal society. In the Conservative Party there prevailed two main views: Those Conservatives who did believe that the comprehensive schools would help to achieve a more equal society, justified them on the basis of the primacy of the individual over the state, which meant that equality of educational opportunity must be provided for all children (20). Other Conservatives, who continued to believe that the comprehensive schools would reduce or efface inequalities, accepted them only provided that they did not exclude the existence of elitist institutions. As mentioned above, the change in the fundamental ideology of the Conservative Party in these years was not such as to enable us to speak of convergence between the fundamental ideologies of the two parties. Far from it; and as the arguments used by the Conservatives to justify their policies were related to their fundamental ideology, it is obvious that they differed from the arguments used by Labour, as those were also in harmony with Labour's fundamental ideology.

In the last period, 1968-1970, the parties reached the apex of polarization. Both parties assumed extreme orthodox positions. The Conservative Party turned the clock back and returned to its traditional position of opposing the comprehensive principle itself, both in the fundamental ideology and on the policy level (21). Labour made the final step towards complete harmony between its commitment to the comprehensive principle, as a means of achieving equality, in fundamental ideology and in policy, by introducing in 1970 a Bill making comprehensive education compulsory (22). Consequently complete conflict existed between the two parties on all levels.

The nature of consensus.

What, then, are the conclusions which can be drawn as regards the degree of consensus which at times prevailed between the two parties. Consensus in the fundamental dimension never existed, not even when consensus on the policy level was high. The distinct character of the two fundamental ideologies was maintained throughout the period.

(20) *Conservatives and Comprehensives*, a Bow Group Memorandum, C.P.C. (London, 1967), p. 12; *Educating the Individual Child*, *op. cit.*

(21) The Report of Secondary Education, The National Advisory Committee 1969, Inner Publication, vol. II, especially the last page; 1969 Conservative Annual Conference Report, p. 41; Hansard, vol. 790, cols. 599-600; *A Better Tomorrow*, Central Office (London, 1970), p. 20.

(22) Education (re-committed) Bill, Standing Committee, H.M.S.O. 1970.

Precisely because the parties' fundamental ideologies remained distinct, a gap was created within each party whenever its policies were adapted to the demands of the day. As Seliger concludes in general « ... deviations from fundamentals are a universal phenomenon... It is necessarily in the nature of ideological, as of all other, thought not only that it should run ahead but also that it lags behind facts » (23). The closest the fundamental ideologies of the parties reached to each other was between 1942-1944 and 1964-1968. During these two periods there was some resemblance in the interpretation of equality of educational opportunity in the fundamental dimension of the two ideologies. However in 1942-1944 the resemblance was much stronger. But there was never a consensus between the operative ideologies of the two parties, i.e., between the arguments used to justify the actual policies. Even when the parties to all intents and purposes agreed on policy, they justified the same policy in two different ways and by relying on their different fundamental ideologies. In effect claimed to pursue different goals by the same means. Some degree of consensus or convergence existed only in the policies themselves ; chiefly in the period 1945-1951, when both the Labour Ministers and the Conservative Party advocated the tripartite system, and to a smaller extent in 1962-1968 when the Conservative attitude towards the comprehensive schools was more flexible. The periods of the greatest degree of consensus, on the policy level, occurred while Labour held power and the Conservatives were in opposition, that is during 1945-1951 and 1964-1968. The reasons for consensus in each of the two periods were different.

In 1945-1951 convergence between policies was based on a combination of two reasons. First, the interpretation the Labour Ministers gave to the moral principle of equality. In contradiction to their party's interpretation, they argued that the tripartite system was the actualisation of the moral principle of equality. Second, the great, though unacknowledged, part played by administrative and financial considerations in the formulation of the Labour Ministers' policies in favour of the tripartite system. Since the Conservative Party also affirmed, at that period, the tripartite principle for secondary education, a consensus in policies existed. In 1964-1968, while Labour was in power, inter-party consensus did not reflect any flexibility on the part of Labour for they fervently adhered to the comprehensive principle. Consensus was a result of the Conservatives' awareness that for electoral, professional and economic reasons they must change their policies and accept the

(23) M. SELIGER, *Ideology and Politics*, op. cit., chap. VI, p. 20.

comprehensive principle while opposing only the ways by which Labour intended to implement it. The consensus in both periods was thus largely the result of various pragmatic and professional considerations.

It is therefore safe to generalise and say that the politics of consensus were a result of technical prescriptions of various kinds. Yet in general the importance of the demands arising from reality should not be exaggerated vis-a-vis the fundamental ideologies. Both Labour and the Conservatives pursued at times policies in contradiction to the demands of the day. Labour pursued the policy of comprehensive schools in the early 1950s when the idea was not popular at all, and had as yet almost no professional arguments to back it. The Conservative Party continued to defend the tripartite system when public opinion was already set against it and acted for years against the accumulating professional findings of the environmentalists.

Adaptability and flexibility.

Concerning the question which of these two parties adapted its policies more easily to public demands, even if this meant the creation of a gap between policies and fundamental ideology, at first glance there seems to be no difference between the parties. While in 1945-1951 Labour's Ministers openly defied the party's fundamental ideology and their policies were primarily dictated by technical considerations, in the years 1962-1968 the same happened in the Conservative Party which from 1962 started adapting its policies to the wind of change. Indeed further consideration shows that there is no substantial difference between the two parties as regards their adaptability.

A dogmatic approach on the policy level rather than flexibility would seem to be the most appropriate posture for a party in opposition, when the tendency is to formulate policies in greater harmony with the fundamental ideology. While in power all parties tend to attenuate, as circumstances require, dictates of fundamental ideology. However, Labour revealed flexibility only in its first term of government (1945-1951). Thereafter, except for the adaptation of fundamental ideology to policies in 1958, the party attempted all the time with growing ardour to pursue policies in harmony with the orthodox interpretation of its moral principles and the allegedly best ways and means of achieving them.

On their part, the Conservatives also defied the rule of flexibility in government and orthodoxy in opposition. The party showed more adaptability while in opposition (1964-1968), while in government it left flexibility and adaptability behind. For eleven out of its thirteen

years in government, the party's policies reflected no flexibility whatsoever. It clung, almost desperately, to those policies which were in harmony with the party's fundamental ideology and paid almost no heed to the changes in the climate of opinion.

Thus we can conclude that the differentiation between periods of government and opposition is not a universally valid indicator of flexibility or orthodoxy.

Both parties avoided a creation of a long lasting gap and tension between their policies and fundamental ideologies. A gap ensued only when there was no other way out, yet each party seized upon the first opportunity to close the gap, and if at all possible did so by adapting policies to fundamental ideology and not the other way about. The resulting inflexibility, however, was not the rule. On other issues both parties, though they disliked it, lived for long periods with policies which were not in harmony with their fundamental ideologies. In the comprehensive schools' issue, however, the parties showed great reluctance to formulate policies contrary to the orthodox interpretation of their moral principles, or introduce changes in their fundamental ideologies. Secondary education policy was for both parties more inseparable from their fundamental ideologies than most other policy issues. Each party fastened upon secondary education as an important means to realising certain of its specific moral principles. That is why, in contrast to other areas of welfare policy, the consensus reached in educational policy was limited not only in duration but in content as well. If the Conservative and the Labour parties reached a great degree of consensus in regard to other aspects of the welfare state, such as housing or health, the attitude to education which was connected directly with the view of society desired, limited the consensus on the meaning of equality of opportunity in education. Yet even limited consensus was always quickly broken because basically the two parties conceived equality of educational opportunity differently. Labour understood by equality of educational opportunity the provision of the same type of secondary education to all children, whereas the Conservatives saw it in the availability of different types of secondary education to all.

Education furnishes perhaps the best criterion for distinguishing between socialist and non-socialist welfare policy. The latter does not aim at an equal society but merely towards a more humane one. For socialists the welfare state is an intermediate stage on the way to the classless society. Welfare policy should, above all, bring the nation a step nearer to the socialist goal of establishing an equal society.

Ideology, policy and professionalism and the phenomenon of ideological change.

As for the general assumptions about the inevitable connection between ideology and politics and the claim that ideological change is heralded first in policy decisions and operative ideology, and afterwards may be acknowledged in the dimension of the fundamentals (24), the present case study confirms these propositions. It could be objected that no connection between ideology and politics existed, if at certain stages one of the parties had justified its policy by using purely professional arguments. However, the case study shows that during the whole period in the justification of the policies, planned or executed by both parties, whether in government or in opposition, professional arguments were always coupled with or overridden by ideological arguments. Indeed, as we have seen, psychological, sociological, educational, administrative and financial arguments were always brought in either to fortify the argument while the centrality was accorded to moral principles, or when professional arguments occupied a central place they nevertheless were connected, or at least an attempt was made to connect them, with moral principles. In this respect there was no difference between Labour and the Conservatives.

Secondly, whenever a change in fundamental ideology occurred it was either as a result of *a*) strong pressure to bring fundamentals into line with policies. For example Labour introduced a change in its fundamental ideology in 1958 by changing the definition of the comprehensive principle to bring it in line with realistic two-tier policies; *b*) as a result of the reappraisal of policies, which previously had been considered in harmony with the fundamentals, it became clear that as previously conceived these fundamentals were unrealizable and the interpretation of the fundamental ideology was changed. It was acknowledged that the accepted interpretation had been proved false through the policies which derived from it. For example, the change in Labour's interpretation of equality in the sphere of secondary education during 1945-1951, derived mainly from observation of the tripartite system. When judged in the light of the final goals of Labour's fundamental ideology, one system of secondary education — the tripartite system — was rejected and another — the comprehensive school — was established in Labour's fundamental ideology as the more appropriate specification of the ways and means of achieving equality. Accordingly equality of educational

(24) These general assumptions are put forward by M. SELIGER, *Ideology and Politics*, *op. cit.*

opportunity was no longer conceived of as providing different secondary education to each child in accordance with his ability and aptitudes, but as providing the same secondary education for all.

In all instances the hatred of inner tension helped to bring about the adaptation of fundamentals. All the changes of fundamental ideology were always the result of what was happening on the level of action. In other words, the policies actually being carried out gave rise to the re-interpretation of fundamental ideology and in this way to ideological change. In each case the deviation of policies from the established specification of fundamentals was unavoidable, and the parties only reluctantly adapted their fundamental ideologies to policies. Indeed in both parties dislike of changes in the fundamental dimension often went so far that in 1965 Labour, for instance, took the first opportunity to return to the old definition of the comprehensive principle by claiming again that a two-tier system with a break at 15 was not truly comprehensive. Likewise from 1968 the Conservative Party restored in its educational policies the traditional specifications to fundamentals and rejected again the comprehensive principle.

What are the general conclusions which can be drawn from the comprehensive schools' case? Within the framework of the bifurcation of ideology into fundamental and operative ideology, evinced in gaps between them and leading possibly to ideological change, consensus will be found above all in policies, unless parties come to agree on fundamentals. The similarity between policies is the result of pragmatic consideration of what is feasible in a given situation. Our case also shows that parties try to avoid long periods of inner conflict just as much as they dislike changes in their fundamental principles. The gap between policies and fundamental ideology does not only usually occur while the party is in power, nor does the adaptation of the former to the later take place only while the party is in opposition. Furthermore, our case indicates that in education, perhaps more than in other spheres, e.g. foreign policy, arguments prevail in which complete centrality is given to moral prescriptions. The predominance of such purely fundamental arguments in the comprehensive schools' case is a direct result of the close relation between fundamentals bearing on education and the overall ideological orientation. For Labour, comprehensive schools are an important specification of the ways and means of achieving the final object of equality, which the Conservative fundamental ideology rejects with equal vigour. The fight of the Conservatives against compulsory comprehensive education was part of the battle for local autonomy and parental choice. For the Conservatives the grammar school bore the same relation to their fundamental ideology as the comprehensive school

did to Labour's fundamental ideology : the grammar schools were to ensure quality and tradition over and against egalitarianism.

Modification of images.

A. *The Conservative Party*

As their attitude towards the issue of the comprehensive school shows, it would seem that the Conservative did not manifest the ability, often attributed to them in the literature, of adapting themselves easily to new situations. Rather, in virtue of the strong relationship between the issue of secondary education and the party's central fundamental principles, the speed of adaptation of the Conservative Party to changing circumstances depended on whether or not considerations, such as electoral success or financial aspects, were strong enough to override the desire of the party to preserve its fundamental principles. An accumulation of factors external to education was therefore essential to bring about an adaptation. Hence as long as public opinion, professional arguments and financial, administrative and electoral considerations permitted, the party adopted an uncompromising stance, as it did from 1951 till 1962. Moreover, even when there was strong pressure arising out of professional arguments and public opinion, it was weighed in the balance with the many fundamentals which were at stake and the party chose to defend its fundamentals. This was the case in 1968-1970. In other issues which are not so closely related to the central principles of the party, or which are more closely related to other strong considerations, the party can be expected to adapt itself to change much more quickly.

Similarly, the generally pragmatic, *ad hoc* nature of Conservative policy is not confuted by the apparently dogmatic conduct of the comprehensive school debate. It was again the nature of the specific issue which led to a debate on principles.

Another assumption — that the Conservative Party is much less concerned with education than the Labour Party — has been challenged. It is usually assumed that since the Labour Party believes in the perfectability of man and in the possibility of achieving a better society by « bringing out » (*e-duco*) the best in men through education, it is much more interested in education than the Conservative Party, because the latter does not believe in such perfectability. We have seen, however, that generally speaking, from 1951 to 1970, education formed an important part in the Conservative Party's debate and official publications. Yet it was not until the grammar schools were challenged by Labour's

proposed comprehensive policy that the Conservative Party started to take such a lively interest in the education of all children. The important place given by the party to secondary education did not reflect a sudden interest in the education of the majority. It was rather the result of the party's persistent interest in the education of an elite. This concern was at the root of Conservative Ministers' interference during 1951-1962 with the autonomy of the local education authorities, although such an interventionism is in contradiction to the party's belief in local autonomy, as expressed both in its fundamental ideology and past policy. The fundamental of local autonomy was overridden by the fundamentals of elitism and personal excellence, which the grammar schools were to preserve and protect.

The Conservatives' attitude in the comprehensive schools debate confirms that the absence of an utopian conception of society does not weaken adherence to a party's fundamental beliefs, that is to the maintenance of their ideology. The Conservative Party, though it denies the fact, does have an ideology and this ideology does influence its policies.

B. The Labour Party

The case study shows the great importance attached by the Labour Party to the principle of equality up to 1970. If the party gave way in the economic sphere, it compensated by shifting the emphasis to social engineering, and the comprehensive school became one of its specifications. In a way it is precisely because the party, until it left office in 1970, abandoned universal nationalisation, that it fought so strongly for the comprehensive schools.

It was also shown that the policies outlined by Labour during its long period in opposition were the basis of the party's actual policies when it returned to government. But such continuity is by far not the rule. For generally, the policies Labour formulated while in opposition were in greater harmony with its fundamental ideology than the policies pursued when the party returned to office. This is due to the fact that while the party is in opposition, the Annual Conference exercises great influence. Also, when out of government the party is not called upon to implement its promises immediately. Education and the economy are the two main spheres which in the view of Labour decide the character of society. That in the issue of the comprehensive schools the policies outlined in opposition were carried out when the party returned to power, was a result of the party's need to adhere to some policy which was in close relation to the principle of equality, because in other spheres,

and especially in economic reorganisation, the policies had to be modified according to the demands of the day.

In sum, because as a left wing party it had no *raison d'être* unless it acts to promote equality, Labour chose comprehensive schools as the one issue through which it manifested its adherence to the traditional goal of a more classless society. That comprehensive schools did not and could not, at least in their present form, achieve this goal was ignored. This reinforces my assertion that once Labour had picked the comprehensive issue as the one through which it wanted to manifest its fight for equality, the real facts and the instrumental questions often played a subordinate part (25). Labour's strong desire to present its ideology as centered around equality is manifested also in the developments inside the party from 1970 to our day. The revival, with even a greater fervour, of the issue of nationalisation in the party's last Annual Conference manifests only too well Labour's determination to appear as a left wing party.

Finally, the practical lesson to be learned from the case of the comprehensive schools is that any policy issue intimately connected with fundamental ideology, requires professional judgment to lay bare the implications of ideological commitments. Admittedly, to devise policies on purely professional grounds is utopian, even though the tendency is anti-utopian. But at least we can avoid what happened in the case of the comprehensive schools: to assign to instrumental considerations secondary importance to the point of rendering them almost irrelevant.

(25) Among the conclusions concerning the Labour Party, stated in this concluding section, a few restate those reached in mine « Ideology and the comprehensive schools » op. cit.

