

HARD TIMES - ACCOUNTABILITY IN ENGLAND

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Accountability is already such a familiar theme in educational debate that its basic issue structure is known to all of us. For what? by whom? to whom? and in what form? are the main bones of contention. The need for accountability, or rather for more or different accountability, is not disputed, although it is variously construed by different individuals and organisations. This consensus is a late development, consequent upon recognition of the elasticity of the concept and the emergence of 'softer' interpretations than seemed likely when it surfaced in public discussion in the early seventies. It appeared first as a hard-nosed threat from dissatisfied paymasters, replete with intonations of coiled accusation and the promise of summary justice for an allegedly slack and incompetent teaching profession. In this guise accountability generated ripples of alarm among those immediately in the firing line and roused the twin spectres of 1862 and 1984. Without wishing to suggest that the concept has entirely shed this image of harsh managerial evaluation, I think it fair to say that in the intervening period the issue has become more complex, more susceptible to competing ideological presuppositions, and more embracing in its ramifications.

As a rhetorical device, accountability has proved to be an invaluable aide de camp for every educational crusade, ranging ideologically from the CCE Campaign for Comprehensive Education, calling for a new Education Act to force the recalcitrant Tamesides and Kingstons into line, to the Black Paper thunderers demanding an end to the allegedly soft-centred pedagogy of an allegedly maverick teaching profession. Most importantly the issue of accountability in education is now seen to be an off-shoot of a larger societal debate about the contemporary malaise of liberal democracy, a debate which constitutes one of the contexts for this particular review. The autonomy of the education service in this country has always been more questionable than those within it have cared to admit, but its peculiarly obfuscated power structure has generally been considered to provide adequate insurance

against bids for dominance from any single quarter. Current challenges, under the banner of accountability, to the way our educational institutions function as social agencies invite us to re-examine these relationships and consider whether a new insurance policy is called for. The task of understanding accountability in education thus calls for a broad approach and the integration of a set of perspectives which will frequently look beyond the boundaries of the educational sector in a search for enlightenment.

#### Uses of Accountability

From time to time one reads, bemusedly, of the zealous or hyper-active worker whose productivity so embarrasses his fellow employees that he is called to account for over-achievement and, in the event of his failing either to absolve himself from personal responsibility or to promise to do worse in future, is instructed to seek a form of employment less suited to his talents. Such cases are still rare enough to attract press publicity, usually followed by general censure of the work force concerned, calls for anything up to a knighthood for the victim, and much shaking of heads about the sad state of industrial relations. This may seem far removed from the proper concerns of a review of educational accountability, but it does serve to remind us of something we might otherwise overlook; accountability may be invoked to restrain as well as to improve performance, to limit as much as to define liability. Nor are such cases confined to the factory floor, although in the social services indices of productivity are usually too inconclusive to support prosecution. I certainly know of one university department where an enthusiastic tutor was dissuaded by collective protest from coaching his less able undergraduates on the grounds that they were thereby afforded an unfair advantage over those whose tutors adhered strictly to the timetable. One future for the current accountability movement, if pressed to substantial realisation, would feature as much concern about upper limits to performance as is now expressed about lower limits. If accountability has its casualties, we may have to include the excessively virtuous among them.

But I press on too quickly. In a society noted, as ours is, for its inertia the suggestion that a 'movement' is taking place should be treated with some scepticism, even at the risk of being surprised by events. No-one would deny that we have all the rhetoric of an accountability movement in education and a formidable parade of advocates warming up on the touchlines. Nor would they deny that, despite the indiscriminate adoption of the concept by reformists of differing persuasions, accountability has an orthodox meaning which is either assumed or explicitly challenged wherever the topic is discussed. A new language, hastily borrowed from fields where ends/means reasoning seems to be relatively non-problematic, appears conceptually capable of transforming education from an indeterminate process in professional hands to a delivery system under public control, has emerged this decade and captured the concerns, if not the imagination, of legislator, bureaucrat and educational practitioner alike. Not all of them of course; orthodox accountability has attracted revisionists as well as champions, and its proposed forms and targets are now so various that one must stipulate which particular form and target one has in mind before speculating about whose interests might be enhanced or whose intelligence insulted by it. For instance, some of the more active opponents of the early managerial prototype (Michael Eraut in Sussex and John Elliott in Cambridgeshire, for instance) have recently countered with models of institutional accountability based on openness of process as an alternative to specification of product. In so doing they have in a sense stolen the enemy's clothes, and thus made this reviewer's task more difficult. At the same time such initiatives, though still at the research stage, do suggest that something of interest is happening. Combined with a number of other initiatives, innovations and developments, which I shall shortly come to, they constitute the prima facie case for the existence of an accountability movement. Whether or not the 'movement' can generate sufficient propulsion to effect a significant change in the conduct of education, and whether or not we can detect with any confidence the direction of such a change, I shall consider later. Few issues in education have been so overtly politicised as accountability, and I doubt if the issue can be understood without rather detailed reference to the broader social and historical context in

which the issue has been raised. And, in so far as educational accountability represents a response to economic and political problems that encompass but transcend educational concerns, its future is likely to be shaped, if not determined, by the ways in which these problems are resolved within that larger framework. In particular, the historical correlation between educational change and economic change is too well attested to be ignored, even if the nature of the interactive process remains a matter of ideological dispute.

#### Accountability - the societal context

For the British people the winter of 78/79 is truly one of discontent; the sense of living in a failing society has become pervasive. Inflation persists, dole queues stretch into the bleak future, especially for young people, and welfare services decline. To the cynical observer bureaucracy and tax avoidance stand alone as growth industries, feeding alienation. Appeals to the national interest fall on increasingly deaf ears as the failure of successive resorts to macro-economic management demonstrates more and more clearly just why Britain is in the hapless tax haven of international business and the poor relation of the European Economic Community.

To the economic impotence of British government many would now add moral drift on a scale which dwarfs the fading indiscretions of Profumo in the previous, more bouyant decade. Poulson revealed the rot in local government as well as the structure of temptation in the management of the public purse. Subsequent cases reinforced the profound unease that was generated by the Poulson case about the integrity of the public services. More recent events now threaten to convert that unease into comprehensive disaffection with the body politic. Recently the press of the world gathered at Minehead to record the grubby wheeler-dealings of previously respected political figures, while at the same time another court indicted another set of powerful government leaders for abusing the criminal justice system in the prosecution of two investigative journalists. And overshadowing these devaluations of the moral currency was Bingham's exposure of a decade of conspiratorial

deceit at the highest levels of political, administrative and business responsibility in the matter of Rhodesian sanction. The sight of the two major political parties, both implicated in the Bingham Report, closing ranks as the demands for a full-scale enquiry rose, conferred both a new meaning to the parliamentary tradition of consensus politics and a bitter twist to the Prime Minister's recent decision to jettison his Party's manifesto commitment to open government. And no-one resigns. Perhaps, as the Oxford Union's ecstatic reception of citizen Nixon suggests, there is no longer any reason why they should. Such is the stuff of political atheism.

Against such a background of ineptitude and abuse it would be surprising if we did not hear, among the welter of proposed remedies, calls for more effective accountability procedures. The targets of such advocacies have been many and various. By a pointed irony only the monarchy has so far escaped the pathologist's microscope as the liberal-democratic state is subjected to a searching review. The scene is a confusing one, not least because the justificatory rhetoric of accountability has been harnessed to competing agendas. But at the broadest political level the demand for accountability is a response to a society believed to be both in decline and out of legitimate control. And at the heart of this concern is an argument about the role of the bureaucracy.

#### Bureaucracy and bureauphobia

At a fundamental level it is argued that the state has outgrown its accountability mechanisms, which no longer assure democratic control. In theory, of course, liberal democracy is the most accountable of systems of government. Citizens elect representatives to act as their agents in the conduct of government, and require them periodically to give an account of their performances and to submit themselves to re-election or eviction. These governors make law and policy, and levy taxes; they also employ people to administer and implement government. These employees in turn are accountable to the governors, who take formal responsibility for directing and supervising

their work, whilst in practice delegating much of the day-to-day responsibility through hierarchical and specialised staffing arrangements. Thus all civic power is provisional, authorised, referrable and accountable to the people. Neat theory, possibly foolproof in small tribes, arguably feasible in larger but relatively simply social organisations, but increasingly problematic in the kind of large-scale, heavily populated, urbanised and economically unstable agglomerates in which most of us now live! In Britain, where the contemporary infrastructure of democracy has evolved adaptively over a long period of time, the susceptibility of the machinery of government to popular control through representative government has become a matter of frequent, and latterly heated, debate. Since the second world war particularly, the expansion of government functions combined with the accelerating rate of legislative enactment have combined to generate a growth and proliferation of bureaucratic mechanisms to the point where their very size and complexity would seem to exclude the possibility of close control. In the last ten years two major reviews of the central bureaucracy, the Fulton Report of 1968 and the Select Committee Report of 1978, have explored this concern, and the lengthy public debate which attended the deliberations of the parliamentary committee last year was a fair reflection of the rising tide of anxiety and even alarm about the power of the civil service.

But the problem of bureaucratic accountability, as it is posed in our society at this time is formidably complex; it is not simply a problem of bigness or of the power syndromes generated by growth and opportunity, although both need to be kept in mind. The rise of entrepreneurial government intent upon economic management of a more direct kind than we have known in previous eras of less competitive international trading and the corresponding increase in the use of legislative power to orchestrate the national effort, have entailed not just a need for more bureaucracy, or even more interventive bureaucracy, but also for a faster bureaucracy with a more responsive capability.

One way to cope would be to create a much larger number of government



departments, restricting each to a manageable size under ministerial surveillance; an alternative, clearly enjoying the support of western democracies, is to maintain the number of departments but to absorb additional functions, particularly those of a specialised nature or with a clearly defined task, by creating a network of departmental agencies or semi-autonomous organisational adjuncts. These QUAGS (quasi-governmental organisation) or QUANGOS (quasi non-governmental organisations) as they are known to theorists of public administration, are freer from day-to-day parliamentary scrutiny and able to concentrate on a single task without being distracted by the full range of concerns of the sponsoring department.

But this creeping fringe of Whitehall not only infuriates the growing number of bureauphobic M.P.s who see it as a form of camouflage of key policy initiatives offering at best only ex post facto accountability; it also raises problems of control and accountability within the civil service itself as the organisational structure becomes more fractured by ad hoc improvisation. The young man in my local garage who in one day received separate and uncoordinated visits from the Local Training Board, the Training Services Agency and the Manpower Services Commission, each offering different training opportunities without reference to each other, will have some sense of the executive maze that presently characterises the interface between education, training and employment. The combination of size, complexity and specialisation, compounded by the requirement for fast action in a more interventive mode, has increased the bureaucracy's need for more control over the services it administers and more freedom from parliamentary or public restraint.

So, while its parliamentary critics seek to emasculate or dismember the central bureaucracy through such means as political/administrative devolution, select committees, and disclosure of executive advice, all designed to render the bureaucracy more accountable both to parliament and directly to the people, the planners within the administrative machine have been concerned with developing internal innovations designed to maintain its unity and cohesiveness under a growing workload.

Attempts to reconcile these conflicting pressures have nourished the practice in recent years of co-opting non-administrators on to the management of essentially administrative organisations, a practice which goes some way to meeting demands for more participative democracy and more involvement of specialist advice without necessarily relinquishing executive control.

It is a complex picture, and the temptation to oversimplify it even more than I have done is hard to resist. Accountability in action will typically present us with the problems of whether we are seeing an attempt to recognise and respond to legitimate citizens rights and interests and to give them effective voice or a strategy to legitimate the policy preferences of a power elite. The issues are mirrored at the local level, and therefore the complexity is compounded by the interactive effects of changes in the distribution of control between central and local government.

It may be clear, for instance, that the Department of Education seeks a more influential role in the determination of local educational policy, but it is equally clear that what is envisaged falls well short of the kind of take-over bid that the Manpower Services Commission has initiated in the further education sector. The 1976 Layfield Committee on Local Government Finance, concerned with the lack of clear accountability for expenditure arising from a confusion between central and local responsibility, considered but rejected proposals to transfer financial control to national government. In reaching this conclusion it was influenced by representations from the DES to the effect that such a transfer would give the central administration too much power. Later in this review we shall look more closely at recent developments in central/local relations in education. For the moment we might just note that when, in the context of Layfield, the Department was offered the prospect of a mighty club with which to beat the educational system into line it insisted that all it wanted was a more compelling baton. We would do well to bear this in mind when we come to examine some of the ways in which the Department has

responded in the past decade to mounting internal and external pressures.

Educational accountability is embedded in this context, both influencing and influenced by it. Is the current spread of Taylor-style school board democracy, for example, a genuine advance in grassroots participation and public accountability, or would it be more accurate to categorise it as the QUANGO outcrop of a more sophisticated technology of administrative control? In Lindblom's terms, are we moving towards an intellect-guided or preference-guided educational institution? We could ask the same question of the Great Debate, or of the structure of consultation and decision-making employed by the Assessment of Performance Unit. But again I leap beyond my argument. At this point it may be useful to review the recent history of the education service within the liberal business state, and ask "How did accountability come to the fore-front of managerial concerns?"

#### The Rise and Fall of Educational Spending

In 1970, following twenty years of expansion under the dotting sponsorship of the welfare state, expenditure on education reached a high water mark by overtaking expenditure on defence for the first time. The same year, however, marked the end of the post-war growth era in the social services generally, and of the priority hitherto accorded to the education services in particular. The fiscal ice age had begun, and a period of educational buoyancy backed by a generous commitment of national resources gave way to a period in which the big spending services, among which education was second only to health and social security, ground to a crawl as the hare of public expenditure was harnessed to the tortoise of economic growth.

Now it is widely assumed that the accountability movement in education is a response to the financial climate of crises and cuts that has characterised the seventies. An informal survey of the views of senior LEA personnel, conducted as part of the research for this

review, backs this assumption. But I would contend that managerial concern for accountability was an effect of educational expansion and the growth of local government in the sixties, a consequence of the need for more sophisticated thinking about increasingly complex administrations. That a transformation of rationale for accountability took place in the seventies is undeniable, and hardly surprising in view of the pressures for cost-effectiveness and the competition for scarce resources that stringency generated. But accountability as a concept was already prominent in the plans and experiments of local as well as national government before the Treasury axe fell. Not to grasp this is to fail to understand why some of those education officers most prominent in the prosyletization of accountability-based management at the beginning of this decade have since joined the ranks of its most uncompromising adversaries. In that time accountability changed from being a means of informing uncontested investments and facilitating co-operative planning with other services to an unsympathetic audit of coveted expenditure.

We don't have to look very far to appreciate the substance of this proposition. The pace, range and complexity of welfare legislation in the sixties heaped responsibilities upon local government even as it provided increased resources to meet them. The strain of coping with a comprehensive range of linked services with an administrative structure geared to departmental autonomy, and the prospect moreover, following the Redcliffe-Maud Commission, of having to do so within even larger local government units, was bound to force some re-thinking of the executive structure, and this re-thinking was evident long before the 1972 Act. By the late sixties firms of management consultants were busy revamping County Hall administrations with variations of the Planning, Programming and Budgeting System that was simultaneously infiltrating Whitehall. Redcliffe-Maud berated local government for its failure to evaluate policy alternatives while national government was already switching to output budgetting and seeking to interlock central and local administrative paradigms, so that by the beginning of the seventies the notion of management by objectives, with its concomitant requirement to monitor

the results of resource allocation, was a focal concept in local planning. With the 1972 Act looming up a study group on local authority management structures was set up in 1971 under Bains' chairmanship, which was to set out the now familiar concept of corporate management. Although the Bains Report employed a rhetoric of efficiency rather than accountability, it clearly conceived greater accountability as a key to improved management. Thus "In order to assist in the vital process of monitoring performance against defined objectives, greater attention must be paid to the development of methods of assessing the effectiveness of activities. The main criterion of success has for too long been the amount of resources put into a service, with but little regard to output."

(Recommendation 7)

Bains reported in 1972, before the Treasury shoe really began to pinch, and almost two years before local government reorganisation was implemented. Educational administrators did not wait for Bains, however. Even as the Bains' study group deliberated, another informal committee of DES and LEA administrators was developing a three year dialogue about educational management, published by the Society of Education Officers in 1974. The publication echoed and reinforced the Bains' view, claiming "There is now a strong recognition of the need to plan all services on a corporate basis" and endorsing the Bains' emphasis on "defining objectives and producing methods of analysing achievement and alternative policies". Again there was little mention of accountability, indeed even a specific disavowal of the use of assessment for other than resource allocation decisions of a general nature. And the group stressed that the interpretation of output measures "is a skilled process which should be done under the direction of professional educationists." Although the mechanisms of accountability featured as an indispensable element in the recommended management model, it is clear that the concept as we now understand it did not.

Let us now add to these somewhat disparate strands of recent history some others that may help us to appreciate the complexity and the

contradictions of educational accountability. Up to this point we have concentrated on the changing ideology of public administration that resulted from bureaucratic expansion and was reflected at the national level in the federalist reforms of the 1970 White Paper, "The Reorganisation of Central Government" and at the local level in the 1972 Bains' Report. At both levels of government there was a growing conviction of the need for more integrated planning, more positive management, more policy evaluation through the definition of targets and the monitoring of effects. This transformation of administrative philosophy predated the accountability movement but was well equipped to respond to those demands for accountability that were directed at the shop floor end of the delivery system. In that sense it could be argued that the accountability issue fell into the laps of those senior administrators intent upon pushing through radical reform of the government machine. Accountability was to prove, however, a tricky resource with hazardous potential for rebound. As we have already noted the problem for managers was how to utilise the concept to raise the level of responsiveness to central policy of personnel in the system without fomenting public and parliamentary concern about mandarin power. In education the problem called for judicious initiatives and selective exploitation of the turbulent pool of dissatisfactions that began to rock the boat of educational practice in the early seventies. One way to gain some purchase on how the accountability issue emerged and was structured is to review the curriculum reform movement, and it is to this that we now briefly turn.

#### Curriculum Obsolescence and Models of Planned Change

The last twenty five years have seen attempts, first in the USA but also in Britain, Sweden, West Germany and latterly in most of the advanced industrial nations, to organise and accelerate the process of curriculum change. In this country the innovation movement that flourished throughout the sixties grew from forecasts made in the early fifties that economic growth would be checked by manpower shortages in science and technology. Throughout the fifties, as awareness of the need for some new machinery to galvanise the schools

grew, observers of the established tri-partite power partnership in the education service noted signs of increasing unrest within the Ministry about central government's exclusion from the 'secret garden of the curriculum', a phrase used by the Minister in 1960 to characterise teacher autonomy. One observer, Manzer, describes the period leading up to the sixties as one in which the tradition of partnership was increasingly seen by those in central government as inadequate in the face of the problems created by an expanding and changing education system. The manpower arguments used by sociologists pressing for an end to selective secondary school education supported the development in the Ministry of a view of education as a form of economic investment. The Ministry began to move from its traditional "regulatory control" function, to a more positive role in policy making and the setting of national goals.

In tertiary education the government, bent upon engineering the delivery of more profitable human resources, found plenty of room for manoeuvre in the non-university sector, and systematically developed the binary system throughout the sixties, expanding and upgrading the institutions of technical and vocational education into a high-quality training arm of the drive for industrial regeneration. Throughout this period the universities came under increasing pressure to respond to national manpower needs, both through the weakening of the buffer function of the UGC, and the stipulative emphasis on immediate utility that in recent years has characterised the conditions of support for academic research to an extent that indicates a quite significant shift of control over the generation of new knowledge.

But the secret garden of the school sector proved to be much more alertly guarded.

The assault was signalled in 1962 by the setting up in the Ministry of a Curriculum Study Group to "oversee examinations and curriculum". In view of all the warnings which preceded this initiative, it is hardly surprising that the reaction of the partners was hostile.

The upshot of it all in 1964 was a new institution, the Schools Council, removed from the Ministry, and reasserting in its constitution the principles of tripartite control and teacher autonomy.

The Council immediately took over the sponsorship of innovation initiated by the Nuffield Foundation and launched a comprehensive range of national development projects to review and up-date virtually the whole of the school curriculum, and to generate appropriate materials and guidance. At first it was widely assumed that the products would be snapped up by the schools; when it became clear, in the late sixties, that the accomplishments of the developers were falling far short of the goal of transforming professional practice the Council was subjected to increasing criticism, both from those who saw it as a toothless tiger and those who saw in its dominant teacher representation a powerhouse of teacher union imperialism. By the early seventies the image and morale of the Council, despite its strenuous efforts in product dissemination and evaluation, and the lack of any clear evidence of its alleged failure, were at a low ebb, and the situation once again ripe for new initiatives and proposals.

#### New Initiatives, New Tides

Theorists of planned innovation, disillusioned with the first decade of reform, were casting around for new models, looking for the optimal combination of central punch and grass roots initiative. The central ministry, still formally committed to the Council as the main national agency of change but convinced of its inadequacy, was gearing itself for a new independent thrust.

The first evidence of this new thrust emerged in 1972 in the shape of the National Development Programme in Computer Assisted Learning, a new organisational animal in which the emerging format of administrative thinking was harnessed to a bold central initiative in the field of curriculum development. This five year, two-and-a-half million pound programme, was not farmed out to existing agencies but placed directly under the control of an ad hoc organisation



headed by an executive committee of bureaucrats from the seven sponsoring government departments. With this kind of federalist administrative control, aided by co-opted professional expertise, and operating through a tough-minded stepped funding and matched funding system of sponsorship based on pre-specification of outcomes, with a heavy investment in both internal and independent evaluation, the Programme could be defined as an experimental prototype of a new instrument of educational change.

The creation of the Programme also marked the development of a closer relationship (albeit bristle to bristle) between the Department of Industry, which was influential in securing Treasury blessing for the investment, and the Department of Education, which assumed the position of *primus inter pares* in its management. The link between educational development and economic growth was thus explicitly embodied in the Programme structure. At the time of writing, following a government decision to invest massively in the silicon chip industry, plans for a twelve million pound educational/training development programme on NDPCAL lines are already under discussion in Whitehall. In this we can see the emergence of a model of educational development that is closer to the kind of control now exercised by the commandos of the Manpower Service Commission in further education than it is to the negotiated organisational structure of curriculum development that dominated the sixties.

The next major thrust from the DES was the setting up, in 1974, of the Assessment of Performance Unit to monitor national standards among the school population. Again logic might suggest the location of such an agency within the Schools Council, which had responsibility for examinations within its remit, but by this time the Council was so demoralised that the Department was able to lodge the APU within Elizabeth House without attracting organised resistance. Mind you, the new unit did not at first appear to constitute a major thrust, and the teacher unions were heavily represented in its supervisory structure. It was set up with a staff of one seconded HMI, and a classics expert at that, which might be interpreted as a defiant assertion of the 'generalist' principle, or as an attempt to disguise the new gun-boat as a gondola.

I shall have more to say about the APU later in this review. For the moment we should note how neatly the APU's consistent advocacy of objectives-based teaching dovetails with the data requirements of the new administrative paradigm.

But in 1974 the Department of Education was still professing, publicly at least, staunch support for the Schools Council. Not until October 1976, did it declare its hand. Then, in a confidential (but leaked) memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Department proposed that it should have a greater say in deciding the curriculum of the schools. Expressing strong criticism of the Council ("overall performance ... generally mediocre") the memorandum called for a review of its functions and constitution, and enhanced powers for the Department's inspectorate to secure improvements in the curriculum. Advocating a national core curriculum to raise standards of achievement and ensure adequate attention to mathematics and science, the memorandum based its case for tighter central control on the need for schools to serve more effectively manpower requirements, particularly to produce technologists and engineers for industrial expansion.

Both the timing and the content of this initiative were well-judged. It came in the aftermath of the William Tyndale saga, an event which not only exposed and dramatically highlighted the laissez-faire tradition of control in education, but seriously undermined the image of professional competence on which the case for teacher autonomy had been based. With its appeal to standards, and its concession to allegations of a decline in standards (although largely repudiated by its own inspectoral surveys) the memorandum was judiciously responsive to the rising tide of educational consumerism, in particular to middle-class fright at the closing noose of classless institutional provision. And with its emphasis on industrially relevant skills it provided an opportunity for the Prime Minister to launch a counter-offensive against an Opposition campaign that, in the wake of the Chancellor's £6,000 million public expenditure cuts earlier that year, had successfully marshalled various discontents into an effective political platform. Small wonder that in its memorandum the Department vouchsafed the view that "the climate for a declaration on these lines may now be

favourable."

By this time, too, the Department was itself under severe attack, and anxious to export the pressure. In 1975 the Paris-based OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) published an evaluation of the Department which alleged that government policy was controlled by career civil servants and formulated largely in secrecy. The Report took the Department to task for insufficient consultation in planning and advocated more open policy-making. Following the OECD Report Parliament set up a committee to investigate policymaking within the DES, and this committee concluded with a broad endorsement of the OECD critique. Parliamentary criticism of the Department mounted but was so contradictory in its content that it must have been difficult for the civil servants to fashion a response. On the one hand they were criticised for lack of consultation, on the other for their failure to respond quickly and decisively to problems. In this latter respect they were compared unfavourably with the mighty fledgling Manpower Services Commission, yet it should have been clear that the speed of action and "smash and grab" tactics exhibited by the MSC were made possible not just by a massive injection of funds but by its freedom from the tangled web of consultative processes in which the Department of Education was firmly embedded.

The Department was flooded with recommendations from the Select Committee. For instance, in 1977 the Education Sub-Committee, enquiring into allegations of lack of basic skills among school leavers, recommended that headmasters should have limited tenure subject to independent evaluation, that there should be an enquiry into maths teaching, that the number of examining boards be reduced, that teachers of basic skills receive volunteer assistance. The political lunacy of some Committee recommendations compounded the work-load of the Department by providing red flags for the bullish militancy of the now heavily unionised teaching profession and stiffening teacher resistance to accountability initiatives. Criticism of the Department also encouraged those educational academics like Maurice Kogan who favoured Scandinavian paradigm of the relationship between

research and policy-making, and who were exploiting the slip stream of the OECD Report. As if all this were not enough the Department had to cope with a huge drain of potential resources into the development of training, and growing pressures from Brussels for accountability to and implementation of EEC policies frequently at odds with national priorities and preferences. Being called upon to become both more democratic and more decisive, the Department responded in part by fashioning a change of role for the traditionally secretive and largely advisory inspectorate, on the one hand encouraging more publication of inspectorial evaluations, on the other shaping them into a would-be technocratic force through the vehicle of an expanding Assessment of Performance Unit. Further evidence of muscular intent came in the shape of a survey of local education authority curriculum policy which has yet to be processed, a survey which contained clear warning (widely interpreted as bluff) of the possibility of central intervention in any authorities deemed to be lacking in educational management.

In delineating these developments in this way it is easy to lose sight of the impact of demands for more direct accountability to the citizenry. Yet the aspirations of administrators and politicians for greater control over the service have to be set alongside the aspirations of traditionally excluded groups for more information and more participation in educational decision-making. The seventies have seen tentative advances towards school-board democracy, a general trend to widen the range of non-professional representation on both consultative and decision-making committees and an opening up of processes of local government policy-making that were previously conducted in secrecy. In this respect Tyndale was a significant catalyst; to those in complacent possession of power it constituted an unprecedented threat to public apathy, galvanising single-issue pressure groups into developing multiple-issue policy platforms, and breathing new life into the languishing body of disaffected and disenfranchised parents.

The immediate effect was to put those supposedly "in charge" on the defensive, and in some cases to bring about long-fought-for concessions.

The ILEA, for instance, made pupil records available to parents, a change of policy hailed as a triumph by the Confederation for the Advancement of State Education, a middle-class parent organisation which had campaigned on this issue. Other pockets of dissidence, widely varying in political complexion and educational intent, also sensed the opportunity for influence and took advantage of the aftermath of Tyndale to exploit a suddenly widespread acknowledgement of the concept of citizen's rights.

At the present time we can safely say that one consequence of these pressures and the response of the education service to them is both a conceptual and an operational confusion between the notion of accountability as a condition of autonomy and the notion of power-sharing as an expression of accountability. From the point of view of the managers of the system the political context of accountability is one which requires them to devise an efficient form of democracy, a more demanding task than that which faced those control engineers whose re-design of the technical processes of factory production inspired the theorists of contemporary social administration. Parent power, a cause repeatedly espoused by Conservative Party spokesmen and embodied in various policy proposals ranging from voucher systems to a "parents' charter" is now a fact of administrative life. As I write, an action group of parents has chalked up another success with an Appeal Court decision that Haringey Council was guilty of an "actionable conspiracy" earlier this year in closing schools during a caretakers' strike. The role of the courts in adjudicating issues of accountability in education is still a modest one in this country (unlike the USA) but both local and national government have been discomfited by legal judgements during the seventies to an extent that has both encouraged dissidence and made inevitable new educational legislation to clarify power relationships.

At one level such action groups may be seen as further evidence of the emergence of community power, already a countervailing force to central planning in the field of transport and communications. The motorway and airport planners in the last few years have found themselves embarrassingly engaged in pitched battles with villages

as the nominal processes for public consultation become registries of heated protest.

### Accountability and Evaluation

Up to this point little has been said about evaluation, the means by which accountability is rendered. Evaluation and accountability are intimately intertwined both historically and conceptually, but the permutations are many and varied. Since the focus of this review is the accountability movement rather than the evaluation movement I shall try to anchor the slippery relationship by adopting a personal definition of evaluation and then relate this concept to differing usages of accountability. For the purposes of this review evaluation will be taken to mean the process of obtaining information about the values and effects of educational activities. This definition may prove to be particularly helpful in the context of accountability because, unusually, it gives equal prominence to ends and means, and we already know that advocates of accountability range from those who seek more evidence that the educational sector accomplishes its stated goals to those who feel that the accountability requirement is not satisfied unless more acceptable goals are effectively pursued. Among the latter group are those who argue that changes in the control of the education service constitute an essential precondition of adequate accountability, whilst the former group includes those who view such changes with alarm, arguing that greater accountability can only be justified if the acknowledged autonomy of professional educational groups is at least respected and preferably enhanced. In practice such a clear division of opinion is seldom transparent, not least because accountability is typically only one of many issues simultaneously pursued by active individuals and organisations concerned with education development. Some of those who favour more control over the bureaucracy, for instance, want to protect the schools from bureaucratic interference, and some of those engaged in stimulating the schools' capacity for self-evaluation also favour community involvement in the process of curriculum development. One LEA which employed the rhetoric of public accountability to get its schools to yield up performance data then closed the

meetings of its education committee to the public on the grounds that it was handling more sensitive information.

The roles of evaluation, and consequently of an evaluation profession, in all this, have not yet emerged in any clear form, although we can safely assert that some kind of evaluation process is envisaged in any accountability plan, whether its focus be policy or personnel, resource allocation or learning outcomes. But the demand for accountability through systematic evaluation in this country, in contrast to the USA, has to contend with an evaluation community that is in the first place too small in numbers to meet the need and too idiosyncratic in approach to slot as neatly into managerial frameworks as did its much more developed and monolithic counterpart in America. Evaluation in this country emerged in the context of the curriculum development movement of the sixties and developed a tradition (now loosely labelled 'illuminative') that stood in marked contrast to the parent tradition of research which dominated the evolution of evaluation in most other countries. The illuminative approach was culturally appropriate, reflecting in its concern to capture the complexities of educational process and in its sensitivity to the consultative tradition of personnel relationships both the values and the power structure of the English school system. And when, in the seventies, this native evaluation school felt compelled to confront the suddenly contentious issue of its own political role the result was a widely shared concern about the dangers of co-option by powerful sponsors, particularly bureaucratic sponsors. In consequence even that small band of evaluators thrown up by the curriculum innovations of the sixties proved to be maladapted to the ideology underlying information needs in the seventies. The National Programme in Computer Assisted Learning burned its fingers on the process-oriented and politically awkward UNCAL evaluation team (led by the reviewer, I should add) while the Schools Council later had great difficulty in attracting to its Industry Project an experienced evaluator who was also politically 'acceptable'.

What this meant was that the evaluation needs generated under the rubric of accountability in response to both internal and external

pressures for more policy control and more evidence of effectiveness had to be met from elsewhere - from the long established testing service agencies such as the National Foundation of Educational Research, from the pool of existing achievement test instruments, and by the conversion of existing personnel to carry out evaluation roles. By the early seventies the NFER was ailing, victim of the long recession that followed the banishment of the 11-plus and the onslaught of the break-away evaluation community. Within a few years it was flourishing once more under DES and LEA sponsorship as the Assessment of Performance Unit led a renaissance of measurement in schools.

#### Accountability on the Ground

At some point, and I think it has been reached, we want to know what difference all these accountability arguments, and the initiatives stemming from them, are in fact making on the ground. Do they add up to an accountability movement in education, and if so, what is its emergent form in so far as we can discern it? The following summary with its mixture of facts and impressions, is intended to indicate both ideas in currency and issues in contention.

At the helm of the DES is the incumbent Permanent Secretary, a Treasury man who has already made evident his determination to acquire more systematic feedback of a quantitative kind from the school sector. His argument is the need to support the Secretary of State's bid for resources in the Cabinet with hard evidence of productivity. But, of course, he can no more organise a delivery service by writing lists of learning objectives in Elizabeth House than he can prescribe LEA expenditure by preparing Rate Support Grant estimates. The schools dispose. The problem is how to weld a distributed decision-making structure into organised pursuit of the kind of learning outputs listed by the Department in the early seventies following the introduction of the system of Programme Analysis and Review. Hence the Assessment of Performance Unit, a data collection instrument with considerable potential for shaping curriculum goals. Hence the LEA curriculum policy review, with its patently prescriptive priorities. The



underlying organisational logic envisages a form of orchestration in which Departmental planners, LEA strategists, and teacher tacticians combine to produce an agreed set of goods with the APU providing the quality control and the productivity indices. This is not the place for a technical critique of the APU's assumptions, but we might note in passing that the assessment structure is technocratic in form, deterministic in values, and precariously dependent upon a costly and defect-ridden technology of test construction. Politically the APU could, like its American equivalent, prove to be a damp squib, or it could be powder keg, in which case the Department's decision to concede so much space on the lid to NUT representatives could in retrospect look especially judicious.

Elsewhere in London, the revamped Schools Council has a much more businesslike look about it, with the new post of Secretary offering a Chief Executive style of personal management to the first holder of the office, John Mann, a leading figure in the Local Authorities move to corporatism in the early seventies. The new Chairman of the Council is the Cheshire CEO John Tomlinson, less of a committed corporatist than Mann, but an influential educational presence in the Manpower Services Commission, and a go-getter of some repute. The Council is still in chrysalis, and it is therefore too early to even guess at its likely impact, but it is safe to say that the programme of work of the Council will be subject to tighter central management, with a new emphasis on financial accountability, efficient delivery and active selling of the fruits of the Council's efforts.

So much for ground movements in the centre of the educational service. What is the impact of accountability at the local level, in the authorities and schools up and down the country?

At first sight the local accountability scene is so diverse that almost any descriptive generalisation seems likely to mislead. The development of accountability patterns in education authorities has a modest, slow and evolutionary character in some areas, where

the concept has percolated with such a lack of pace and passion that it could scarcely be held to constitute a significant force for change in the consciousness of the constituency. Such areas don't make news but it is important not to lose sight of them within the compass of an overview. It is the pace-setters which keep sub-editors happy, conflict rather than consensus that catches the casual reader's eye and shapes his profile of local accountability. The resignation of the Avon Chief Education Officer and the subsequent blacking of the vacancy by the society of CEO's, the decision by one Authority to publish school by school performance in public examinations, the formal demand by members in another Authority to see pupil assessment data withheld by its officers, the trail-blazing implementation of school board democracy in one place, of saturation testing in another - these action highlights, together with the goal-scoring feats in Tameside, Islington, and Haringey, for example, may provide a good index of the issues in accountability, but an inadequate measure of the general pattern of largely consensual change which is steadily transforming the organisation and government of education in every area of the country.

The contrast with education in the sixties, say, reveals the scope of the change, the relevance of accountability as significant concept underlying its logic. Education officers are now, as a result of the bureaucratic reformations of 1974, more accountable to other officers within the administrative hierarchies of local government, and in general this means they spend less time actually operating the educational service, more in pressing resource claims and justifying expenditure to their colleagues in other service departments. The loss of autonomy of the CEO from this change alone varies considerably, but certainly some discretionary powers have been conceded, to the Chief Executive, or the Treasurer, or to the corporatist committees. The traditional departmental pyramid of control and accountability seems to be giving way to a new, still shapeless structure of administration marked by idiosyncratic variations which defy generalisation. In one Authority a headmaster was carpeted by a Chief Executive over the head of the CEO, an admittedly rare but

still bewildering instance of radical departure from respected boundaries. Last year an advertisement for a CEO contained the statement "education experience not essential", an atypically pure instantiation of Bains' theory. In other cases the CEO no longer signs letters of appointment to teachers or sends agenda papers to Education Committee members. More common is the requirement for all non-teaching education appointments to be cleared outside the education department, and virtually universal is a close monitoring of staffing establishments in education. Because administrative practice varies so much from Authority to Authority, it is difficult to summarise the overall impact. Some educational administrators claim that they feel they are working in a more collaborative and supportive bureaucratic framework, others that the clumsy and dogmatic imposition of new management is leading to unnecessary delays, poor use of their time, and an undervaluing of the tradition of personalised leadership through intimate involvement in the day-to-day problems of the schools.

So much for internal changes in administrative organisation, but we should note that so far we have been talking about changes in the degree to which one bureaucrat is accountable to another, about changes in bureaucratic decision-making which in themselves do not effect change in the relationship between bureaucrats and others. Except that, and it is an important exception, it has become more important for the education administrator to demonstrate the cost effectiveness of educational investment, and to do so in terms which rely much less on the kind of ambiguous, judgement-saturated data which is acceptable currency within his own professional domain.

When we look at the relationship between members and officers in local education, again we immediately see evidence of the rapid growth of accountability procedures, although the effectiveness of these procedures is open to question. The general pattern of change in the organisation of local government in the seventies is one in which education committees have less autonomy within the council (The Association of Education Committees folded in 1977) and are also more answerable to the community at large. In turn the members, no

doubt helped by the introduction of the attendance allowance scheme, are much more involved in a range of decisions previously delegated to officers - allocation of pupils to schools, compilation of maintenance and renovation programmes for schools and colleges, appointment of teachers, pupil assessment and institutional assessment plans, establishing criteria of teacher efficiency and promotion. Again we have to be careful not to make too much of this incursion into professional territory. Members are part-time and some would argue that both the growth and the organisational complexity of local government in recent years have made it increasingly difficult for the members to control the officers. The evidence I have suggests that the effectiveness of more participatory decision-making by elected members depends very much on the degree to which members and officers share values and aspirations.

The accountability of local government to the community is also moving away from a narrow electoral base to provide more opportunities for participation and observation. The democratisation of school management is one evidence of this shift, and most Authorities have introduced, some cautiously and others boldly, innovations pioneered in Sheffield, Humberside and the London boroughs. The opening of committee meetings to press and public is another trend that provides windows for the interested layman to the decision-making processes of County Hall. Education information services have been improved in many localities, and both members and officers spend more of their time explaining and justifying their policies to parents who have become aware that they have the right to question how their children are allocated to institutions and how they are taught and assessed. Whether we interpret this developing pattern as pacificatory or emancipatory in intent, the fact is that there is in local education a pervasive mood of responsiveness to the notion of public accountability.

Local advisers may well hold the key to the issue of whether and how the accountability movement impinges on the work of the school. The advisory service has no equivalent in other departments,

but is widely considered by students of education to play a crucial role in the promotion of curriculum innovation and creative change. Traditionally they have operated as free agents of quality control, men who at their best combine the roles of policemen, firemen, and curriculum entrepreneur. And it is within this crucial link service between central management and the schools that orthodox accountability finds its most implacable adversaries. This should surprise no-one. The job of the adviser has yet to be adequately described, and is not readily susceptible to the kind of output-per-unit-cost evaluation so favoured by corporate accountants. Being sceptical of efforts to devise performance criteria for their own task within such a framework, advisers tend to see centrally devised plans for teacher and school accountability as similarly reductionist in conception as well as alienating in effect. They are, characteristically, reluctant agents of managerial pressure for more depersonalised indices of school productivity. Not all of them of course share these misgivings; there are many who welcome the opportunity to exercise a more direct and arguably more effective influence on the development of schools than charismatic informality can guarantee. The contrast in attitudes to accountability between advisory teams in different Authorities strikes me as more marked than between administrators or elected members, and this is bound to be a factor in local development of school accountability schemes. This contrast in attitudes is currently disguised by the apparent similarity of emerging accountability structures involving the advisory services. A growing number of Authorities have re-named their advisers 'inspectors' to emphasise their formal evaluation role. Team inspections of individual schools have been stepped up, especially since the HMI reduced its commitment to full inspections. Achievement testing, either by sample or saturation, is now an important function of local inspectorates, who are also increasingly involved in team planning with administrators, writing reports for senior officers, participating in industry/education liaison groups, defending policy to school governors and parent associations, and working with teachers to produce schemes of work. The notion of

the adviser as an enthusiast doing his own thing (with, in most cases, a modest sum of cash to invest at his discretion) is under siege from accountability imperatives. Some advisory teams will choose to act as buffers against tough-minded accountability, softening the edges of the industrial metaphor as they negotiate the consent of the schools. How many, we must wait and see. Already it is evident that in some Authorities school performance evaluation is being systematically exploited to point up shortfalls in resource provision. Accountability is a two-edged sword.

Because accountability has tended to unfold through a top-down sequence of organisational initiatives the impact on schools and teachers is at this stage particularly difficult to gauge. Certainly most schools are aware of a transformation of circumstances and expectations, of challenges to their autonomy and pressure to explain and justify how they discharge their trust. They are aware, too, that falling school populations support local treasury arguments for lower levels of resources and teacher accountability. The possibility of sanctions against incompetent teachers, given a background of rising teacher unemployment, cannot be lightly dismissed. In the secondary sector the need for sixth-form rationalisation threatens institution-based decision-making, while in the primary sector political and consumer priorities converge in a unified press for a 'no frills' curriculum.

In terms of actual impact generalisations will certainly mislead, and should be treated as highly speculative. My impression is that the objectives model of curriculum, widely adopted for the curriculum reform movement of the sixties and subsequently taken up by the education bureaucracies in Whitehall and County Hall, has established a beach-head in the schools. At the very least it can be said that the school curriculum has moved from the implicit to the propositional. Some LEAs require schools to lodge statements of aims and intents, others provide middle management courses for school personnel that emphasise goal-setting and aims achievement evaluation. With more output testing and more reporting

to governing boards, more local school inspections which have to make sense to lay committees, the process of institutional technologisation is in some areas well under way. Many heads and teachers won't recognise this portrayal, of course. Accountability at the school level is in some areas no more than impotent noise. One influence yet to be clearly articulated is the response of the teacher professional associations. If, as is not unlikely, they put their weight behind the development of professionally controlled school-based accountability schemes along the lines of the Cambridge Accountability Project, current trends and ideologies could suffer a sharp reverse.

#### The Future of Accountability

So whither accountability in England? Within the larger societal framework it is not easy to discern the pattern of resolution of contemporary conflicts and pressures that will shape the educational service of the 1980s. It is safe to predict that the kind of economic growth that would sustain a level of social services adequate to meet consumer demand will not be attained; that the state will continue to try to manage the economy and to engineer the human resource needs of industry whilst seeking more cost effective means of delivering services, possibly by encouraging the private sector to grow, particularly in health and education. The bureaucracy will not be dismembered, in part because it will mobilise to resist the knife, in part because the needs of the state are not reducible to the needs of localities. But it may become more dispersed in the form of secondary centres in response to devolutionary pressures. Bureaucratisation and democratisation, two potent trends in the present transitional period, will trade off to create more representative and more cumbersome organisation structures in both the production and the social services sectors. This will to some extent enfranchise new pressure groups who will know how to use the opportunity rather than the citizenry at large, although in any case effective power will be exercised within the ad hoc task forces which the administration will continuously generate to escape the constraints of participative machinery.

There is nothing fanciful about such speculation; all these things are happening now. Private education, like private medicine, is growing despite the abolition of the direct grant school, and receiving increasing support from the public purse (one estimate put the figure at £50 million pounds for 1978). Pressures for cost effectiveness alone will be sufficient to guarantee this subsidy although some form of accountability will be part of the deal; it seems that the campaign for equality of opportunity, like the effort to reduce income differentials, has run its course for the time being. Industrial decline has egalitarianism by the windpipe, legitimating inequality in the name of efficiency. School board democracy is spreading, slowly and cautiously, theoretically giving local communities a voice in school policy but in practice likely to provide leverage for sectional lay interests. The Schools Council survives but in reconstituted form, more representative and more cumbersome than before, despite its hard-nosed managerial rhetoric, and its potentially numbing accountability mechanisms.

How will teachers, in the end, respond to accountability? When the glittering promise of technology delivers structural unemployment and the burden of state welfare leads to a reduction of benefits for the unemployed but an increase in their respectability? How exactly is accountability to national needs to be reconciled with accountability to the pupil in a context which calls for selective transmission of the work ethic?

And what of moral and political education in a nation searching for a new basis of government by consent? How will teachers construe their accountability to the young citizen in a democracy where the stresses of contemporary social conflict threaten the fabric of civil liberties, eroding liberal tradition and liberal aspiration alike? Earlier in this review I reminded the reader of a string of recent events in public life that have undermined the confidence of people in the probity as well as the competence of government. If, however, that selective profile of fallibility in high places conveyed a Solzhenitsyn air of doom-laden



prophecy, this was far from my intention or conviction. But it takes neither an alarmist nor a political dissident to feel a genuine sense of unease about the stability of widely shared liberal values. Racism has attained all-party respectability (virginity tests for black immigrants may scandalise but many subtler forms of ethnic victimisation apparently lie within consensual limits of tolerance). Leading policemen clamour for greater powers of arrest and resist the introduction of accountability mechanisms. The punishment of criminal acts persistently reflects class-based assumptions about differential culpability. We are not even allowed to know how many telephones are tapped each year. And this not to mention the normalisation of abnormal police and military power in Ulster.

When we talk of an accountability movement it is worth remembering that in some areas of our social life the context is one of a loss and not merely a lack of accountability. At some point, perhaps when teachers have absorbed the present onslaught on their own obligations and devised a comfortable and justifiable response, they will give some critical attention to a reappraisal of what students are entitled to learn about moral and political accountability. At the present time the climate is far from propitious for such an initiative; the education service lacks confidence at all levels, preoccupied with minimising damaging concessions, unable to shake off the taint of Tyndale's cultural deviance. This will pass, hopefully in time for teachers to take a close look at the APU's currently beached proposals for monitoring personal and social education, and to scrutinise the assumptions values and interests underlying contemporary demands for young people to acquire 'better' attitudes to work and a keener sense of social and political responsibility. What is, in 1979, the cultural inheritance of the young?

We shall see. Nothing is quite so revealing of the distribution of power and values in organisations than attempts to change them. I believe that power over the English school is so effectively distributed that it can only be effectively changed by consent,

between legislature and executive, between teacher and pupil, and between school and community. Each party can frustrate the aspirations of the others, none can unilaterally and successfully impose its will.

In accountability and its associated themes we can discern a loosely coordinated coalition of efforts to persuade teachers to modify their traditional rhetoric of service to the individual child. The concept of the teacher as an executor of the public will is certainly consistent with democratic theory but stands in contrast to the 'academic freedom' that insulates his university colleagues from political interference. A self-critical, openly reflective and responsive teacher profession could argue the case for extending such freedom to those whose task is to emancipate the young through the cultivation of their critical and expressive powers. We don't have such a profession now, but we have become so accustomed to the law of opposite effects in educational innovation that it seems none too fanciful to foresee such an outcome as the ultimate legacy of the accountability movement.

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