

The Education Question in British Parliament 1802 – 1833

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Abstract:

The purpose of the present article is an attempt to examine the education issue at a parliamentary level, which was in fact, a matter of control between the Church and the State through different Bill proposals to provide State elementary education for poor children in Britain. These parliamentary debates would gradually drag the State towards intervention. It considers all of the Factory Act of 1802, the 1807 Poor Law Bill, the 1816 Select Committee recommendations, the 1820 Parish Schools Bill and the Roebucks scheme of 1833. Such parliamentary debates would call the State for the need for legislative action by the State.

Key words: education, State, Church, intervention, Act, provision

ملخص:

الغرض من هذه المقال هو محاولة لدراسة قضية التعليم على المستوى البرلماني في بريطانيا الذي كان، في الواقع، مسألة النفوذ بين الكنيسة والدولة من خلال مقترحات بيل واخرين لتوفير التعليم الرسمي الابتدائي للأطفال الفقراء في بريطانيا. ومن شأن هذه المناقشات البرلمانية السحب التدريجي للدولة تجاه التدخل. فهذا المقال يحاول مناقشة بعض مشاريع قوانين امام البرلمان البريطاني التي من شأنها ان تدعو الدولة لضرورة اتخاذ إجراءات تشريعية من في مجال التعليم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم – الدولة – الكنيسة – التدخل – قانون – إجراءات

Introduction

The eighteenth century witnessed no legislative action relating to elementary education, which could be undertaken by Parliament. In the nineteenth century, this attitude improved gradually, assuming that education

was a necessity of life, and that the conditions of society among the poorer orders of England prevented parents from giving education of an effective character to their children. Such conditions drew the attention of the State to the cruel behaviour to which the children in various industries were subjected. This situation required Parliament involvement. Such involvement, a legislative struggle, began with the Peel's Factory Act of 1802, Whitbread's Parochial Schools Bill of 1807, Brougham's first Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry of 1816, Brougham's Bill in 1820 and Roebuck's Bill of 1833. All those attempts convinced the state to recognize, at least financially, its responsibility towards education.

1. The Factory Act, 1802

The Health and Morals of Apprentices Act, 1802 (The Factory Act - 42 Geo III c.73) was introduced by Sir Robert Peel. It addressed concerns felt by the medical men of Manchester about the health and welfare of children employed in cotton mills, which they exploited and first expressed by them in 1784 in a report on an outbreak of 'putrid fever' at a mill at Radcliffe owned by Peel. Although the Act included some hygiene requirements for all textile mills, it was largely concerned with the employment of apprentices; it left the employment of children unregulated.

On April 6th, 1802, motion to introduce the Bill into the House of Commons was made. On this motion the original title was altered, and the Bill was extended to apprentices "and others," employed in mills and factories; "other" than cotton mills and factories. Sir Robert Peel, Viscount Belgrave, and Stanley were ordered to bring in the Bill.

On April 13th, it was introduced and read twice before being approved. Some amendments were made in the Bill, and it was reported on April 15th. The Report was considered on May 3rd and 4th, and the Bill was recommitted for further amendment. On May 18th, it was again reported as further amended. On consideration of this Report on May 25th, a clause was added directing the visitors to be appointed under the Act to call in a physician in case of infectious disorder.¹ The third reading was taken on June 2nd, 1802, when an "engrossed clause" was added to compel masters to cause an entry to be made of their mills and factories in a book to be

¹ J.E.G. De Montmorency, *State Intervention in English Education, A Short History from the Earliest Times down to 1833*, Cambridge University Press, 1902, p. 210

kept by the clerk of the peace.¹ Various other amendments, chiefly relating to the religious education of children in Scotland, were added at this stage. After the third reading, which was carried without a division, it was ordered that Sir Robert Peele do carry the Bill to the Lords and desire their Concurrence.²

On June 12th a message was brought from the Lords, by Mr. Leeds and Sir William Weller Pepys, that “ the Lords have agreed to the Bill without any amendment.” It received the Royal Assent on June 2nd, 1802.³ The Act was directed to come into operation in Great Britain and Ireland on December 2nd, 1802.

The Act stated that all mills and factories should be cleaned at least twice yearly with quicklime and water including ceilings and walls. There was a requirement that the buildings should have sufficient windows and openings for ventilation.

Each apprentice was to be given two sets of clothing, suitable linen, stockings, hats, and shoes, and a new set each year thereafter. Working hours were to be limited to 12 hours a day, excluding the time taken for breaks. Apprentices were no longer permitted to work during the night (between 9 pm and 6 am). A grace period was provided to allow factories time to adjust, but all night-time working by apprentices was to be discontinued by June 1804. Section VI of the Act of 1802 stated that

“Every such Apprentice shall be instructed , in some Part of every working Day, for the first four Years at least of his or her Apprenticeship.....in the usual Hours of Work, in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetick , or either of them, according to the Age and .Abilities of such Apprentice, by some discreet and proper Person , to be provided and paid by the Master or Mistress of such Apprentice, in some Room or Place in such Mill or Factory to be set apart for that Purpose ; and that the Time hereby directed to be allotted for such Instruction as aforesaid, shall be deemed and taken on all Occasions as Part of the respective Periods limited by this Act

¹ Ibid.,

² Ibid., p. 534.

³ Ibid., p. 642.

during which any such Apprentice shall be employed or compelled to work.”¹

All apprentices were to receive instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic for the first four years of their apprenticeship. The Act indicated that this should be done every working day within usual working hours. However, no time was mentioned for it. Educational classes should be available in the mill or factory intended for the purpose. Apprentices were to be taught Christianity for one hour every Sunday. The apprentices had also to visit a church monthly as a preparation for confirmation, usually between the ages of 14 and 18 and had to be examined by a clergyman at least once a year. Section VIII provided:

“That every Apprentice, or (in case the Apprentices shall attend in Classes), every such Class shall, for the Space of one Hour at least every Sunday, be instructed and examined in the Principles of the Christian Religion, by some proper Person to be provided and paid by the Master or Mistress of such Apprentice.”²

Local magistrates had to appoint inspectors to ensure that factories and mills were complying with the Act; These inspectors had the power to impose fines for non-compliance and the authority to visit at any time of the day to inspect the buildings.

The Act was to be exposed in two places in the factory. Owners who would refuse to fulfil any part of the Act could be fined between £2 and £5³, which was, in fact, an effort to enforce the Act. Such measure created some discontent in the manufacturing districts.

A variety of petitions from proprietors of cotton mills and woollen spinners were presented to the House of Commons stating that “the principle of the said Act is injurious and oppressive, not only to the cotton, woollen, and flaxen spinners, but to the manufacturers at large,” required to bring in a

¹ A. Aspinall, Anthony Smith, *English Historical Documents, 1783-1832, Vol. VIII*, Psychology Press, 1995, p.723-4

² Ibid., p.724

³ B. L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *A History of Factory Legislation*, 2nd Edition, P.S. King & Sons, London, 1911, p.16

repealing or amending Bill.¹ These various petitions were read again by the House, and referred to a Committee on March 29th, 1803.²

2. The Poor Law Reform Bill, 1807

Mr Whitbread introduced a general Poor Law Reform Bill into the House of Commons on February 19th, 1807, which included a scheme for the education of the children of the poor. In his speech, he proposed a general system of national education by the establishment of parochial schools. He, thus, declared:

“this is a period particularly favourable for the institution of a national system of education; because within a few years there has been discovered a plan for the instruction of youth, which is now brought to a state of great perfection; happily combining rules, by which the object of learning must be infallibly attained with expedition and cheapness, and holding out the fairest prospect of eminent utility to mankind.”³

It was of course a tribute to the rapid spread of elementary schools. The Bill, which was presented to the House on February 23rd, 1807, was entitled “*A Bill for the promoting and encouragement of industry among the labouring classes of the community, and for the effectual relief and regulation of the criminal and necessitous poor.*” It was a Bill that offered a series of solutions for the many troubles of the period. It, however, advocated the creation of a State Savings Bank for the poor, the building of cottages out of the rates to meet the acute housing problem that existed in agricultural districts, and the restriction of poor law relief, except with regard to the absolute necessities of life, to the aged, to children, and to the sick.

On April 17th, 1807, Whitbread proclaimed his intention to divide the clauses into four Bills. The first of these related to education; the second dealt with a poor law reform and the building of cottages for the poor; the third contained his scheme for a parochial fund of assurance, and the fourth proposed to regulate and equalise the county rates. These Bills were reported

¹ Ibid., p. 160.

² Ibid., p. 302.

³ Rowland Mainwaring R.N., *Annals of Bath, from the Year 1800 to the passing of the New Municipal Act*, Mary Meyler and Son, 1838, p. 6

except the Bill for establishing a Plan for the Education of the Poor, which was brought forward on April 24th, 1807. ¹ It had been formerly circulated among the magistrates throughout the kingdom with disappointing results. Whitbread said

“It was not meant to supersede any parish schools for the education of the poor, already established; it was not meant to increase un-necessarily the charges upon any district, where parish schools were already instituted for the education of the poor, by establishing therein additional schools ; his object was, that in every parish where there was a number of poor who could not afford to pay for the education of their children, there should be a school established for their instruction.” ²

He viewed the education of the poor as “the incipient principle and grand foundation” of all benefits to be derived from any future reform of the poor laws. The Bill proposed that the poor children of each parish should be entitled to receive two years’ education between the ages of seven and fourteen years. The occupiers of lands and houses in the parish were to be rated to provide for education, which was to be superintended by the parson and the parish officers. The Bill empowered the magistrates to “purchase or hire any buildings or lands whereupon to erect buildings for the purpose of schools.”³ The appointment of schoolmasters was also to be made by the magistrates. The carrying out of the Act was to be placed in the hands of the magistrates with power to suspend the law where further or new schools were not necessary.

Apparently, no petitions were presented in favour of the Bill, yet there were some against it. In the committee of July 21st, 1807, Sturges Bourne (1769-1845), a Tory politician, objecting to the compulsory character of the educational relief offered, moved an amendment, making all the provisions of the Bill optional and suggested a substitutional clause, which was adopted on August 4th. ⁴

¹ J.E.G. De Montmorency, op. cit., p. 220

² Ibid.,

³ Thomas C. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates: Official Report: Session of the Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, Volume 9, 1807, p. 1051

⁴ J.E.G. De Montmorency, op. cit., p. 221

The Bill was read the third time on Thursday, August 6th,¹ and on August 11th Lord Holland moved the second reading in the House of Lords, three months later, the Bill was adopted without a division. The Bill was opposed by the Lord Chancellor (Lord Eldon) and by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Manners Sutton), who, however, declared themselves in favour of improved educational conditions. Lord Stanhope strongly supported the Bill, and attacked the claim of the Establishment to control all education.² With the failure of this Bill, all effort after legislation was abandoned until 1816.

3. The Select Committee on Education, 1816

In 1816, The Select Parliamentary Committee to inquire into the Education of the Lower Orders was appointed under the presidency of Lord Brougham. It issued its first report dealing with the Metropolis in the same year and subsequently the Committee extended their enquiries to the whole Kingdom. In the third report, a very different version to that given by Brougham, with respect to the condition of the country in 1803, was told by the Committee as to the educational position in 1816:

“There is the most unquestionable evidence that the anxiety of the poor for education continues not only unabated, but daily increasing ; that it extends to every part of the country, and is to be found equally prevalent in those smaller towns and country districts, where no means of gratifying it are provided by the charitable efforts of the richer classes.”³

The condition of education in country districts was, however, very bad. There were few who could help the ignorant, and the efforts of individuals combined in societies are almost wholly confined to populous places.⁴ The Committee pointed out the difficulties that occurred where the only school in the country district was governed by regulations that excluded the Dissenters, but added that

¹ Ibid., p. 224-5.

² Thomas C. Hansard, op. cit., p. 1074

³ Thomas C. Hansard, *The Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present Time*, Volume 38, 1818, p. 1209

⁴ Ibid.,

“in many schools where the national system is adopted, an increasing degree of liberality prevails, and that the church catechism is only taught, and attendance at the established place of public worship only required, of those whose parents belong to the establishment; due assurance being obtained that the children of sectaries shall learn the principles and attend the ordinances of religion, according to the doctrines and forms to which their families are attached.”¹

The Church had realised once again the great part that it had to play in national education, and it had recognised that if the common faith was once more to shape the education of the children of the country, the conscientious scruples of Dissenters had to be respected. In that fact lies the origin of the conscience clause of later years. The principle of the clause was definitely suggested by the Select Committee. The Committee advised, on the whole, educational position that two different plans were desirable, severally adapted to the opposite circumstances of the town and country districts. The Committee, thus, stated:

“Wherever the efforts of individuals can support the requisite number of schools, it would be unnecessary and injurious to interpose any parliamentary assistance. But Your Committee have clearly ascertained, that in many places private subscriptions could be raised to meet the yearly expenses of a School, while the original cost of the undertaking, occasioned chiefly by the erection and purchase of the school house prevents it from being attempted.”²

The Committee recommended that money might be employed in such a way, but that it had to be left to the wisdom of Parliament to decide whether such public, the Select funds should be vested in Commissioners empowered to make proper terms with the private parties desirous of establishing schools, or whether the money should be entrusted for distribution to great institutions in London for promoting education.

¹ J. Stuart Maclure, *Educational Documents: England and Wales, 1816 to the Present Day*, Methuen, 1972., p.20

² Thomas C. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates: Official Report: ... Session of the ... Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, op. cit., p.1210

The Select Committee had at once realised the nature of the problems that were destined to occupy the attention of Parliament for the greater part of the nineteenth century. It moreover offered the solutions that were eventually accepted by the county. It suggested a conscience clause; it recommended grants for building for a certain class of districts and schools that were practically rate-supported, and for other and less helpless districts. The system of control over the rates was to be parochial; the system of inspection was to be diocesan, but full regard was to be paid to the claims of conscience and to the right of Dissenters to retain their children in dissent. The scheme was sound, and well thought out; however, Parliament was unable to adopt such suggestions.

The amount of data collected by the Select Committee of 1816 enabled Brougham to bring forward his Education Bill with wide knowledge of the educational problem that awaited solution.

4. The Parish Schools Bill, 1820

By 1820, Lord Brougham was recognised pioneer of elementary education. He had been Chairman of the Select Committees of 1816, 1817 and 1818 had given him a great deal of first-hand information. He presented his well-informed and excellently constructed Parish Schools.

This was the first definite proposal submitted to the House of Commons, for a scheme of national education to cover England and Wales. Brougham was well aware of the Opposition, which remained unfavourable to any measure of general education. He went to great lengths to show that education "had been in early ages, and by the wisest governments, the best security for the morals, the subordination, and the peace of countries."¹ According to the statistics collected by the Committee, Brougham indicated that in 1820, there were 500,000 children getting their education in unendowed schools.²

Brougham went on to compare most unfavourably the numbers receiving education in England with the numbers in other countries,

¹ J.E.G. De Montmorency, op. cit. ,p. 254

² Ibid., p. 229

especially in Scotland and Switzerland. "He informed the House that Middlesex was beyond all dispute the worst educated part of Christendom."¹

Brougham's Bill, 1820 was presented under four heads;

1. The foundation of schools,
2. the appointment and removal of masters,
3. the admission of scholars and their mode of tuition and
4. the improvement of old educational endowments .

The first was to plant a school where it was needed. Power was to be given to the Grand Jury or to the parson of the parish or to two justices or to five resident householders to lodge a complaint through a special or school sessions of quarter sessions, and to demand the building of the school and the endowment of a mastership.

The second object of the Bill was to secure efficient schoolmasters, and it was felt that this could be done by offering a fixed endowment, and by restricting the age of the masters to the limits of twenty-four and forty years, and by only accepting those who were members of the Established Church.

The third object of the Bill was to define the class of education to be given. It was provided that at each new appointment of a master to a school, the parson of the parish should fix the course of teaching according to the state of the parish. In order to attract Non- conformists, it was further provided that the Scriptures alone should be taught, and that no form of worship should be allowed in the school except the Lord's Prayer and other passages of Scripture. It was also provided that Church children should attend church, but that Dissenters should take their children to their own churches or chapels. It was also provided that there should be a school meeting on Sunday evening to teach the Catechism to all those who did not object. It was finally provided that reading, writing, and arithmetic should be taught in all the schools and to all the children of fit age.²

The fourth object of the Bill was to decrease a part of the expenses by making the old endowments in some measure available for modern elementary education. Brougham estimated that the cost of carrying into effect his Bill "*for the better education of the poor in England and Wales*"

¹ Ibid ., p. 259

² Ibid., pp. 231-2

would be £500,000 for the cost of erecting schools and £150,000 a year for maintenance.¹

The decade from 1820 to 1830 witnessed no legislative action in the domain of education despite the interest and increasing demand of the public. In 1823, King George IV issued a Letter authorising subscriptions to be given in aid of the educational work of the National Society. The Royal letter resulted in the public subscription of above £28,000, which was applied to the erection, enlargement, and fitting-up of schoolrooms under the National Society's control.²

In 1825, when Brougham brought out his "*Observations on the Education of the People*" the interest in the subject was so great. Lord Brougham, whose efforts during half a century, on behalf of all grades of education, were enormous to organise education for the great middle classes was strongly convinced that the power of education to improve a people was necessary.

In 1825, The Christian Instruction Society was founded by the Dissenters in London. It did a great educational work among the poor; petitions for a national educational system began to appear before Parliament.

5. The Roebuck's Bill, 1833

On July 13th 1833, The Radical MP, Roebuck (1801-1879) urged upon the House of Commons the necessity for a compulsory system of education for the whole people. He stated:

"That this House, deeply impressed with the necessity of providing for a due education of the people at large ; and believing, that to this end the aid and care of the State are absolutely needed, will, early during the next Session of Parliament, proceed to devise a means for the universal and national education of the whole people."³

He set forth a scheme of State schools: Infant Schools, Evening Schools, Schools of Industry and Normal Schools. These schools would teach, in addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, the elements of art,

¹ Ibid., p. 232

² Ibid ., p. 233

³ T. C. Hansard, *Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 20, Great Britain, Parliament, 1833, p. 166

hygiene, natural history, and the proper knowledge of some trade.¹Roebuck thought that the country would be divided into school districts, where the voters would elect a school committee. Education would be controlled by a member of the Cabinet, who would supervise the National School system.

Though Roebuck's proposal helped to form the character of public opinion, it had no direct legislative result (was not concretised into an Act). However, the proposal contributed in capturing the government's attention in approving, in August the same year, a financial support for the profit of education.

Conclusion

The opening of the nineteenth century witnessed a change in attitude towards education as being a necessity of life. Therefore, the first legislative battle started with the Peel's first Factory Act of 1802, which regulated the working hours for children in cotton mills. It principally addressed factory owners but also to allow children have some basic education. In 1807, Whitbread introduced a general Poor Law Reform Bill, which included a scheme for the education of the children of the poor. In 1816, The Select Parliamentary Committee to inquire into the Education of the Lower Orders was appointed under the presidency of Lord Brougham. It sought to ensure a "sound and cheap" primary education to all. Brougham's Bill of 1820 was presented under four heads; the foundation of schools, the appointment and removal of masters, the admission of scholars and their mode of tuition and the improvement of old educational endowments. In 1833, The Radical MP, Roebuck set forth a scheme of Infant Schools, Evening Schools, Schools of Industry and Normal Schools, to be provided in school districts and controlled by an elected school committee for the district.

No state aid was given to primary schools until 1833 when Parliament had considered and rejected the above mentioned state education proposals. Though the grant of £20, 000 approved to the National Societies was small, it was considered as the first legislative action towards education.

¹ J.E.G. De Montmorency, op. cit., p. 237