News Review

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Editor of Education puts into perspective the major news

There is no doubt what the daily prints, whether pop or heavy, thought was the big educational issue of the first half of 1985 — it was teachers’ pay. It is an annual row and ought not perhaps to occasion much by way of exceptional interest, but there were two reasons why this round was different. In the first place, the teachers — following the example, it could be argued, of the Scottish teachers organised by the Educational Institute of Scotland — launched a vigorous campaign in England and Wales in which the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers (NAS/UWT) were the most prominent. No doubt it was hoped that the dispute would be resolved by the end of the summer term, but there was equally no doubt that most teachers were willing to see the battle continue, uniquely, into the autumn term and this, in the event, is what happened.

The second difference from previous occasions lay in the insistence by the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Sir Keith Joseph, that part of the pay deal should be the promise of a measure of reconstruction in the teachers’ salary scales. There ought to be a way in which good teachers in the classroom were better rewarded and did not have to leave the classroom to get more money. This was the nub of Sir Keith’s argument. But it followed that there had to be some system of teacher assessment in order to reward the better teachers and, of course, on the other hand, to get rid of the bad ones. Teacher appraisal, restructuring, Burnham — these were the persistent topics in all salary debates. By and large, the main teachers’ unions — such as the NUT and the NAS/UWT — found it difficult to go along with restructuring and, in the end, the NUT simply dismissed it as part of any possible deal in 1985.

The NUT narrowed the argument to a straight percentage increase in pay. The Treasury had already determined in its Public Expenditure White Paper in 1984, that public sector pay increases should be no more than three per cent and some local authority treasurers budgeted accordingly, though most provided for an increase which would be nearer five per cent. There was, however, no way by which the unions would accept five per cent, particularly as inflation had risen to some seven per cent by May 1985.

Negotiations were further complicated by the fact that the composition of the management panel changed following the county council elections in May. The Conservatives suffered a major set-back in the counties. Indeed, the elections resulted in some 20 “hung” councils because of the incursions of the Social Democratic-Liberal Alliance. But it became possible by the end of June for the Labour representatives on Burnham to mount a majority in the management panel. They attempted to get through a deal which would have given the teachers over seven per cent, but it was blocked by a combination of the Conservatives and the Department of Education and Science (DES). In any case, in repeated statements, Sir Keith Joseph had made it plain that the Government was not giving way on salaries and, in view of
the knock-on effect a high teachers' settlement would have on other public sector pay agreements, it is hardly surprising.

But the thwarting of the management panel by the DES led the management to a startling decision. They resolved to tear up the so-called "concordat". This concordat, established in the days of Lord Alexander when he was leader of the management panel, had allowed the local authorities to conduct the negotiations in return for allowing the DES the ultimate veto. The great tearing up act abolished the veto and allowed the LEA representatives to make their own deal with the teachers.

Meanwhile, the evidence was of low morale among teachers. True, there were no cases of compulsory redundancy — a point often dwelt on by Sir Keith Joseph — but even a DES-financed inquiry into teacher appraisal by a team of administrators and heads in Suffolk came down unambiguously in their report, published in early July, with the view that teachers' morale had fallen too low and an all-round increase was called for. The Graham report (called after Duncan Graham, the county education officer for Suffolk, who headed the team) also dealt a body blow at the simple view that somehow appraisal and pay could be linked.

The Graham committee had made an in-depth inquiry into areas in England where appraisal was going on — though there were not many of them — and had looked at appraisal schemes in the United States and in France and Germany. They concluded that merit payment systems had not worked, and where they seemed to work they would not be applicable to conditions in this country. They, therefore, rejected the appraisal-pay link almost totally, but came up with the interesting concept of "corporate remuneration", that is to say that higher salaries might be paid all round in schools which showed special merit. The Graham report did not reject appraisal as such; indeed, they wholly supported appraisal as a means of improving standards and helping the career development of teachers — and, for that matter, getting rid of wholly incompetent teachers.

Burnham gave every appearance of being in a log-jam. How to get it released was almost an obsession with some people both in the DES and on the local authority side. Many believed that all that was necessary was to remove the majority position of the NUT in the teachers' panel. Whatever the other teachers' associations decided, in the closeted deliberations of the teachers' panel, the NUT contingent have always been able to overrule them. If only this were made impossible, then would not the way be open for reason to prevail? The Secretary of State, therefore, announced — at the height of the Burnham negotiations — that there was to be a review of Burnham and all the teachers' associations were asked to submit their membership figures. The NUT, of course, saw this as a deliberate affront.

Whether it has the effect that the DES and some of the management believe is pretty arguable. Up to now, other teachers' unions — notably the NAS/UWT — have exploited the inevitable dominance of the NUT by going to their members after every agreement and saying how much better it would have been had the NAS/UWT view been heeded. And, there is no doubt that if it has not recruited members, it has usefully jollied along the current membership. But when the NUT majority is broken, the NAS/UWT will not be able to play such games. Nevertheless, the fundamental weakness on the teachers' side will remain; as an organised body in England and Wales they are wholly disunited.

As always, during a major dispute, the cry was heard that teachers were not behaving professionally, but the fact that it came chiefly from the Professional
Association of Teachers probably did not help the critics. That body remained small, despite the opportunity always offered to recruitment when relations with employers are soured. It reached a membership of some 25,000, a hopelessly small voice in a profession of well over 400,000 teachers.

Interestingly enough, the Graham report argued that appraisal would enhance professionalism and claimed to have found evidence that this was the case in the schools where they found appraisal going on. The Graham report could well turn out to be the most important educational document since the Hargreaves report on secondary schools in the ILEA. It found that it had to address itself to quite fundamental issues, such as "what is effective teaching?" and actually came up with some rough and ready guidelines.

1985 seems likely to be a productive year for reports. The ILEA continued their big self-flagellation exercise with enquiries into the ILEA’s primary schools and special schools. The first, the Norman Thomas report which appeared in January, gave the metropolis’s primary schools good marks on the whole. "We would like to endorse parents’ obvious confidence in ILEA primary schools at present," said Mr. Norman Thomas, the former chief HMI for primary schools, and doubtless it came as a relief to the hard-pressed Authority. The Fish report, too (again John Fish is a former HMI), which appeared early in July, was supportive, but — more importantly — it gave encouragement to the integration of those with special needs into ordinary schools. It was critical, though, of the way in which the psychologists and the special education departments within the ILEA seemed not to be cooperating effectively.

But the biggest single report was, of course, Swann. Called Education for All, its remit was to look at the needs and attainments of children from ethnic minority groups. The report, under the chairmanship of Lord Swann FRS, enunciated some important principles and a number of practical proposals. Swann rejected both assimilation and separatism. There was to be no question of the ethnic minority citizens of the UK becoming indistinguishable from the majority. In varying degrees and in different respects, it was argued, those minorities would remain distinct.

But separatism was also resisted. A society based on separatist notions was seen to be a contradiction in terms. The essence of society as a cohesive entity should be a degree of shared experience and commitment to values. So the report’s view of a multi-racial society, such as exists in parts of Britain, was that it should be pluralist. The report went so far as to say that if its concept of a plural society — which sprang from the thinking behind the Race Relations Act 1976 were not applied, it would have serious consequences. "There is a genuine risk of the fragmentation of our society along ethnic lines which will seriously threaten the stability and cohesion of society as a whole."

Some of the practical proposals followed from this. Thus, on the creation of separate schools by or for different minority communities, the report thought this should be avoided as likely to exacerbate the rejection of minorities by the majority (though some members of Swann disagreed). On the other hand, Swann argued that every reasonable effort should be made — for example, by the retention of appropriately located single-sex schools — to meet the specific religious or cultural requirements of particular minority groups.

On mother-tongue and community languages, the view was that they should be fostered but not incorporated into the standard school curriculum. In other words, ethnic groups could use school premises to enable the community language and
culture to be maintained. And where a large number of children knew the community
language, then it could form part of the modern languages provision of the school
concerned. The proposal on religious education was rather more contentious. For
example, the requirement for the daily act of worship was questioned. Did it fit in with
a multi-faith approach?

Reports do not come cheap. The Warnock report on the handicapped was perhaps
the most notable example. By 1985 there was hardly an LEA which did not complain
of the financial burden of the 1981 Act. Nor will Swann come cheap and, still less,
Graham on teacher appraisal, if it is ever implemented. All this, of course, against a
background of unrelenting restraint by the Government and the LEAs who faced
rate-capping if they did not comply.

But in one area, the education system was in the business of expansion. This was as a
consequence of the activities of the Manpower Services Commission. The MSC
remained as much a source of contention, indeed anger, as it had ever done. The
MSC’s bid to take over some 25 per cent of the provision of non-advanced further
education (NAFE) led to a strong — indeed bitter — fight-back by the LEAs,
especially the metropolitan ones. It had, in the end, to come to a knocking together of
heads; the compromise was found by a committee, headed by Sir Roy Harding, the
newly-knighted secretary of the Society of Education Officers, which would give the
LEAs most of the say they wanted in running NAFE. But it was not without the
deepest reluctance on the part of the Department of Employment and its aggressive
junior minister, Peter Morrison MP.

The budget of early 1985 had yielded the inevitable announcement that the
Government would finance a two-year Youth Training Scheme (YTS). Sad
comparisons had already been made between Britain and West Germany, France
and other western countries, and even sadder ones with the United States and Japan.
In all those countries there was extensive provision for vocational training; something
much more serious would need to be done in Britain. In the event, when the details of
the extension of the one-year YTS to two was announced, it promised nothing
remotely radical. It is probably untrue to say that it came as a disappointment to the
education interest, because they expected little else.

The test of adequacy on the educational side is the period allowed for off-the-job
training. The MSC decided that it should only be 20 weeks over the 2 year period.
The probability is that most industries will give 13 weeks of off-the-job training in the
first year and 35 days of day release in the second. Yet, one of the key aims of the
scheme is that all trainees should get some kind of qualification (in 1984 some 30 per
cent got a recognised vocational qualification), yet the wherewithal to ensure this does
not seem to be present.

Many asked how serious the MSC was about better training? They certainly had
no expectation that more and better training would increase the proportion of YTS-leavers getting jobs. That, as the MSC chairman, Mr Bryan Nicholson, said early in
July was a function of the labour market. The MSC, none-the-less, had shown signs of
concern about quality. An independent Training Standards Advisory Service
(TSAS) was established comparable, it was said, to Her Majesty’s Inspectorate
(HMIs) for education. These new officials would develop and monitor schemes, and
there would be a massive staff development programme.

The policy statement which launched the YTS expansion was in the White Paper
Education and Training for Young People, published early in April. It was launched by
Lord Young, a somewhat surprising newcomer to Mrs Margaret Thatcher’s Cabinet. He had begun as an enthusiastic advocate of ORT (a scheme for the vocational training of Jewish youth, with a long-established record), had quickly become chairman of the MSC, and then moved on to a Cabinet position, though without portfolio. Not having a portfolio seems to weigh more heavily than having one on newcomers to that kind of position, and there was some evidence that Lord Young quite quickly became a strong advocate of a Ministry of Education and Training (which would have widespread support among the educational fraternity), and that he, Lord Young, might well be a suitable Minister to head it, if only Sir Keith Joseph could be persuaded to move in another direction. Whatever the truth of the story, evidently Mrs Thatcher was not having any. It seemed unlikely, none-the-less, that the idea of a Ministry of Education and Training would go away.

Among other things, the Lord Young White Paper called for a review of vocational qualifications, a standing minor obsession of the Conservative Government, believing that somehow industry wanted nothing more than vocational certificates of one kind and another. A working party was established to recommend the structure of vocational qualifications.

Examinations and their reorganisation continued their frenetic course. Among the vocational participants in the examinations circus — notably the City and Guilds, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and the new Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) — there were even recriminations, the RSA at one point accusing BTEC of dishonesty and deceit. Indeed, at the end of March, Sir Keith Joseph had to intervene in one of the quarrels between the GCE boards and the rest, to prevent the GCE boards from continuing with the Certificate of Extended Education (CEE) as soon as the new Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE) was established. For good measure, he also said he would suppress existing AO level courses to prevent them competing with the AS levels. It did not seem a moment too soon; the Further Education Unit (FEU) board had actually announced bluntly “we believe that the entrepreneurism of the exam industry is getting out of hand and generating a degree of confusion dangerously near to deception”.

On 26 March came Sir Keith’s major White Paper, Better Schools, which was essentially an amalgam of Government policies on everything from governors and their duties to the Swann report. The White Paper began with the assertion that there were two reasons for thinking that standards were not as high as they could be. First, other countries seem to be doing better, and, second, there were many examples of high standards in schools (in quite widely differing circumstances) which were not achieved by other schools similarly placed. So, it was realistic, was it not, to look to a substantial and sustained improvement. This should come, the White Paper argued, in the curriculum, the examination system, the professional effectiveness of teachers and school government.

For the curriculum the message was that it should be “broad, balanced, relevant and differentiated”, but, significantly, it was added that there had to be some way of fitting “work related skills into full time education” and that somehow there ought to be a strong element relating to the “technological aspects of working life”. This did not fit too easily with the broad and balanced criteria, but somehow it seemed to accept that broad programmes were necessary up to the age of 16 and that “explicitly vocational programmes” must be left to post-16. Somehow, the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) had to fit into this scheme of things.
Throughout the five years of secondary education it was recognised that there had to be these subjects: English, mathematics, a broad science course, normally physical education or games, “together with elements drawn from the humanities and the arts”; practical and technological work, a foreign language, religious education, and one of Sir Keith Joseph’s recurring obsessions, “economic awareness”.

There was a further commitment to in-service training and more than a hint that LEAs might be required regularly “to appraise the performance of their teachers”. Better Schools signalled a retreat from the Green Paper demand on Parental Influence at School published in May 1984, which wanted a majority of parents on governing bodies. This has gathered so little support that the Government had no alternative but to think out its proposals afresh. So the intention is that no single interest will predominate on governing bodies — neither those appointed by the LEA, nor elected by parents, nor those representing teachers will have a majority. The White Paper had something to say too on LEA management, including what was happening about the professional development of teachers and what had become of all the HMI reports and their proposals.

Then, there was the minimum size of schools, a burning issue in a period of contraction. The following “principles” on the minimum size of schools were proposed:

5-11 schools — at least one new class entering each year;
7-11 schools — at least two new classes entering each year;
small primary schools — in general pupil numbers should not fall below the level at which three teachers are justified;
11-16 comprehensive schools — a school with five or fewer classes entering each year is unlikely to be able to offer a good curriculum without disproportionately generous staffing;
comprehensive schools with sixth forms — normally the school needs to be the size which enables it to maintain a sixth form of at least 150 pupils.

So much for schools. HE, if anything, got tougher treatment. A Green Paper on the Development of Higher Education into the 1990s came out at the end of May. It chiefly reflected the fact that the 18 and 19-year old population in Great Britain was expected to fall by 33 per cent between 1984 and 1996. Secondly, it promoted the belief, held very strongly by the Conservative Government, that HE must be very much more responsive to the needs of industry and commerce. So that the Green Paper is peppered with references to what the taxpayer looks for and the taxpayer, it seems, frequently takes a carpingly critical view of what is going on in HE.

Hardly surprising, few Green Papers could have caused so much intense displeasure among the fraternity who would be most affected by it. Even so, there seemed to be a few crumbs of comfort. It was not possible to throw out the Robbins principle entirely, though it was obvious from the Green Paper that the Government was not happy with the open access which Robins seemed to imply. The criterion of “ability to benefit from HE” must apply to everyone entering upon it and the implication seemed to be that quite a number of those who got into HE did not have that ability, (it was defined in terms of “intellectual competence, motivation and maturity”). Secondly, the Green Paper did not come down unequivocally in favour of two-year honours courses as the Leverhulme report wanted, although it deployed the argument that the DipHE might become a more suitable alternative for some than a general humanities or social studies degree. Clearly, it would also be much cheaper. At any rate, the National Advisory Body was adjured to look into it.

Essentially the HE Green Paper was about keeping costs down. The assumption on
which the future student numbers were based was the least optimistic. Although it
was conceded that there might be some modest increase in university entry as the
expected demand for student places fell overall, there was to be no "automatic
admission to the universities — and particularly to humanities courses". It was the
same kind of message which appeared to afflict the rest of the educational system —
constraint coupled with an insistence on vocational relevance.

Indeed, the public expenditure figures put out on 22nd January (Cmd 9428) showed unequivocally that education was in for three years of pressure to reduce
spending. Overall cash provision was planned to fall in 1985-86, followed by slight
cash increases in 1986-87 and 1987-88 (Table 1). But these figures had to be set
against the Government's inflation assumptions over the next three years, which were
that prices in the economy as a whole would rise by 4.75 per cent in 1985-86, by 4.5
per cent in 1986-87 and 3.25 per cent in 1987-88. In the light of this kind of inflation
there would have to be a real terms cut in education and science spending of some 13
per cent by 1987-88. In fact, of course, by the middle of 1985 it looked as though
inflation projections would be exceeded. It was a gloomy prospect.

Table 1
Expenditure 1984-85 to 1987-88

|             | 1984-85  | 1985-86  | 1986-87  | 1987-88  |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|             | budgets  | plans    | plans    | plans    |
|             | £m.      | £m.      | £m.      | £m.      |
| England     |          |          |          |          |
| Schools     | 8,233    | 8,149    | 8,420    |          |
| Further and Higher | 4,190 | 4,083 | 4,170 | 13,620 |
| Other       | 775      | 782      | 830      |          |
| Wales       | 686      | 694      | 710      | 730      |
| Scotland    | 1,757    | 1,696    | 1,760    | 1,780    |
| N. Ireland  | 589      | 616      | 640      | 610      |
| Research councils | 550 | 584 | 600 | 610 |
| Total       | 16,781   | 16,603   | 17,140   | 17,400   |