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CABINET**EDUCATION POLICY****MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

The Government are committed to a series of advances in education for most of which timetables have been announced. We have said we would eliminate oversize classes as first priority, reorganise all-age schools and steadily replace slum schools, and expand higher education on a great scale.

These and other commitments were calculated to require an increase in educational expenditure over the next four years of 4.6 per cent. a year—a figure which was compared with the forecast of 2½ per cent. increase a year in the Gross Domestic Product. In C. (61) 88 I was asked to keep educational expenditure within an increase of 3 per cent. a year. Since this slow-down would involve postponements of published programmes, at a time when in my judgment we should do more rather than less in education, I could not accept it. It may be useful if the main arguments are drawn together in this paper.

Arguments of Political Principle

2. The grant of the vote to men and women at the age of 21 started a race between an egalitarian and an opportunity State. Stripped of inessentials the choice before the new electors was between a controlled economy in which wealth was much more equally distributed irrespective of merit and an open society in which opportunities for all would be enlarged to a degree that would produce "one nation" with far less class-consciousness.

The standards of public education were bound to become all-important in this race. Unfortunately the Tory horse had to carry a heavy handicap. Up to the war British education was in no condition to provide fair and wide opportunities for all children. In relation to the introduction of universal suffrage the 1944 Education Act was 25 years too late; worse still only in 1956 did we begin to build a system of technical education remotely adequate for a leading industrial nation. Nevertheless the Education Act was a Conservative measure, and, provided we carry it out with unremitting vigour, it will prove an invaluable and permanent asset to our party.

Tory Governments since 1951 have therefore been under exceptional pressure so to improve the public system of education that we all become middle-class, speak the same language and can comprehend the responsibilities of living in a free and fully-employed society.

This is happening. But the open question is whether the pace is adequate to the political necessity. We can take comfort from the fact that the maintained schools are achieving a fair mix-up within the range of families who send their children to them. The 11-plus exam picks out the clever children and puts them on the ladder to higher education. But it is common knowledge that secondary and further education for the average child are still far from satisfactory.

3. A social division arises between children who go to maintained schools and children who go to fee-paying schools, which are expected to give a privileged start in life. This division is a gift to the Socialists. Our political interest is to see that the gap between the two systems is narrowed. To that end I have said that:

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- (a) We must improve the maintained schools so that the overlap in educational standards will grow at a rate fast enough to take the sting out of the controversy.
- (b) Parents should choose to send their children to primary schools wherever the education offered is satisfactory.

One effect therefore of a slow-down in the expected rate of improvement (see the Appendix to my Paper C. (61) 212 which shows how big is the task before us to eliminate oversize classes in primary and secondary schools) in the maintained schools would be to cast doubt on our determination to narrow the gap between the two systems. Such action would bring general protests from the Trade Union Congress and the Labour Party; and from the local authorities responsible for education who are now all converted to expansion in the service. Indeed a new feature in the last few years has been that Tory-controlled councils are now, if anything, the most enthusiastic. Opposition would also come from the Public Schools and the Universities. Their leaders are nervous that the Labour Party will destroy the independent schools, and they fully realise the importance of swift improvement in the maintained system for the reasons given above.

It is hard to point to any important body of opinion in the country, or any single newspaper, which would not oppose a slow-down in the rate of educational advance. The political results of doing so would be serious and the contradiction with a policy of opportunity and growth obvious.

Economic Arguments

4. Since the war the nature of public education as an element in national policy has undergone a radical re-assessment. Education for the masses used to be bracketed with other articles of consumption, like better housing, food and clothing, and higher Old Age Pensions—all benefits to be progressively increased as a country became richer. But recently the pace of change has been so quickened by science and technology that education is more often thought of as an article of production rather than as an article of consumption. Economists are now studying the relation between the expenditure on education and the rate of economic growth, with conclusions pointing to education as a form of public investment which gives a very high return.

The British employer is becoming converted to this view. His demands grow every year for better educated entrants to all occupations. He is discovering that industry needs more than a few top-level experts; these men require to be supported by technicians and sub-professional grades in far greater numbers than we have to-day. As the President of the Board of Trade will confirm, the prospect of entry into the Common Market has much accelerated the demand for better education at the technical level, which is itself dependent on better education in the schools.

If then we slow down the rate of educational advance we shall be going counter to one of the clearest and loudest demands of British industry.

Income-Policy Arguments

5. Figures given by the Treasury show that increases in incomes in excess of what we have earned have been the major cause of the stop and go in the economy since the war. The two sides of industry and the country in general are now being asked to accept a reduction in the annual increase in incomes to about half what they have become accustomed to expect. In this policy compulsion is ruled out. We are bound therefore carefully to consider whether what we do in other directions will help or hinder consent to income restraint.

I believe the majority of the electors would accept cuts provided:

- (a) They were fairly distributed between one income group and another.
- (b) They were seen to be part of a design to release greater resources for production either in the public sector or in the private sector.

Electoral Considerations

6. We have had in the last ten years two domestic priorities of which the country was proud and from which the party derived much benefit: 300,000 houses and the civil use of nuclear energy. To-day we have no obvious priority. The

message is restraint all round. It may be said that the balance of payments has to be our priority, but this has little appeal for the working man and his family.

Growth would be a sound and attractive priority. But growth is one of those omnibus words like duty, which does not mean much unless a man knows where and how it is to be achieved. If growth were to catch on it would have to be illustrated by manifest choices in policy—in the cuts and increases in public expenditure, in taxation and investment and so on.

We know from experience that in campaigns to arouse public support for a new line of action it is necessary:

(a) To be consistent.

(b) To plug a very short list of outstanding examples to create the desired image.

I fear that some of the measures now proposed are inconsistent with a growth-cum-incomes policy, but be that as it may, I submit that public education is the most telling priority we have, the best banner for a growth policy, to collect the support of the largest number (all the mothers) to take less to-day in order to enjoy more tomorrow.

There is a further argument for such a choice. People are disturbed about standards of behaviour and are looking round for ways to reverse what appears to be a progressive decline. The home and the schools interact in the formation of character. When one is weak the other has a greater responsibility. To-day it is widely held that parental discipline is slack and that everything possible should be done to help the schools to take the strain.

7. In my view the political, social and economic arguments all point to the wisdom of doing more rather than less to improve the system of public education.

D. E.

Ministry of Education, W. I.

3rd January, 1962.

