Exploring the changing dynamics of social class educational inequality throughout the history of state education in England: an analysis of four policy documents

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Abstract

This article contributes a historically reflective critical exploration of the relationship between English state education and social class. In analysing selected historically significant policy documents, the article provides insights into the changing dynamics of social class educational inequality in England. Specifically, how across the life course of English education social class has been 'washed out' or 'erased' from policy documentation and either transmuted into different, sometimes unrelated, ideas or ignored altogether. Firstly, an introduction is locates the contemporary significance of social class to education in England. Thereafter, a section contextualises the history of education in England before the policy documents are analysed. These are: Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission (1868), Report of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education (1895), Secondary Education (1938), and Better Schools (1985). All four documents were not only written at times of policy significance and informed significant government policy but represent important trends in their own right. Through analysing these documents, it is clear how the presence of social class in official policy documents transitioned from unproblematically stated to ignored and 'washed out'. In the final section, this pattern observed is assessed through broader dynamics taking place throughout the twentieth century. What is argued is that although social class was increasingly erased from

education policy documentation the significance of it remained but was henceforth misrecognised and hidden. The findings indicate how contemporary social inequalities cannot be addressed in any meaningful way without engaging with the historical genealogies of such inequality and appreciating its historic roots.

Keywords: *education, England, social class*

Social class and education in England, today

> ‘the hereditary curse of English education has been its organization along the lines of social class’ (Tawney, 1931, p. 142)

In this article, a sociologically informed historical analysis of the embedded nature of social class education inequality in England will be demonstrated using selected historical sources. Using government documentation from across the life course of English state-led education (since 1870)[i], this article will shed greater light on the ‘hereditary curse’ declared by Tawney and situate contemporary dynamics of social class education inequality within its historical ancestry.

Today, there is a sense of the growing inequality in opportunities and outcomes in society (Major & Machin, 2018), following a period wherein the importance of social class, amongst other factors, was denied as an irrelevant category which was increasingly becoming redundant in an increasingly individualised society (Beck, 1986).Upon her election as Prime Minister, Theresa May acknowledged the ‘burning injustices’ shaping contemporary society (May,2016), of which she was chiefly referring, though not explicitly, to social class inequality. In doing so, there was a recognition of the role social class plays in undermining the promotion of ‘meritocracy’ in the country. This has

long been understood by academics, with increasing evidence demonstrating how social class 'suffuses more or less everything we do' and the changing dynamics of this inequality (James, 2019, p. 233). Irrespective of the abundant evidence and incremental recognition of the role social class operates in our lives (e.g. Reay, 2017), the myth of meritocracy has increasing traction in the public discourse (Littler, 2016), causing a paradox wherein 'the structural importance of class to people's lives appears not to be recognized by the people themselves' (Savage, 2000, xii; see also Bottero, 2004). Underpinning this is an increasingly neoliberal, individualising cultural tendency to continue to deny the significance of class and assume it belongs to a more divided past (Littler, 2016). At its core, this discourse displaces the responsibility of structural problems onto individuals. Nowhere is this paradox best illustrated than in education, where prejudices of working-class 'deficit' are particularly prominent (e.g. Curtis, 2009).

However, despite the significant attention social class educational inequality has received in academic research, there has been a relative lack of critical engagement with the historical origins of this inequality. Where this has been discussed there has been a lack of engagement with the abundant policy documentation from the past to demonstrate the 'close relationship between education and social class in English society' (McCulloch, 2006, p. 691). In the history of education literature there has been more historically reflective accounts of the relationship between social class and education (e.g. ibid). However, these tend to be naturally narrow in their focus and do not deal particularly with the historical sources considered here. Thus, there is a gap in existing research demonstrating the historic pattern seeing social class become increasingly 'washed out' of policy documentation over the life course of state education.

In analysing four significant government policy documents, the *Report of the School Inquiry Commission* (1868) and *Report of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education* (1895), *Secondary Education* (1938), and *Better Schools* (1987), this article will explore the changing dynamics of social class in policy across the twentieth century from explicit to implicit in policy, though remaining significant throughout in its impact in English education. Here, it is argued that historical documents, particularly legislative documents, are of use for understanding change over time and the 'historical roots of specific issues' (Bowen, 2009, p. 29-30). Documents are understood as 'social facts' (Atkinson & Coffey, 1997, p. 47) and are able to offer insight into the context, both contemporary and historical, of present social phenomena and problems.

Analysis of the texts conducted draws on ideas taken from critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is oriented towards 'social wrongs' (in this case, social class educational inequality) and aims to understand this via the systematic analysis of texts (Fairclough, 2010, p. 11). The texts chosen are constructed texts which have been textured, or constructed, by social agents as part of their social practice (Fairclough, 2003, p. 22). These agents are neither full agentic nor structurally constrained but are instead 'socially constrained' (ibid); imbued with historical power relations, positionings and discourses, whose 'choices are tied to the conditions of possibility' (Janks, 1997, p. 329). Being constrained by their historical and socio-cultural surroundings, the documents chosen in this article will allow for the 'conditions', or genealogy, of contemporary social class inequality in education to be situated more effectively in its 'life story' (Tosh, 2006). The use of critical discourse analysis meant that the analysis conducted attended not only to the text. In addition, attention was focused on the way documents were constructed, by whom, for whom, for what purposes, and what was *not* included or was left unsaid is attended to also.

The four specific government policy documents are chosen based on their temporal significance, with all four published during periods of significant reform in English education. In selecting articles from the late nineteenth to late twentieth century, this report is able to draw insights on the historical patterning of social inequality, in this case in the representation of social class in government documentation. Indeed, the two nineteenth century texts have been chosen in order to reveal the stark class distinctions present in this period. Yet, their inclusion is justifiable too given their significance in shaping subsequent education policy and discourses in the early twentieth century. *Secondary Education* has been selected not only because of its importance in informing the post-war educational reforms, but also to represent how class-based educational discourses present in the nineteenth century reports analysed had been transmuted into notions of intelligence during the mid-twentieth century. Lastly, *Better Schools* not only represents a relatively under-researched document, but it was produced during a period where class was simultaneously significant to everyday life and policy yet denied during the rise and establishment of Thatcherism and Neoliberalism (Hall & Jacques, 1983). Arguably, there are three ‘periods’ from which the four articles are drawn from: (1) emergence of state-led education provision in the late nineteenth century, (2) the post-war reform era, and (3) the post-tripartite, neoliberal era. These historical contexts are considered in light of the patterning observed in this article and in some ways is dialectically linked to the trend observed. Therefore, in drawing on analysis of the four government documents chosen this article contributes to understandings of existing social class educational inequality and how its ‘conditions of possibility’ cannot be understood without appreciating historical patterning(s), (mis)representations, and policy discourses.

Firstly, this article will demonstrate the pertinence of social class to education and government involvement in education during the nineteenth century. This

will foreground subsequent discussion in the embedded roots of English education in social class inequality and prejudice. Thereafter, the four historical documents previously mentioned are analysed to understand how social class became increasingly erased in government policy documentation. The core insights drawn from this analysis are then discussed before concluding remarks are offered whereby the core argument of the paper is discussed: that the representation of social class in government documents on education shifted across the period covered, signifying the erasure of social class from education policy.

Historical context: social class and education in the nineteenth century

During the second half of the nineteenth century, important educational debate, policy, and reforms were introduced which would fundamentally change the relationship between state and individual. Before this period, education was not conceived as a right; it was instead ‘regarded as a family decision, an issue of freedom from the state’ (Ball, 2008, p. 59). Instead, education was a private good and while the state did have some involvement providing funding, this was not concerted and thus left significant space for private interests to deliver education provision across England. Indeed, religion had operated a strong influence over education before the twentieth century (Ball, 2018). Without concerted state involvement, education provision was geographically and socially variable, meaning that privilege and poverty had a large influence over participation (Lawson & Silver, 1973). However, notable examples of progressive educational provision, aimed at the working-class (particularly the working*man*), did manifest as a consequence of this. Examples include the mechanics’ institutes, first established in the 1820s, which provided opportunities for the working *men* to acquire a basic understanding of the principles underpinning their manual work practice (Royle, 1971; Foreman-Peck, 2004; Simmons, 2017). But again, these were predominantly organised

and funded by philanthropic *private* interests. However, opportunities such as these, whilst growing, were not abundant and structurally imposed constraints, such as the necessity of child labour for poorer families and long working hours, prevented sustained participation. Indeed, these difficulties were recognised by the policymakers at the time:

> Much evidence has been laid before us tending to show that indifference and ignorance of the subject on the part of the parents are among the chief hindrances to education at present. Too often the parents seem hardly to care for education at all. Too often they give an inordinate value to mere show. Too often they think no education worth having that cannot be speedily turned into money. In fact, many parents need education themselves in order to appreciate education for their children, and their present opinion cannot be considered final or supreme (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 15).

Though the commission seems to locate deficit in the parents, it is also clear that the historic bracketing of education for the upper-class only and the economic necessity experienced by the masses in England dictated the capability of parents to invest in education. Excluding privately funded provision, education provision was heavily socially stratified and where the working-class was able to participate, such participation was significantly different to that of the growing middle- and upper-class. Informing this was a scepticism (and a perceived threat felt) amongst the ruling elite in England towards the education of the working-class which is demonstrated by the following contemporary warning against broadening the educational offering:

> education would teach them [the working-class] to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good (…) it would render them *insolent* to their superiors (Giddies, 1807 in Reay, 2017, p. 31).

Whilst more progressive ideology entered the public discourse in England, it was economic necessity rather than emancipatory ideals, which largely stimulated calls amongst those close to power for increased education provision and for state involvement in such provision (Green, 1990; 1995). This is because Britain was becoming increasingly aware, through international events such as the *Great Exhibition* (1851) and the later *Exposition Universelle* (1867), of the growing competitiveness of other nations [ii]

Thus, while social class-based prejudices remained, there was a tension between maintaining existing social relations and enhancing the productivity of the means of production. The underpinning economic logic is demonstrated through the following contribution in the House of Commons by a then member of parliament (MP), Viscount Sandon, arguing for:

> Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity. It is of no use trying to give technical teaching to our artizans without elementary education; uneducated labourers (..) are, for the most part, unskilled labourers, and if we leave our work-folk any longer unskilled (..) they will become overmatched in the competition of the world (..) Upon this speedy provision of education depends also our national power (..) if we are to hold our position among men of our own race or among the nations of the world we must make up the smallness of our numbers by increasing the intellectual force of the individual (Hansard, 1870, c. 465-466).

It is in this context, that three commissions were tasked with examining education provision in England and providing recommendations for how to enhance existing provision to meet national demands. Significantly, the three commissions were appointed to examine the education of distinct social classes. This saw the Royal Commission on the State of Popular Education in England (Royal Commission on the State of Popular Education in England, 1861), Royal Commission on the Public Schools (Royal Commission on the Public Schools,

1864), and the School Inquiry Commission (1868) examine existing education provision for the working-class, upper-class (who attended public schools), and middle-class, respectively. Thus, it is seen here, before examining the particular historical source in question, that social class was clearly integral to education at this time and would inform subsequent efforts of reform. It is to the Report of the School Inquiry Commission (1868) that this article now turns.

Document Analysis

Report of the School Inquiry Commission (1868)

The Schools Inquiry Commission, led by Lord Taunton, was tasked with examining the current provision of education for the middle-class in England. These recommendations would then feed into subsequent reforms introduced via the *1869 Endowed Schools Act*. The commission was tasked with investigating the schooling of all children who were not educated in the 'Nine Schools of Eton, Winchester, Westminster, Charterhouse, St. Paul's, Merchant Taylors, Harrow, Rugby, and Shrewsbury' and those 'whose education is or might be aided from the Parliamentary grant by the Committee of Council' (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 1). It is therefore in those schools not covered by parliamentary grant and outside of the nine 'Clarendon schools' that the committee were interested. These are categorised by the commission as either (a) endowed grammar, (b) private, or (c) proprietary schools; all three of which are private in some manner (see ibid, p. 4-5). Endowed schools are those wholly or mainly sustained via charitable donation. Private schools are those which are the property of a master or mistress who conducts such education. Proprietary schools differ to the former through them being sustained neither through philanthropy nor property and are instead 'the property of individuals [and] companies or corporations, who in some cases appropriate to themselves the profits of the undertaking' (ibid, p. 2). Whilst the commission was aware of

the category of schools with which they were concerned, given the lack of clear state involvement the commission explained:

> Some difficulty was felt in deciding what schools we should send our circulars, partly from the absence of any means of satisfactorily ascertaining beforehand what schools were in fact comprised in our Commission, and partly from the large number of those which we had reason to believe were included (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 4).

In the writing of the Commission's report, the commissioners utilised oral submissions, written information provided by requested schools, personal investigations conducted by assistant commissioners, in addition to a number of submissions from 'persons of eminence whose opinions whose opinions were thought likely to be valuable' (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 3). These persons were to include religious leaders, those who had prior experience of ascending the educational apparatus in a number of fields of study (of which, the majority would likely come from privileged backgrounds), representations from a number of occupations (e.g. medicine, law, engineering), 'masters and mistresses of schools', and those involved in the establishment of new schools for public use.

The Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission is structured so to first provide a portrait of the potentialities for English education. In the first chapter, the commission summarises the attitudes of parents and witnesses on the subjects to be taught and religious instruction and the practices observed in other nations[3], and the particular relevance of such observations to 'English requirements' (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 78). In chapter two, the current state of secondary schooling is outlined, which is followed in chapter three by a summarising of existing financial arrangements in England, with the following

chapter discussing the legal frameworks in place for endowed schools. Chapters five and six focus on the education of children in 'eight of the largest endowments' and girls' education, respectively. Though chapter six is demonstrative of another integral social inequality to the history of English education (e.g., gender), and other chapters are important to the life course of education in England, these are not focused on in the forthcoming discussion. For reasons of brevity, the analysis presented focuses on specific areas of the Report of the Schools Inquiry Commission which are illustrative of the class-laden nature of the document. Nonetheless, these elements are mere indications of the *embedded* class inflections informing education policy during this period and lying beneath the report in its entirety. The first chapter is the primary focus of the discussion below because, while a recommendation section exists, this takes as its basis the school grade structure presented in chapter one.

The first chapter is where the social class-based secondary education gradation the commission will later recommend first appears (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 577). Parents are claimed to wish for a longer education for their children, though the length and content of which is claimed to 'correspond roughly, but by no means exactly to the gradations of society' (ibid, p. 16)[4]. Parental desires could therefore, according to the commission, be stratified according to the social class of parents. The first grade would be 'identical (…) with those whose sons are in the nine [Clarendon] schools' and is for parents who either wish for their children to pursue a university education, which demand the learning of classics, or who 'intend their sons to go into business or into professions, direct from school' (ibid, p. 16-18). The social classes who would frequent this grade were 'men with considerable incomes independent of their own exertions' or those 'having received a cultivated education themselves, are very anxious that their sons should not fall below them'. Classics would form the basis of first grade schooling given the aim of

this schooling is to enable higher education (ibid, p. 581). The second grade of secondary schooling desired would, while teaching classics, provide a 'thorough knowledge of those [modern] subjects which can be turned to practical use' such as English, arithmetic, and the natural sciences (ibid, p. 18). This grade was said to be for parents who 'could well afford to keep their children at school two years longer, but intend them for employments, the special preparation for which ought to begin at 16' either economic necessity or otherwise. The final school grade 'belongs to a class distinctly lower in the scale (…) the smaller tenant farmers, the small tradesman, the superior artisans' who wish for improved reading, writing, and arithmetic, or in some cases 'a clerk's education' (ibid, p. 20). However, the commission add that:

> But, so little of what really deserves the name of secondary education is at present put within the reach of this class, whether in town or country, that they cannot be said to have had fair means of forming an opinion (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 20-21).

This assertion indicates that the third grade of secondary schooling would be provided to the lowest element of the middle-class. Before this, this group is said to have had little experience of this, which also indicates the clear absence of opportunities for lower social classes. Much like the first and second grade schools, the curricula taught was to be occupationally relevant and thus at a lower level of academic expectation. Across all of the social class groups categorised by the commission, parents desired 'that their children should be religiously brought up' (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 38). Thus, it is from the outset of the Report that social class is cited as a factor in the thinking of the commission. Social class is also positioned as a key form of stratification in education which shapes education. Yet, this becomes clearer in the discussion of the relevance of international exemplars to the English context. The

commission concedes that it is in the education of the general working population that England disappoints, stating how there is ‘unanimous’ evidence of the failings of education for the lower social classes, including ‘the artizans, the small shopkeepers, [and] the smaller farmers’. But below these occupations, there would also exist a large number of the labourers towards which the third-grade school previously discussed would be targeted. A conclusion was reached that the lack of prior state intervention created issues for this group, where they explained that:

> the private schools cannot be relied on to fill up the gap; for as soon as a master is thoroughly successful in a school of this sort, there is everything to induce him to raise his terms, and to fill his school with boys of a higher social class; and thus the need still remains unsupplied (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 79).

Thus, the socially stratified ability to access education was recognised clearly in the document as an issue needing to be addressed. This is additionally shown via many references to the social class constitution of education in other countries. An example is shown in the very positive commentary given on the American system, where the commission wrote:

> There are boarding schools in America as in England, but the boarding schools are all private. The public schools are intended for, and to a great degree are filled by, all classes. There are indications here and there of a tendency among the wealthier to send their children to private schools as more select; but the great majority prefer the public schools (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 52).

Further, in concluding the first chapter, the commission emphasised the particular weakness of English education for the lower middle classes in arguing that secondary education should be provided for boys up to 16 years of age in towns with a population exceeding 1,000, and within such there should

be places available for 10 boys per 1,000 of the local population, at least half of which should be provided to the third grade (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 99). Given that the grades would 'correspond roughly, but by no means exactly to the gradations of society' (ibid, p. 16), it is evident that social class, in addition to being central to the Report, was also recognised as an issue for the English education system. It would thus be the lowest of the middle-class who were the intended target of such policy.

In reading the Schools Inquiry Commission's report it is tempting to ignore the wider context within which it was being written and particularly the fact that it was a report designated for the middle-class, *not the working-class*. The separation of social class via the three reports conducted between 1850-1870 is indicative of the explicit, yet deeply embedded, classed assumptions in English education discourse. Moreover, the recognition in the report of the limited secondary education for the lower middle-class is a stark indication of the state of secondary education for the working-class. Indeed, its exclusion from this report's coverage is demonstrative of the general mood of exclusion towards the working-class in education policy debate. Secondary education, even of the third grade, was not to be for the working-class. In many ways, the analysis provided of the Report document in this article supports Ball's (2008, p. 61) argument that:

> The commissioners recommended (…)[t]hree grades of fee-paying school were outlined, excluding working-class students but matched to different fractions (lower, middle and upper) of the middle class.

It is now to the later Royal Commission of Secondary Education of 1895 that this article now turns to explore if, and how, the relevance of social class to English education has changed since 1868.

Report of the Royal Commission on Secondary Education (1895)

The Royal Commission on Secondary Education (1895) was chaired by James Bryce who had previously contributed the work of the Schools Inquiry Commission (McCulloch, 2006), and assisted by a number of assistant commissioners drawn from 'certain districts of England [so to be] sufficiently typical of the country as a whole' (Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1895, p. 4). In its own words, the commissions purpose was to examine existing provision, in the light of the earlier Schools Inquiry Commission, and to recommended changes to:

> complete the education system of England, now confessedly defective in that part which lies between elementary schools on the other hand and the universities on the other, and to frame an organisation which shall be at once firm and flexible (ibid, p. 2).

The subsequent report begins with a 'historical statement as to the previous legislation on our subject' (Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1895, p. 6), explaining the limited application of the previously discussed Schools Inquiry Commission's recommendations, particularly with regard to secondary education. Moreover, there were issues pertaining to the organisation of provision too, seeing different government departments engaged in education provision, which the commission felt resulted in 'frequent overlapping of effort, with much consequent waste of money, of time, and of labour' (ibid, p. 18). Thus, while education provision had been improved there were still significant issues with such provision. The second section displays the 'present Condition of Secondary Education in England', wherein a large portion is devoted to issues of governance in secondary education. Whilst these issues were a significant part of the report and the subsequent reforms introduced in *1902*

Education Act, they are beyond the scope of this article (see Robinson, 2002 for a further discussion).

It is in the section following the 'present Conditions of Secondary Education in England', where evidence is provided from a total of 85 witnesses, drawn from relevant government departments, existing provision and educational practice across England, and other countries and existing overseas British colonies, that social class emerges in the text. The Commission draws directly upon the prior social class school classification provided in the Schools Inquiry Commission's report. There was to be three schooling grades: firstly, a school for 'two different classes; parents of ample means (…) [and] parents of good education, but confined means' (Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1895, p. 131). Secondly, the children of 'well-to-do parents' and 'parents of straitened means', whose children intend to enter occupations for which 'the special preparation for which ought to begin at 16'. The final school grade 'belongs to a class distinctly lower in scale, but so numerous as to be quite as important as any; the smaller tenant, farmers, the small tradesman, [and] the superior artisans'. Thus, although the Commission did assert that some modification was necessary to this, there is no development upon this throughout the report and the discussion of this structure of schooling in the report can be argued to represent an implicit affirmation of the School Inquiry Commission that Bryce himself was part of. Indeed, excluding the recommendations pertaining to school governance and organisation, the report largely demonstrates a symmetry with the School Inquiry Commission.

Significant to note also is the following passages after which 'social distinctions' are referred to directly in the report (Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1895, p. 133). The report then moves onto explore 'the growth of special and technical studies in schools' and subsequently the scarce

examples of schools, particularly in urban centres, providing opportunities for social mobility. The placement of this section must be seen in relation to the prior discussion of social class distinctions in schooling. As Cardno (2018, p. 624), policy documentation is value laden and embody human values, meaning such documents can be used to understand policy history. Placing this short passage in this specific location (e.g., immediately after its discussion of social distinctions) implicitly shows the relation with which the commission understood social class and certain forms of education. In line with CDA, the layout of the text, its sequencing, and positioning reveals a great deal of the underlying conditionings and structure of the text (Janks, 1997). Thus, the report itself is demonstrative of the deeply embedded associations held between certain forms of education (or training) and certain 'social stratum' (Royal Commission on Secondary Education, 1895, p. 131). Furthermore, ideas of social reproduction and the role of education in occupational selection are evident in the passages cited above. Each recommended grade was to impart upon its pupils the necessary knowledge for the types of occupation and subsequent trajectory they were aiming for. This would mean that the curriculum to be taught would be a combination of (a) literary, (b) scientific, and (c) technical curricula deemed most appropriate to the grade (and the class taught therein). In aligning specific secondary school grades to specific social stratum in English society, the Royal Commission was sustaining the arguments portrayed in the earlier Schools Enquiry Commission, and while they asserted not 'being at all satisfied with the terminology of the Schools Enquiry Commissioners' they felt it appropriate to 'continue to use, as the more convenient course, their classification into schools of the first, second and third grade' (ibid, p. 138).

In discussing the two chosen reports from the second half of the nineteenth century this section has demonstrated that while the appreciation of social class

to education increased and, it might be argued, had a slightly more critical reading, despite little subsequent action based on this criticality, there was consistency in both (a) the inclusion of social class, or 'social distinctions' in the government documentation, and (b) the proposition of schooling based on social class. What is evident at this stage is how between the two documents, there was a recognition of a need to remedy the issue of the relationship between social class and education participation. As will be shown in subsequent sections, this recognition and the relevance of social class to education, would be 'washed out' of government documentation, rendering it invisible.

Social class and education in the twentieth century

Entering the twentieth century, policy reforms in a range of areas of social policy were being openly discussed and advocated. In education, the *1902 Education Act* heralded in the beginning of a century of education reform which would fundamentally alter the relationship between the state and the individual. This built upon earlier reforms in elementary education and resulted in the majority of children in England being educated in elementary schools, including the working-class who received limited, yet improved, educational prospects (Thompson, 2019). However, wider political and social changes, such as the First World War, caused significant disruption to further potential reforms. According to J.H. Brittain (1907 in McCulloch, 2002, p. 36) there were still embedded prejudices operating against the broadening of the educational offering. In discussing the Board of Education, formed from the *1902 Education Act*, he contended that:

> rightly or wrongly, I feel that under the administration of the Board during the past ten years the working man has been "jockeyed" out of facilities which the splendid enterprise of the great school boards gained for him.

Such prejudices, in addition to the absence of state provision of funding to support universal attendance at elementary and secondary education, meant that the period lasting until the post-war reforms was one of stagnation in meaningful reforms. Underpinning this was a tension between 'the furtherance of the common interest and the fostering of an elite' in England (Sadler, 1930 in McCulloch, 2006, p. 38). The emergence and growth of the Labour Party during the early twentieth century placed universal education as a core tenet of their campaigning in response to, what McCulloch argued was, a regression in education policy development under the 1920s Conservative government. This regression, while seeing the number of school places generally increase three-fold between 1912-1937 (Board of Education,1938, p. 143), led to a persistence of social class educational inequality. Indeed, the government itself showed that, by 1938, a large majority (86%) of children aged 11-14 years old attended elementary school, only 11% attending secondary school (Thompson, 2019). Furthermore, fee-paying schools existed outside of state authority and provided for a mostly privileged cohort of young people who were fortunately able to afford a place at such a school, or who could depend on a scholarship (see Green & Kynaston, 2019).

In was under this backdrop that the ensuing decades saw a number of committee reports commissioned focusing on future education policy. It is to one of these, *Secondary Education*, which we now turn.

Secondary Education (1938)

Secondary Education, also known as the Spens Report, was one of the final commissioned reports by the Board of Education Consultative Committee before the post-war reforms were implemented. Its terms of reference were to:

> Consider and report upon the organisation and interrelation of schools, other than those administered under the Elementary Code, which provide education for pupils beyond the age of 11+; regard being had in particular to the framework and content of the education of pupils who do not remain at school beyond the age of about 16 (Board of Education, 1938, p. iv)

Here the commission recognised how there was a need for a basic, 'general education' at secondary education level to be delivered between 11-16 years of age. The report is based on the examination of 150 witnesses, in addition to 22 witnesses who were responsible to specific sub-committees tasked with considering particular aspects of the secondary education system. Important for the later discussion of this government policy document is the influence enjoyed by Professor Cyril Burt over the report, whose psychology 'form[s] the basis of Chapter III of [the] report' (Board of Education, 1938, p. xvi). Now shown to be based on unscientific research conduct (Dorfman, 1978), Burt's psychological experiments and subsequent views on genetics was found to exert considerable influence over the report and subsequent policy discourses in education. Before delving into Burt's influence and the reports contents, it is important to detail the structure of the report for contextual purposes. Chapter one and two detail firstly the 'development of the secondary curriculum', drawing 'lessons of history' from this (Board of Education, 1938, p. 1), and secondly the contemporary provision of secondary education in England. Chapter three provides 'psychological' perspectives on the 'physical and mental development of 11-16 year olds' (ibid, p. 107). Chapter four begins a triad of chapters, from chapters four to six, dealing with aspects of the curriculum, including the teaching of religion, classics, and the sciences. Chapter seven provides a discussion of the use, and future planned use, of examinations in secondary schooling, before chapter eight reviews technical schooling. In the final three chapters, issues of governance, the state of Welsh education, and final

conclusions and recommendations are delivered. Evidently the report is a lengthy document with useful insights into a range of topics pertaining to contemporary education. However, the discussion below selects only those sections of relevance to the topic of this article: that is, the presence and changing dynamics of social class.

In its opening section(s), the report speaks of the formation of state education in the second half of the nineteenth century. This discussion speaks of such reforms as if it they are a relic from a distant path, stating at one point that 'the old lines of social cleavage have become blurred' (Board of Education, 1938, p. 142). While it is true that important social and political changes had taken place during the early twentieth century, there still remained clear social distinctions and inequalities in education, of which social class will be focused here, but others, including gender were also significant. In explaining the socially situated nature of earlier state education provision in England, the commission explains:

> Secondary or higher schools in England and Wales and indeed in most Western European countries were at the time of their origin, *and even down to a comparatively recent date*, to a considerable extent institutions for the education of children, chiefly boys, either belonging to the more prosperous classes or selected for their ability. Schools designed to provide education for the mass of the people were not established till after Grammar Schools, and those institutions of University rank with which they were intimately connected, had long been in existence… (ibid, p. 1, *own emphasis*).

The passage above seems to position the socially unequal past as distant from the period the commission was working within, despite it reference to a 'comparatively recent date'. This would be to ignore, as pointed out in the report, how at the very least school fees still remained until the post-war reforms and, while gradually more of the population became in receipt of state support, it would be incorrect to speak of the historic social inequality in such a

distant manner. Throughout the report, however, there is little direct acknowledgement of social class, especially when compared to the two earlier commission reports, which explicitly speak in terms of 'social distinctions'.

There is discussion of how increasing numbers of young people 'from a wider range of social and cultural backgrounds' are entering the nation's secondary schools and that changes in the nature of secondary education, which prior to this was based heavily on academic content for entry into higher education, are needed to accommodate this widening of the educational offering (Board of Education, 1938, p. 143). Underpinning such an assertion, it could be argued, is an implicit continuation of social class-based prejudices regarding what forms of education and education are to be had by certain groups. It is worth considering that *only* as a consequence of a widening of educational opportunity is the forms of education available to be changed. It would not be those from more privileged classes, however, who would be entering the education system, but those previously excluded intentionally or through structural conditions – the 'range of social and cultural backgrounds' (ibid, p. 143). Thus, while social class in this report is not explicitly acknowledged, and thus not clear as an explanatory factor in policymaking, there are implicit and embedded meanings in the policy being recommended. These recommendations, amongst others, recommended the establishment of three school types in a similar fashion to the nineteenth century commissions previously discussed. These were to be (1) grammar schools, (2) modern secondary schools, and (3) technical secondary schools (ibid, p. 377). The first school type was intended 'for the abler children of the nation, beginning at 11+ and continuing in general up to the age of 18 or 19' (ibid, p. 165). This would be exclusively for those wishing to pursue an academic trajectory in the university system and, though with some changes, would mirror existing grammar school provision. For those who are not academically able, it was recommended that after receiving a general education

of sorts up until 11 years of age, 'secondary schools would equip students with the desirable 'mental equipment' to function as an 'individual and a future citizen' before allowing for occupational specialisation (ibid, p. 178).

Decisions on which school students would be placed within were to be based on intelligence testing; a method popularised in policy circles and amongst the committee by Cyril Burt (1961). Indeed, the report itself included an abundant level of psychological theory and additions from 'academics' from the field of 'psychology' and used such ideas on human development in the design of the school curriculum. Intelligence was grounded in assumptions that the predicting of a child's intellectual powers and their specific aptitudes and interests at an early age was possible and valuable. In agreement, the report stated that:

> 'intellectual development during childhood appears to progress as if it were governed by a single factor, usually know as 'general intelligence', which may be broadly described as innate all-round intellectual ability' (Board of Education, 1938, p. 124).

Thus, those whom were to fail in these 'intelligence' tests were to enter either of the non-academic school options based on schools:

> mak[ing] a careful review of its pupils in the light of what has been observed of their progress, development and tastes during the two preceding years, and (…) the opportunities for transfer to schools better adapted to their abilities or interests should be fully used (Board of Education, 1938, p. 182).

Important to note here is that 'intelligence' is not explicitly tied to any social group and throughout the report there is little attempt to draw such social class categorisations. This is broadly consistent with the lack of mention of social class throughout the report. Indeed, as previously mentioned, this is mainly done in referring to the past so to portray the recommendations as building upon

an increasingly ‘classless society’ in its broadening of educational opportunity (Board of Education, 1938, p. 198). While there is an implicit recognition for the need to expand education, the persistent importance of social class to education is not clearly signified. Instead, it is understood as an increasingly redundant explanatory factor due to the ‘opening up’ of educational opportunity. This absence of talking of intelligence in social class terms is however hiding the underpinning logics of such ‘psychological’ ideas held by influential advisors at this time. In his own ‘research’, which has now been proven to be unscientific, Burt (1961, p. 3) explored ‘the apparent differences between the class-means for general intelligence’. In concluding, Burt accounted for the ‘appreciable differences in the average level of intelligence in the different socio-economic classes’ (p. 5) via ‘differences in intelligence and motivation’ (p. 23). This therefore demonstrates the heavily prejudiced ideas held by key ‘scientific’ advisors to the Commission, especially one who is personally cited in the report’s text. What this indicates is how, despite *Secondary Education*, as a text, seemingly ignoring social class and positioning itself as contributing to an increasingly equitable education system, underpinning it and its key contributors were social class prejudices regarding education.

The change indicative in the above discussion is the introduction of ideas of inherited intelligence explicitly into official government discourse and documentation. The introduction of this, with the simultaneous lack of any meaningful discussion of social class and education inequality, in the document demonstrates the transition to notions of the ‘meritocratic’ society first satirised by Michael Young (1958) in *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. What is evident in the Commission’s recommendations is how nineteenth century discourses surrounding education and ‘types’ of learner remained. This discourse of stratified schooling, given its emergence within a heavily class-ridden society,

had a strong social class inflection, as Ball (2017, p. 73) previously indicated in arguing:

> Versions of the 19th-century tiered and classed model of education continued up to the Second World War and in modified form for a period after until the system could no longer contain and satisfy the aspirations of the growing middle classes.

Thus, despite the appearance of social inequalities along class lines being largely non-existent in the report compared to the two prior nineteenth century reports, the underlying ideas on education remained. Education was to be stratified, with the privileged academic pathway (e.g. grammar schooling) placed in distinction relative to its vocational alternatives (e.g. modern & technical schooling). This, as with most if not all, educational reforms ignored the abundant social class inequality which would shape the participation in this new secondary system. As Thompson (2019, p. 82) explains:

> In terms of access, grammar schools are amongst the most socially selective state schools in the country, and the chances of pupils from poorer backgrounds attending one are considerably lower than for other pupils.

As will be discussed later, this is merely an illustration and a symptom of a process whereby social class educational inequality was increasingly 'washed out' of educational policy and official discourse, despite its persisting presence. It is to the final policy document that this article now turns to explore the continuation or transformation of such dynamics.

Better Schools (1985)

Better Schools is a policy document written during Margaret Thatcher's second term as Prime Minister and shortly before the *1988 Education Reform Act* (HM Government, 1988). The report was preceded by a number of important reports

and events which, while mentioned in passing here are of importance for the development of English education in the second half of the twentieth century and have helped frame the context of the below discussion and broader analysis in this article[5]. These include: (a) *15 to 18*, tasked with understanding how best to match education to industrial needs (HM Government, 1959); *(b) Half Our Future*, which was particularly concerned with education provision for those unable to pass the 11+ examination(HM Government, 1963)*; (c) Children and their Primary Schools*, that was tasked with recommending improvements to the primary-to-secondary education transition following on from previous recommendations against the 11+ examinations(HM Government, 1967)*,* and *(d) Circular10/65*, which is recognised as the communique signalling the national organisation of secondary education along comprehensive lines (Department of Education and Science, 1965). These documents, along with *Better Schools* analysed below, come to constitute a collection of reforms in English education which are fundamental to its 'life story' (Tosh, 2006), especially the demise of the tripartite system and the emergence of the new 'comprehensive' system.

Better Schools (1985) aimed to review the existing 'policies for school education in England and Wales [focusing on] the experience of every pupil over the whole range of school activities' (HM Government, 1985, p. 1). Unsurprisingly, this report, commissioned by the Conservative Government of Margaret Thatcher, who herself declared 'no such thing as society' (Hall & Jacques, 1983), there is very little appreciation of social class in this report. However, in reading the report there are some telling themes that run throughout, which inform us of the changing dynamics of the discourse surrounding education and social class inequality.

Chapter one outlines existing arrangements in schools of all levels and 'a number of weaknesses' found within such provision (HM Government, 1985, p. 8). These weaknesses include the lack of curriculum planning, the focus on basic skills to cultivate literacy and numeracy, the inadequacy of the primary-to-secondary transition, and schools failing to give pupils 'more opportunities to learn for themselves' and develop necessary skills for the future economy. Many of these weaknesses, according to the government, are:

> …related to the wider problems facing our society, many of which are not, or not only partly, susceptible to Government measures (HM Government, 1985, p. 8).

It is to the primary and secondary school curriculum that chapter two turns. This chapter sets out the need for raising standards in education; key to which is improving the curriculum and how it is taught. Within chapter two there is a revealing of the contemporary mood increasing the use of market discourses in education. The report explains how 'schools and employers continue to understand each other's purposes and needs imperfectly' with the report seemingly siding with employers in their desire for greater involvement in education and curriculum policy (HM Government, 1985, p. 9). Although central government will need to assume some responsibility in the allocation of curriculum elements to certain stages of education (e.g. according to age of student), it keenly stresses how localised management, via the headteacher, will also become a growing feature of school curriculum decision-making. Chapter three discusses the examinations and assessment, which shall link closely to the educational pathway followed from primary education through to secondary and further education, or labour market entry, thereafter. The report posits the aims and objectives of examinations in schooling and proposes for a reform of several areas of the examination regime, including the GCSE and pre-vocational courses. In chapter four, before a consideration of how to enhance teaching

quality in chapter five, the education of pre-primary aged students is presented. It is here that the first vague mention of social class inequality is given, where the case is made for nursery education being particularly beneficial for certain *types* of children:

> For some children nursery education is particularly beneficial; for example, for those with physical or emotional problems or other learning difficulties, or from socially or economically deprived background. Where children come from homes where little or no English is spoken, too, nursery education can be valuable in itself and enable the children to derive more benefit from the early years of the compulsory period… (HM Government, 1985, p. 38).

Though the report then ties this socio-economic disadvantage to inner cities:

> The Government has recognised this in the additional support it has given to nursery education for children in inner cities under the Urban Aid Programme and for ethnic minority children… (HM Government, 1985, p. 39).

As will be discussed below, this is one example of the confused and changing dynamics of how the influence of social inequality on education became confused as the twentieth century progressed. This would see such inequality spoken of as of substance *within* a particular group, rather that group's inequality the product of wider social structures. Thought this was no completely present within earlier government documentation in the nineteenth century, there was a larger acknowledgement of how society had a problem of social class educational inequality which was general in its presence rather than something which was declining. In exploring issues pertaining to teaching quality in chapter five, the following statement is given in tempering the emphasis allotted to teaching:

> All teachers also need to be able to recognise when the reason for an individual pupil's poor performance lies elsewhere than in low motivation, poor preparation or presentation of lessons, or the teacher's failure to adapt to the mood of the class. There is a wide range of possible reasons why a pupil may be failing in school - medical conditions, whether permanent, temporary or recurrent, intellectual impairment, *or failure to adjust because of emotional or social insecurity, which may have its roots in the pupil or the home* (HM Government, 1985, p. 43, *own emphasis*).

The final sentence seems again to implicitly refer, for those with a sociological imagination, forms of social inequality. Though, in discussing this in the same passage as medical problems which present issues in education, the report might be argued to be individualising the problem of social inequality and its impact on education participation and experience. Rather than forming ideas on how to tackle this larger societal problem, the report merely provides a brief check on its assertions before moving on to more apparent issues regarding teaching standards.

Thereafter, three short chapters on 'Discipline' (chapter six) 'Parents and Schools (chapter seven), and 'The Education of Ethnic Minority Pupils' (chapter eight) are placed in the centre of the report. Chapter eight bares particular significance to this article, as it demonstrates that the contemporary government did recognise social inequality but paid greater attention to that of ethnic inequalities and also those linked to children with special educational needs (SEN) (see HM Government, 1985, p. 25). Indeed, the earlier mentioned 'socially and economically disadvantaged' pupils (ibid, p. 38) is then understood only in terms of how ethnic minority pupils 'tend to be relatively more affected by economic and social disadvantage' (ibid, p. 61). Again, whilst this is rather surprising intersectional recognition on the part of government policy documentation, it minimises one form of inequality in exchange for an enlargement of the other. While ethnic inequalities are equally important to

ensuring a more equitable education system in England, as will be explained below, this can be understood in terms of a 'washing out' of social class from educational discourse following supposed emancipatory education reform and the inception of neoliberal ideals[6]. Indeed, in a deeply class-ridden society such as the United Kingdom, it is striking that in all the official government documentation analysed in this article, there has not been one main report section devoted to the issue of social class. This, as will be argued, is a product of both the deeply embedded yet increasingly 'hidden nature of social class inequality' which renders social class educational inequality simultaneously everywhere in objective terms but nowhere subjectively. Similarly, to the other government reports explored in this article, a long discussion of 'The Legal Framework' governing schooling is provided in the ninth chapter and followed by chapters on the management of local education authority (LEA) and resources (chapters 10 and 11, respectively). The independent, fee-paying school sector is discussed in chapter 12 before which a concluding section is delivered (chapter 13).

What *Better Schools* is able to demonstrate is how social class inequality, continued to be excluded from official documentation. While it is promising to reflect on the inclusion of ethnicity in this government policy document, it is also important to note that this is only given a total of three pages in the document. Though it shares a consistency with *Secondary Education* in terms of its erasure of social class inequality relative to nineteenth century equivalents, *Better Schools* does mark a step change, and somewhat of a more long-term reversal, in the underpinning discourse or philosophy of education circulated via official documentation. As in the nineteenth century, the state was to ensure 'all pupils have a (…) good education appropriate to their needs' (HM Government, 1985, p. 61). Whilst these needs are not explicated, the report's focus on the 'adult world [of work]' (ibid, p. 20) and assertion that 'schools should always

remember that preparation for working life is one of their principal functions (ibid, p. 15) is suggestive of these ‘needs’. Looking more comprehensively at this period, and the rampant vocationalism which characterised it and the ensuing decades (Callaghan, 1976), further strengthens this point that occupational readiness was the key aim of each individual student’s education – rather than aligning this to other more broader aims pertaining to citizenship[7] and equity (see HM Government, 1944). This indicates a returning, though in a less obvious and unashamedly class-ridden way, to the occupation-oriented education which was conceived of during the inception of English primary and secondary education (see Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868; Royal Commission of Secondary Education, 1895).

In addition to the vocationalism informing government education policy, a social analysis of the wider societal context forces our attention on Thatcherism and the growing grip of neoliberal cultural tendencies in government (Littler, 2016). Though this article has made the case via its analysis of textual data of the change of patterning of the representation of social class in government education documentation, the neoliberal period that begun with the rise of Thatcher marked an additional crucial turning point. Rather than ignoring class struggle, governments in the Thatcherite era aimed to confront any notion of the working-class consciousness rooted in communal labour, organisations such as trade unions, and the protections these delivered to those in exploited socio-economic positions (Hall & Jacques, 1983). Such behaviour stemmed from a disdain of the working-class and the conceptualisation of it, by the privileged elite constituting the government of the day, as a problem to be confronted. Therefore, the absence of social class in *Better Schools* appears consistent with government discourses of this era and the decades of the misrecognition (and in many ways denial) of social class as a pertinent explanatory factor to follow cannot be understood without reference to this wider social context.

The continuities discussed will be developed in the forthcoming section, in addition to a focus on the changing dynamics of social class educational inequality demonstrated via the government policy documents analysed.

Concluding discussion

What this article has aimed to demonstrate in its analysis of four government policy documents across the life course of English education is how despite the persistent significance of social class throughout the history of state education, the recognition of this via its inclusion in government policy documentation has changed. As displayed, in the nineteenth century, public discourse surrounding education and policy documentation themselves were laden with social class, or 'social distinctions' (Royal Commission of Secondary Education, 1895, p. 131) and related terminology. Talking in terms of social class was acceptable, as demonstrated by the creation of government commissions on secondary education according to social class. Underpinning this was a view that education, and subsequent occupational entry, 'correspond[ed] roughly to, but by no means exactly to the gradations of society' (Schools Inquiry Commission, 1868, p. 16). With the increasing opening up of the educational offering the appreciation of the *still* relevant explanatory factor of social class diminished. This is firstly found to be superficial in the case of in *Secondary Education* (Board of Education, 1938) where social class-based educational typologies were seemingly replaced by merit-based typologies, which were informed by unscientific ideas on the classed inheritance of 'intelligence'. Here, and in the case of *Better Schools*, though, we see social class as predominantly absent from official documentation. Social class came to be replaced with discourses informed by meritocratic ideas and able/less able binaries. This changing dynamic, from education designed according directly to social class to the *washing out* of social class altogether, can be argued to represent a similar process to what Reay (2001, p. 334) terms 'erasure' regarding working-class

educational experiences. Reay explains how for the working-class to be 'successful' in education they must escape their working-classness, leading to cultural and social isolation, though also providing opportunities (e.g. Ingram & Abrahams, 2016). What is argued in this article is that despite social class remaining important in shaping education, social class has been gradually *erased* from official government documentation. Though this transition to ignorance in government and policy circles of the strong significance of social class to education, the deeply embedded classed nature of English education is concealed and has not addressed, leading to the 'burning injustices' referred to above in the words of Theresa May (2017).

In the nineteenth century, education deeply embedded social class into the fabric of state education when it was introduced, but there was an overt recognition and exhibition of the classism informing such inequality. This then enabled for change, though insufficient, to take place; though this change was stimulated more by economic necessity than aspirations for egalitarian ideals (Green, 1990). Today, this overt understanding of how social class 'suffuses more or less everything we do' is no longer present (James, 2019, p. 233) and has instead been replaced with a rampant, neoliberal individualising discourse. This is self-reinforcing in its advocacy of meritocratic social institutions within a fundamentally class-ridden society. This overt understanding has disappeared and has been replaced today by a neoliberal individualising discourse which dispels of a range of social inequalities as explanatory factors for social position and trajectory (Littler, 2016). Where references are made to social class, such as in defining school success criteria by OFSTED and OFQUAL, this is often hidden and spoken of in terms of social mobility. This is not to say these debates and issues are not important. It is instead to assert that without recognising and confronting social class which is integral to such issues, change will be unlikely and constrained.

However, as this article has demonstrated, the genealogy of the social class inequality still found today to shape educational policy, experience, and space is deeply rooted in a historical process. This historical process at its inception began being based on social class and has not been effectively addressed. One consequence of this, apparent in the policy documents analysed, is the re-emergence of similar discourses without an appreciation of how social class relates to them. In discussing *Better Schools,* this article explained how discourses of vocationalism re-emerged during this period which bare some semblance to those present in the nineteenth century. However, the one clarification to add, is that while in the nineteenth century it was immediately apparent that the occupational relevance of education was understood in social class terms, this is not apparent in *Better Schools*. Whilst those designing the report may not subscribe to such ideas on the classed occupational preparation entry, this does not mean that social class did not, and indeed continues to, shape occupational aspirations and entry. Indeed, much literature in the sociology of education actively draws on Pierre Bourdieu's (1984; 1998) concept of habitus and the way such enduring dispositions structure what is and is not possible for the individual. So, in many ways the patterns of changing representations, or non-representation, of class in policy documentation demonstrated in the article can be understood as part of a wider paradoxical social process, whereby social class is increasingly prominent in people's lives, but simultaneously misrecognised (Bottero, 2004).Not only is the relevance not recognised on the *individual* level, but it is also not spoken of at the levels of *policy* and *structure* and this double ignorance likely causes dialectical reproduction of each. However, in understanding why it continues, especially today where class dynamics have transformed from those in nineteenth and twentieth century England (Savage, 2015), it is essential to root any future analysis in the contemporary neoliberal order shaping society on the individual, national and global level (Littler, 2016).

Thus, the changing dynamics of social class educational inequality have served to reinforce the historically embedded roots of English education in social class. Yet, the genealogy of today's social class inequality, largely ignored by those with the ability to confront such social problems, in now distant classist understandings is not immediately evident. It is only through rendering such historical roots as existent that the 'life story' of English education and its entrenchment in social class inequality can begin to be appreciated confronted (Tosh, 2002). This can be achieved in numerous ways, such as: the involvement of those historically misrepresented and underrepresented in texts, politics and in policy debate in the political and policy formation process; the honest recognition of the historical roots of contemporary inequality and the task that lay ahead; and the transformation of educational practice, from a more representative teaching workforce to diverse and inclusive learning materials and processes. However, as Basil Bernstein (1970) famously contended, schooling cannot compensate for wider society, so if social class educational inequality is to be effectively addressed, wider progressive and equitable change is necessary too.

In its tracing of contemporary social class educational inequality to the origins of state education in England, and the paradoxical increasing *erased* from official documentation on education reform of such inequality, this article has hoped to demonstrate how the 'hereditary curse' to which Tawney (1931, p. 142) refers can be better understood as an enduring, construed process which, at its core, is part of a pattern much broader: a socio-historical process imbued by social class. As Marx famously wrote, it is one thing to understand these processes in the world, it is yet another, more tremendous task, to change the world. However, it is only through understanding problems in all their complexity that equitable change can be achieved. This article has contributed to this struggle for comprehension through re-inserting history and the past into

contemporary debates around social class educational inequality. It is our collective failure to learn from this deeply structuring history which condemns us to reproduce it.

Notes

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[i] Whilst it is recognised that education *did* exist before this date in England, state engagement in education was very limited, and did not amount to a leading of education provision, before the *1870 Education Act*.

[ii]During the latter Great Britain only received prizes in 10 of 90 departments (Spens Report, 1938, p. 52). This led to growing unease among the elite and establishment in the country that educational reforms were necessary to reverse Great Britain's decline. Exploiting the 'untouched' minds of the working population by improving their technical skills and training was understood as a way that the nation's global position could be maintained.

[3] Specifically, the United States, Canada, France, Prussia, and Scotland.

[4] It is important to reflect here on the wording of this assertion. This is because its use of *different gradations of society* rather than explicitly the middle-class can be read as an indication of the underlying logic, which informed education reform in this period.

[5] Indeed, many policy texts and secondary accounts and summaries of these texts have helped inform this article's analytical position (e.g., Ball, 2006; Chitty, 2014).

[6] This can be usefully related to recent attempts by the UK government to 'play' different structural causes of inequality (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class) against each other, such as in Liz Truss's recent accusation that certain groups in Britain (e.g., white disadvantaged groups) have been sacrificed as a consequence of a focus on, what she coins, 'fashionable' minority issues (see Truss, 2020).

[7] Indeed, the following quote seems to affirm the economic orientation of government: 'the government believes that to assign a special place in the timetable to courses labelled "peace studies" unbalances the curriculum and oversimplifies the issues involved' (HM Government, 1985, p. 24).

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