

REVIEW: SCOTTISH EDUCATION IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Henry Cowper

Lindsay Paterson, **Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century**,
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, 256 pp.,pb, £16.99,
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Something of the current state of Scottish Education may be gleaned from the report of HM Inspectorate of Education and the Accounts Commission into the education function of the City of Edinburgh Council published in March 2003. It is hoped that all local authorities in Scotland will be inspected by 2005. Here is a sample of the findings on the capital city.

The City of Edinburgh Council is the second largest local authority in Scotland – Primary school rolls are currently falling; Secondary schools rolls have risen in recent years but are projected to fall by 2013.

Around 6% of the school population come from ethnic minorities, with significant communities of Pakistani, Chinese, Indian and Arabic origin. In 2001/2002 13% of primary aged pupils and 23% of secondary aged pupils attended independent schools, compared to 3% and 5% respectively, nationally.

The report goes on to show that Edinburgh is a city of contrasting wealth and prosperity going hand-in-hand with 15,000 children living in families dependent on income support. The percentage of children on the Child Protection register is twice the rate for Scotland as a whole. Surprisingly, the percentage of school leavers entering full time higher education was consistently below the national average.

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Review: Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century

Lindsay Paterson's **Scottish Education in the Twentieth Century** deals with some of the above topics, but this outstanding and meticulously researched book is essentially an overview of the history of 20th century Scottish Education dealing not just with schools but with the entire gamut of post compulsory education.

Paterson starts off by pointing to the enduring importance of the 1947 Advisory Council on Education in Scotland and the prescience it showed in dealing with those topics which would continue to emerge over the next 50 years.

This is a report which is essential reading for all those who have an interest in the changes which have taken place in education in the last fifty years. Paterson draws heavily on the work of R. D. Anderson whose recent books on Scottish Education have challenged many of the myths surrounding the subject. Hitherto, many overblown claims have been made about Scotland's education system. Paterson's book is a comprehensive account of how a small country like Scotland dealt with changes which inevitably took place in the latter half of the century.

However one interprets the concept of the 'Democratic Intellect' (made famous by George Davie in his 1961 book of that name), it is clear that Scotland has not been unique in reconciling democracy with the social necessity of selection. As Paterson states

This Scottish experience was both particular and universal. It was universal because it participated in much broader trajectories. Scots shared enthusiastically in the shift from education by ascription to education as a right – education according to class of birth, or gender, or religion, to education in the same terms for all. They shared in the growing belief that, with appropriate conditions, most people could learn far more than tradition had expected of them. Moreover, they developed the resulting sense that education could liberate people, even if that meant – to the disquiet of many on the political left – that people exercised their freedom by losing contact with some of the collective social experiences that had frustrated the educational opportunities of their parents and grandparents.

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As the author states, most of this was common to other countries, but Scots were particularly open to the extension of opportunity because they had an inherited sense that this was right.

The Scots were open to taking public, collective action because they acquired from their religious histories such a strong attachment to social liberalism and then social democracy that even voluntary provision was suspect. In addition, they found no difficulty in accepting the liberatory potential of collective reform because of their inherited belief in competitive individualism.

Paterson is both a statistician and a sociologist, and he puts both disciplines to good use. On higher education he is most percipient. He claims that there was a persistent belief that higher education ought to be broadly available. Thus, there was almost no public sense at all in Scotland that a mass system was dubious. However, the statistics reveal the differences between the pre-1992 universities and the so called 'new universities'. The decline of localism (Glasgow University is still an exception here) from the 1960s indicates that the older universities witness declining proportions of students from working class families. For example, in 1998, in the eight 'older' universities, only one fifth of entrants aged under 21 had fathers who were in manual occupations. Both St Andrews and Edinburgh continue to increase the number of students from independent schools south of the border.

Finally, the choice of cover seems most apposite. Joan Eardley's portrait of Port Glasgow Children in 1955 reveals a by-gone world just as Scotland's industrial decline was beginning to take hold. At the same time considerable changes were beginning to take place in Scottish education. Paterson charts these with the academic rigour one has come to expect of him. The bibliography indicates the extent of Paterson's reading. By any standards, this is a carefully researched book covering all aspects of Scottish education. It is without a doubt a major contribution to the history of Scottish education and essential reading for all who claim an interest in the subject. One can only hope that those who shape education policy in twenty-first-century Scotland pay attention to it.

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