

## **Social Policy**

### **THE 1906 AND 1907 EDUCATION ACTS**

#### **Introduction**

From 1906, after the Liberal Party won the General Election, there was increasing pressure for reform measures towards social justice. The 1906 Education Act was introduced for the Provision of Meals in school, and the 1907 Education Act for Administrative Provisions such as School Medical Inspection. The problem of child malnutrition was highlighted when youth were rejected from recruitment for the Boer War (1899-1902). The Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, 1904 recommended various reforms for children [Lund, 2002]<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Discussion**

The liberal government's reforms in relation to children were the first initiatives to tackle destitution and its effects on children. The 1906 Education Act for provision of meals and the 1907 Education Act for the provision of medical inspection in schools were followed by legislation strengthening the law protecting children from cruelty and neglect, and legislation "publicly emphasizing the social rights of the child" [Frost, 2005: 279]<sup>2</sup>.

#### *Provision of Meals*

The cost of providing meals for elementary school children who were otherwise unable to make use of the provision of education due to lack of food, was met by the Local Education Authorities. Those parents who could afford to pay the subsidized cost of the meal, were charged the nominal amount of one penny or a halfpenny [Wardle, 1977]<sup>3</sup>, while most did not pay by reason of their circumstances. Voluntary contributions helped the local authorities to meet the

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<sup>1</sup> *Understanding State Welfare*: p.70.

<sup>2</sup> *Child Welfare*: 279.

<sup>3</sup> *English popular education 1780-1970*: p.74.

costs of school feeding. “The state supply of school meals established an important beachhead for the subsequent development of welfare programmes” [Lund, 2002: 70]<sup>4</sup> such as those related to medical attention, educational scholarships and several humanitarian concerns.

### *School Medical Inspection*

The Education Act 1907 placed responsibility on local education authorities “to provide for the medical inspection of children on their admission to a public elementary school” [Lund, 2002: 71]<sup>5</sup>. Doctors and nurses went to schools to carry out the medical inspections free of cost. Though inspection was compulsory, any treatment required by the children had to be paid for by the parents, until the introduction of the Education Acts of 1912 and 1918 which made treatment also compulsory. The other areas covered by the 1907 Act was to allow local authorities to take charge of vocational advice to the students, and to provide play centres and other forms of recreation during holidays as well as academic classes during vacations.

Further, the 1907 Education (Administrative Provisions) Act established the scholarship and free place system for secondary education with the purpose of giving promising children from elementary schools the opportunity to go to secondary schools [Gillard, 2001]<sup>6</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has highlighted the significance of the Educational Acts of 1906 and 1907 with their emphasis on providing for children’s nutritional and health needs. From these earliest Liberal reforms emerged further legislation in rapid succession, supporting the care and development of children in England.

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<sup>4</sup> *Understanding State Welfare*: p.70.

<sup>5</sup> *Understanding State Welfare*: p.71.

<sup>6</sup> *Education in England*, <http://www.dg.dial.pipex.com/history/text03.shtml>

### **Bibliography**

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