THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENTIATION:
EDUCATION REFORM IN POSTWAR BRITAIN AND GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the structural evolution of the general systems of education in Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II and seeks to explain an important empirical puzzle, namely why Britain reformed its early postwar policy of placing students in separate secondary schools on the basis of perceived ability while Germany has retained the practice. It maintains that the variation observed in the case studies is largely explained by two factors: 1) the institutional framework of educational policymaking in both countries and 2) the timing of changes in dominant policy discourses. In Britain, new sociological and psychological conceptions concerning the nature of human ability led policymakers to rethink fundamentally the ideational foundation of differentiation in education, leading to political reforms in the mid-1960s that created a single “comprehensive” state secondary school model attended by nearly all students. In West Germany, by contrast, cultural federalism and structural legacies from the Nazi era served to retard the application of modern social science techniques to education. The result was a fatal delay in the introduction of reform initiatives to modernize the school system.
For Tucker, Taylor, and Vitti.
And for Flynn.
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Chapter I
Introduction: The Practices of Differentiation

All advanced industrialized societies differentiate their youth populations. The functioning of modern economies predicated on the division of labor within complex systems of production requires that states create mechanisms to separate new entrants to the workforce into different occupational categories. Such differentiation generally occurs in educational institutions, which – in addition to their pedagogical functions – serve as “sorting machines” (Kerckhoff, 1995: 325) in societies that channel young people towards different locations in the labor market on the basis of their educational attainment. How states’ education systems carry out this differentiation plays a key role in distinguishing the skill regimes that characterize different varieties of capitalist political economies (Hall and Soskice, 2001), as well as helping to determine a range of social and economic conditions and educational outcomes, including the degree of class division (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 2002), the relative academic performance of a country’s students (Dobbelsteent, et al, 2002), the percentage of the population obtaining tertiary education (Shavit and Müller, 1998), and the equality of educational and occupational opportunities available to the young people (Horn, 2009), including particular societal subgroups such as women (Pekkarinen, 2005) and migrants (Worbs, 2003; Entorf and Lauk, 2006; Entorf and Tatsi, 2009).

Countries demonstrate significant variation in how this “sorting” takes place, but most fall into one of two general types, distinguished primarily by the relative age of students at the time of their differentiation. In countries in which differentiation – also known as tracking – occurs early, students are selected on the basis of their perceived ability by teachers, parents,
and/or standardized test performance for placement in different academic groups (often located in completely separate schools) in a vertically-structured and stratified system of secondary education after the completion of elementary school around the age of ten or eleven. Within these systems, a student’s future education, occupation, and social standing will depend largely on the results of the initial selection, since specific academic and career pathways are tightly linked to particular secondary school tracks and the transfer to a higher-status pathway after early differentiation is difficult. In countries in which differentiation occurs later, by contrast, secondary education systems are more horizontally-structured, with most students attending a common “comprehensive” school at least through the lower secondary level (until about age sixteen) at which point students are differentiated into various upper and post-secondary educational tracks on the basis of individual choice, academic achievement, and exam performance.

This dissertation seeks to account for the variation in differentiation observed in Great Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), two advanced industrialized countries that are often cited as reflecting sharply contrasting approaches to the practice (Hanushek and Wössmann, 2005; Entorf and Tatsi, 2009). In doing so, the study highlights a central puzzle of the comparative economic and social development of both countries in the postwar era. The general education systems constituted in Britain and the FRG immediately after the Second World War were structurally quite similar (Dustmann, 2004: 214). Both were constructed along vertically differentiated lines with students sorted into separate secondary or upper elementary schools that varied in terms of curricula, length of study, prestige, and advancement possibilities after a period of common study in the elementary stage. In both countries, support for these systems existed across the political spectrum in the early postwar
years, but sharp conflicts over their perceived inadequacies would emerge during the 1960s as the countries began to face a range of common material pressures for change, including a spike in the youth population, a growing middle class, heightened global economic competition, technological development, and shifting patterns of production. During this period, center-left governments in West Germany and Britain would seek to reform the structure of their general education systems, proposing in both instances to eliminate early differentiation practices and collapse the different ability-based school types present in the vertical system into a single comprehensive school that would be attended by most students regardless of perceived ability. Of the two, however, only the British would achieve significant horizontal structural reform, largely eliminating early selection and its “tripartite” secondary school system by the 1970s. Germany would not only retain its vertically-differentiated structure through this period but also expand it to the new Länder of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) following reunification in 1990. What explains why countries that faced largely similar pressures for reform to such broadly similar institutions experienced such divergent outcomes?

The conflicts that shaped these institutions are no mere relics of history. The period associated with horizontal school reform would end in both countries around the mid-1970s, a time that by most accounts marked the end of the “Golden Age” of European capitalism and the beginning of the long adjustment of West European countries to significantly different conditions, characterized by slower economic growth, the end to full employment, and the

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1 The persistence of vertical differentiation in the general education system of the Federal Republic renders the country an outlier among Western European nations, many of which undertook significant horizontal reforms around the same time as Britain. Besides the FRG, only Austria has retained the practice of differentiating students at age ten into separate ability-groups for purposes of secondary school placement. In Central Europe, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic also separate students around age eleven on the basis of perceived ability (See Horn, 2009: Appendix I).
combined processes of de-industrialization, globalization, European integration, and technological change. By setting the institutional and political boundaries of future debates on the structure of schooling, the legacies of the reform movements examined in this dissertation have shaped the particular adjustment paths followed by Britain and Germany over the past three decades in response to these shifting conditions.

These legacies also continue to inform education debates in both countries, where issues related to selection and differentiation remain at the center of policy discussions. In Britain, concerns remain over the capacity of comprehensive schools to raise academic standards and close the “skills gap” between the UK and other countries that is viewed by many as crucial for improving the country’s economic competitiveness. The ongoing nature of this debate was captured by a 2005 BBC report, which stated “as the new school year begins, the decades-old debate persists. Has the comprehensive idea - admitting a large group of secondary school pupils to a single school, without selecting by ability - worked?” (BBC News, 1 September 2005). In the face of such questions, governments under both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have controversially sought to inject elements of early differentiation into the structure of general education in recent years, most notably by expanding the number of so-called “specialist schools,” which are permitted to accept a portion of their students on the basis of ability, within the state education system. In the Federal Republic, the country’s three-tiered secondary structure has come under renewed attack over the past decade in light of the shockingly poor performance of German students on first Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) examination administered by the OECD in 2000, where the country placed 21st out of 27 OECD members in an assessment of student reading skills (OECD, 2001). The same study found the connection between social background and school
performance in Germany to be the highest in any industrialized country, accelerating calls from critics, including the United Nations chief inspector for education, for the system to be dismantled (Die Welt, 69/2007: 3). Such developments have led to new policy proposals in the FRG, including a recent effort by the CDU/Green coalition in Hamburg to reduce the number of schools in the city’s secondary system and limit the differences between those remaining that has generated a heated debate among citizens and pitted the Christian Democrats against many of their own middle class constituents (The Economist, 12 December 2009).

Beyond their substantive implications for British and German politics and policy, the historical cases analyzed in this study also provide insights into theoretical issues related to institutional continuity and change. By examining the evolution of the two countries’ differentiation practices over time, this study situates itself squarely in the tradition of historical institutionalism (HI), one of the dominant variants within the “new institutional” approach to the study of politics (see March and Olsen, 1984; Hall and Taylor, 1996; Peters, 2005). While the dissertation utilizes the methods and analytical tools of historical institutionalism – notably historical process-tracing, path dependency and critical junctures – it argues that the materialist conceptions of continuity and change common in the HI approach cannot fully explain the postwar development of differentiation practices in British and German education. It maintains instead that accounting for the variation in the historical cases requires an understanding of the different discursive environments in which British and German actors were located during the crucial years of reform in the 1960s and 70s and specifically the relationship between shifts in the dominant policy discourses and political opportunities that shaped the possibilities for policy reform and institutional change. In
Britain, new sociological and psychological conceptions of the nature of human ability and the relationship between ability and educational structure that emerged in the 1950s led policymakers to rethink fundamentally the ideational foundation of early differentiation in education, helping to generate reforms in the 1950s and 1960s that set in motion the near complete transformation from a vertical to a horizontal secondary system. In the FRG, by contrast, cultural federalism and structural legacies from the Nazi era served to retard the application of modern social science techniques to education and to insulate policy actors from the new ideas developing elsewhere (including in Britain). The result was a “frozen discourse” within West German educational policymaking circles, which served crucially to delay the introduction of reform initiatives to modernize the school system. Ideas that challenged the old view would eventually emerge in the FRG, but by the time actors sought to restructure differentiation practices to reflect the new discourse, the broader political context had radically altered and forced shut the window of political opportunity for reform. The ultimate failure of the structural changes proposed during this period would serve to re-embed early differentiation in general education in the FRG and ensure its persistence into the current unified German era.

Sources

The dissertation draws on a considerable range of historical and contemporary source material, including nearly one hundred primary sources. The primary material falls into four basic categories. First are the official government sources such as legislation, records of parliamentary proceedings, reports of government-commissioned advisory bodies, and the official statements of state ministries and officials. The electoral programs, policy statements,
and founding charters of German and British political parties encompass the second category, while the third category consists of media accounts from magazines and newspapers. The final category includes the pronouncements of key actors themselves through their published writings, interview statements, and speeches. The dissertation also utilizes a rich English and German-language secondary literature from an array of academic perspectives, including sociology, history, economics, psychology, and pedagogy, as well as political science.

**Plan of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is organized as follows. The next chapter frames the larger empirical and theoretical issues the historical case studies address. It begins by providing an overview of the variation in the structure of the contemporary British and German general education systems, analyzing how the former institutionally reflects the practices of late differentiation while the latter is configured around early selection and placement. This section also includes an institutional sketch of the selective British tripartite system that was established after the Second World War but was reformed in the 1960s and 70s to create the current horizontal system. The chapter then reviews recent literature on the social, economic, and academic impact of differentiation practices in general education and examines how such practices have fit into larger conceptions of national political economic variation, most notably within the influential *Varieties of Capitalism* framework. Following this, the chapter seeks to situate the historical study in a larger set of theoretical debates in political science on processes of institutional continuity and change. This section examines the core concepts in historical institutionalism and outlines some of the recent criticisms leveled against HI by scholars within the emerging “discursive institutionalist” approach in comparative politics. Finally,
the chapter offers the primary explanatory hypothesis of the dissertation and provides an overview of some of the core theoretical findings of the study.

Chapters three through five contain the first historical case study, which focuses on changes in the structure of the general education system in Britain between 1944 and 1979. Chapter three examines the origins and implementation of the vertical tripartite system of education established by the Education Act 1944. It argues that the creation of system was shaped by a dominant interwar discourse of fixed intelligence associated with a set of prominent academics and researchers working primarily in the field of educational psychology and provides evidence demonstrating how the beliefs of this discourse and the vertical education system it promoted created a powerful coalition of policy actors, which included, most notably, the British Labour Party. The chapter also examines the impact of this discourse within Labour as it implemented the tripartite system during the governments of Clement Attlee between 1945 and 1951.

Chapter four analyzes the causes and impact of a shift in the dominant education policy discourse that occurred in Britain in the 1950s. It documents how a new generation of academics primary in the field of education sociology challenged the scientific basis of the psychologists’ assumptions regarding the fixed nature of intelligence and demonstrated through empirical studies of students and schools that the tripartite system was failing to achieve its objective of leveling access to educational opportunities for young Britons of all social classes. Such views would achieve widespread acceptance through a series of government advisory reports issued in the 1950s and early 1960s. The chapter then traces how this shift in policy discourses coupled with changing views of equality and opportunity on the Left led to a splintering of the coalition the interwar era and the emergence of a new
alliance led by a now-reoriented Labour Party that would call for and end to early selection, the dismantling of the tripartite system, and its replacement with a horizontal system comprised of mixed-ability comprehensive schools.

Chapter five completes the British case study by tracing the institutional effects of the discursive shift. It first examines how by the mid-1960s the central government under Labour would set into motion a process of institutional transformation in the state secondary education whereby the tripartite system would be largely replaced by a system of comprehensive schools in the 1970s, despite a political backlash during that decade against perceived “progressive” thinking in education. It then reorients the focus to examine the effects of shift on reforms in the higher education sector carried out during the same period, outlining how the same Labour government that sought to eliminate early selection in the secondary education sector would retain the practice for older students, maintaining competitive admissions within an expanded – but still clearly differentiated – system of independent and state universities.

Chapters six through eight examine the evolution of West German general education system during the same period. Chapter six first provides an historical overview of the “traditional” German system from its creation in the early 19th century to its near dismantling during the Nazi era. It then turns to a detailed examination of how a discourse coalition comprised of academics, center-right politicians, churches, secondary school teachers, and parents that shared many of the British interwar coalition’s beliefs about the biological basis of intelligence helped bring about the reconstruction of the traditional system – over American objections – in the Western areas of occupation in the years immediately following the country’s defeat in World War II. The chapter then analyzes the relationship between the
reconstitution of the traditional system during the occupation years and the formal
establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949, outlining how the key provisions of cultural
federalism and the principle of parental choice enshrined in the West German Basic Law
would serve to embed early selection and vertical differentiation within the institutional fabric
of the new country.

Chapter seven examines the West German system during the 1950s and early 60s,
outlining how general support for early selection and vertical differentiation continued during
this period just as similar arrangements were being called into question in Britain and other
Western European countries. As the chapter explains, the continuity in practices was rooted a
“freezing” of the German variant of the fixed-ability discourse that had so influenced the
reconstruction of the traditional system after the war. Driven by an older generation of
academics trained in the 1920s, the fixed-ability view would persist in the first decades of the
new Federal Republic for a host of reasons related to the dynamics of party competition, the
institutional position of key political actors, and the reconstruction of educational sociology
and psychology as disciplines after World War II. The effect was a crucial insulating of
policy discussions from the ideational trends present in other countries and a delay in the
development of an endogenous challenger discourse. As a consequence, while other countries
(including Britain) had by the early 1960s begun considering and initiating significant
structural reforms in general education, the beliefs of key West German policymakers and
educationalists continued to reflect the view that separate schools for students of different
ability corresponded to the “natural” conditions in the population and was the most
appropriate organizational framework.
A challenge to the fixed-ability discourse would, as chapter eight examines, eventually come to the FRG in the mid-1960s. Driven by new thinking about the relationship between education and economics and research conducted largely by a younger generation of social scientists that demonstrated the social biases of the traditional system, this new discourse would help elevate education policy to the near the top of the political agenda and consideration of new arrangements, including the comprehensive Gesamtschule, that had been considered radical – if not subversive – just a decade earlier. Under the coalition of Social and Free Democrats led by Chancellor Willy Brandt, the federal government would introduce proposals for significant horizontal change in general education in the early 1970s. But as the chapter outlines these would largely fail as policy actors and public influenced by student movement of the late 1960s and a renewed traditionalism in education would turn against reform ideas, ensuring the persistence of the vertical system.

The dissertation concludes with an overview of policy developments in German and British general education since the 1970s and review of its major empirical and theoretical findings.
Chapter II:
Institutional Variation in Education and Theories of Continuity and Change

Introduction

The current chapter has three primary objectives. The first is to document in detail the variation observed in the dependent variable of the study, namely the differentiation practices in British and German systems of general education. While the structure of German general education has remained largely unchanged since the system was reconstituted following the Second World War, secondary schooling in Britain was institutionally reconfigured in the 1960s and 70s largely to eliminate its three-tiered framework and end the early differentiation practices associated with it. The first section therefore also includes a sketch of the pre-reform British system. The second objective is to examine how differentiation practices and the structure of general education matter for societies. Reviewing some of the findings in sociological and comparative political science literature, the second section of this chapter highlights the effects of differentiation on a range of outcomes, including academic performance, social equality, and the broader skills regimes upon which countries’ systems of economic production rely. The final section positions the study and its findings within a larger set of theoretical debates and discussions in comparative politics and political economy. Specifically, it analyzes some of the dominant theoretical conceptions of continuity and change in institutional arrangements in advanced industrialized democracies and seeks to outline a framework based on the empirical findings of the dissertation that integrates concepts associated with hegemonic policy discourses and discourse coalitions with more “traditional” approaches within historical institutional studies of politics.
Outlining Variation: The Structure of German and British General Education Systems

The British and German systems of general education demonstrate significant variation in their organizations, though this was not the case for much the second-half of the 20th century. The structure of the German system has remained largely unchanged since it first emerged in the early 19th century and continues to be characterized by the practices of early selection and placement into different secondary schools. On the basis of teacher recommendations and parental decisions, students are generally sorted into one of the three different types of schools around age ten following four years of common study in primary-level Grundschule. While all three of the secondary schools are part of the same general system, they exist largely independent of one another, with each differing in relative level of academic and social prestige and each having its own specific courses of study, administration, faculty, and alignments of political and economic interests. This separation among schools has been reinforced by the general absence of permeability (Durchlässigkeit) or the ability to change school type after the initial selection at age ten. Only 10 percent of 9th

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2 An additional feature of the traditional German school system concerns the relative brevity of the average school day. Most German schools meet only in the mornings, with classes often ending for the day before noon and no provision made for school lunches or extracurricular activities (Hahn, 1998: 115). Under this system, parents are expected to monitor their children’s completion of their homework in the afternoons. Critics maintain that this arrangement traditionally has served to disadvantage students from families in which both parents worked or were uneducated, limiting the possibilities for intergenerational academic advancement under the system and elevating the importance of parental class and wealth for individual students’ educational achievement. Spurred by such concerns and buoyed by a 2003 capital spending agreement reached by federal and Land authorities, communities have experimented increasingly in recent years with Ganztagsschulen (all day schools) in which students remain in classes through mid-afternoon (Deutsche Welle, 13 March 2007).

3 There are some exceptions to this, most notably in those local systems where the “orientation stage” (Orientierungsstufe) or “support stage” (Förderstufe) is present. In these systems, students are observed and assessed for two additional years beyond the Grundschule to ensure that the accuracy of their secondary school placement. In most cases, this stage is used in conjunction with the three-tiered system and students are still separated into different schools after 4th grade. In some Länder, however, most notably Hesse, the stage consists of mixed-ability classes, serving essentially as a fifth and sixth year of common schooling (Mühlenweg, 2007; KMK, 2009). First proposed in the late 1950s, this practice has been the subject of significant political and pedagogical debates for much of its history (see Chapter VII).
grade students in the 2004/2005 school year were attending different schools than those in which they had been placed in 5th grade in 2000/2001; of those that did switch, only about 20 percent constituted “upward” transfers from a lower to higher prestige school, while roughly 60 percent transferred “downward” to a lower-status type (Carey, 2008: 26).4

The basic educational school type in the German system is the Hauptschule.5 In this school, attended by a significant majority of young Germans until the 1970s, the curriculum is geared towards instruction in reading, writing, and math skills. Upon completion around age fifteen, students receive an elementary school-leaving certificate (Hauptschulabschluss), which serves as the minimum qualification needed to enter the dual system of vocational training but does not itself provide a qualification for entry into a specific career.

Hauptschule graduates have historically moved into manual occupations in the industrial or craft sectors of the economy upon completing the three years of in-firm apprentice training and part-time classroom study required under the dual system (Nixdorf, 1970; Ertl and Phillips, 2000).

The middle school type is the Realschule (or Mittelschule), an intermediate school that provides a course of study comprised of technical and practical subjects such as science, engineering, economics, and modern foreign languages. Students completing the Realschule (usually around age sixteen) receive the Realschulabschluss,6 a certificate that provides access to upper secondary education in a full time vocational school (Berufsfachschulen) or an upper technical school (Fachoberschule), as well as entry into the dual system. Students who pass

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4 The remaining 20 percent consisted of transfers unclassifiable as either up or down.
5 Prior to the extension of mandatory general education in 1964, this school type was generally referred to as the Volksschule. The Hauptschule usually comprises grades five through nine, though there is significant variation among Länder, depending the duration of the common Grundschule, the presence or absence of a two-year, mixed-ability orientation level, and whether the Land has adopted a tenth year of mandatory schooling (Führ, 1997: 109).
6 Also known as the Mittlere Reife.
special qualifying exams following their upper secondary studies can obtain the 
Fachhochschulreife, a qualification for admission to a polytechnic or college of advanced technology (Fachhochschulen).

Young people following this intermediate path have traditionally obtained mid-level management and supervisory positions in the state bureaucracy or service sector of the economy, often within technical or administrative departments. Although Realschulen have existed in Germany since the 18th century and became a favored educational destination for children of the country’s emerging capitalist classes in the 19th century, it was not until the post-World War II era that it would come to assume a significant percentage of the total student population (Kuhlmann, 1970: 145; Ertl and Phillips, 2000: 399).

The most prestigious of the secondary schools school types is the Gymnasium, which in most instances provides a nine-year classical curriculum centered on traditional liberal subjects such as history and culture as well as language training in Greek and Latin. Successful completion of the Abitur exams administered at the end of the Gymnasium result in the granting of the Allgemeine Hochschulreife, a secondary school leaving certificate required in most cases for admission to a German university. With a university degree needed for entry into the leading professional occupations, such as medicine or law, and higher civil service positions within the German state administration, the Gymnasium has served as a gateway to advanced social status, greater economic wealth, and political power for much of modern German history.

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7 While the Abitur grants its holders admissions to German universities, it does not guarantee access to all fields of study. Under the provisions of the numerus clausus system as it developed in the 1960s and 70s, university departments could limit the number of Abiturienten it would admit for specific majors (often medicine or law), accepting only a select number of students based on a specific set of admissions criteria (see Katzenstein, 1987).
8 The primary exceptions to this have been the Nazi period and the era of German Democratic Republic in East Germany between 1949 and 1990. See Chapter VI.
Access to specific school leaving qualifications has in recent years become increasingly de-linked from specific school types, and there are greater possibilities for students initially selected for the Hauptschule or Realschule to gain access to higher education via non-traditional pathways than in past decades. In 2006, over 1/3rd of all students obtaining a higher education entrance qualification were graduates of vocational schools rather than the Gymnasium (Carey, 2008: 26).

German schooling has witnessed changes to its traditional structure in recent decades. The most significant of these has involved the introduction of non-selective schools, or Gesamtschulen, in the 1960s, which offered mixed-ability classes and provided opportunities for all students to obtain higher qualifications. Although state authorities would officially recognize these schools as an alternative to the three-tiered vertical system, the unwillingness of several large Länder, notably Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, to adopt the Gesamtschule model on even a small scale has kept the total percentage of young Germans attending such schools to below 10 percent of the total secondary student population. Even in those areas where it is most common, the Gesamtschule has been viewed as experimental for much of its history (Ertl and Phillips, 2000: 395-396). The overwhelming majority of German students continue to attend one of the three traditional school types. In 2006-2007 school year, 82 percent of Germany’s 4.8 million secondary school students were enrolled in a Hauptschule, Realschule, or Gymnasium, an increase of 7 percent over figures in 2000 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2007).

Although experiencing significant growth in recent years,9 the independent school sector in Germany has traditionally played a less significant role in the overall education system than

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9 Between 1992 and 2008, the total number of independent schools increased by 55 percent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009: 15, 17).
in other countries. Roughly 7 percent of German students attended an independent school in 2008 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009: 17). Though comparable to attendance rates in the better-known independent system in Britain, this figure masks significant differences. First the structure of private schooling in Germany largely replicates the vertical-organization of the state system. In 2008, nearly 40 percent of all students attending a private school in the FRG were enrolled in a Gymnasium, while an additional 17 percent studied in a Realschule (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009: 18). Second, the historical absence of a hierarchy of prestige among post-secondary institutions in Germany\(^{10}\) has largely eliminated one of the traditional advantages of private school attendance, namely privileged access to elite higher education institutions. Since successful Abiturienten have been technically eligible to study in any of the traditional universities in the FRG, there could be no German equivalent to the link in England between elite independent schools such as Eton and Harrow and the Oxbridge universities. Finally, fees for German private schools are relatively low compared to their English (and American) equivalents. With some 90 percent of their operating costs publicly subsidized and the system subject to government control and standards, the term “private” is somewhat of a misnomer (Hahn, 1998: 115).

As in other Western countries, the number of young people studying in higher education in the Federal Republic has increased significantly since the 1960s. In the early 1970s, some 510,000 students studied in higher education in Germany, but by 2003 the number had increased four-fold to over 2 million (Welsh, 2004: 366). Despite this rise, tertiary attainment levels remain comparatively low in the FRG. In 2007, the percentage of

\(^{10}\) The recent “Excellence Initiative” (Exzellenzinitiative) launched by the federal and state governments in 2005 to create “elite” universities in the FRG by encouraging institutions to promote research has challenged the long-standing equality of prestige among German higher education institutions, though it is unclear what its effects – if any – will be on patterns of undergraduate admissions (for an overview see Stuchtey, 2007).
German students graduating from a tertiary program corresponding to a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree under the Bologna system of academic degrees within the European Higher Education Area stood at 23.4 percent, close to the bottom of OECD member states and well below the average of 38.7 percent (Carey, 2009: Table A3.1).

In most other comparable countries, education expansion has been matched by change in the structure of secondary education. By “comprehensivizing” formerly selective systems, countries aimed to expand the higher educational opportunities for students. While expansion has clearly occurred in Germany, it has done so within the framework of a traditional structure that was designed specifically to promote a small elite to the highest levels of education and occupation. Explaining how this seemingly contradictory outcome has occurred is a key objective of this dissertation.

*The General Education System of the United Kingdom*

The administration of the education system in Britain is distributed across national, regional, and local authorities. In England, by far the largest of the four primary constitutive regions in the United Kingdom, responsibility is divided between the Department of Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF), which oversees planning and the monitoring of schools, and the recently (2009) created Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (BIS), which administers further and higher education. As a “devolved” policy sector in the UK, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland each maintain administrative departments to oversee their respective educational systems. Governance at the local level has also traditionally played an important role in education, with local authorities responsible for many aspects of school organization, budgeting, and administration.
While the structure of general education has remained largely the same in the Federal Republic since the country’s creation in 1949, in Britain the postwar era has been marked by the presence of two different organizational structures. The first of these was the so-called “tripartite system,” established by the Education Act 1944. Distinctly vertical in its organization, the secondary modern, technical, and grammar schools that existed under the tripartite framework roughly approximated the three types in the traditional German system, with each school distinguished by its curriculum, prestige, and the access to future educational and occupational opportunities it afforded its graduates. While the organization of the tripartite system resembled the structure of Germany’s secondary schools, the process by which students were selected for placement in the separate school types was different. Instead of taking place primarily on the basis of parental wishes and primary school teacher recommendations, selection under tripartism was based largely on a student’s performance on a special ability and intelligence examination given around age eleven, commonly known as the “11-plus.”

Grammar schools were the most prestigious of the three types in the system, designed only for students of the highest ability and offering an academic curriculum that like the course of study in the German Gymnasium emphasized literature, classical languages, and higher mathematics. Until the 1960s, only grammar school students were eligible to sit for General Certificate Examinations (GCE)\(^\text{11}\) generally required for university admissions. The secondary technical school served as the middle school in the system. Like the German Realschule it provided young people with mechanical, engineering, and scientific skills for careers in industry and commerce. The final and least prestigious school type under the tripartite system was the secondary modern, which was designed for those students who could

\(^{11}\) After 1951 GCEs were split into the Ordinary (O) and Advanced (A) levels.
demonstrate neither academic nor technical aptitude. Modern students, like their counterparts in the *Hauptschule*, received only a basic education and received no qualification at all until the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examinations became available in the mid-1960s as a (lower status) alternative to GCE exams taken by grammar school students.\(^\text{12}\)

As Chapter III examines, the tripartite system underwent significant changes in the 1960s and by the 1970s the separate schools and 11-plus exams had largely disappeared in England, Scotland and Wales.\(^\text{13}\) Although selective grammar schools continue to operate in some areas, over 85 percent of all students now complete the final five years of compulsory education in comprehensive secondary schools that accept all pupils regardless of ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Comprehensive</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Secondary Modern</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970/71</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001/2002</td>
<td>85.8%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Office for National Statistics, 2003: Table 3.3

\(^{12}\) The two-tiered system of lower secondary qualifications would end in 1988, when the common General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) replaced the CSE and O-levels.

\(^{13}\) Not so for Northern Ireland, where plans for eliminating tripartism were proposed in the early 1970s but were put on hold following the restoration of direct rule from London in 1972 and the suspension of the Northern Irish parliament in 1973 carried out in response to the increased sectarian violence in the region. As a result, the system continued to operate into the 1980s as it had in the rest of the country in the 1950s, with students selected for placement in different schools on the basis of their performance on the 11-plus exam (Gallagher, 1989). In 1989 a new policy directed grammar schools to accept as many students at facilities could accommodate, resulting in a 15 percent increase in attendance rates over the next decade (Maurin and McNally, 2007). As Education Minister in the new Northern Irish coalition government formed following the 1998 Good Friday agreement, Martin McGuinness called for the abolishment of early selection in 2002 and the final round of 11-plus exams was scheduled for 2009.
In England and Wales, where some 88 percent of all students in the UK reside, compulsory education begins at age five and continues through age sixteen. With the introduction of the National Curriculum in the Education Act 1988, general education was divided into four “Key Stages,” with the first two stages covering the period of primary school through age eleven and Stages 3 and 4 encompassing secondary education. Towards the end of Key Stage 4, students prepare for examinations to obtain the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). GCSE exams are subject-based and students generally take ten separate exams in core academic areas such as English, math, science, and modern or classical languages, or in vocational subjects, including applied business, engineering, manufacturing, and applied science.

In the current system, differentiation occurs following the completion of the GCSE around age sixteen. Young people have a range of options available to them at that time. For students intending to study at a university, the most common pathway involves an additional two years of upper secondary study in the “sixth form,” which may be completed in their secondary school or at a special sixth-form college. Admission criteria for entry into the sixth-form are not standardized and schools can set their own requirements. In the sixth-form students prepare for the General Certificate of Education Advanced-level examinations (A-levels), which like the GCSE exams are offered on a subject-by-subject basis. A-level certification is the most common pathway to higher education admission and in 2007 some 57.7 percent of the British adult population aged 25-29 had achieved at least six A-level

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14 Of the roughly 9.7 million pupils and students in the UK, some 8.5 million are in England and Wales, 830,000 in Scotland, and 350,000 in Northern Ireland (British Council USA, 2009).
15 The Scottish equivalent of the GCSE is the Standard Grade.
16 The term “sixth form” is carried over from an earlier period in which individual years within British secondary education were referred to as “forms.” Under this system, the sixth form generally represented the final year. The designation of schools years as “forms” continues to be used by some independent schools.
passes or their equivalents (DIUS, 2008, Table 1). Students who choose not to enter the sixth-form can enter the job market at age sixteen or obtain vocational skills in a further education college, government-training scheme, or apprenticeship. Compared to countries that have well-established dual systems of training, such as Germany, vocational education and the in-firm apprentice system in particular have been regarded as underdeveloped in Britain (Finegold and Soskice, 1988; House of Lords, 2007).

Although the private school sector in Britain is roughly equivalent in relative size to Germany’s, it has historically placed a much more important role, with its graduates holding vastly disproportionate access to elite institutions in the country’s differentiated higher education sector and positions of political and economic power. A 2006 report found 48 percent of the undergraduate British-educated student population at Cambridge attended state schools compared to 38 percent from the much smaller private sector. Oxford reported an even more disproportionate ratio of 47 percent-to-43 percent state vs. private school graduates (Sunday Times, 17 December 2006). A 2009 study anticipated that roughly one in three Members of Parliament in the House of Commons elected in 2010 would be private school graduates, including over 50 percent of all Conservative Party MPs (Telegraph, 06 Jul 2009). The role of private schools in cultivating British (and especially English) elite made them a highly contentious political issue in postwar era. As the historical case outlined in this dissertation demonstrates they would be a major factor in shaping the new Tripartite system that emerged after the Second World War and help justify initial Labour Party support for early differentiation practices.

**Why Differentiation Matters: The Effects of Differentiation Practices in Advanced Political Economics**
Recent studies examining the relationship between and among the structure of general education, students’ academic performance, and social and economic arrangements and outcomes have noted the importance of countries’ differentiation practices. Much of this literature has been critical of early tracking, highlighting in particular the role of vertical differentiation in exacerbating inequalities between different groups. In Betts and Shkolnik (2000) study, the authors found that students’ performance was dependent not only on their initiative and aptitudes, but the average ability of the entire class; as such those students who were placed with like-ability peers in lower status schools within vertically differentiated systems tended to be disadvantaged by the practice of early tracking. Hanushek and Wössmann (2005) found in their study of 26 OECD countries that early selection not only led consistently to greater inequality in student achievement, but also was associated with reduced overall academic performance.

Studies have also highlighted how the structure of general education can influence the social mobility of students. While parents’ income and educational attainment are related to those of their children in countries with both vertical and horizontal educational structures (see Feinstein and Symons, 1999 and Emrisch and Francesconi, 2001 for the UK), this relationship appears to be enhanced in countries where early tracking is prevalent and parents’ influence in selection is stronger. Dustmann (2004) found that school placement decisions in the German secondary system were heavily influenced by the socio-economic and educational background of students’ parents and that early differentiation helped to generate significant wage differences between the children of parents who attended a more prestigious secondary school and those who attended a lower status school. More generally, Marks (2005) analysis
of the data from the 2000 OECD PISA study found that the effects of class background on academic performance were enhanced by the presence of more school tracks in an education system.

The effects of school organization on the equality of outcomes for migrant populations and young women have also been a focus for analysts. Also using data from the PISA exams, Entorf and Lauk (2008) examined how differentiation practices in secondary education impacted the school performance of migrant students, finding that selective school systems magnified the educational inequality between students with migrant parents from a low socio-economic background and children from wealthier families. In a study of boys and girls in the Finnish school system, Pekkarinen (2005) demonstrated that girls were more likely to enter the academic track after the education system switched from early (age ten) to late differentiation (age sixteen) following structural reforms in the 1970s and that this change contributed to a closing in the wage differential between women and men observed since then.

Not all studies have been critical of early differentiation, however. Dobbelsteen, et al (2002) found that early tracking could improve the performance of higher ability students. And Shavit and Müller (1998), though acknowledging that tracking lowers the overall equality of educational opportunity, argue that early differentiation could actually be beneficial to students in lower prestige schools compared to their academically less-inclined counterparts in horizontally-structured systems by increasing the chances that students would later obtain marketable qualifications in vocational education and reducing the likelihood that they fall into the unskilled working class.17

17 A similar claim would be made from a Varieties of Capitalism perspective by Estevez-Abe, et al (2001) in their study of the relationship between social policy and skill regimes in the (see below).
Differentiation has also figured prominently in distinguishing patterns in how country’s structure young people’s transition from education to work. The concept of youth transition has been widely developed in the field of youth sociology over the past thirty years (see Müller and Gangl, 2003). While different analyses and authors have emphasized different dimensions of transitions, the concept generally reflects the life phase involving the shift from economic, emotional, and residential dependence associated with late-adolescence (or youth) to one of independence and the assumption of the social and financial responsibilities of adulthood (Corijn and Klijzing, 2001). From an institutional standpoint, one can conceive of youth transitions encompassing the pathways that cover the period from (post-primary) education to career selection and stable employment.¹⁸

The role played by differentiation practices in structuring education to work transitions in advanced democracies was influentially articulated by Allmendinger (1989; see also Kerckhoff, 2000 and Shavit and Müller, 2000). In her analysis of the FRG, Norway, and the United States, Allmendinger found that the greater the level of early differentiation, or “stratification” in a country’s secondary education system, the “tighter” the relationship between educational attainment and occupation. In such systems, the school-leaving certificates that students obtain in the differentiated tracks correspond with specific clusters of occupations: employers can thus rely on the selective process to channel and sift young people into appropriate occupational categories, limiting the amount of individual screening that firms themselves must carry out to bring on new employees and reducing the costs associated with developing their own selection processes. For first time workers with

¹⁸ The transitions period was once clearly associated with a specific age range (roughly the mid teens to the early twenties), but observers have noted that the above discussed de-standardization of youth transitions that has occurred over the past few decades has served to extend significantly the period associated with transitions deep into the twenties and even beyond (Walther, 2006).
qualifications entering the labor market, this has the advantage of ensuring that their first jobs will actually require them to use the specific skills they obtained during education. At the same time, however, Allmendinger found that stratification can dramatically limit the range of jobs available to school-leavers in a given ability category and reduce opportunities for career transfers later in life. In her view, stratified systems exert a tremendously powerful influence on a country’s social arrangements, serving “to regulate entry into the class and status system on almost all levels” (1989: 240). Moreover, students who fail to obtain a qualification are marginalized in early differentiation systems, since entry into skilled employment generally requires commensurate certification and those who drop out prior to completing a course of study often end up in lower paying, unskilled positions with few of the protections available to their educated counterparts.

In unstratified secondary systems, by contrast, Allmendinger argues that individuals and jobs tend to be “unbound.” The absence of early differentiation within secondary education means that curricula and certifications are not as closely tied to specific occupational or future educational pathways. As a consequence the transition from school to work is far less institutionalized in these countries; school-leavers face a far more differentiated labor market than their counterparts in countries with stratified secondary systems and must rely on individual initiative rather than the strength and substance of their educational qualifications in obtaining a job. The absence of a strong link between qualifications and occupations also makes career mobility much higher in these countries; workers regularly transfer not only to new positions but routinely move to entirely new industries.
One the key findings in transitions studies concerns the relationship between the type of differentiation practice present in a country and the relative emphasis on general or specific skills in the labor market. Drawing on Allmendinger’s work, Shavit and Müller (1998) find that stratification within secondary education is highly correlated with vocational specificity – the more specific the skills provided for in the education system, the earlier students tend to be differentiated into educational tracks. In countries with early selection, the practice serves to reinforce the separation of academic education and vocational training, with the latter being provided largely outside of the general education system through apprenticeship programs conducted within firms and administered by businesses through their organizational representatives. In countries in which differentiation occurs later, vocational systems tend to be weaker and students are more likely to pursue further general education in the tertiary sector.

The general/specific skills distinction also lies at the heart of the broader categorization of advanced political economies in the highly influential Varieties of Capitalism literature. The emphasis on education and training within VoC is a comparatively new development in studies of comparative politics and political economy. For much of the postwar era, comparativists had been content to leave the study of such institutions to others (see Busemeyer 2009: 375-376). This has been the case particularly within literature on welfare states, where education, despite its more or less free provision by the state, had traditionally been viewed as “different” from other social policy categories, largely because it had never been offered in a completely egalitarian manner (Wilensky, 1975: 3-7; Iversen and
Stephens, 2008: 3). As a consequence sociologists, economists, and pedagogues, rather than political scientists conducted much of the research on education policy, and the sector remained largely outside of wider debates in comparative politics and political economy.

For scholars working in the VoC framework, however, the question of whether education systems provided workers with specific or general skills would be viewed as crucial for understanding the main outcome the literature has sought to explain, namely the variation observed in national production regimes. The basic argument of the VoC approach, familiar to scholars for nearly a decade since the publication of the edited volume by Hall and Soskice (2001) that launched its vast research program, maintains that political economies of advanced industrialized countries can be distinguished primarily by how firms and their representative organizations coordinate interactions among themselves and other actors across different spheres or clusters of political economic institutions. According to this conception, firms in all capitalist countries must resolve coordination issues – rooted in information asymmetries among economic actors – that are central to their basic competencies (Hall and Soskice, 2001: 6-7; Hanke, 2009: 2-3). In the original framework, Hall and Soskice distinguished between two basic types of coordination that corresponded with two ideal models of modern national capitalist political economies. In Liberal Market Economies (LMEs), such as the UK and the United States, coordination is market-drive, with

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19 As Iversen and Stephens (2008: 3) point out, state-run school systems that provided education at no cost to the population preceded by decades the sickness insurance scheme created under Bismarck in Imperial Germany that scholars generally have acknowledged as the first modern public welfare policy.

20 For a survey of literature in the VoC school, see Sopart (2005). For analyses of the state of the VoC research program and its future, see Hanke, Rhodes, and Thatcher (2007) and Hanke (2009).

21 For a critical assessment of the employer-centered approach in VoC, see Korpi (2006).

22 Analyses following the publication of the Hall and Soskice volume have examined West European countries such as Italy, Spain, France, and Portugal, that failed comfortably to fit in either the CME or LME classification scheme, categorizing them, alternatively, as “mixed-market economies,” (Molina and Rhodes, 2008) or state-enhanced market economies (Schmidt, 2002a).
competition, formal contracting, and market forces structuring the relationships among firms. In Coordinated Market Economies (CMEs), such as Germany and the Netherlands, coordination is rooted in strategic or non-market interaction among actors, with cooperation and collaboration, rather than competition, driving firm behavior. Hall and Soskice made no claim regarding whether one model was “superior” to the other, but did argue that a country’s economic performance should be enhanced by more closely adhering to the coordination logic present in one of the models (Hall and Soskice, 2001: 21; for an empirical evaluation of this claim, see Hall and Gingerich, 2004: 27-29). They further maintained that the specific type of firm coordination present in a country would shape its future adjustment path in response to changing conditions and exogenous pressures such as globalization. In contrast to those arguing that countries were converging on a single (usually liberal) type of political economy, Hall and Soskice maintained that the comparative institutional advantages provided to firms by their national capitalist variety would sustain their preferences for maintaining the present equilibrium arrangements and avoiding movement in the direction of the other model.

Much of the VoC platform rested on the notion of institutional complementarities. Similar to the concept of “complementary goods,” in economics, the concept as it was employed in the VoC approach held that an institution’s efficiency could be increased by the presence of other institutions. A labor market in which large-scale employee dismissals are uncommon, for example, is supported by the presence of a financial system in which investors do not demand immediate returns (Hall and Soskice, 2001: 17). The VoC approach identified five key institutional spheres or clusters within national political economies, including systems of corporate governance, intercompany relations, industrial relations, employee relations, and education and training, and argued that the presence of either strategic or
market coordinative logic in one sphere should push institutions in other spheres to develop according to similar logics, driven by firms’ recognition of the increased returns associated with complementarity and their subsequent pressure on policymakers to adjust arrangements to better reflect a single coordinative logic. The presence of strong complementarities among these institutions could thus both shape future adjustments and enhance overall national economic performance.

Education and training systems play a fundamental role within this framework. According to Hall and Soskice, firms’ production strategies are linked to – or complemented by – the presence or absence of different types of skills. In a CME such as Germany, the production regime consists of what Streeck (1991) has termed “diversified quality production,” characterized by specialized or niche production in high quality goods, incremental innovation, and long-term relationships of patient capital between industry and financial institutions. Such a production regime depends on the presence of workers with highly specific skills, which are often of use only within one industry or even a single firm. As such, CMEs tend to have well developed system of vocational education and training, which include extensive in-firm apprenticeship programs where young people obtain the skills in demand by producers. Firms in CMEs are willing to make investments in specific skill training because cooperative inter-firm agreements limit the practice of firms’ “poaching” employees trained at another company’s expense, while workers are willing to invest in such skills because complementary industrial relations, labor market, and welfare systems ensure they will receive high wages, employment protections, and – in the case of an economic downturn and layoffs – generous state unemployment benefits (Estévez-Abe, et al 2001).

In LMEs, by contrast, firms generally receive funding from investors in equity markets
who insist on short-term profits and the maintenance of high share prices. Because industrial relations systems and employee protection laws are weak and worker representation in management is essentially non-existent, these firms can easily release labor when faced with pressure from financial markets to increase profitability or change product strategies. In the context of such highly fluid labor markets, individuals seek higher levels of general education (including tertiary degrees) rather than industry- or firm-specific skills, since long-term employment in a specialized position within a single company of the type found in CMEs is unlikely and workers anticipate that they will spend their careers in several different firms.

Similarly, the logic of market coordination and competition punishes firms that train workers in skills specific to their industries, since in the absence of inter-firm agreements other companies could simply poach these workers and profit from the investments in their skills made by their competitors. As a consequence, vocational education is often provided in formal education institutions and in firm apprenticeship programs administered by businesses themselves are significantly less well developed than in CMEs. Even in high tech fields such as engineering most education programs in LMEs provide general certifications of competency rather than specialized qualifications (Hall and Soskice, 2001: 29-30). Social systems in LMEs also encourage workers to invest in general or mobile skills. Since reentry into the labor market following job loss is comparatively easy for workers with general skills in LMEs, unemployment insurance provisions tend to be lower in LMEs than in CMEs (Iversen and Soskice, 2006).

The institutional correspondence between skill regimes types and the presence or absence of in-firm training systems has led scholars in the VoC tradition to investigate a range of topics associated with such systems, including patterns of continuity and change in modern
training practices (Culpepper, 2003, 2007) and the relationship between vocational skill systems and other organizational and institutional features of the state, economy, and society, including firms’ production strategies (Iversen, 2005) and social policy (Estévez-Abe, et. al., 2001; Iversen, 2005), as well as opportunities for women in the labor market (Estévez-Abe, 2005, 2009; Soskice 2005).

The central place of vocational training in the VoC framework has also generated historical investigations that seek to explain the origins of variation in countries’ training systems. Most notable in this category are Thelen’s study (2004) on the evolution of in-firm training in Britain, Japan, Germany, and the United States, which argues that actions taken by producer groups in the late 19th and early 20th centuries shaped the trajectory of countries’ apprenticeship systems during critical moments in the transition to industrial economies, and Iversen and Soskice’s (2006) analysis of the influence of business actors and electoral system types on the relative strength of countries’ vocational training systems. Culpepper summarized the findings of these VoC historical studies of vocational training in the following general terms:

But what do we know about how skill-provision systems change over time? The principal empirical studies of this policy area stress two key points. First, government attempts to legislate large shifts in education and training systems are almost certain to fail, as long as the underlying institutional condition of employer coordination is absent. Second, in CMEs, organized employers will use their collective power to prevent government intervention that could deprive them of the skill sets on which they rely for production (Culpepper, 2007: 612).

This dissertation does not challenge these findings when applied to the sphere of vocational training – clearly the coordinative preferences of firms were key factors driving the comparative evolution of the in-firm apprenticeship systems that represent a crucial dimension of a country’s skill regime in advanced industrialized economies. Yet there is
more that distinguishes national skill regimes than in-firm training systems. This dissertation argues that school differentiation practices offer an alternate lens through which we can examine the variation in different types of skill regimes in advanced political economies. A clear institutional correspondence exists between differentiation practices and national political economic types. Most of the Liberal Market Economies identified within the VoC framework, including Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom, are late-differentiators, maintaining largely comprehensive secondary education systems in which students are (largely) self-placed into occupational or educational tracks around age sixteen or later. By contrast, the majority of Western European Coordinated Market Economies, including Austria, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, 23 differentiate significantly earlier, with most young people selected for placement by teachers and parents between the ages of ten and twelve.

Despite this correspondence, the logic of the institutional development of differentiation practices and the structure of general education do not correspond to the claims made by VoC-inspired investigations. In contrast to these studies, the historical cases examined in this dissertation find that the coordinative preferences of firms and their organizational representatives were not the primary drivers behind the success (Britain) or failure (Germany) of institutional reform movements in general education that took place in both countries during the 1960s and 70s. To be sure, British and German businesses were involved in the policy debates and discussions associated with attempts to reform the

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23 The primary outliers among Western European CMEs are the Nordic countries, all of which differentiate around age sixteen. There is evidence, however, that these countries reflect a different skill system among the coordinated political economic types of the region. As Busemeyer (2009) argues his case study of Sweden, the merging of vocational and general education that occurred following the 1971 law that “comprehensivized” the country’s formerly selective secondary system (for a discussion see Chapter V) established within the country an “integrationist” skills regime that falls somewhere between the “general” and “specific” categories outlined in earlier VoC skills literature.
countries’ respective school systems, but were not the dominant and decisive actors that the VoC analysis would predict. Understanding patterns of institutional development in general education in the second-half of the 20th century requires instead an accounting of non-material factors in each country’s education reform movements and specifically the role played by hegemonic policy discourses in shaping the outcomes of those movements. Such a claim, in turn, requires an understanding of policy discourses in theoretical conceptions of institutional continuity and change.

Theories of Institutional Continuity and Change

Within studies of comparative politics, processes of continuity and change in large social institutions and public policy sectors24 have been the primary focus of historical institutionalism, a major variant within the “new” institutionalist movement that emerged in the discipline in the 1970s and 80s (March and Olsen, 1984; Hall and Taylor, 1996). HI developed largely as a response to the structural-functionalist and pluralist paradigms as they had arisen out of the behavioral revolution in the 1950s. Historical institutionalists generally accepted the pluralist view that policy and politics result largely from the conflicts generated by interests organized to pursue the collective objectives of their members, but sought to demonstrate how the institutional configuration of the polity “structured” these conflicts and shaped their outcomes over time by influencing the distribution of power among actors and privileging certain groups over others. Historical institutionalists also rejected what they perceived as the functionalist logic of many historical explanations in comparative politics literature, which in assuming that certain arrangements existed to fulfill certain “functions” in

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24 For a discussion of the conditions under which specific policies and policy sectors can be considered “institutions,” see Thelen and Streek, 2005: 11.
society took a highly efficient view of history that HI practitioners maintained was simply not borne out by detailed empirical investigation (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 6). In contrast to more rationalist approaches, which accepted actors’ preferences as exogenously given and rooted in utility-maximization, HI scholars maintained both the content and expression of preferences were themselves shaped by the institutional framework in which actors operated (Steinmo, et. al., 1992: 9).

Historical institutionalists further differentiated themselves from their structuralist and rationalist counterparts in limiting their analyses to “intermediate” institutions, such as interest group systems, political parties, and specific public policy sectors, such as tax policy (Steinmo 1996), economic policy (Hall 1986) or social policy (Pierson, 1996; 2001) within a handful of countries, often in Western Europe and demonstrated a marked preference for middle-range theorizations which, while lacking the ambition of grand constructs such as modernization or Marxist theories, could nevertheless “travel” beyond the specific temporal and geographic locations provided in the cases analyzed (Pierson, 2004: 6). In addition, HI research has empirically been largely problem or puzzle-oriented, focusing on why one set of arrangements was selected in a country during a specific period rather than an alternate set. The emphasis on explaining outcomes over time has also shaped the methodology of HI practitioners, who have generally utilized case study methods and historical-comparative research designs in pursuing their puzzles.

\[\text{25 Thelen would later argue that a loosening of the hard utility-maximizing assumptions about actors held by rational choice adherents and their increased willingness to consider the role played by norms and culture had lessened the sharp divide between rational choice and historical institutional variants on the issue of preference formation (Thelen, 1999: 376-77).}\]

\[\text{26 For a discussion of the affinities between HI and the study of Western European politics, see Immergut and Anderson, 2008.}\]
Earlier HI studies emphasized how historically-based variation in national institutional arrangements shaped divergent policy and performance outcomes, but later studies have focused on understanding the impact of time on institutions themselves, examining “longitudinal” processes involved in the comparative genesis and development of key institutions in which significant national variation is observed (see Steinmo, et. al., 1992; Pierson, 2004; Thelen, 2004). In these more recent HI studies, it is the institutions themselves that have become the dependent variables, or outcomes to be explained, rather than only as independent variables exhibiting causal force on a particular effect. This reorientation has sparked a renewed interest in the drivers of continuity and change in institutional arrangements.

**Explaining Stability/Explaining Change**

At the conceptual heart of investigations examining the historical basis of institutional variation has been the notion of path dependence. Adopted by political scientists from scholarship in economic and technological history, the concept was invoked by scholars initially to help explain two puzzles: how institutions that carried out broadly similar functions in societies exhibited significant variation across countries and why many institutional arrangements had persisted despite manifest pressures for change. The general argument provided by path dependence theory was that institutions were not created to carry out some particular societal function at maximum efficiency, but were instead the product of distinctly political conflicts, in which the organizational landscape of domestic politics and the power, preferences, and strategies of different actors – more than some ill-defined notion

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27 For a review of this literature and the associated arguments, see Pierson, 1996.
of “optimality” – were responsible for the ultimate success or failure of any given
arrangement.

These formative processes have often been tied to “critical junctures,” or moments in
which the arrangement options available to decision-makers are (often suddenly) widened as
the result of developments such as the destabilizing of a country’s overarching structures
brought about by, for example, revolution or war, or a major technological innovation, such as
the creation of nuclear weapons or the deployment of space satellites. For HI, a key insight
developing from the study of critical junctures is that the temporal ordering and timing of
associated with such junctures may be crucial for shaping how countries’ experience junctures
and the effects they have on institutional outcomes (Katznelson, 1997). In the Colliers
influential study critical junctures in the political evolution of countries in Latin America,
they find that “a sequence of international developments that influenced all the countries
roughly in the same chronological time, but often at a different point in relation to these
internal political phases” influenced the nature of the regimes that ultimately emerged (Collier

The outcomes of these processes, in turn, could under certain circumstances shape
subsequent decisions and outcomes across a historical sequence of events, making shifts from
one course of action, or path, to another difficult once the initial steps were taken. Such an
emphasis on continuity seemed to comport with the empirical reality of the institutional
landscape in advanced democracies, where resilience of formal arrangements and public
policies appeared to be the rule rather than the exception (Immergut and Anderson, 2008:
and Mahoney (2000) have sought to account for this institutional stasis in path dependent
processes through the mechanism of increasing returns. Described alternately as “self-reinforcing” or “positive feedback” processes, the concept highlights how “investments” in early institutional arrangements made by actors, such as by learning a new technology, for example, raise the costs of switching from a selected path to an alternative one over time, even – crucially – if the arrangement is not necessarily the most efficient one in functional terms.

While accounts of stasis seemed appropriate for much of the postwar period, the dramatic political and institutional reorientations of the 1980s and 1990s, would lead scholars to investigate processes of institutional change. In early HI literature, two types of change were generally identified. The first type was associated with transformative large-scale shifts. Captured most influentially by the model of “punctuated equilibrium” (Krasner, 1984) this type of change generally involved powerful “exogenous shocks” or radical movements in the basic environment of politics that causes existing arrangements to collapse and provides space for new ones to arise (Thelen, 2002: 99). The second type involved incremental (though significant) changes in arrangements that occurred as the result of “small” causes and slow-moving processes of a type that often required detailed empirical examinations of events at the micro-level to be identified (Pierson, 2004; Immergut and Anderson, 2008).

For some HI scholars, these conceptions of change were too limiting, since they seemed to encourage analysts to view institutional change as either minor and continuous or major and abrupt (Hogan 2006). Taking this view, Thelen and Streeck (2005) sought to outline an approach that accounts for endogenous types of change that are both gradual and transformative, emphasizing how all institutional arrangements are subject to constant renegotiation and reinterpretation that provide them with both the legitimacy and legal
foundation upon which they depend if they are to operate. In this conception, institutional change is viewed as a far more political process, driven by agents with beliefs, values, and ideas, and capable of transforming institutions, rather than simply “tweaking” them. According to Thelen (2004), such a process of gradual transformation characterizes the evolution of apprenticeship training in Germany, where the system as it first emerged under the authoritarian Imperial regime in the late 19th century in opposition to organized labor was redeployed or “converted” over time to become a cornerstone of the social partnership between unions and industry.

*Communicating Ideas: Discursive Institutionalism*

For many scholars, even modifications to historical institutional analysis such as those provided by Thelen and Streeck simply did not go far enough both in acknowledging the dynamism in the institutions of advanced democracies and accounting for non-materialist factors in conceptions of institutional continuity and change. As Beland (2005) notes, despite being more receptive to ideational arguments than other theoretical schools such as rational choice, historical institutionalist accounts have nevertheless had limited room for ideas as independent variables. The absence of ideas, in turn, limits the capacity of HI to account for institutional change, even for the sudden and transformative processes which the approach was best equipped to address. As Hay writes:

> For, whilst ostensibly concerned with ‘process tracing’ and hence with questions of institutional change over time, historical institutionalism has tended to be characterised by an emphasis upon institutional genesis at the expense of an adequate account of post-formative institutional change. Moreover, in so far as post-formative institutional dynamics have been considered, they tend either to be seen as a consequence of path dependent lock-in effects or, where more ruptural in nature, as the product of exogenous shocks such as wars or revolutions. Historical institutionalism, it seems, is incapable of offering its own (i.e.: endogenous) account of the determinants of the ‘punctuated equilibria’ to which it invariably points. (Hay
Accounting for gaps in institutional theory’s conceptions of change has been at the center of recent work by scholars working in what Schmidt (2008a), the approach’s leading theorist, has referred to along with Campbell and Pedersen (2001) as “discursive institutionalism” (DI).\textsuperscript{28} From the discursive institutional perspective, the primary problems with HI are that it views institutions as fixed or given – and thus external to actors – and primarily as constraints to action rather than as targets of contestation. According to this criticism, the causal arrow is unidirectional in standard HI accounts: the material preferences and behavior of actors are influenced by institutional legacies in path dependent processes and agents are therefore subordinated to structures. In the view of DI, institutions are structures and constructs that rest simultaneously on the foundation of actors’ legitimizing discourses and shape actors’ beliefs as to what constitutes an appropriate arrangement.

In Schmidt’s formulations (2001; 2002a; 2002b; 2004; 2005; 2008a; 2008b; 2009), discursive institutionalism has two distinct but interlinked components. The first is ideational. The discursive approach explicitly adopts the view that ideas matter for politics and, more specifically, that cognitive and normative factors can play a causal role in shaping policy outcomes. In taking this view, DI shares much with other approaches that characterize what Blyth (1997) referred to as the “ideational turn” in comparative politics and political economy. Befitting the inclinations of the discursive approach, however, it is expressly neutral on whether ideas should be viewed in more “positivist” terms, i.e. primarily in setting

\textsuperscript{28} Other theorists have used alternate terms to describe similar approaches, including ideational institutionalism (Hay, 2001), constructivist institutionalism (Hay, 2006) or strategic constructivism (Jabko, 2006), though Schmidt (2008: 304) argues that her approach is distinct in emphasizing the communicative aspect of policy discourses rather than only the ideational dimension.
conditions for collective action and serving as ex post justification for decisions made on the basis of interest-calculations (Hall, 1989, 1993; Parsons 2003; Thatcher 2004), in more “constructivist” terms, i.e. in generating policy narratives and creating “frames” through which actors’ understandings of their own interests are constructed and on which their subsequent behavior is based (Bleich, 2003; Fouilleux, 2004), or somewhere between the two poles, such as when cognitive and normative factors are seen as shaping outcomes within the context of “traditional” interest-based behavior (van den Hoven, 2004) or institutional path dependencies (Rothstein, 2000).

In Schmidt’s view, however, the ideational turn in comparative politics, while welcome, has been better at demonstrating that ideas matter in determining political outcomes than in how they matter, or, in her words, “considering the process by which such ideas go from though to word to deed, that is, how ideas are conveyed adopted, and adapted, let alone the actors who convey them” (Schmidt, 2008: 309). Ideas, in short, require agents to carry them into the political sphere.

This gap in the ideational approaches leads to the second component of the discursive approach - communicative interaction based on sets of conceptually articulated and logically consistent beliefs held by actors. Ideas, according to Schmidt, cannot make a causal impact unless they are communicated between and among actors within policymaking circles to construct a particular proposal or program (the “coordinative” dimension of discourse) and then again in processes of public persuasion (the “communicative” dimension). It is by virtue of this communicative process that discourses, Lehmbruch (2001: 41) writes, are distinguished “from belief systems lacking that property.” This conception is based on the fundamental – though often overlooked – observation that state policies and institutions rest
on legitimating discourses that publics accept. As with the ideational component, the communicative component of the discursive approach is largely agnostic on the issue of specific terminology, incorporating such terms as “epistemic communities,” “advocacy coalitions,” or the role played by “norm entrepreneurs.”

Discourse thus serves as the crucial link between the agents favored by methodological individualists such as those working in the rationalist and behavioralist traditions, and the structures emphasized by institutionalists. As Schmidt and Radaelli (2005) argue, structural (institutional) change occurs through a distinctly political process that is rife with communicative elements as agents formulate ideas and seek to persuade others of their appropriateness. DI adherents thus agree with HI analysts such as Thelen that politics needs to be brought back in to analyses of institutional change, but provide a more expansive conception of the “political” that goes beyond the material conflicts and bargains of political actors to include communication, persuasion, and legitimation.

Unlike political science approaches, such as rational choice, in which hard ontological assumptions drive methodological and explanatory frameworks, discursive institutionalism does not hold that discourse or ideas will always serve as an independent causal factor in any institutional or policy outcome. In many instances, factors rooted in the material interests of actors (rational choice), inherited institutional legacies (historical institutionalism), or cultural norms (sociological institutionalism) may be the primary cause. Determining, as Schmidt (2002a: 252) writes, when one could call “policy discourse transformative rather than merely instrumental” is a key challenge for discourse-based explanations that demands scholars carry out detailed empirical investigations into the factors shaping a particular outcome of interest.
Conclusion: Discourse as a Causal Variable in British and German General Education

The primary hypothesis advanced in this dissertation is that the structural transformation of general education in Britain and the continuities observed in the FRG during the postwar can largely be explained by reference to the content of legitimizing policy discourses in both countries and the comparative timing of shifts in the each country’s respective discourses. The case studies that follow are offered as data to support this hypothesis by demonstrating three sub-propositions. First, that the system of early selection and vertical differentiation established in both Britain and Germany immediately after World War II were “discourse-driven,” that is owed their structure to particular sets of commonly-held ideas and beliefs regarding the nature of human intelligence and ability in terms of which major political and societal actors would define their interests and policy preferences from the range of options available. Such an understanding of institutional and preference formation stands in opposition to both power-interest theories that view outcomes to be largely determined by the relative organizational and material strength of powerful actors and rationalist views that assume actors’ preferences to be rooted in utility-maximization, such as the coordinative preferences of firms in the VoC approach.

The second proposition maintains that political movements for change in the structure of general education paralleled shifts in the dominant discourses in the two countries from views that held ability and intelligence levels to be fixed in individuals at a relatively early age and unaffected by environmental factors to ones that conceived of these qualities as dynamic and influenced by social and economic conditions. Support for this proposition in the case studies is drawn from the observation that pressures to reform early differentiation practices stemmed mainly from the delegitimization of the fixed ability discourse, as opposed
to exogenous factors, and that key actors redefined their interests and preferences in terms of the new dynamic ability conception and its associated policy prescription of the comprehensive school.

The final proposition holds that the temporal sequencing of discursive change in Britain and the FRG affected their respective reform outcomes. The case studies seek to demonstrate how an “early” shift in the British policy discourse in the early and mid-1950s created opportunities and incentives that otherwise may not have been present for policymakers at the local level to begin the process of horizontal reorganization under the facilitating conditions of relative economic prosperity and growing ideational consensus of the period. By contrast, a “later” shift in discourses in the 1960s in the West German case inhibited reform efforts that may have succeeded at an earlier time by delaying both the elevation of education policy on the political agenda and as a public concern and the introduction of policy reform measures until an era of economic upheaval and social disunity in the 1970s.
Chapter III

Britain Case Study I:
The Education Act 1944 and the Tripartite System

Introduction

Spurred by the experiences of the Second World War, the Education Act 1944 carried out what was seen by many as a long overdue expansion of general education in Britain. Passed by a wartime coalition government that included representatives of both the Labour and Conservative parties and garnering wide public support, the Act created a universal system of secondary education in the country by raising the minimum school leaving age and eliminating the tuition fees that had served to limit much of post-elementary schooling to the wealthier social classes in the first half of the 20th century. It also led to the introduction of a new “tripartite” secondary system in which students were separated at age eleven into one of three different schools on the basis of their perceived academic ability, which was determined largely by intelligence tests. Constructed on the belief that the system would benefit young people of all ability types and that its constituent grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools would enjoy a “party of esteem,” tripartism was designed to channel students at a young age into the most suitable educational and occupational pathways.

Given that policymakers had a range of institutional designs available, why did they choose to construct a secondary education system based on the practice of early selection? This chapter argues that both the elected representatives and civil servants in the Board of Education who crafted the 1944 Act were guided by the assumptions of a policy discourse that served to limit the range of organizational options that they would consider for the new system. Originating in the interwar years among a relatively small set of academics working
in the field of educational psychology, the core ideas of this discourse held that human beings demonstrated significant individual differences in innate intelligence levels, which revealed themselves at a fairly young age and could be accurately determined by specially designed mental tests. Given such views, which were presented as scientific findings rather than academic conjecture, the discourse held that practices of early selection within a vertically differentiated structure of separate schools was the most appropriate arrangement for the country’s new general education system. An alternative organizational model based on the mixed-ability multilateral or comprehensive school did exist at the time, but it would be considered by most educationalists and policymakers as experimental and lacking the legitimating ideational foundation of its vertical counterpart.

The ideas of the interwar discourse on ability would be communicated to political actors, policymakers, and the general public through a variety of communicative channels, including academic research, writings in the popular press and media appearances, and the educational psychologists’ direct work with school officials at the local level. The primary avenue by which these ideas would be both legitimated and injected into national policy discussions, however, came in the form of a series of reports written in the 1920s and 1930s by the advisory committee to the Board of Education, then the national agency overseeing the school system, which were widely distributed and generated significant public interest. Presenting the assumptions of the educational psychologists largely as conclusions, the reports cast early selection in education as a scientifically-substantiated and thoroughly modern practice and recommended its adoption by policymakers within an expanded system of secondary education.
The crucial political actor involved in the translating of the interwar education
discourse into the new institutional framework of the postwar general education system would
be the British Labour Party. Labour had been an early member of the discourse coalition
comprised of politicians, bureaucrats, and academics that formed around the educational
psychologists ideas in the interwar period. For many in the party, early selection for schools
based on perceived ability held the promise of advancing gifted working class students
educationally, occupationally, and socially by providing them with the access to academic
schooling that had been denied to many of them under the old system. Although
dissatisfaction with tripartism would grow among some Labour members in the years
immediately following the passage of the Act, adherence to the basic assumptions of the
discourse would be of such strength among the leadership of the party during the governments
of Clement Attlee between 1945 and 1951 that Labour would be largely responsible for the
implementation of the tripartite system introduced by the 1944 Act.

This chapter begins by providing a historical overview of the pre-World War II system
of general education in Britain, highlighting the role played by social class and wealth in
determining students’ educational opportunities. The next section examines the findings of
the educational psychologists in the 1920 and 1930s and their ascendancy into policymaking
discussions, focusing in particular on the ideas and influence of Professor Cyril Burt, who
served by most estimates as the leading figure in the field. The influence of the educational
psychologists’ views on intelligence and intelligence testing in the policy program for
educational expansion developed by the Labour Party in the interwar years is examined next,
followed by a discussion of the two key government advisory reports of the period, namely
the Hadow and Spens reports on secondary education. The chapter then turns to an overview
of the political process associated with the passage of the 1944 Education Act before turning in the final section to an examination of the influence of the interwar discourse on Labour’s educational leadership during its years in power in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

**The Evolution of General Education in Britain, 1870-1939**

The seven-plus decades between the creation of universal education system in Britain and the start of the Second World War would be among the most transformative in British history. Enfranchised by the great reform legislation of the 1860s, working class Britons, represented in trade unions and – after 1900 – the Labour Party, would see their political power grow markedly in the years between 1870 and 1939. Yet for most children of working class parents, access to advanced education and the opportunities it afforded would remain highly circumscribed; despite mounting pressure for change, British schooling on the eve of World War II would be marked by many of the rigid class-divisions born of the industrialization and urbanization of the previous century and the vast majority of young Britons would continue to have access to no more than a rudimentary education.

The era of universal schooling began in England and Wales\(^29\) in 1870, when the Education Act passed that year established the basis for a state system of elementary education.\(^30\) As it was consolidated in the 1902 Education Act, this system would be essentially two-tiered in structure. The first tier consisted of universal, compulsory, and free elementary schools for young people between the ages five to thirteen. The second tier

\(^{29}\) The Education (Scotland) Act 1872 set our similar requirements for Scottish children aged five to thirteen and also established the Scottish Education Department in London to oversee the new system.

\(^{30}\) While organized labor generally supported the expansion of the state education system during this period, it is interesting most of the still unorganized majority of workers would oppose universal schooling prior to the 1980 Act, fearing the economic consequences that would result from the loss of children’s wages (see Davies, 1986: 21).
included voluntary, fee-charging secondary schools into which students were transferred around age eleven. These latter schools provided advanced instruction in liberal arts for students until age sixteen and were intended to serve as preparation for university study and a professional career.

With students’ separated into different classes of schools around age eleven this system was clearly organized on the basis of early selection, though it was students’ familial wealth or social standing, not past academic performance or perceived intellectual ability that determined if they would ascend to the academic track. The secondary schools were dominated by the middle classes, while the overwhelming majority of working class students completed their entire education in a single elementary school before leaving at the minimum school leaving age to enter the labor market (Chitty, 2004: 19). Although the Board of Education would make provision for state authorities to pay the fees for one-quarter of all students in the secondary schools in an effort to increase attendance levels for poorer children, working class parents were often reluctant to allow their children to enroll, since increased time in school generally meant fewer weekly wages for the family (Parkinson, 1970: 7).

Reinforcing this system of early selection by social class was the private or independent school sector, where an even smaller percentage of students from the wealthiest classes received secondary education. These graduates of these institutions, which included the so-called “public” schools in England such as Eton and Harrow,\(^\text{31}\) often continued to elite higher education at the “ancient” universities of Oxford or Cambridge and to the top tiers of

\(^{31}\) The term “public school” in the English system is reserved for independent boarding schools, and not all fee-charging institutions. The name is the source of frequent confusion to outside observers, a fact noted by Labour MP and later Secretary of State for Education and Science Anthony Crosland who dryly commented that “foreign readers should note the quaint solecism whereby public schools mean exclusive private schools” (Crosland, 1957: 261).
business, government, and the military, all of which would be dominated for much of the 20th century by private school alumni (Nicholas, 1999).

In the decades prior to World War II, several attempts would be made to reform the manifest inequalities of the system, but few significant changes would actually be realized. The Fisher Education Act of 1918 raised the school-leaving age to fourteen, but its other key provision requiring all fourteen to eighteen-year-olds to attend compulsory part-time further education (then a requirement in Germany) was never implemented, primarily due to budgetary pressures brought on by the 1921 recession (Sanderson, 1999: 60). Although governmental advisory bodies32 in the 1920s and 1930s would advocate the extension of general education for most young people beyond the elementary stage, these recommendations would remain unimplemented or outright rejected by government officials (Barber, 1994: 2-4). Structural change efforts would be hampered by the limited funds available during the Depression years and the gathering international crisis on the continent; provisions to raise the minimum school leaving age to fifteen for most students were included in the Education Act 1936 but had the unfortunate implementation date of September 1, 1939 and were later suspended (Akenson, 1971: 151). With no significant changes to the system during this period, access to post-elementary education remained open only to a minority of young people of the wealthier classes; on the eve or war, 80 percent of all students in England and Wales were leaving school at the minimum age permitted (Barber, 1994: 1).

The early period of universal schooling in Britain would also see the development of a national organization framework for primary and secondary education whose basic structure

32 Namely the Board of Education advisory committees that produced the Hadow (1926) and Spens (1938) reports (for a further discussion see below).
would survive with few dramatic changes until late in the 20th century. Under the 1870 system, state schools were to be administered by over 2,500 local school boards, but the 1902 Education Act consolidated the various boards into 318 local education authorities (LEAs). Created as committees by the county councils and county borough councils that themselves were the recent products of government legislation, the LEAs were responsible for the administration and maintenance of schools within their jurisdiction, as well as for designing academic curriculums.

The flexibility and autonomy provided by locally based decision-making authority in education allowed considerable room for policy experimentation, an institutional feature that would play an important role in later secondary outcomes (see Chapter V). This early partial devolution of competence in state education also stood in marked contrast to the more centralizing tendencies evident in the French system established in the 1880s under the Ferry laws, but would more closely resemble the system that would emerge in the new Federal Republic of Germany after World War II, where the regional Länder would have significant control over education and the central government’s role would be limited (see Chapter VI).

**Educational Psychology and the Policy Discourse on Selection in Interwar Britain**

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33 Notably with the establishment of the national curriculum in the 1988 Education Reform Act. The most significant prewar change to the framework involved the changing role of religious authorities. Under the 1870 Act, responsibility for the provision of education in England and Wales was shared between the state and the Anglican and Catholic churches in a “dual system.” The 1902 Education Act would shift the balance of power in the system towards state control by increasing the amount of public funding church schools received, beginning a long process in which religious authority over education in England and Wales would gradually decline.

34 Specifically, the Local Government Act 1888.

35 By the 1980s the trends would be reversed, as the Thatcher administration would pursue a recentralization of educational policymaking while France would experiment with delegating greater competence to the local areas (Daun, 2004: 331-334).
Although the institutional structure of general education would undergo few fundamental structural changes between 1870 and 1939, a range of actors would challenge the assumptions that guided the practices of educational selection under the old system in the years prior to World War II. Among these the most influential would come from the relatively new academic field of educational psychology. First emerging in the late 19th century, educational psychology had established itself as a distinct academic discipline in Britain by the 1910s. Under the influence of the Eugenics movement and Francis Galton’s late 19th century hereditary theories of intelligence, research in British educational psychology would develop a particular focus around questions concerning the nature of individual differences within student populations. On the basis of this research, a dominant view would emerge among the field’s early practitioners that the structure of the education system should reflect the manifest differences in students’ intelligence, which educational psychologists believed could accurately be measured through testing. Between 1920 and 1939, this view would gain widespread acceptance among political and policy actors and within British society, generating a policy discourse that would become the basis of the postwar selective system of education.

_Cyril Burt: Discourse Agent Number One_

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36 For detailed discussion of the origins and influence of Eugenicist thinking in education in Britain, see Chitty, 2007: 25–64.
37 Based on an analysis of the lineages of nearly 1,000 members of the English upper class, Galton’s most influential work, _Hereditary Genius_, concluded that mental ability was transmitted hereditarily to offspring. Like the educational psychologists that followed him, Galton stressed the importance of using his findings for the general advancement of humankind. As he stated in the book’s introduction: “I propose to show in this book that a man's natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the whole organic world... I conclude that each generation has enormous power over the natural gifts of those that follow, and maintain that it is a duty we owe to humanity to investigate the range of that power, and to exercise it in a way that, without being unwise towards ourselves, shall be most advantageous to future inhabitants of the earth” (Galton, 1870: 1)
Among educational psychologists,38 Professor Cyril Burt stood as the most influential ideational entrepreneur in the interwar years. Trained at Oxford and the University of Würzburg in Germany, where he briefly studied with Oswald Külpe, a leading German structural psychologist, Burt would serve as a lecturer at the London Day Training College39 and later as Professor and Chair of Psychology at University College, London, before becoming in 1946 the first British psychologist to be knighted for his contributions to the field. Appointed to the London County Council in 1913, Burt was also the first educational psychologist to serve in a local education authority (Miller and Hersen, 1992: 100).40

Influenced by fellow educational psychologist Charles Spearman’s concept of “general intelligence,”41 Burt, as Wooldridge (1994: 94) notes, would spend his career seeking to demonstrate three psychological propositions: “that general intelligence exists; that it can be isolated and measured; and that it is inherited rather than acquired.” These basic conclusions were first outlined in two early works. In his 1917 book The Distribution and Relations of Educational Abilities, Burt argued that that a young person’s ability was determined by his or her innate intelligence, while environmental factors played little role. Ability, however, was not randomly spread out across the student population, but was distributed evenly across it, with small high and low ability groups at either end of the distribution and the majority of students in the middle range. A later work, Mental and

39 Later to become the Institute of Education at the University of London.
40 Burt’s influence on policy debates over education would continue up until the end of his long life in 1971, when his writings appeared in the influential Black Papers on Education (see Chapter V). In a matter that would generate significant controversy, a good deal of his research was alleged in the 1970s to be based on falsified findings. For a review of the debates associated with Burt, see Macintosh, 1995. For a defense of Burt, see Fleming, 1991.
41 Spearman’s measurement, known as G-factor, or general intelligence factor, is purported to identify a single common factor in individuals that allows them to score highly on tests measuring a range of different cognitive skills (see Spearman, 1927).
*Scholastic Tests* published in 1921 made the case for the use of mental tests to determine students’ innate levels of general intelligence.

In Burt’s view, the traditional types of examination used to award scholarships to underprivileged students to attend secondary schools were designed on the basis of faulty assumptions. Such test focused on how much students knew rather than how capable they were of comprehending complex ideas and associations. Intelligence tests, by contrast, could not only more successfully identify students of potential higher ability than traditional scholastic exams but, Burt argued, could do so at an earlier age.

Under the scholarship examination system for secondary schools as it was currently structured … the cleverest genius, destitute of a certain minimum of academic knowledge, could hardly be admitted. Occasionally, it is true, an able child is found whose gifts have a technical bias, rather than an academic; and whose intelligence, therefore, may be grossly underrated in school, unless it is judged by tests of manual construction rather than of scholastic knowledge. But too often it is through the neglect to discover three or four years ago the richness of his real capacity that the poverty of a child’s attainments is observable to-day. A test of intelligence, applied at the age of seven or eight, would avert much unmerited failure at the age of ten or eleven. Among the brightest children in our schools not a few miss scholarships because at an earlier age their ignorance of scholastic rudiments has relegated them to a class below their actual merits. They have remained, like sundials in the shade, with their available powers unused, because their presence has been left unilluminated… First consideration should always be accorded to the child’s innate intelligence (Burt, 1921: 2).

The view of intelligence as innate, measurable, and unchanging had significant implications for how education systems should be structured and governed. Along with other educational psychologists of the era, Burt believed that occupation and ability were closely linked – people of greater intelligence tended to ascend to the more important positions in society while those of normal or lower intelligence generally found employment in the middle and lower rungs of the occupational ladder. Given such correspondences, the core task for society should be, Burt argued, “to discover what ration of intelligence nature has given to each individual at birth, then to provide him with the appropriate education, and finally to guide him into the career for which he seems to have been marked out” (quoted in Chitty,
2004: 26). In Burt’s vision of a new society, the role of the psychologists would be crucial, since it would be their task to measure and classify “citizens and then allocating them to their positions in the educational and occupational hierarchy” (Wooldridge 1994: 86).

Burt did possibly more than any other figure in the interwar era to popularize the core views of educational psychologists in Britain. His ideas not only had a significant influence on successive generations of academic psychologists, but also – through his frequently published articles in newspapers and magazines and appearances on radio (and later television) – popular opinion. By the 1930s, Burt was, as his biographer Hearnshaw (1979: 44) writes, “no longer an expert, but a public figure” who had in Wooldridge’s estimation become the best-known psychologist in Britain (1994: 106).

*The Politics of Intelligence*

In the 1920s and 30s, the ideas of Burt and his colleagues would find a seemingly unlikely reception among members of the British Left. From the perspective of the early 21st century, a pairing between a political movement founded on principles of egalitarianism and social leveling and a school of thought that viewed human beings as distinctly and permanently unequal in their mental endowments would seem a case of strange bedfellows.

In the context of the period, however, the affinity between the two sides is more understandable. A “meritocratic” interpretation of the educational psychologists findings would see in them an argument calling for access to opportunities for educational, occupational, and social advancement to be determined by natural ability, rather than familial wealth.42 Such a view comported with thinking in interwar British social democracy that

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42 This is clearly Wooldridge’s reading of the educational psychology movement, which is forcefully rejected by Chitty. Labeling Wooldridge a “Burt apologist,” Chitty claims that Burt, like his intellectual mentor Galton used
maintained that the disregarding of ability in deference to wealth and social rank was precisely why aristocrats and professional classes continued to exert a stranglehold over British society. While left-wing positions on education generally argued in favor of universal expansion of opportunity, there existed simultaneously clear consensus among some middle class socialists and working class intellectuals on the need for an intellectual elite specially trained to lead the masses of workers.⁴³ Among this group, Wooldridge (1994: 187-189) argues, were many leading interwar leftists, including Ramsay MacDonald, Labour’s first prime minister, future Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin, and J.B.S. Haldane, a leading evolutionary biologist who was also a member of the Communist Party and editor of the London edition of the *Daily Worker*, who was not only a believer in the unequal distribution of intelligence in the population, but was also a strong advocate for early selection in education. With clear contempt for the basic principles of mixed-ability schooling, Haldane would write in a 1932 essay “when children of all grades of ability are combined in one class, the intelligent merely learn to be lazy while the stupid are hopelessly discouraged” (1932: 12).

R. H. Tawney, the leading interwar socialist theorist of education, shared much of the views of his meritocratic Labour colleagues and would be significantly influenced by the interwar educational psychologists, particularly Percy Nunn, who helped establish the field within the LDTC and served a member of the Labour Party’s advisory committee on education (Wooldridge, 1994: 65). Labour politicians had long advocated for structural reforms of the school system and the expansion of educational opportunities for working class

⁴³ For an overview of the socialist conception of leadership in early 20th century Britain and its relationship to left-wing views on education, see McCulloch, 1991, 98-118.
youth, but a detailed policy statement on secondary education would not be articulated until 1922 with the publication of Tawney’s pamphlet entitled *Secondary Education for All*. The report argued that the traditional practice of segregating students on the basis of wealth in the two-tiered system of elementary and secondary schools was not only “socially obnoxious” but “educationally unsound” since it resulted in “(a) a grave waste of talent, (b) the exclusion from the secondary schools of children who ought to enter them, (c) the imposition on the primary schools of the task of educating children between twelve and fourteen, for which they may not be specially fitted, (d) waste and inefficiency arising from overlapping.” (Tawney, et al, 1922: 11). The report called for a system comprised of successive primary and secondary stages, in which all children would be transferred at age eleven to some type of secondary school where they would remain at least until they reached the system’s new school leaving age of sixteen.

In *Secondary Education for All*, Tawney drew heavily on the educational-psychologists arguments to counter the conservative claim that expanding education would serve no purpose, since most young people would gain little from longer schooling and more advanced study. Tawney noted how educational psychology - and Burt’s studies specifically – had provided evidence “resulting from the development of more exact measurements of intelligence than could be applied till recently” that clearly demonstrated how many youth could benefit from additional education.

It is sometimes objected by persons without practical experience of educational questions that a wide extension of secondary education up to sixteen is not desirable, because all but a small minority of children … are not, as it is said, "worth educating."… In reality, however, absurd as this view is on other grounds, the whole tendency of recent educational investigation has been still further to discredit it by emphasising the immense mass, not only of average talent – and average talent is worth cultivating – but of exceptional talent, which is sterilised for lack of educational opportunities.
...[I]t is evident that not only are we failing to cultivate the intelligence of all the children described as normal, but we are actually failing to provide higher education for almost two-thirds of those who are of exceptional intelligence! The evidence on this point is overwhelming. "The results of nine years' experience in examining elementary school candidates for scholarships to secondary schools," states the Director of Education of a county borough, "has led me to the conclusion that between forty and fifty per cent, of the candidates would undoubtedly profit well by a course of secondary school education." Greater precision has been given to these estimates by the investigations of Mr. Burt, the distinguished psychologist employed by the London County Council, who recently made a survey of the educational abilities of the children – in number 31,965 – in the schools of a single London borough (Tawney, 1922: 66-67).

For Tawney as well as for many other socialist thinkers of the period, expanding education was not the same as providing everyone with the same education. Separate schools for different ability categories would be necessary in any system of universal secondary education. What was crucial, in Tawney’s view, was that selection for the schools be based on students’ natural abilities rather than their family background.

It is true, of course, that not all children respond equally to the same methods and curriculum. Equality of educational provision is not identity of educational provision, and it is important that there should be the greatest possible diversity of type among secondary schools (Tawney, 1922: 66).

Tied to these leftist conceptions of educational expansion as a means of social mobility was the view that by failing to identify and advance intelligent young people in the population, the traditional education system in Britain was wasting national ability at a time that the country desperately needed it. Kenneth Lindsay, a Labour MP who would later follow Ramsey MacDonald out of the party after the formation of the National Government with the Conservatives in the 1930s, would make such an argument in his 1926 study of the scholarship system for the secondary schools, Social Progress and Educational Waste.

Perhaps two figures will give perspective to the whole problem and point to the heart of the matter. First, of the 550,000 children who leave elementary schools each year, 9.5 per cent, of an age-group proceed to secondary schools, one-third exempt from fees and two-thirds fee-paying, while 1 per 1,000 reach the University. Secondly, of 2,800,000 adolescents in England and Wales, 80 percent, are not in full-time attendance at any school ... at least 50 per cent, of
the pupils in elementary schools can profit by some form of post-primary education up to the age of 16…

In Lindsay’s view, the traditional system as it has been established in 1870 and modified in 1902 was clearly one in which class, and not ability, determined opportunities for educational advancement.

it has been conclusively proved that success in winning scholarships [to attend secondary school] varies with almost monotonous regularity according to the quality of the social and economic environment. London, Bradford, Liverpool, and the countryside bear this out in the minutest detail (Lindsay, 1926: 6-7).

Despite the adoption of the proposals in Secondary Education for All as party policy, Labour would have little success realizing them during its two periods in power in the interwar period. The parliamentary weaknesses and brief duration of both the 1924 and 1929-1931 governments,\(^44\) coupled with fierce resistance from the churches to greater state control dramatically limited the ability of the party to carry out its policy program for educational expansion (see Parkinson, 1970: 17-21, 23-27). It would not be until the wartime coalition of the early 1940s that the party would be able to revisit these proposals again.

For the Conservatives who would rule Britain for most of the interwar period,\(^45\) education policy in the decades prior to World War II was decidedly non-reformist. The party tended to view the school system primarily as a source for the basic skills needed for work in the industrial sector and rejected arguments in favor of expanding education on pedagogical and social grounds (Parkinson, 1970: 30). It also wished, in deference to its middle class constituents, to maintain the elite position of the fee-charging secondary schools (Sutherland, 1984: 173). In this context, the views of innate intelligence and wasted ability advocated by

\(^{44}\) Both were minority governments.

\(^{45}\) Conservatives would hold power during this period both in single majority governments and as the largest party in the coalition National governments.
educational psychology could be interpreted as a direct challenge to Conservatives’ interest in protecting privilege (Wooldridge, 1994: 198).

Influencing Education Policy

Beyond the political parties, the ideas of the educational psychologists would enter policy debates through another crucial communicative pathway - the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education. Created in 1900 to provide expert advice to the President of the Board of Education, the Committee would include many of the leading educational psychologists of the interwar period, including Burt, Spearman, and Nunn, all of whom served directly as members of the Committee or provided testimony before it. During the interwar years, the Committee would publish a series of reports that would lay a foundation for the selective school system established after World War II. These reports, which would largely adopt the psychologists’ assumptions regarding the measurability of intelligence and the hereditary nature of mental ability, would influence not only the senior Board officials who commissioned them but a wider net of politicians, civil servants, educators, and the public (Wooldridge 1994: 249). The Committee would author nearly a dozen reports between 1919 and 1939, covering a range of issues associate with the administration and organization of the entire system of general education. It would be, however, its two major studies on the structure of secondary education, the 1926 Hadow report, *The Education of the Adolescent* and the 1938 Spens report *Secondary Education,* that would have the most enduring impact on postwar differentiation practices (Hearnshaw, 1979: 111; Chitty, 2007: 74).

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46 For a discussion of the origins of the Committee, see Kogan and Packwood, 1974: 10-13.
47 The two reports would be commonly referred to by the names of the Committee chairs who oversaw their publication, William Henry Hadow, a musicologist who served as Vice-Chancellor at Sheffield University who
Commissioned in 1924 by the first Labour government to study the relationship between the primary and secondary school sectors, the Hadow report would accept many of the recommendations contained in the 1922 Labour policy statement, most notably the proposal that secondary education should be made available to all young people, regardless of their economic background, and that the minimum school leaving age should be raised (though only to fifteen). On the issue of how any new secondary system should be organized, the report also adopted the Labour position that it should consist of different school types into which students would be placed around age eleven on the basis of their aptitudes and abilities, stressing how all schools in the system should be of equal prestige.

Burt and Nunn would play a prominent role in formulating the recommendations of the report. In his evidence to the Committee, Burt argued that psychological research had proven that young people exhibited vastly different abilities and that any system of education should be organized with this fundamental understanding in mind. Students of high ability (which in Burt’s view constituted only about 2% of any age group) should be removed from the larger student population at age eleven and placed in smaller classes. Nunn, who sat on the special drafting subcommittee for the report made a similar appeal that students be placed in one of three separate school types: the grammar school, the technical school, and a third school for those who demonstrated neither academic nor technical aptitudes (Wooldridge, 1994: 225).

These views clearly resonated with the authors of *Education of the Adolescent*, who accepted largely without question the educational psychologist argument that the level of

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served as chair from 1923 to 1933, and Sir William Spens, a theologian and Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, who would chair the Committee from 1933 to 1939.
intellectual ability a person would exhibit for his or her entire life could be identified before the age of thirteen.

At the risk of overloading our Report, we have ventured to quote these expressions of opinion at some length, because the general agreement of administrators and teachers that primary education should be regarded as ending, and post-primary education as beginning, at the age of 11+ seems to us important... The principal reasons for this consensus of opinion are, we think, two. In the first place there is the argument of the psychologist. Educational organisation is likely to be effective in proportion as it is based on the actual facts of the development of children and young persons. By the time that the age of 11 or 12 has been reached children have given some indication of differences in interests and abilities sufficient to make it possible and desirable to cater for them by means of schools of varying types, but which have, nevertheless, a broad common foundation.

Moreover, with the transition from childhood to adolescence, a boy or girl is often conscious of new powers and interests. If education is to act as a stimulus - if it is to be felt to be not merely the continuance of a routine, but a thing significant and inspiring - it must appeal to those interests and cultivate those powers. It must, in short, grow and expand with the growth of those for whom it is designed. And it will do this most successfully if its successive stages are related to each other in such a manner that the beginning of a new stage in education may coincide with the beginning of a new phase in the life of the children themselves.

The arguments derived from educational theory are reinforced by practical considerations. For, in the second place, the tendency of educational organisation during recent years has been to mark the years 11 to 12 as the natural turning point up to which primary education leads, and from which post-primary education starts (emphasis added. Hadow Report, 1926: 74-75).

Although the Conservatives, who had returned to government before the 1926 report was released, would not implement its major recommendations, its effects were nonetheless considerable. Hadow would play a significant role legitimizing an expanded secondary structure based on the principles of vertical differentiation and early selection that it advocated, helping to generate both public and policy momentum in support of expanding secondary education within a vertically-structured system that relied on psychological measures of ability to determine a student’s proper educational pathway (Wooldridge, 1994: 244). Perhaps most significantly, under the influence of Hadow and other studies of the era

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48 Most notably the Young report of 1920, Scholarships and Free Places (see Sutherland, 1984: 169).
LEAs would increasingly begin using intelligence tests as part of the 11-plus examinations (so termed for the age at which students generally sat for them) for the allocation of secondary school places under the pre-war system (Sutherland, 1984: 186). This growing reliance on IQ as a measure of particular school types would become a significant social and political issue after the Second World War (see Chapters IV and V).

Although it would appear over a decade after Hadow, the Spens report would address many of the same issues as the earlier report. As in Hadow, Spens made the case for the expansion of secondary education, advocating the abolishment of fees for state secondary schools and the raising of the minimum school leaving age, though now by two years to age sixteen. It also recommended that the new expanded secondary system be organized around selective lines, suggesting, as Nunn had in the 1920s, that establishment of a tripartite system comprised of the three different school types of grammar, technical, and modern, into which students could be placed on the basis of mental tests.

The stamp of educational psychology can be seen throughout Spens, which reflected its basic assumptions even more thoroughly than in the earlier studies produced under Hadow. The psychologists’ conceptions of the innate and measurable ability, carried directly to the Committee in a memorandum written by the Burt on adolescent intellectual development, served as the guiding ideas for discussions in the report on both curricular and structural questions (for a discussion, see Chitty, 2007: 74). As Kogan and Packwood (1974: 38) write, “the historical importance of the Spens report cannot be exaggerated…it provided the scientific backdrop to the tripartite system. The Committee was professed as up to the hilt and

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49 The major structural reform in general education during this period was the so-called “Hadow reorganization” of elementary schools, under which elementary students were to be transferred to separate senior schools or departments at age eleven for their final three years of schooling. Like other reforms of the era, however, the reorganization would be inconsistently implemented in the 1930s and ultimately stopped completely with the outbreak of war in 1939 (see Barber, 1994: 12).
so able to legitimize the assumption that the soft concept of equality was right, that schools can be equal though separate, that life chances can be distributed at eleven years without injustice…The 1944 Act philosophy found its philosophers in the Spens Committee.” In a chapter entitled, “Physical and mental development of 11-16 year olds” the report’s authors made clear their debt to educational psychology.

*Intellectual development during childhood appears to progress as if were governed by a single central factor, usually know as ‘general intelligence’, which may be broadly described as innate all-round intellectual ability. It appears to enter everything which the child attempt to think, or say, or do, and seems on the whole to be the most important facto in determining his work in the classroom. Our psychological witnesses assured us that it can be measure approximately by mean of administering intelligence tests…Psychologists are confident that there are, in fact, wide individual differences in the development of general intelligence…We were informed that, with few exceptions it is possible at a very early age to predict with some degree of accuracy the ultimate level of a child’s intellectual powers.*

…Modern psychology insists on the wide individual differences that are noticeable in intellectual and emotional characteristics. One child differs from another far more than is generally supposed, and the notion that every normal child follows the same general course of development is mistaken.

Since the ratio of each child's mental age to his chronological age remains approximately the same while his chronological age increases, the mental differences between one child and another will grow larger and larger and will reach a maximum during adolescence. Thus a child who is a year backward at the age of 4 is more likely than not to be two years backward at the age of 8 and still more backward at the age of 15. In general, minor differences, which were hardly noticeable in the infant school, will be distinctly observable in the primary school, and by the age of 11 will have increased so much that it will no longer be sufficient to sort out different children into different classes. Different children from the age of 11, if justice is to be done to their varying capacities, require types of education varying in certain important respects  (emphasis in the original. Spens Report, 1938: 123-125).

The Spens report represents the peak of the psychologists’ influence in the interwar years. By the time of its publication, the belief that an education system should fundamentally reflect an understanding of human ability as innate, unchanging, and measurable had moved through a range of communicative channels from the writings of a

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50 This sentence would later referred to by Committee member Lady Simon as the report’s most “celebrated and ill-founded assertion” (Simon, 1977: 174).
relatively small group of researchers in a rather obscure academic sub-field to the highest levels of government consideration. On the eve of the Second World War, these views had achieved a hegemonic standing in the educational policy discourse of Great Britain and would, by war’s end, achieve institutionalization in a new secondary system of education.

**The Education Act 1944 and the Tripartite System**

Among victors and vanquished alike, the experiences of the Second World War would generate a reconsideration of basic social and political arrangements among actors and create new possibilities for institutional change. In the case of education policy, the war would dramatically accelerate the demands for greater access to schooling that the interwar period had witnessed. More than anything, the experience would make clear to Britons the manifold lapses in the basic education of the country’s young people\(^5\) and usher in what Barber refers to as a “social sea change”\(^6\) that would bring together actors to reform the system of general education.

To be sure, the most vocal advocates for change were on the Left. Led by a coalition comprised of the National Union of Teachers, the Trades Union Congress (TUC), and the Workers’ Educational Association, all of which would come together in 1942 to form the Campaign for Educational Advance, an advocacy group chaired by Tawney, progressive supporters of educational expansion would travel throughout the country in the war years demanding reforms of the type that Tawney himself had called for twenty years earlier in

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\(^5\) As Barber (1994:4) notes, the British army would report that one in four of its conscripts during the war years was functionally illiterate.

\(^6\) In this sense, the Act (despite its passage before the war’s end) would generally be considered part of the legislation that established the postwar British welfare state.
Secondary Education for All and the Hadow and Spens reports had reaffirmed (Barber, 1994: 4).

By the start of the war, however, more traditionally conservative groups and media outlets, including the military, the Church of England, the BBC and The Times, would also begin making clear their support for fundamental changes to the structure of the general education system. Although Labour would serve in government in a wartime coalition with the Conservatives beginning in 1940, it would be Tory R.A. Butler who would oversee the Education Act from his appointment as President of the Board of Education to the Board by Prime Minister Winston Churchill in July 1941 through its passage in summer of 1944.54

Consideration of the new legislation among Board officials began in 1940 and led to the issuance of a Green Book entitled Education After the War in the spring of 1941, which outlined the basic framework of a new general education system (Gosden, 1976: 248). In accordance with the recommendations in Hadow and Spens, the proposed secondary sector in the system was decidedly structured around early selection. Following six years in primary education, students would transfer to one of two school types at age eleven: modern schools, with a leaving age of fifteen, and grammar schools with leaving ages of sixteen to eighteen. Students who demonstrated technical abilities would also be able to transfer at age thirteen to technical schools, which would provide a course of study through age fifteen or sixteen (Barber, 1994: 51).

53 As Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1950s, Butler would convince many in his party to accept the basic features of the welfare state created during Labour’s first postwar governments (Hall, 1986: 76, see below).
54 Although the 1944 legislation would later be referred to as “the Butler Act,” some historians have questioned Butler’s personal contribution to its drafting, arguing that his primary role was one of an advocate for existing plans drawn up prior to his appointment by civil servants in the Board of Education in late 1940 and early 1941 (see Gosden, 1976).
The vertically differentiated system proposed in the Green Book would receive further confirmation in 1943 from the Norwood report,\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools}. Commissioned by Butler in 1941 to advise the Board on programs of study for the new secondary schools under consideration, the new report would be written not by the Consultative Committee that had produced the Hadow and Spens reports, but by the Secondary Schools Examinations Council, an advisory body to the Board that also coordinated the administration of university entrance exams between the schools and university examination authorities (Kogan and Packwood, 1974: 19).

While written by a different committee, Norwood would in many ways be even more explicit than Hadow and Spens in its advocacy for a selective tripartite system of secondary education. Under the heading “Variety of Capacity,” the report’s authors outlined the reasons why a vertical structure with early selection was the most appropriate for the new system then under consideration by the Board.

One of the major problems of educational theory and organisation has always been, and always will be, to reconcile diversity of human endowment with practical schemes of administration and instruction…The evolution of education has in fact thrown up certain groups, each of which can and must be treated in a way appropriate to itself. Whether such groupings are distinct on strictly psychological grounds, whether they represent types of mind, whether the differences are differences in kind or in degree, these are questions which it is not necessary to pursue. Our point is that rough groupings, whatever may be their ground, have in fact established themselves in general educational experience, and the recognition of such groupings in educational practice has been justified both during the period of education and in the after-careers of the pupils (Norwood Report, 1943: 2).

The report described the various “groupings” in terms of their aptitudes and occupational trajectories, emphasizing how students in each group should be provided with a curricular design appropriate to their particular ability type. The first group, according to the report, included:

\textsuperscript{55} The report was written under the direction of Sir Cyril Norwood, a former headmaster at Harrow and president of St. John’s College at Oxford.
the pupil who is interested in learning for its own sake, who can grasp an argument or follow a piece of connected reasoning, who is interested in causes, whether on the level of human volition or in the material world, who cares to know how things came to be as well as how they are, who is sensitive to language as expression of thought, to a proof as a precise demonstration, to a series of experiments justifying a principle… He may be good with his hands or he may not; he may or may not be a good 'mixer' or a leader or a prominent figure in activities, athletic or other. …Such pupils, educated by the curriculum commonly associated with the Grammar School, have entered the learned professions or have taken up higher administrative or business posts.

By contrast, a member of the second student group, while less capable of abstraction and rhetoric than his counterparts in the first group:

often has an uncanny insight into the intricacies of mechanism whereas the subtleties of language construction are too delicate for him… He may have unusual or moderate intelligence: where intelligence is not great, a feeling of purpose and relevance may enable him to make the most of it. …The various kinds of technical school were not instituted to satisfy the intellectual needs of an arbitrarily assumed group of children, but to prepare boys and girls for taking up certain crafts… Nevertheless it is usual to think of the engineer or other craftsman as possessing a particular set of interests or aptitudes by virtue of which he becomes a successful engineer or whatever he may become.

The final group identified by Norwood was comprised of the practical student, who lacked academic or technical gifts, and could comprehend:

concrete things [rather] than…ideas. He may have much ability, but it will be in the realm of facts. He is interested in things as they are; he finds little attraction in the past or in the slow disentanglement of causes or movements. His mind must turn its knowledge or its curiosity to immediate test; and his test is essentially practical…Because he is interested only in the moment he may be incapable of a long series of connected steps; relevance to present concerns is the only way of awakening interest, abstractions mean little to him…..Within this group fall pupils whose mental make-up does not show at an early stage pronounced leanings in a way comparable with the other groups which we indicated. (Norwood Report, 1943: 2-4)

While clearly supporting early selection on the basis of ability, Norwood de-emphasized the use of intelligence tests that were at the center of the educational psychologists discourse, advocating their use more as supplements to other methods of placement considered by the Committee to be more reliable, notably teacher recommendations (Norwood Report, 1943: 17). Not surprisingly Burt took issue with this
aspect of the report, arguing that age eleven was, in effect, too late for selection, since intelligence tests could accurately assess individual differences in young people well before then. He also rejected the “types of mind” framework that Norwood had invoked as justification for the three-tiered system of grammar, technical, and modern schools, maintaining that ability was not distributed in the fixed “capacity” categories outlined but continuously distributed across a wide spectrum. To Burt, Norwood represented clear turn away from modern psychological understanding of ability and a return to unscientific educational traditionalism (Fenwick, 1976: 32; Wooldridge, 1994: 239-243).

Wooldridge makes much of Burt’s criticism of the Norwood report, implying that the commonly-held but mistaken belief that Norwood’s views were the result of the influence of educational psychology has served to cast Burt and others in an undeserved bad light (Woodbridge, 1994: 243-44). As Torrance (1981:52) points out, however, Burt’s criticism of Norwood was more about ensuring that the ideational rationale for early selection and vertical differentiation in education remain firmly rooted in the theories of educational psychology, rather than in some more fundamental objection to the principles espoused in the report. Burt, he writes, thought “administrative convenience the main force behind selection at eleven [in Norwood], but he endorsed selection as such, in effect saying the right policy had been adopted but not for the right (i.e. his) reasons.”

During the period in which the Education Act was being drafted in the early 1940s, supporters of mixed-ability schools represented a distinct minority in Britain. The view that the proposed selective system might simply reproduce existing class division or that poorer students might have more opportunities in schools commonly attended by young people of all
ranges of ability had been limited to a few progressive educationalists prior to the 1930s.\textsuperscript{56} By the middle part of that decade, however, interest in horizontally-organized education had arisen in leftist political circles, particularly among members of the Labour Party’s Advisory Committee on Education (ACE). Under pressure from this group, Labour would adopt a policy in 1938 calling for local experimentation with “multilaterals,” or schools in which students of all ability types would be educated in a common facility but placed in different academic streams (Parkinson, 1970: 32; Barber, 1994: 23).\textsuperscript{57}

Despite such actions, Labour leaders in government and Parliament were for the most part reluctant to offer their support to the multilateral idea.\textsuperscript{58} Here they would be joined by the TUC, the peak British labor association that dominated Labour Party politics for much of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. While open to limited multilateral experimentation, the TUC was similarly unwilling fully to back any widespread deployment of mixed-ability schools in any newly expanded secondary system of education. As Parkinson notes, comprehensive schools, “ran very much counter to the official philosophy in this period. The three major reports on English education in the inter-war period, the \textit{Hadow, Spens, and Norwood Reports}, all stressed the need for a variety of schools which would cater for the educational needs of different children in different institutions, as had, of course, the Party’s own programme in \textit{Secondary Education for All.”} (Parkinson, 1970: 31). Indeed the Spens report had explicitly considered and rejected the idea of placing students in multilateral schools as general policy,

\textsuperscript{56} The general absence of enthusiasm for comprehensive schools in Britain in the early interwar period stands in mark contrast to Germany, where the mixed-ability \textit{Einheitsschule} had significant support among progressive educationalists and leftist political parties (see Chapter VI).

\textsuperscript{57} This school type is similar to the “additive” version of the \textit{Gesamtschule} endorsed primarily by the Christian Democrats in West Germany during the 1960s (see Chapter VIII).

\textsuperscript{58} As Parkinson points out, even members of Labour’s ACE differed significantly during this time in their opinions of the merits of mixed-ability schools (Parkinson, 1970: 33).
recommending instead that their construction be limited to areas in which grammar schools would be too small to maintain alone (Spens Report, 1938: xx-xxii; see also Chitty, 2007: 75).

The Board’s final plans for the new system were made public in a June 1943 White Paper entitled *Educational Reconstruction*, which accepted the tripartite structure proposed in Spens. The Paper, which was received with significant approval from the political parties, trade unions, teachers, educationalists, and press outlets from both ends of the political spectrum, set the stage for parliamentary consideration of the Bill in the winter and spring of 1943-44 (Barber, 1994: 57-58). Over the course of the debates in the Commons and Lords there would be passionate arguments over a range of issues associated with the Bill, yet a review of the parliamentary record shows that the selective system adopted in the White Paper was not an overly contentious topic among MPs and government officials. As Barber (1994: 23) writes, “Many, even on the Left, were happy to settle for universal secondary education, regardless of the form it should take.” The Bill received the Royal Assent on August 3, 1944.

The Act was a wide-ranging piece of legislation that made several key changes to the structure of educational policymaking as well as to the school system. It created a new Ministry of Education led by a Cabinet Minister to replace the old Board of Education and Board President and a new advisory board, the Central Advisory Council on Education (CACE), to examine various issues at the request of the Minister. It also consolidated the system of local education authorities, cutting in half the total number of LEAs by eliminating

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59 A key area of concern cited by Labour MPs during the parliamentary debate on the Bill focused on the raising of the minimum school leaving age to sixteen. Under the Bill, the minimum age was to be raised immediately from fourteen to fifteen. Despite attempts by Labour MPs to obtain a firm timetable from Butler, the Bill stated that the age would be raised again to sixteen when “practicable.” History would demonstrate that the MPs’ concern was warranted – the minimum leaving age would not reach sixteen until the early 1970s.

60 *See Hansard*, HC Deb January-April 1944 vol 396-397.

61 In Germany, such a ministerial position would not be created until 1969 (see Chapter VIII).
those responsible solely for elementary education (Education Act, 1944). Most importantly for advocates of education expansion, however, was the new general education system established under the Act, which consisted of successive stages of elementary schools for ages five to eleven and free secondary schools for ages eleven to at least fifteen. Two decades after the publication of Labour’s policy proposal, Britain would finally have secondary education for all.62

*Labour and the Implementation of the Tripartite System, 1945-1951*

It is one of the great ironies of the 20th century British political history that the tripartite system of early selection and vertical differentiation that come to be seen by many in the British Left as the institutional embodiment of class-prejudice and pedagogical backwardness would not only be implemented by a Labour government, but by a Labour government that by most measures was among the most radically progressive the country had known since at least the 1860s. The landslide election victory of Labour in June 1945 under Clement Attlee heralded an enormous change in the politics and policies of Great Britain, resulting in a departure from many of the practices and arrangements that had characterized the British state for much of the industrial era and leading to the establishment of the “postwar consensus” that would shape the decisions of Conservative and Labour governments alike for the next thirty five years.

The core of Labour’s postwar program consisted of three primary economic and social policy components. First, the government committed itself to the achievement of full employment through public intervention in the economy. The experience of mass joblessness

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62 Although the Education Act 1944 applied only to England and Wales, many of its key provisions were included in the Education Act 1945 in Scotland and in the Education Act 1947 in Northern Ireland.
during the Depression years had moved members of both parties toward this policy goal, which was first comprehensively articulated in the White Paper on Employment issued by the wartime coalition in 1944. In the ensuing years, governments of both parties would increasingly draw on Keynesian ideas on public management of demand in the economy to reach full employment. Second, the Labour government, building on the foundation of earlier pension and insurance policies, established a system of universal welfare provision that included national insurance benefits for illness and unemployment, a system of child support, and a health service created to provide free medical care. Finally, Labour nationalized several key companies and industries, including British Airways, the coal, iron and steel, gas, and telecommunication industries, as well as the Bank of England. Although this component of the Labour program engendered the most controversy, it arguably had the smallest long-term impact, since policymakers were reluctant to use public ownership radically to enhance workers’ control over production, or as a method for promoting industrial rationalization (Hall, 1986).

While the general expansion of secondary education in the 1944 Act was welcomed across Labour’s membership, questions over the vertical structure of the system would come to divide the party during its time in power from 1945 to 1951. On one side of this divide were what Brian Simon referred to as the “determinedly meritocratic” Fabians, who supported a view of equality of opportunity very much in line with the selective principles of the tripartite system, while on the other side were the ethical socialists, for whom selection in education of any type reflected a fundamental violation of the party’s core egalitarian principles (Simon, 1991: 155). This latter group, led by the party’s teacher union, the

63 See the discussion of Crosland’s *The Future of Socialism* in Chapter V.
National Association of Labour Teachers (NALT), dominated the party’s educational advisory committee, where it would consistently press party members in Parliament and government to pursue policies based on principles of horizontal education in mixed-ability comprehensive schools.

While the ethical socialists may have had power within the party, it was the Fabian camp that controlled the government ministries and parliamentary faction tahtand would seek to implement the 1944 Act in accordance with the tripartite structure outlined in 1943 White Paper. The Fabianists were particularly well represented among the hundreds of new Labour MPs who entered the House of Commons in the 1945 election. As Baron Goronwy-Roberts, a Welsh Labour MP first elected in 1945, later recalled, “to most new MPs eager to build socialism, it seemed important to create secondary education for all. The idea of multilateral schools was remote and esoteric and familiar only to a few educational experts” (quoted in Vernon, 1982: 218).

The 1944 Act itself made no specific reference to the tripartite system or the school types in the Spens and Norwood reports, but instead called on LEAs to “afford for all pupils... such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities, and aptitudes, and of the different periods for which they may be expected to remain in school, including practical instruction and training appropriate to their respective needs” (Education Act, 1944: 5). Instead, the specific implementation in of the tripartite system the late 1940s and early 1950s owed much to guidance published by the Ministry of Education under the caretaker government led by the Conservatives following Labour’s withdraw from the wartime coalition government in May 1945. While the 1944 legislation had been vague on the specifics of organization, the Ministry’s guidance, entitled The Nation’s Schools,
advised LEAs to adopt the proposed secondary structure contained in the Spens and Norwood reports and the 1943 White Paper, namely a selective system in which all students would be selected for placement in either a grammar school or secondary modern school at age eleven -- with those demonstrating technical aptitudes further placed in technical schools at age thirteen – and discouraged the general adoption of mixed-ability schools. The Ministry pamphlet also maintained that there was little need to expand the number of grammar school places currently available, a view that seemed to be firmly at odds with the belief that more working class students would enter the academic schools under the new system (Parkinson, 1970: 38).

*The Nation’s Schools* was received with considerable hostility by many Labour members, who called on the new Minister of Education Ellen Wilkinson to renounce the pamphlet and adopt a policy actively advocating reorganization around mixed-ability schools. Wilkinson, who herself was of working-class origins and had won a scholarship to a local grammar school and Manchester University under the old system (Vernon, 1982: 6), rejected this call, maintaining that that tripartite system was a marked improvement from the previous system and one that promised to allocate students to the appropriate educational pathway on the basis of objective and rational educational considerations rather than social criteria (Parkinson, 1970: 40). Under the influence of pro-tripartite civil servants, Wilkinson would continue to adhere to the Ministry’s earlier guidance that local authorities adopt the tripartite framework (Lawton, 2005: 49). When Wilkinson died in early 1947, she was replaced by another skeptic of comprehensives, George Tomlinson, who like his predecessor, would reject demands from party members that the Ministry pursue the horizontal reorganization of the
secondary schools, even turning down the Labour-led Middlesex LEA’s plan to establish comprehensive schools in its district in 1948 (Chitty, 2007: 80).

While such actions from Labour officials may seem inexplicable in hindsight, in the discursive context of the period they are perfectly consistent with a clear thread of educational thought within the party. As educationalist and early comprehensive school supporter Robin Pedley (1966: 38) would write of the Attlee governments’ approach to education from the radically altered climate of the 1960s:

One might have supposed that an avowedly socialist party would look askance at plans for separate types of secondary school which offered courses of different length and scope to children judged superior or inferior in mental ability; schools which were, therefore, likely to vary greatly in social prestige. But Labour was not an egalitarian party… few of the leading figures had the knowledge which would have enabled them to effectively to answer the [pro-tripartite] arguments… Still more important, most saw no need to do so. (1966: 38)

In addition to allowing LEAs to decide on the structure of the new compulsory secondary education system – subject to Ministry approval – the 1944 Act had also left it to individual LEAs to decide the method used to allocate students to different schools at age eleven. As discussed above, local authorities – largely on the basis of educational-psychologists’ recommendations – had begun using intelligence tests in the 1920s to help award scholarship places for students in the old two-tier elementary and secondary system. With LEAs now needing to sort the entire school populations at age eleven for secondary placement after the 1944 Act, the use of such tests expanded significantly. A survey conducted by the National Union of Teachers in 1947 revealed that some 78 of 106 authorities responded that they were already using some type of standardized intelligence tests to help place students into different school types and by 1952 the figure had risen to encompass essentially all LEAs in the sample (Thom, 1986: 118, 123). To be sure, the IQ test was only part of the overall eleven-plus exam – attainment tests, teacher assessments, and, on rare
occasion, interviews were also used. But intelligence tests uniquely offered a method of determining school placement was administratively straightforward and appeared to be, unlike recommendations, wholly objective. The IQ cut point for acceptance to the grammar schools was generally expected to fall between 114 and 120 points, above which it was assumed that only about twenty percent of the population would place (Montague, 1959: 375).

What explains the reluctance of the Ministry of Education in the Attlee governments to accept party calls for comprehensive education? Factors related to simple administrative issues clearly provide one explanation. Requiring LEAs to reorganize their systems along still largely experimental horizontal lines so soon after the 1944 Act would present significant challenges to local authorities to say the least. Beyond this, however, were the continuing beliefs among many Labour leaders that state grammar schools provided the best counterweight to the independent schools for working class students and their continuing acceptance of the interwar education policy discourse.

It is hard to overstate the hatred held by many on the English Left for the independent schools during the first half of the 20th century. Drawing support from a wave of writings in the 1930s and 40s decrying the English private education culture of the “the old school tie,” 64 many in the Labour Party would advocate for the formal legal abolition of the independents, arguing that the presence of institutions that conferred such dramatic advantages to its narrow circle of wealthy members was contrary to the values of democracy, particularly as they were being defined for the new postwar era.65 As Workers Education Trade Union Committee General Secretary and leading Labour educationalist Ernest Green wrote, “any class

64 See Worsely, 1941.
65 Although the Conservatives were far more likely to be graduates of independents, many significant Labour Party leaders attended private schools, including Prime Minister Attlee (Haileybury) and future Minister of Education and Science and architect of comprehensive education reform Anthony Crosland (Highgate).
distinction in education is totally at variance with the democratic way of life, and inequalities of educational opportunity within the State system cannot be effectively checked if educational privileges are maintained in certain types of schools outside the State system” (Green, 1948: 157).

The schools entrench position in the country’s elite fabric rendered politically impossible any attempt to close them down completely.66 But many critics of the existing private system saw in the grammar schools established under the 1944 reorganization an opportunity to do the next best thing, namely to create a high quality state system of universal and free state secondary education that would end any advantage conferred by access to exclusive fee-charging private schools and reduce the still dominant role played by family class and wealth in determining young people’s life chances. In Green’s estimation:

The solution lies in the State providing educational opportunities of such wide variety, encouraging experiments so comprehensive in character, and planning and staffing its schools, both day and boarding schools, to such high standards of teaching and amenities that no parent, however rich or however snobbish, could gain any advantage either in prestige or social opportunity by paying £315 per year to maintain his son at Eton (Green, 1948: 161).

The idea that a state system comprised of comprehensive schools could seriously challenge such advantages seemed highly unlikely, even to otherwise ardent believers in egalitarianism. A selective general system of education may not be ideal, but it still

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66 Although they survived the reorganization of education initiated by the 1944 Act, Independent schools were also the subject of a wartime study, the 1942 Fleming Report, which advocated greater state involvement in their administration and recommended that one-quarter of their students be drawn from the state primary schools and financially supported by state funds. Interestingly, this recommendation was rejected by the a Conservative government in the 1950s on the grounds that increased standards in state schools had obviated the need for such a scheme, despite support for the idea from many Independents themselves (Dancy, 1963: 28-32; also Anderson, 2006: 131-132). For a succinct summary of the range of obstacles facing those who sought the abolishment of public schools, see Crosland, 1982: 149.
provided capable working class students with the best possible chance of gaining access to higher education and the opportunities it created.

In the immediate postwar years, the interwar discourse on ability continued to shape the preferences of Labour Party leaders. While many rank and file party members had turned against the psychologists’ conceptions and their institutional prescriptions for the schooling since the late 1930s, the belief in human intelligence as innate and measurable and ability as fixed at an early age still dominated much thinking within the Ministry of Education under Attlee. In such a discursive climate, the option of reorganizing the education system around comprehensive schools was, as Parkinson (1970: 51) writes, “at best superfluous and at worst educationally retrograde. That these assumptions in many ways have since been rejected …does not alter their importance as one of the conditioning factors operating upon administrators and the Ministers at this time. They clear formed part of the climate of opinion by which the Ministers were consciously or unconsciously influenced into accepting the validity of the tripartite system and rejecting the comprehensive alternative. And these factors were bound to appear more important at the time than the apparently ideological considerations of Party members.”

Few statements validate Parkinson’s assessment more completely than one made by Ellen Wilkinson while serving as Minister of Education in 1946. In language that it could have appeared in one of Cyril Burt or Percy Nunn’s writings, Wilkinson demonstrated the extent to which the ideas of interwar educational psychology still held sway over the newly created Ministry and shaped the new institutional arrangement it was tasked with implementing.

There are differences in intelligence among children as well as among adults. There are distinctions of mind and these are imposed by nature. I am afraid that this is a fact which we cannot get over. Children will be different in bent, and in intellectual capacity. There is a
purpose in education and that is to draw out and develop the best in every child. Because children differ in their intellectual makeup, it seems to me that different provisions must be made by the Ministry of Education (quoted in Vernon, 1982: 59)\textsuperscript{67}

Conclusion

The 1944 Education Act resulted from a decades long fight for the expansion of education in Britain. Since the early 1920s, the Labour Party had called for the creation of a system of free secondary education open to all students, reflecting a view that greater access to schooling for working class youth could help break the stranglehold of the middle and upper classes on British society. Due to the sharp political constraints imposed on its two interwar governments, Labour would be unable to realize such policy itself before 1939. It would find success, however, during the Second World War, when it would be joined by a number of traditional opponents of educational expansion, including the Conservative Party, for whom the war had revealed the shortcomings of the British education system and who recognized the need for an educated workforce to rebuild the country at the conflict’s end.

A powerful explanation for the expansion of secondary education carried out by the 1944 Education Act can be found in power-interest explanations of politics. Labour had experienced significant electoral growth and increased political influence during the interwar years, replacing the Liberals as one of the two major parties in the British political system. Through decades of active campaigning and resource mobilization that would be aided by shifting climates of opinion during the war, the party achieved a clear advancement in the material interests of its working class constituency with the 1944 legislation by significantly expanding access to schooling within the state-maintained system of general education.

\textsuperscript{67} In recent years Wilkinson’s quote has been invoked by a number of political actors and educationalist, mostly on the right of the political spectrum, who advocate a return to the postwar tripartite system, including the UK Independence Party, which cited it in the party’s 2005 education policy program (UKIP, 2005: 15).
While the power-interest approach may explain the expansionary dimension of the 1944 Act, it cannot account for either the general preference among policymakers that the new system be organized around early selection and vertical differentiation or the specific preference of Labour Party leaders for such an organizational model. As this chapter has argued, such an explanation requires an understanding of the influence on actors of the interwar discourse of educational psychology. The discourse defined the problem of expanding education not merely in terms of offering more schooling but in offering the most appropriate schooling given the innate and unchanging nature of human ability. Under such a definition, the tripartite system that was built on practices of early selection and vertical differentiation served as the institutional solution that best addressed the psychologists’ conception of the problem of expansion. Critically, this definition and solution also comported with the interwar and immediate postwar views held by the Labour leadership, which saw selection by ability as a remedy to the manifest inequalities of the old system’s practice of selecting by social class, which the party sought to realize by supporting the 1944 Act and later by implementing the tripartite system.

Continuity in the organization design of the secondary system created after the 1944 Act thus depended more on a set of beliefs than on a set of interests. As a consequence, ideas that undercut those beliefs would concurrently challenge the design. As the next chapter examines, such an ideational challenge would arise within a remarkably short time after the creation of the tripartite system; this counter discourse would hasten the collapse of coalition that had supported tripartism by generating marked uncertainty about the practices of early selection where firm belief had existed only a few years before.
Chapter IV

Britain Case Study II:
Shifting Discourses in General Education, 1951-1964

Introduction

In his study of the politics of stem cell research in Britain, Germany, France, and the United States, Banchoff (2005) outlines the two primary causal pathways linking institutions created at critical junctures to subsequent policy outcomes within conceptions of path dependence derived from analyses of what he terms “interest-driven” issue areas, such as welfare state reform, which are characterized by the presence of actors who pursue material advantages under sets of institutional constraints. The first focuses on how institutions affect the distribution of future agenda-setting power within a policy sector. In this conception, legacies from early battles over institutional design at the time of an institution’s creation afford some actors greater participatory opportunities and decision-making authority in future policy debates. The second pathway describes how new institutions can create networks of actors whose material interests are tied to the continuation of arrangements under those institutions and who thus consistently oppose changes to them. Such an understanding can provide an explanation for why many institutions and policies associated with interest-driven issues appear so to be resilient to reform (2005: 204, 207).

As Banchoff notes, however, not all issues are interest-driven. Policies associated with “value-driven” issues such as stem cell research can demonstrate a different logic of path dependence. While the lasting effects of institutions on the configuration of actors and interests is central to notions of path dependence for interest-driven issues, patterns of continuity and change in value-driven issues are further shaped by how the constitutional and
policy frameworks of state institutions influence the terms of future legislative debates in ways that eliminate certain policy alternatives and provide actors with rhetorical resources used to advocate caution and incrementalism in debates over policy change (2005: 202).

The significance of Banchoff’s analysis for the present study lies in its core insight that the basic nature of an issue area can shape its development. As the last chapter argued, the policies of early selection and vertical differentiation reflected in the tripartite system of secondary education created by the Education Act 1944 were “discourse-driven,” that is, owed their form and legitimacy to a more or less coherent set of ideas and beliefs regarding the relationship between human intelligence and the structure of schooling that had been articulated to policymakers and advanced in public circles via a range of communicative channels mainly by a set of academics in the 1920s and 1930s. To a remarkable degree, contemporary observers recognized the extent to which the existence of the tripartite system rested on a discursive framework. As the social psychologist Charlotte Mary Fleming wrote in 1948 while the system was still being set up:

If there is any reason to doubt the early fixity of the intelligence quotient, the abruptness of other changes during adolescence, the clear delimitations of specific aptitudes, and the absolute necessity for class instruction, the foundation of the much of the present structure of educational organization will have been shaken (Fleming, 1948: 120).

Continuity in the arrangements of tripartism thus depended more on key actors adhering not only to the ideational assumptions of the discourse but also continuing to define their interests in terms of those ideas. As discussed in the previous chapter, to the extent that the new system reflected the interests of any group in British society, it was the Labour Party and its working class constituents, which largely accepted the ideas of the educational psychologists and come to support practices of early selection and vertical differentiation as
arrangements that could truly provide real equality of opportunity to young people who had been held back by the social biases of the old system.

As the current chapter documents, however, it was precisely this group that would drop out of the interwar discourse coalition, becoming a vocal critic of the selective system the 1944 Act had created and advocating its complete dismantling just a few years after a Labour government had helped to create it. Why did Labour change its position on early selection in secondary schooling so quickly and completely? This chapter argues that much of the explanation can be found in the rise in the 1950s of a counter discourse to the educational psychologist view that would both shape and be shaped by actors in the Labour Party and would contribute to the doubt and uncertainty about the nature of the secondary school arrangements of the tripartite system that had been growing in the country since the early 1950s. Rooted in the research of educational sociologists and other academics and communicated into policy debates through advisory studies commissioned by the Ministry of Education, the ideas of this counter discourse would challenge the core assumptions of the interwar view that intelligence was innate, fixed, and measurable and that a vertical school organization based on practices of early selection could eliminate the socially-biases of the old system by advancing students on the basis of merit rather than wealth. Such assumptions had been the basis of Labour’s support for tripartism in the inter- and immediate postwar periods; once they were revealed to be flawed, Labour’s support would quickly collapse. The ideas of the sociologists also comported with shifting conceptions of equality within the party itself. In the interwar period, the party had defined egalitarianism largely in terms of “soft” notion of equal opportunity and access reflected in practices such as early selection; by the 1950s, however, the party had reoriented its views around “hard” notions of equality that
emphasized commonly shared experiences and outcomes. It would precisely this latter view that would be reflected in an alternate model for secondary education – the comprehensive school.

The chapter begins by examining some of problems of the tripartite regime encountered during the 1950s, most notably how the commonly-administered IQ tests given to help determine selection at age eleven under the new system were proving problematical in practice, creating significant concerns among parents, teachers, and students. The next section discusses the core findings and ideas of the educational sociologists’ counter discourse. Sociologists would play a key role in challenging not only the performance of tripartite system but also the psychological foundations on which it was based, elevating their ideas into policy debates through advisory reports to the Education Ministry, much as the psychologists had a generation earlier. This discussion is followed by an examination of the changing outlook of Labour in the 1950s and early 1960s. Influenced by the sociologists’ findings and its own internal ideological reorientation, the party would formally renounce its support of tripartism and come to advocate the creation of a horizontal system of education.

**Equality and Allocation in the Tripartite System**

Within a few years of its creation in the 1944 Education Act, the new selective system of secondary education would exhibit patterns inconsistent with the intentions of its designers and supporters. First, the tripartite structure suggested in the interwar reports, 1943 White Paper, and the 1945 Ministry of Education guidance to LEAs would not be fully realized. Instead of a three-tiered arrangement, what emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s was more of a two-track system comprised of, on the one hand, grammar schools that accepted

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68 See Chapter III.
roughly twenty percent of all eleven year olds, and on the other, the secondary moderns, which took the bulk of those remaining. For a host of reasons related to funding and the availability of facilities, local authorities had been reluctant to build technical schools, dramatically limiting the number of students who would shift into the technical track at age thirteen; by the late 1950s, only 3.7 percent of all state secondary students attended such schools (McCullough, 1989: 3). Beyond the facility issues was the absence of political support - technical schools also had no strong advocate among government, firms, or organized labor. Businesses and Ministry of Education officials preferred to promote grammar schools, while the trade unions maintained their long standing suspicion of technical education, believing that technical schools held the potential for a return to the “detested prewar notion of vocational education, aimed at providing a stream of low skilled workers for industry” (Parkinson, 1970: 39).

Second, questions would emerge about the fairness and reliability of the selection process itself. Although most LEAs were using purportedly objective intelligence tests as part of the 11-plus exams used to make school placement decisions, individual areas were demonstrating striking variation in the percentage of students selected for places in grammar schools. In Gateshead in Northeast England, for example, only 8 percent of elementary students were selected for the academic track, while Merioneth in Wales, the figure was as high as 60 percent (Wooldridge, 1994: 261). Moreover a number of secondary modern students who had fared poorly on the 11-plus exams began performing well at age fifteen on the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (O-Level) exams that had been introduced in the early 1950s, leading many to question the capacity of the selection tests to identify a student’s true ability (Chitty, 2004: 25-28; 2008: 85).
The particular school type into which one might be placed under a system of early selection would always matter for one’s future educational and occupational opportunities. In the context of 1950s Britain, however, it would matter more. Areas in which more students attended grammar schools also demonstrated greater levels of higher education attendance and advanced educational qualifications. And it was precisely these students who would begin filling the ranks of salaried managers and skilled workers that the country’s industry increasingly demanded in the 1950s (see Halsey and Gardner, 1953: 60; see also Wooldridge, 1994: 261). As such, students selected for secondary modern schools would be effectively shut out at the age of eleven from a growing part of Britain’s postwar occupational structure. A child’s entire life prospects would thus largely ride on his or her ability to solve questions such as the following, taken from an actual 1950s 11-plus exam (reprinted in Dunk, 2008):

Select and write down one of the answers below which makes the best answer to the following:

A woman who had fallen into the water was dragged out in a drowning condition by a man, but she did not thank him because:

a) She never felt thankful for small things.
b) She did not know the man well enough.
c) She was feeling better.
d) She was still unconscious.  

The huge significance of the 11-plus would render an enormously stressful experience for parent, students, and teachers alike. Agencies specifically created to coach children for the exam even emerged in the 1950s to cater to anxious parents during this period, charging fees in return for promises of higher 11-plus scores and pressure to improve students’ scores on the exams and increase class percentages selected for the grammar school track led

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69 This correspondence would be duly noted in the 1963 Robbins Report that helped to generate higher education expansion in the 1960s and 70s (see Chapter V).
70 The best answer is d).
primary school teachers to reorganize their lessons around the 11-plus in the hopes of sticking performance (see Simon, 1978: 56).

**Collapse of a Coalition: The Delegitimizing of Early Selection**

That the new tripartite system would experience problems in its first years is not particularly surprising, given the vast scope of the institution and the assortment of actors associated with its implementation. For reasons such as poor management and administration, financial limitations, unforeseen developments, and simple bad luck, new institutions often fall short of the aspirations of their planners or encounter problems once they are put into operation. Few arrangements work with high demonstrable efficiency after decades, much less “out of the box.” Policymakers can address such problems through a variety of available legislative and administrative fixes, including strengthening controls, increasing funding, and implementing new protocols. In some instances, officials may simply muddle through, hoping that inefficiencies will work themselves out in time. Transformative institutional change of the type that would be seen in Britain’s system of general education during the first postwar decades, however, is seldom the outcome.

What would be different in the case of the secondary education sector was that early problems with the selection process would coincide with the rise of a new discourse coalition that would challenge the ideational basis of the system. There would be two related dimensions to this new discourse. The first involved arguments advanced by academics working largely in the field of educational sociology. Research conducted by sociologists and others would find that many of the conclusions reached and disseminated by the educational psychologists during the interwar years about the nature of intelligence and its relationship to
the structure of schooling had been overstated or were simply inaccurate. In a communicative process that largely paralleled the way in which the psychologists themselves had come to influence policymakers in the years before World War II, the views of the educational psychologists would enter into the policy discourse by way of consultative committees to the Ministry of Education, namely the Central Advisory Council on Education that had been established by the 1944 Education Act.

The second dimension involved changing conceptions of equality in the Labour Party. Between the late 1930s and late 1950s, progressive elements in the party would successfully reframe Labour’s understanding of equality of opportunity in education from one associated with the tripartite system and its psychological foundations, to one that viewed early differentiation as inherently unequal and inimical to socialist ideals. Achieving the reframed vision of social equality in the party would require the dismantling of the vertical structure established by the Education Act 1944 and its replacement with a horizontal system, characterized by the widespread establishment of non-selective comprehensive schools.

*Challenging the Psychologists: Sociology and the 1950s Counter Discourse in Education*

The tripartite system of education generated significant interest from academic researchers in the immediate years following its implementation. Interested in the social consequences of the new education system in a country still riven by class divisions and spurred by the widely reported problems with the selection process cited above, educational sociologists would begin investigating how students were faring under the new education system. In a series of studies produced during the 1950s, the members of this group would
argue not only that the system was failing to provide equality of educational opportunity for young Britons, but that the very assumptions upon it rested were flawed.

Two general conclusions mark the sociologists’ research during this period: first, working class students were not benefiting from tripartite system as early selection advocates had anticipated; and second, intelligence was not innate and determined by heredity – as the interwar psychologists had claimed – but acquired over time and affected by a range of environmental factors. Scores on intelligence tests such as the 11-plus were thus not accurate indicators of basic mental ability, but could reflect the social conditions in which one was raised. Far from opening the doors of opportunity for a new class-blind meritocracy, the tripartite system was reproducing the pre-war social system under the legitimating guise of science.

One of the earliest studies to assess whether working class students were benefiting from the tripartite system was conducted by Albert Halsey and L. Gardner as part of research project conducted by the Department of Sociological and Demographic Research of at the London School of Economics. Published in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 1953, Halsey and Gardner’s study examined students in grammar and secondary modern schools in Greater London, analyzing the relationship between social class and opportunities for educational advancement under the new system. Their conclusion was that little had changed.

Despite the changes introduced into secondary education by the Education Act of 1944, it remains the case that a boy has a greater chance of entering a grammar school if he comes from a middle-class rather than a working class home. The difference in social composition between Grammar and Modern Schools cannot be completely explained by reference to the crucial role played by intelligence tests in the selection procedure, for at the borderline range of intelligence, the chances of allocation to a Grammar School are closely related to social class. Nor can the distribution of intelligence explain the greater proportion of boys from small families found in the Grammar Schools since only in the working-class group is this a distinguishing characteristic of Grammar as opposed to Modern School boys. It would seem that some of the factors which were known to reduce
the chances of entry to a grammar school as the holder of a free or special place still continue to exercise their effect (Halsey and Gardner, 1953: 74-75).

These findings would be confirmed by a larger study conducted by Halsey and his collaborators Jean Floud and F.M. Martin three years later in their book *Social Class and Educational Opportunity* (1956). Analyzing student school placement outcomes in a wealthy southeastern district in Hertfordshire and a northern working class district in Yorkshire, the researchers found that while the tripartite system was clearly providing access to grammar schools and higher education to more young people of higher ability, it also was the case that working class were not sharing in this access, despite the fact grammar schools were now free. Middle class children continued to outperform their working class counterparts, even when common measures of intelligence assessment were used.\(^71\)

*Social Class and Educational Opportunity* also sought to counter the notion that intelligence was a fixed, innate, and measurable quantity. The relative success of middle class children on the 11-plus exams and their subsequent overrepresentation in grammar schools was not the result of deliberate class bias on the part of administrators, but was reflective of fundamental flaws in assumptions of the system’s designers. The basic problem was that intelligence was an acquired characteristic that could be shaped by a range of environmental factors, including a child’s socio-economic background. It was no surprise that working class children would perform more poorly on the exams than their middle class counterparts, given

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\(^71\) Two notable grammar school students with working class backgrounds were Liverpool natives George Harrison and Paul McCartney, both of whom placed into the academic Liverpool Institute as a result of their 11-plus scores. John Lennon, whose parents were of working class origins but was raised in the middle class home of his aunt and uncle, also placed into a grammar school following his exam. Richard Starkey (Ringo Starr) missed years of primary school due to illness and proceeded directly to a secondary modern, having never taken the 11-plus (see Gould 2007). A notable 11-plus failure was Declan McManus, better known by the stage name Elvis Costello, who would later write about the experience of taking “second place in the human race” in his 1980 song “Secondary Modern” (Crook, 2007: 157).
the cultural dissimilarities between the classes and the differing social and familial expectations for performance, success, and achievement (Parkinson, 1970: 67).

The objectivity and accuracy of intelligence tests had been increasingly disputed by academics since the end of the Second World War. In *Intelligence Testing and the Comprehensive School* (1953), Brian Simon, a lecturer (and later professor) at the University of Leicester\(^2\) who had served on Labour’s educational advisory committee in the late 1930s, would argue that intelligence tests failed to measure other factors associated with ability, such as emotional responses and social environment. Far from reflecting a subject’s innate intelligence, Simon maintained that test scores reflected *acquired* knowledge and were thus culturally and socially-biased towards the middle and upper classes. In a series of reports first published in the late 1940s, the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), and influential research group that had developed close ties with Ministry of Education, the teacher’s union, and the LEAs, found that environmental factors, such as pre-test coaching, clearly influenced students’ performance on IQ tests, concluding on the basis of their findings that the allocation of young people into the new schools of the tripartite system was being distorted (see Wooldridge, 1994: 281-284). In the 1957 NFER report on selection for secondary schools, researchers Douglas Pidgeon and Alfred Yates estimated that nearly 10 percent of students were placed in a school type either above or below their abilities by the 11-plus and that it was unlikely for most students that this misallocation would be corrected later, particularly for students wrongly sent to grammar schools. They also found that selective process demonstrated a clear gender-bias: girls who achieved “borderline” scores on their exams that placed them just under the grammar school cutoff were significantly more

\(^2\) University staff had helped the Leicestershire LEA in the early 1950s to develop one of the earliest versions of a comprehensive system that would later be highlighted by Anthony Crosland in advocating for a national comprehensive policy in 1965 (see Chapter V).
likely to be placed in the academic route than boys with similar scores (Yates and Pidgeon, 1957: 144-145).

Such conclusions were not confined to sociologists. In the 1950s, a new generation of British psychologists were also challenging beliefs that had stood as disciplinary orthodoxy just a decade earlier. Several psychologist-led studies during the decade demonstrated that intelligence, far from being fixed and immutable, changed frequently in accordance with the length and type of education one received. In one long-term study begun shortly after the war, the IQs of nearly 60 percent of a group of 150 children changed by more than fifteen points between the ages of six and eighteen and 35 percent of the group demonstrated changes of twenty or more points. By contrast, the number of students whose IQ changed by fewer than ten points was only 15 percent of the total sample (Wooldridge, 1994: 285-287).

Many supporters of tripartism in the 1950s acknowledged the inadequacies of the system, but maintained that the problems associated with early selection could be corrected.\(^\text{73}\) In a study commissioned by the British Psychological Society in 1957, Professor Philip Vernon rejected such a view, arguing that refining the selection process or improving the accuracy of intelligence tests could not rectify the system’s shortcomings. To Vernon, tripartism’s clear bias towards academic education and subsequent diminution of the non-academic schools had little to do with the specific implementation or operation of the system, but were the unavoidable consequences of any arrangement that differentiated students at such a young age. Vernon suggested in his report that disillusionment with intelligence testing was growing among psychologists as a result of tripartism. Even with the selection process operating at peak efficiency, he maintained that about one in four of students selected

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\(^{73}\) Among this group would be members of the Conservative Party (for a discussion, see below).
for grammar schools would fail, while six percent of those initially rejected for the academic track would likely have succeeded in it (Husen, 1966: 252-253). Such findings led Vernon to conclude that the selective system was unjustifiable and that “on psychological grounds, there would seem to be more to be said in favor of comprehensive schools than against them” (Vernon, 1957: 50).

By the early 1960s the ideas of the educational sociologists had come to represent a more or less coherent critique against the practice of early selection. A 1963 National Foundation For Educational Research pamphlet sought to summarize what it termed “certain criticisms made on education and psychological grounds of the present system of allocation and most of its varieties.” Primary among these was the argument that “the age of eleven is too early definitively to force what amounts to a pre-vocational choice,” a point made clear by the fact that “some ‘rejected’ children show that they are able to follow academic courses, while some ‘accepted’ children fail either to stay at school or to pass the G.C.E. [O-level] examinations.” Furthermore, critics of tripartism had concluded that one’s intelligence level as represented by an IQ test may change with age, or in the words of the pamphlet, that “the rhythms of physical and psychological development may be associated with intellectual growth” (National Foundation for Educational Research, 1963: 6).

Crucially, the discursive shift in the UK started by the educational sociologists in the 1950s would be communicated both to publics and policymakers via a series of advisory reports on secondary and higher education produced by the Central Advisory Council on Education in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Much as their educational psychology counterparts had done with the Board of Education’s consultative committee a generation earlier, educational sociologists and other academics frequently provided expert testimony to
the CACE, publicly questioning the scientific assumptions behind educational selection based on perceived ability and suggesting that other factors, including social conditions and public policy, might also impact a young person’s academic—and by extension, occupational—potential (Ainey, 1987: 48-50).

In *Early Leaving*, the first comprehensive review of the new system published in 1954, the Council found early selection was already revealing significant inadequacies. While reports had demonstrated that more working class students were attending grammar schools under the new system, it was clear that they were largely failing to benefit from their attendance. Among the such students selected for grammar schools on the basis of their 11-plus scores, failure rates were extremely high; well over one-half of all working class students were not obtaining even three passes on the newly created Ordinary (O) level subject exams given at the end of the fifth grammar school year and nearly one-third were dropping out before they reached age sixteen. Much as the educational-sociologists’ studies had found, the report concluded that social factors, such as over-crowding at home and a lack of support for academic endeavors, were discouraging working class students from achieving success. In the view of its authors, as a predictor of future academic success the 11-plus exam was clearly falling short and, as a result, the talent of young Britons was being wasted (Ministry of Education, 1954: para. 90-91).

Concerns over failure rates for was working class students would also be the focus of two additional CACE reports. The first, the Crowther report, or *15 to 18*, published in 1959 maintained that under the tripartite system, social class continued largely to determine access to educational opportunities. The report found that even when controls for measured ability

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74 Five O-level passes was the norm for admission to the university preparatory sixth form.
75 The report was named after then-CACE chair Geoffrey (later Baron) Crowther, who had been the long-time editor of *The Economist* magazine.
were put in place, children whose fathers had higher occupational standings were more likely to attend grammar schools than working class students. Over 40 percent of students classified in the highest ability range had left school by age sixteen, failing to continue to the sixth form where they could sit for A-level exams generally required for university admission (Ministry of Education, 1959: para. 102). As the Early Leaving study had found five years earlier, Crowther cited the differences in environmental conditions between middle and working class children as reasons for the variation in the two group’ performance, but also suggested that intelligent working class students might be more likely to perform up to their true abilities in comprehensive schools, away from the highly competitive atmosphere of the grammar schools (para. 302).

While much of Crowther focused on grammar schools, the 1963 CACE Newsom report\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Half our Future} was commissioned by the Conservative government to examine secondary schooling for average and underperforming thirteen to sixteen-year-olds. Citing data again demonstrating the weak performance of many high ability working class students on O-level exams, Newsom, much like its predecessors, concluded that environmental factors were serving to hinder their educational advancement. More than the previous reports, however, Newsom invoked the sociologists’ criticism of the psychologists’ conceptions of innate and immutable intelligence as a basis for early selection. As the report’s introduction maintained:

\begin{quote}
Intellectual talent is \textit{not} a fixed quantity with which we have to work but a variable that can be modified by social policy and educational approaches. The crude and simple answer was given by Macaulay 139 years ago (1): 'Genius is subject to the same laws which regulate the production of cotton and molasses. The supply adjusts itself to the demand. The quantity may be diminished by restrictions and multiplied by bounties.'
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{76} John Newsom, a business executive and former County Education Officer of Hertfordshire, served as chair of the Council in the early 1960s.
A more subtle investigation into what constitutes the 'restrictions' and the 'bounties' in our society is of far more recent growth. The results of such investigation increasingly indicate that the kind of intelligence which is measured by the tests so far applied is largely an acquired characteristic. This is not to deny the existence of a basic genetic endowment; but whereas that endowment, so far, has proved impossible to isolate, other factors can be identified. Particularly significant among them are the influences of social and physical environment; and, since these are susceptible to modification, they may well prove educationally more important. (Newsom Report, 1963: 6; italics in the original).

The CACE reports would do much to publicize the deficiencies of the new education system, but by the late 1950s early selection and the 11-plus tests would become targets for criticism in popular culture as well. In a bestselling book that would be credited with coining the term, Michael Young’s *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958) would lampoon the notion of using intelligence to create a new society. Written as satirical “history” of Britain from 1870 to 2033, the book described a modern school system in which people were divided on the basis of IQ instead of wealth. In Young’s future Britain, a merit-based education system had indeed succeeded in established a new social hierarchy but it would be one that was ultimately even more divisive than the old class system it had replaced.

*Discursive Change and Political Actors*

In political terms, the 1950s was a period noted in Britain for its consensus. Broad agreement would emerge on the desirability of a range of institutional arrangements and policy positions, including the welfare state, Keynesian demand-management for the economy, and Britain’s membership in the Western Alliance. While such consensus was made possible by the weakening of the sharp ideological conflicts that characterized politics in the prewar era, it was also clearly enabled by the state of economic prosperity that after two decades of material hardship the country would rather suddenly find itself in by the mid-1950s. As Dean notes:
In 1951, the Conservatives had returned to power to face a population which, despite reservations, accepted shortages and expected little immediate improvement in long-term prospects. Society remained preoccupied by the issues of the interwar period, such as high unemployment, social distress, and inadequately funded welfare services. By early 1955, as Churchill prepared to depart, a different language talked of affluence, consumerism, and materialism. This new perspective was attributed to steady employment, a leveling of incomes, and the emergence of more skilled, white-collar occupations (Dean, 1992: 6).

The general education system of postwar Britain had been founded on consensual grounds; the Education Act 1944 had enjoyed wide support among the political parties and population. Yet unlike other features of the settlement, which would remain largely in place until Margaret Thatcher’s government began dismantling them in the 1980s, the education system would become the object of profound political conflict by the first postwar decade, with the Labour opposition calling for the comprehenisivization of secondary education and the Conservatives continuing to support the selective system, albeit in a modified form.

For Labour, the party’s internal divisions over the tripartite system that characterized the Attlee period would diminish in opposition. Crucial in this process of policy reformulation was the completion of the ideational reorientation that had led some in the party to oppose the creation of a vertically differentiated secondary system as early as 1938 (see Chapter III). For those in the party who had held that tripartism was the best arrangement to advance working class students, the delegitimizing of early selection provided by the educational sociologists would render such claims untenable. As Bilski writes, “Once there was doubt whether children can be classified at the age of eleven and whether it is possible to establish parity of esteem between the three types of schools, it became impossible to regard the tripartite system as an implement for achieving equality of educational opportunity” (1971: 202).
Reflecting this change and recognizing the public’s growing concern over the 11-plus, the party’s National Executive Committee explicitly called in 1953 for the next Labour government to end the exam, dismantle the selective system, and create a single comprehensive lower secondary school for all students to attend.

The entrance examination, taken at the age of eleven, is the dread of child and parent alike. In most areas it is the accepted method of deciding whether a child should go to a grammar, a technical, or a modern school, and a mistake made in this examination may well prejudice the child for the rest of its life.

It may be possible at this age to pick out the exceptionally bright or exceptionally backward child, but the vast majority are not in either of these categories…

Labour will abolish the eleven-plus examination, because it is convinced that all children would benefit if, between the ages of eleven and fifteen, they shared the facilities, both social and academic, of one secondary school (Labour Party, 1953: 21).

Just as Tawney and other party theorists had provided intellectual support for early selection and vertical differentiation in the interwar years, a new generation of Labour intellectuals would do the same in advocating for horizontal reforms to the selective system in the 1950s. Chief among these was Anthony Crosland, a Labour MP and Oxford professor who crucially would later serve as Secretary of State for Education and Science under Harold Wilson’s governments in the mid-1960s. Crosland maintained in his 1956 work The Future of Socialism that the issues of industrial ownership that had long dominated social democratic debates and formed the foundation of the Labour Party platform were losing their saliency as determinants of social and economic relations and that the further nationalization of industry and expansion of state control over production more generally had become less important to reducing class stratification in Britain than conventional socialist wisdom held.\textsuperscript{77} Crosland argued that the focus of future Labour governments should instead be on establishing a truly

\textsuperscript{77} Crosland’s views on nationalization would lead to his being labeled “revisionist” by more traditionalist elements in the British socialist movement (see Archer, et. al, 2003: 35).
egalitarian system of education that would serve to level British society by providing all young people equal access to life chances.

To that end, Crosland advocated dismantling the tripartite and 11-plus systems and establishing in their place locally administered, non-selective comprehensive secondary schools for all students enrolled in the state sector. Although he acknowledged that it was possible that the tripartite system might have some effect on reducing class divisions if given enough time, it was clear to him by the mid-1950s that any change was happening at far too slow a pace (Crosland, 1957: 232). Crosland furthermore did not doubt that middle class youth generally had higher IQs than their counterparts in the working class. Citing figures from the 1953 Halsey and Gardner study, however, he maintained that the genetic endowment of intelligence could not explain the vast disproportion observed in the class distribution in the grammar schools; given their much larger absolute numbers, Crosland argued that the percentage of working class students attending such schools should be considerably higher. Against the psychologist proponents of “fixed-intelligence” who had so influenced the 1944 Act and following the views of Floud and other educational sociologists, Crosland believed that explanations for the comparatively poor performance of working class youth were not to be found in genetics, but instead in a combination of social factors, such as parents’ education levels and the relatively smaller number opportunities for extra-curricular learning in working class homes, and financial conditions, specifically the burden imposed on working class families by a child’s continuation at school (Crosland, 1957: 259).

Beyond the issue of selection, Crosland argued that state policy towards educating young people more generally was fundamentally misdirected. In his view, the British education system’s traditional focus on fostering elites in separate institutions such as public
and grammar schools was based on outmoded and anti-democratic conceptions on the relationship between leadership, youth, and national prosperity. Any modern school system, he argued, should be concerned primarily with educating students of so-called “average” ability or attainment, not with cultivating a class of elites. This latter view may have been appropriate for the economic and political conditions extant in the 19th century, but Crosland maintained that modern systems of production relied primarily on workers with mid-range skill levels. The economic success of the United States, he argued, was not the result of the superiority of America’s elites, but instead in the skill levels of the middle-tier of its young people. Most of this class, he pointed out, attended non-selective state high schools and were far more likely than their British counterparts to be educated in universities (even if these institutions were, in his words, “second-rate”). The emphasis on cultivating the skills of the typical American youngster, according to Crosland, was the source of a massive comparative advantage for the United States and demonstrated, in opposition to the assumptions of tripartite’s proponents, that comprehensive schools were not incompatible with economic competitiveness but, on the contrary, could be essential for it (Crosland, 1957: 270).

Although Crosland was clearly speaking for most party members in calling for horizontal reorganization, the Labour leadership had been reluctant fully and publicly to embrace the comprehensive school for most of the 1950s, particularly in its “all through” form in which students would attend a common for ages eleven through eighteen, with essentially no distinction – or differentiation – made between the lower and upper secondary stages (Parkinson, 1970: 84). Hugh Gaitskell, who became party leader following Attlee’s resignation in 1955, would seek in effect to have it both ways on the issue, embracing the comprehensive school principle on one hand while continuing to express support for grammar
schools on the other out of fear of losing the middle class votes Labour needed to unseat the Tories (Lawton, 2005: 56).

Such concerns were reflected the party’s 1958 policy statement Learning to Live: Labour’s Policy for Education. Instead of providing a detailed plan for horizontal reorganization, Learning to Live would emphasize the injustices of early selection and tripartism, while describing only in general terms the advantages of comprehensive model.

The main feature and defect of this system is that it labels children at this early age as belonging to different ‘types’ and segregates them into different kinds of school, each with curriculum supposedly suitable for one type of child. This segregation is generally permanent, since only a tiny minority of children get, at age 13, the chance of moving to a different type of school… In the modern school, children whose latent gifts appear after age 11 have not the chance even to become aware of the branches of knowledge they may well be fitted to attain…

We can deliver ourselves from this evil by adopting the principle of comprehensive secondary education. Then, the 11 year old children are not segregated and sent to separate types of schools; schools are available for them, all of which offer a wide range of studies (Labour Party 1958: 26, 29)

Labour leaders were clearly concerned that voters would view Learning to Live as an attack on the grammar schools. While claiming that the placement of students into different school types at age eleven amounted to a “permanent segregation” that the national party would implore LEAs to end, Gaitskell maintained in a speech given in Surrey given shortly after its publication that the idea that Labour wanted to abolish them was “complete nonsense.” Rhetorically framing the newly proposed comprehensive system as one that offered “a grammar school education for all,” he maintained instead that the policy’s objective was “greatly to widen the opportunities for all children to receive what is now called a grammar school education, and we also want to see grammar school standards – in the sense of higher quality education – extended far more generally” (The Times, 7 July 1958).
Labour, of course, was only one-half of Britain’s two-party system, and for most of the 1950s was the one out of power. For its part, the Conservative Party remained publicly committed to the 11-plus and the vertical system for most of the decade. Much of this support was rooted in the party’s preference for the maintenance of separate grammar schools, reflecting the views of the party’s largely middle class constituency. In principle the party opposed comprehensive schools, believing them to be suitable only in special circumstances, such as in rural areas with very small grammar schools, and even then only on an experimental basis. In the early 1950s, the party sought to restrict Labour-controlled LEA plans to merge grammar schools into comprehensives in urban areas, most notably in 1953, when Education Minister Florence Horsbrugh denied such a request from the London County Council (Lawton, 2005: 56).

Faced with Labour Party opposition that appeared to be effectively challenging public anxiety over tripartism, Conservative governments in the late 1950s and early 1960s found it increasingly difficult to maintain its earlier position. Under David Eccles, who replaced Horsbrugh in 1954 and would serve twice as Education Minister during the party’s thirteen consecutive years in office, the Conservatives would seek to remedy what were increasingly viewed as the deficiencies of the tripartite system without fundamentally reforming its structure. Under the party’s rather oxymoronic 1955 election slogan of “selection for everybody,” the Tories would emphasize the need to improve technical and vocational courses at the secondary moderns, but leave the grammar schools largely untouched. Such a policy was based on a belief that improving the standing of the modern schools would lessen the pressures associated with the 11-plus. As The Economist reported “Sir David’s hope is

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78 Eccles would serve as Minister from 1954-1957 and 1959-1962, with the period 1957-59 spent as the President of the Board of Trade.
that the examination will be shore of most of its terrors if ‘failure’ means, not an educational
dead-end and a working class job, but a schooling that lead to various kinds of further
education and offers good career prospects of a technical kind” (The Economist, 1955,
175/186). Eccles also sought to reduce the stigma of secondary modern schools by
advocating the expansion of opportunities for its graduates to continue on to further
education, commenting in a 1960 debate in Parliament over government education priorities
that, “[i]t must be the glory of British education that we always give a second chance” (The

Notably absent from the Conservative education policy in the 1950s were appeals to
the psychological basis of early selection. Members of the Tory government defended the
system with a different set of arguments, which held that the postwar economic expansion had
so widely reduced income disparities and raised youth wages as to elicit a general leveling of
class divisions in British society and had rendered it impossible to distinguish the parents of
children in grammar schools from those in secondary moderns, or the graduates of one school
type from another (Parkinson, 1970: 79). Indeed, real and growing doubts had emerged in
Tory circles over the psychological assumptions behind the early selection process.
According to Edward Boyle, the Conservative Minister of Education from 1962-64 and later
the Shadow Minister in opposition, the work of educational sociologists through the CACE
reports in particular had a real impact on policymakers by demonstrating that there was a
larger pool of talented youngsters than earlier thinking had realized. In terms that reflected a
differentiated understanding of “weak” and “strong” equality that had been made by Crosland
and others, Boyle maintained that the selective system created by the 1944 Act was rooted in
a prewar conception of equality that had become untenable just a few years later.
The 11-plus system, and the emphasis on the G-factor and the intelligence were the
egalitarianism of the 1920s and 1930s – a way of selecting the ‘able poor.’ It was really the
educational sociologists who showed that as measured in terms of people who got the
benefits from the system, this could not be true… So by the 1950s there were already
arguments showing that the “weak” concept of equality were not good enough if one really
wanted equality (quoted in Kogan, 1971: 92)

While many Conservatives would continue to oppose comprehensivization and
support separate grammar schools, by the early 1960s it was clear that the psychologist-based
ideational justification that had both shaped and legitimated the tripartite system could no
longer be maintained by political actors as a system-justifying discourse. Boyle admitted so
much in a party education pamphlet published in 1963:

None of us believe in pre-war terms that children can be sharply differentiated into various
types or levels of ability; and I certainly would not wish to advance the view that the
Tripartite System, as it is often called, should be regarded as the right and normal way of
organising secondary education, compared with which everything else must be
stigmatized as experimental (quoted in Fenwick, 1976: 118).

For the most part, established interests within the secondary education community
were skeptical about the growth of comprehensives in the early 1950s and plans for any wider
national comprehensive reorganization. But as with other actors, this view would change
through the decade. As noted in the last chapter, the position of the TUC had developed along
a path similar to that of the Labour Party, moving from general support of the 1944 Act to
questioning the selective system in the early 1950s to calling for its replacement with non-
selection by the late 1950s. While groups representing the interests of the grammar schools,
such as the Incorporated Association for Headmasters, remained consistent in their opposition
to comprehensivization, interest group positions on comprehensive schooling generally
evolved to reflect, rather than influence, the institutional and ideational changes that were
unfolding in the 1950s. Teacher trade unions, such as the National Union of Teachers and the
National Association of Schoolmasters, had been reluctant to support comprehensive schools in the first years of tripartism, reflecting member concerns that the organizational streamlining of the selective system’s multi-school structure would necessarily lead to teacher and staff rationalization. Yet this position began to soften as increased experimentation with comprehensivization translated into rising numbers of comprehensive schoolteachers represented within the unions. Even the Headmasters gradually moved away from a position of rigid opposition to a more pragmatic one, seeking to increase the group’s role in shaping the coming comprehensivization (Fenwick: 1976).

**Conclusion**

The challenge to the interwar discourse on education by educational sociologists and the Labour Party in the 1950s created significant uncertainty among British political actors – including members of the Conservative governments in power – and the public over the organization of a secondary school system that until recently had been viewed by most as firmly grounded in rationally-deduced, scientifically-objective facts. This rather sudden discursive delegitimation served as the ideational equivalent of an exogenous shock to the British education system, the effect of which was to create a discursive-driven form of critical juncture. A central concept in certain models of change in historical institutional analysis often associated with moments of large-scale upheaval such as revolution, war, and economic crisis, such junctures, Capoccia and Keleman write, “are characterized by a situation in which the ‘structural’ (that is, economic, cultural, ideological, organizational) influences on political action are significantly relaxed for a relatively short period” (2007: 343). According to this conception, the easing of these influences can lead to conditions under which actors may
redefine their interests and institutional preferences and policymakers may pursue new arrangements. Changes that seemed unlikely when the pre-juncture set of structural constraints were in place may appear possible or even probable once they are suspended.

As this chapter describes, the collapse of the interwar discourse on education created such conditions in Britain. In this climate of doubt, political actors, most notably in the Labour Party, would have the opportunity to recast the problem of secondary education in ways that redefined how the costs and benefits of the 11-plus and tripartite system were calculated and allowed for the advancement of alternative arrangements as solutions – in this case the comprehensive school – that only a few years earlier would have been viewed as socially radical and administratively unworkable. The political process by which that onetime unlikely outcome was achieved is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter V

Britain Case Study III:
Comprehensive School Reform and Higher Education Expansion, 1964-1979

Introduction

By the early 1960s, the interwar policy discourse upon which the tripartite system of education had been founded in the 1944 Education Act had largely been delegitimized. As the previous chapter outlined, once the psychological assumptions of the discourse were challenged, even conservative actors loathe to disassemble the grammar schools of the system would find the practice of selecting students for different schools at age eleven on the basis of their perceived intelligence to be unjustifiable. Within ten years, the 11-plus exam and the grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools that had been established only two decades earlier would be vanishing from the institutional landscape of British society, replaced by some form of non-selective and mixed-ability comprehensive school.

What explains how the new horizontal system of secondary education developed following the collapse of the interwar discourse? The current chapter maintains that realization of the comprehensive school solution would be shaped largely by the organizational structure of the British education system. The traditional decentralization of competence to LEAs that had been reasserted in the 1944 Education Act would provide local actors with the capacity to initiate horizontal reforms in the organization of their general education systems well before any systemic policy change would be initiated at the national level. These early local reorganizations served to legitimate the comprehensive school model, facilitating the national drive to dismantle the selective system that Labour would begin in 1965 with an Education Ministry directive calling on LEAs to submit plans to the central
government for horizontal reform of their systems issued shortly after the party took power from the Conservatives. Spurred by the directive, most of the remaining local educational authorities would follow through with their own reorganizations by the mid-1970s despite the directive’s revoking in 1970 by Margaret Thatcher, the Education Minister of the newly-elected Conservative government, and the rise of a new traditionalism in education policy debates that blamed the problems of British schooling in the 1970s on “progressive” education ideas, such as those that had launched the horizontal school reforms in the 1950s and 1960s. The timing and sequence of these developments would be crucial for the outcome of institutional change in the form of horizontal reorganization; the reform process that would establish the comprehensive school as the dominant secondary model would be nearly complete by the time the ideas of the traditionalist movement would come to dominate thinking in the Conservative Party, now led by Thatcher, who would attempt – unsuccessfully – to persuade LEAs to readopt the system of early selection following their reassumption of power in 1979.

As the chapter further examines, the movement to reform secondary education coincided with pressures to expand access to higher education. While the initial opening of this space would be driven by material factors, including demographic pressures and increased public demand for higher education, the outcome that would emerged for the university sector would be shaped by the same counter discourse that had so strongly impacted the organization of secondary schooling. Yet the same Labour government that would act to end differentiation in secondary education would reassert it for the university system, ensuring that educational selection would not so much be eliminated in Britain as shifted from an earlier to a later age.
This chapter begins with an overview of local efforts to build comprehensive systems in the 1950s and early 1960s, focusing on how LEA reorganizations generated momentum for a national policy aimed at ending tripartism. The next two section examines the realization of this policy under Harold Wilson’s Labour government in the mid-1960s, tracing the development of comprehensive schools in the country through the political and economic changes of the 1970s. The final section shifts the focus to the higher education sector, highlighting the role of the 1950s counter policy discourse in shaping the expansion of the system of colleges and universities in the 1960s and examining how this new system would, unlike the new secondary schools, continue to rely on differentiation practices to match its expansion.

Change at the Local Level: LEAs and Comprehensive Reorganization, 1944-1964

While this discursive shift outlined in the last chapter was taking place at the center, change was that would prove highly significant for the development of future policy was also occurring at the periphery. As Chapter III discusses, the institutional design of the state education system that had been established in Britain in the early 20th Century provided local authorities with wide ranging decision-making competence over curricular issues and the administration of schools. Under the 1944 Act LEAs had significant, though – as the cases of Middlesex and London demonstrate – not unlimited, freedom in determining the precise structure of the new universal secondary system implemented within their districts.79 For reasons outlined earlier, the postwar Labour governments had been reluctant to allow local experimentation with comprehensive schools in the late 1940s. At the time, however, few

79 This system has been characterized as a “central service, locally administered” (see Crook, 2002: 253).
authorities had expressed interest in horizontal reorganization; in 1953, only 23 out of 146 LEAs had submitted plans to the Ministry even to establish experimental comprehensives intended to operate alongside existing selective schools and only six had presented designs for the full comprehensivization of their systems (Parkinson, 1970: 76). Yet as Labour grew increasingly united behind the comprehensive school reform during the 1950s and serious doubts emerged about the tripartite system, the party’s education committee would call on the local Labour officials to restructure school organization along more horizontal lines, eliminating the 11-plus and establishing mixed-ability schools to replace the differentiated ones of the vertical system.

Initially, the committee faced significant resistance even from Labour-controlled LEAs, which were reluctant to carry out local comprehensivization given the costs associated with reorganizing a tripartite organizational framework that had just been implemented (Bilski, 1971: 204). Moreover, since all reorganizations had to be submitted for approval to the now Conservative-controlled Ministry in London, local authorities would have few assurances that they would be able to carry their plans out. By the late 50s, however, these concerns had largely faded. The Ministry had become less rigidly opposed to comprehensive reorganization schemes and Labour-led LEAs had become more open to comprehensive schools. Following a Labour sweep in local elections in May 1963, LEA-led comprehensivization would accelerate markedly, with schemes for reorganization introduced in Bristol, Liverpool, and Manchester. As Fenwick notes, “the efforts of committee

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80 Not all early horizontal experimentation occurred primarily as the result of the shift in ideas and discourses described in the last chapter; in some instances, the establishment of comprehensive schools was driven by building and facility shortages owing to wartime damage. While some comprehensives were developed in a handful of mainly rural (and Conservative-led) authorities, such as Cardigan and Westmoreland, most of the early postwar comprehensives had been established in large cities that had borne the brunt of Nazi air attacks, including, notably, Coventry and London (Fenwick, 1970: 87, 94).
comprehensive supporters ..., the drift of party policy and non-political educational thought, and, above all, the favourable publicity given to comprehensives experiments such as in London, Coventry, and Leicestershire, led to a more positive attitude on the part of Labour-controlled education committees” (Fenwick, 1976: 127).

As the public and central actors in educational policy increasingly abandoned the educational psychologist discourse, even some non-Labour LEAs would begin to view change as both inevitable and appropriate, including Conservative-led Devon, Dorset, and Shropshire, all of which indicated their intention in 1963 to go comprehensive (Crook, 2002: 251). On the eve of Labour’s victory in the October 1964 general elections, an article in the Times Education Supplement claimed that “[i]t is already being assumed that an LEA which has no new plan [for comprehensive schools] up its sleeve must be a backward type” (quoted in Parkinson, 1970: 69). By then roughly one in ten British secondary students was enrolled in a comprehensive school (Trowler, 2003: 4) and some 250 such schools were operating in England across 23 counties and 16 county boroughs 81 (Fenwick, 1976: 94)

The rise in the number of LEAs reorganizing their secondary systems around comprehensive schools would be significant in initiating what Brian Simon would refer to as the “breakout” of comprehensives and the national drive to end the selective system that would begin after Labour assumed power in 1964 (Simon, 1991: 203). By demonstrating that such schools could be created and maintained without massive upheaval to parents, students, and teachers or a decline in standards that many opponents of horizontal reforms had warned would occur, the local introduction of comprehensive schools in the 1950s and early 1960s largely demystified what had until then been viewed as an “experimental” education model.

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81 This figure compared to 4,000 secondary moderns, 1,000 grammar schools, and 200 technical schools in England and Wales (Fenwick, 1976: 94).
Local reorganization also made it clear to national Labour leaders that the LEAs could carry out horizontal reforms on their own without “command and control”-style legislation from the central government in London, while at the same time making any future national comprehensivization drive more politically palatable by leaving the management of the reorganization in the hands of local authorities.

**The National Drive For Comprehensive Schooling, 1964-1979**

Despite the increased number of comprehensive schools and the growing consensus on the fallibility of the 11-plus, widespread political support for a central policy on comprehensivization would not develop in Britain until the early 1960s. As noted in Chapter IV, although calls for comprehensive reorganization of secondary schooling and the abolition of 11-plus had appeared in the Labour Party’s official policy platform by the late 1950s, many higher officials in Labour, including future party leader and prime minister Harold Wilson, were not enthusiastic supporters of comprehensives, expressing concerns that mixed-ability schools were “vote losers.” Such a view was confirmed by a 1957 survey commissioned by the party that found reform of the tripartite system had little saliency among voters as a political issue (Kogan, 1975: 39, Parkinson, 1970: 81).

By the 1964 general election, however, the critical mass of public opinion had shifted on the issue, paralleling the changes in the viewpoints of many academics and policy experts (see Chapter IV). Polls found increasing interest in education policy generally and sympathy for the Labour’s position on education specifically (Fenwick, 1976: 128). Wilson’s famous “Science and Socialism” speech delivered at the 1963 party conference made clear the party’s

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82 Wilson, who had served as President of the Board of Trade during the Attlee government and Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer and Foreign Minister during the years in opposition, had become party leader after Gaitskell’s unexpected death in January 1963.
opposition to selective schooling in terms that not only condemned the perceived social injustices of the 11-plus system, but highlighted how the system inhibited the advancement of scientific and technological advancement in the country and thus threatened the country’s long-term economic competitiveness and security. The speech also reflected the shift in Labour’s conception of egalitarianism from its immediate postwar definition to the one held by the mid-1960s. Within the party, equality of opportunity no longer meant equal access to the elite levels of the system, such as was purported to be provided under the tripartite system, but rather a leveling of differentiation within the system itself.

As a nation, we cannot afford to force segregation on our children at the 11-plus stage. As Socialists, as democrats we oppose this system of educational apartheid, because we believe in equality of opportunity. But that is not all. We simply cannot as a nation afford to neglect the educational development of a single boy or girl. We cannot afford to cut off three-quarters or more of our children from virtually any chance of higher education. The Russians do not, the Germans do not, the Americans do not, and the Japanese do not, and we cannot afford to either (Wilson, 1964: 19).

In the 1964 election manifesto the party called for the selective system to be dismantled, framing the policy – in accordance with the rhetorical strategy the party had adopted at least since the publication of *Learning to Live* in 1958 – not as the elimination of the grammar school but its expansion to all students.

Labour will get rid of the segregation of children into separate schools caused by 11-plus selection: secondary education will be reorganised on comprehensive lines. Within the new system, grammar school education will be extended: in future no child will be denied the opportunity of benefiting from it through arbitrary selection at the age of 11 (Labour, 1964: Part B(ii)).

The Conservative Party had adopted a policy in the early 1960s that sought to place it somewhere between the poles of total comprehensivization and rigid adherence to the practices of early selection, resulting in a policy position characterized largely by its
ambiguity. While criticizing what it termed Labour’s “doctrinaire” reorganization plans for the secondary sector, the party’s 1964 electoral platform could only offer the rather murky promise to provide “opportunities for all children to go forward to the limits of their capacity in good schools of every description” (quoted in Dale, 2000: 154). As Fenwick notes, “the limits of their flexibility had been reached and the forward ground was already occupied by the Labour Party. The Conservative government had unintentionally contributed to its own defeat by acknowledging and fostering the increasing importance of education, by tolerating the comprehensive schools until they were too important to ignore, and by failing to convince the interested public that it had an alternative answer to the ‘bogey of the eleven plus’” (Fenwick, 1976: 130).

Labour’s narrow victory in the election and the slim parliamentary majority it maintained of only four seats tempered the reformist enthusiasm of a party that had spent some thirteen years in opposition, and ministers were reluctant to push for major policy changes upon first taking office. Comprehensive reorganization failed even to make it into the Queen’s first speech from the throne opening Parliament in 1964 and announcing the government’s legislative priorities. Significantly, it was pressure from local authorities that forced the issue; the submission to the national government of a plan for full-scale comprehensivization by the Labour-led Bristol LEA pushed the new Secretary of State for Education and Science83 Michael Stewart to address the subject shortly after the election. Stewart reaffirmed the party’s basic policy of restructuring the secondary system along comprehensive lines, emphasizing that the new policy would be an extension of the academic values of the grammar school to all children. The Conservatives, sensing a potential

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83 The Department of Education and Science was created in 1964 as a fusion of the Ministry of Education and the Office of the Minister for Science.
vulnerability in the new government, called for an early parliamentary debate on Labour’s secondary education policy in January 1965. Advocating a general policy of “no experiments in education,” Boyle and former Education Secretary Quintin Hogg urged the government in the debate to limit LEA comprehensive reorganization, preserve the grammar schools, and establish any new national policy based on the advice of non-partisan educational experts (Fenwick, 1976: 132). In his response, Stewart attempted to characterize Labour’s policy as recognizing a process that had already begun at the local level, emphasizing how Conservative-controlled LEAs had also submitted plans for comprehensive reorganization (Lawton, 2005: 68). Such a characterization was reflected in the motion passed in the Commons in support of reorganization at the end of the debate on January 21st.

That this House, conscious of the need to raise educational standards at all levels, and regretting that the realisation of this objective is impeded by the separation of children into different types of secondary schools, notes with approval the efforts of local authorities to reorganise secondary education on comprehensive lines which will preserve all that is valuable in grammar school education for those children who now receive it and make it available to more children; recognises that the method and timing of such reorganisation should vary to meet local needs; and believes that the time is now ripe for a declaration of national policy (quoted in Montague, 1971: 46).

In the House of Lords, Conservative criticism of the government’s policy was sharper still. Lord Newton, who had briefly served as Minister for Education and Science in 1964, argued that very principle of comprehensive schooling was fundamentally at odds with the purpose of the grammar education and that Labour’s attempts to characterize the ending of selection as the expansion of the grammar school to all were disingenuous.

… such intellectual integrity as I possess had been affronted by the statement in the Labour Party Election Manifesto that, as a result of reorganising secondary education on comprehensive lines, grammar school education would be extended. I am doing my best not to tread on any corns, or at any rate to do so only lightly, but I cannot refrain from saying that that phrase was naughty. It was naughty because it is capable of suggesting to the ordinary man and woman that within a completely comprehensive system you can still have grammar schools. My Lords, you cannot. Grammar school education is education in one school of able children, who are in it
because, and only because, they are demonstrably able... however much you may compensate children for the inequalities bestowed by background, environment and similar social factors, the intellectual inequalities bestowed by nature will always remain, at least to some extent (Hansard, 10 February 1965, v. 263, cc122-123, 133).

In his response on behalf of the government, Minister of Technology Charles (Baron) Snow reiterated the educational sociologist critique of intelligence testing, emphasizing the importance of the tests in selection decisions and their manifest unreliability.

It is flogging a dead horse to attack [the 11-plus exam], but I will perhaps flog this dead horse for the last time. To select anybody by competitive examination at 11 means a faith in examinational procedures which even the English or the Imperial Chinese would find very hard to accept in their more lucid moments. It was based on a delightful piece of optimism: that a method called the I.Q., or Intelligence Quotient, could be really helpful. This was perfectly sensible; everybody was trying to find some device which would eliminate environment, eliminate what the child was taught, and was trying to get nearer to a representation of the actual mental machinery. It was not a stupid concept; in some ways it is still quite valuable. But it has the faint disadvantage that it does not work.

...my Lords, I really think that this 11-plus examination must be taken off the shoulders of our children. It has created great strain and has produced immense bitterness and a sense of injustice... For any such 11-plus examination probably can be trusted to select the 10 per cent or so best academic children; that is, it is probably accurate to that extent. I would guess it would eliminate—and it is always easier for these devices to eliminate—the 20 per cent. less fitted for academic training. But between those two there is an enormous area where often you might as well spin a coin (Hansard, 10 February 1965, v. 263, cc 148-149).

Snow maintained in the debate that at issue was not simply ending the widespread reliance on the 11-plus exam as a mechanism for sorting students into different school types; in his view, any type of method used to select children for something of such importance would be fraught with problems. Given this, he concluded that the only possible alternative for the state system of education was to scrap the tripartite system and replace it with some form of comprehensive school.

We cannot possibly, as the noble Lord, Lord Newton, rightly said, eliminate all these inequalities in the human condition; but it is the task of good government at least not to add to the inequalities of the human condition. In fact, this method of selection undoubtedly has
helped to add to these inequalities. I would go further: I would say that any of the methods I have seen devised, not by examination but by taking account of course teaching, of parents’ intentions or of interview ... are in some respects likely to be more socially unjust, rather than less.

...My Lords, if this is so, if we cannot select without inefficiency and injustice at this age, then we are automatically forced into another form of education. There is no possible way of getting out of this new course of action. Once you believe selection is unjust at 11, then you must have a non-selective education, for a time at least. There is no other way (Hansard, 10 February 1965, v. 263, cc 149-150).

The dynamics of the comprehensive initiative changed notably when Anthony Crosland himself was appointed Secretary at DES following Stewart’s promotion to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in January 1965. Continuing the process initiated by his predecessor, Crosland began to formulate a national directive on comprehensive reorganization in negotiations with the LEAs. The result was the publication on July 12, 1965 of Circular 10/65, which requested that LEAs in England and Wales provide to the DES plans to transition from a tripartite to a comprehensive system.84

The circular made clear “the Government's declared objective to end selection at eleven plus and to eliminate separatism in secondary education” (DES, 1965: Para 1), but also that the ultimate responsibility for the timing and structure of comprehensive reform lay with the local authorities, indicating that while the DES preferred an “all-through” form of comprehensive for students from ages 11 to 18,85 “the most appropriate system will depend on local circumstances and an authority may well decide to adopt more than one form of organisation in the area for which it is responsible” (DES, 1965: para. 4). These alternate forms included: a two-tier system in which all pupils would transfer at age eleven to a junior comprehensive school and at thirteen or fourteen to a senior

84 In 1965, the Scottish Education Department also issued a plan for comprehensive reorganization of secondary schools in Scotland that generally mirrored the Labour policy for England and Wales outlined in Circular 10/65 and achieved it with considerably more uniformity than in other parts of Britain (see Kerckhoff et al, 1996: 6; McPherson and Raab, 1988: 394-398).
85 This version of the comprehensive most closely resembles the American secondary system
comprehensive school; a two-tier systems in which all pupils transfer at eleven to a junior comprehensive school with a choice of senior school at thirteen or fourteen; and a system in which schools with an age range of 11 to 16 combined with a sixth form college for pupils age 16 to 18 (DES, 1965: Para. 3).

The language of the circular sought to convey to local authorities that DES was truly committed to seeing comprehensivization through as a “bottom up” initiative that would be planned and carried out by the LEAs themselves. The circular contained no timetable for authorities to submit their plans, but did highlight how local actors had already quickly and successfully accomplished horizontal reforms, implying that the Department would not tolerate claims of administrative obstacles to reorganization from any future local laggards.

The Government are aware that the complete elimination of selection and separatism in secondary education will take time to achieve. They do not seek to impose destructive or precipitate change on existing schools; they recognise that the evolution of separate schools into a comprehensive system must be a constructive process requiring careful planning by local education authorities in consultation with all those concerned. But the spontaneous and exciting progress which has been made in this direction by so many authorities in recent years demonstrates that the objective is not only practicable; it is also now widely accepted (DES, 1965: para. 46).

The fact that the circular contained a request that schools shift to comprehensive system rather than a requirement was the result of two conditions that the Labour government encountered. First, thinking within the DES itself was split on the request/requirement issue and Crosland’s decision to take the voluntary approach to comprehensivization reflected this absence of departmental unanimity. Driving this debate was the existence of two separate and competing views within the DES itself, which revolved around what Edward Boyle labeled the “social justice” and “technical college” traditions in the professional civil bureaucracy of the Department. The first of these viewed education policy as a means of open opportunity to improve themselves and their standing through the acquisition of intelligence, while the
second group saw the purpose of education policy is strict economic terms, namely as an
investment that would pay off in future productivity gains (Chitty, 2004: 90; Kogan, 1971:
123). In the view of many, including Boyle himself and other members of the Conservative
Party’s more moderate wing, these views were not incompatible during the 1950s and 60s
when postwar economic growth and the population bulge seemed to demand that education
policy focus both on expanding opportunities and enhancing efficiency; indeed to many, the
social and economic goals of education policy at this time were seen as reinforcing. Second,
and perhaps more important to the government, was the political situation at the time Circular
10/65 was issued. Labour members sympathetic to comprehensives controlled most of the
local authorities in the country and the national government could thus be fairly certain the
request for secondary reform could be achieved voluntarily (Kogan, 1971: 191).

By 1970, over one-quarter of all secondary students in Britain were attending
secondary schools and the vast majority of LEAs had submitted plans to the DES in London
for comprehensivizing their systems. The reluctance of some twenty local authorities to
submit plans for reorganization led Edward Short, who had been appointed to head DES in
1968, to consider replacing the voluntary approach in Circular 10/65 with legislation in 1969
requiring local comprehensivization, before such a move was ultimately rejected by Wilson
(Crook, 2002: 253).

While ambiguity on the question of early selection and even “soft” support for
comprehensive schooling among some party leaders (including Boyle) characterized the
Tories education policy stance for much of the 1960s, by the end of the decade there would be
a resurgence of traditionalist views, led by Boyle’s replacement as Shadow Education
Secretary Margaret Thatcher, who backed a policy allowing both comprehensives and
grammar schools to operate within LEAs, with students’ placed in one or the other on the basis of parental choice. In their 1970 election manifesto, the Conservatives promised to repeal Circular 10/65 and promote a policy of greater voluntarism within individual LEAs.

In the post-Circular 10/65 Britain, however, early selection for secondary schools was never, as it would become in West Germany after the Social Democrats assumed power in 1969, a clear left versus right issue. Shortly after the Tories return to power following the party’s victory in 1970, Thatcher carried through on the promise to revoke Crosland’s circular, replacing it with a new Circular 10/70 that cancelled the request for LEAs to submit to the DES their comprehensive reorganization plans. Yet this action was not an attempt to reverse comprehensivization and reinstate the vertical system. Following a contentious meeting between Thatcher and the teacher’s union after the issuance of the new circular, the DES sought to clarify its meaning in a press statement that is noteworthy for its unambiguous renunciation of the practice of early selection.

Authorities are free to proceed with approved schemes of non-selective secondary education on comprehensive lines if they wish to do so. Indeed, [Secretary Thatcher] will be pleased to consider any new plans which may be submitted. In the Secretary of State's view the age of eleven is too early to make final decisions about a child's future. Provision should be made for the late developer and there are a number of ways of doing this. Authorities which did not make this provision would be failing in their central duty under Section 8 of the 1944 Education Act (DES, 13 July 1970).

As an Economist article pointed out just prior to the 1970 elections, “it is important to be clear how limited the disagreement on this really is. It is now clearly accepted that 11 is too early to divide children up into different schools on the basis of ability. There are few defenders of the 11-plus. Apart from the unfairness of this, one result has been that Britain is very near the bottom of the pool for advanced countries in the number of 16- and 17-year-olds

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86 See Chapter VIII.
in school and this is a serious national defect that is being remedied by comprehensive reorganization” (1970: 234/13-14).

While the article’s claim that the 11-plus had few remaining supporters left in Britain was certainly true at the time for politicians and political parties, it would ultimately be premature for other actors in British society. The 1970s would by marked by the worst economic downturn since the Second World War. After decades of steady growth and full employment, Britain, like other Western countries, would be forced to grapple with the twin challenges of high unemployment and inflation, only to find that Keynesian interventionist prescriptions would be ineffective in ending the crisis. In this context of economic crisis, a new educationalist movement centered around traditionalist notions of schooling would begin to challenge the education policy ideas of the 1960s, viewing them as causes of what they perceived as declining standards in British schools, the rising rate of youth unemployment in the country, and a more general breakdown in law and order (Chitty, 2004).

Many of the members of the traditionalist movement would be affiliated with the new conservative think tanks of the period that would play a key role in shaping the ideological parameters of what would later become known as Thatcherism, including the Centre for Policy Studies, the Education Research Group, and the Conservative Philosophy Group. Arguably, however, the most influential contributions to the movement would come in the form of the Black Papers on Education. In these populist-style pamphlets edited by English professors Brian Cox and A.E. Dyson, a range of academics, educationalists and politicians would launch a frontal assault against progressive educational ideals, such as “child-centered” teaching and egalitarianism in education reflected in the comprehensive school (Lawton,

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87 For a comprehensive analysis on the role of think thanks in the rise of the New Right in Britain, see Denham, 1996.
Refusing to accept the educational sociologists arguments on the role played by social and environmental factors in shaping intelligence, many of the *Black Paper* contributors continued to maintain that the individual differences were rooted in innate inequalities that should be recognized in the organization of education systems (Wooldridge, 1994: 387).

Across the decade, the arguments of the *Black Paper* authors would be increasingly adopted by leading figures in the Conservative Party, which by the mid-1970s had begun emphasizing more traditional themes in its education policy program, including the desirability of a return to a differentiated secondary school structure (Wooldridge, 1994: 392). Sensing that public opinion was turning against progressive education policies, Labour PM James Callaghan would attempt to get ahead of the issue by calling for a national “Great Debate” over the future of education in a speech at Oxford in 1976 and greater alignment between the British education system and the needs of British industry (Lawton, 2005: 91).

Crucially, however, comprehensivization would continue more or less unfettered in at the local level despite the shifting climate in education policy in the 1970s. Set in motion by local reorganization in the 1950s and early 1960s and boosted under Crosland’s DES circular, more and more LEAs would dismantle their postwar systems of early selection and differentiated secondary schools. Indeed, the pace of comprehensivization accelerated dramatically under the Conservatives in the early 1970s, with the total number of secondary

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88 Including, in his one of his last publications before his death in 1971, Cyril Burt, whose article “The Mental Differences Between Children” appeared in the second (1971) of the *Black Papers*. 89 Changes in public opinion would be driven more by press reports of the seeming excesses of progressive educational methods than academic writings such as the *Black Papers*. A case in point was the so-called William Tyndale affair in 1976. A junior and infant school in Islington, William Tyndale had established a highly progressive team-teaching regime that allowed children considerable choice in their daily routines, with few rules imposed on them by the faculty or staff. Revealed by an investigative article in the Times Education Supplement, the affair sparked widespread outrage and concern over the extent to which basic educational standards had been sacrificed to ideology (see Lawton, 2005: 90-91)
students attending some form of comprehensive school in the state sector doubling between 1970 and 1973, rising to 60 percent of total population by the time the Conservatives were defeated by Labour in the 1974 general elections (Bellaby, 1977: 11). As Lawton notes, “once of the best known ironies about education at this time was that Margaret Thatcher, however unwillingly, approved more comprehensive schemes that any other Education Secretary” (2005: 78). By the end of the decade, 82 percent of all state secondary students in Britain would be attending some form of local comprehensive (Kerckhoff, *et al*, 1996: 4).

A final attempt to reverse comprehensivization would come in 1979 when Thatcher’s new government proposed legislation to permit local authorities to reestablish the 11-plus and selective system. The legislation would ultimately have little effect on the process already well underway. As Gillard (2007) points out, attempts at vertical reorganization in Berkshire, Wiltshire, Redbridge and Solihull all failed as a result of strong local opposition and support for comprehensive schooling. But the Thatcher proposal is notable for demonstrating the extent to which the parameters of the debate continued to be dominated by the legacies of the psychological and sociological ideas and their competing conceptions of equality. In the House of Commons debate on the legislation, two Labour MPs, Stuart Holland of Vauxhall and Martin Flannery of Sheffield Hillsborough, recounted, in effect, the history of differentiation in education in postwar Britain, outlining the impact of the twin discourses on the structure of schooling.

Mr. Holland:

One of the surprising aspects of the Government proposal in the Bill is the degree and scale of its backwardness...I wonder whether the Government are trying to reverse not only the principle of equality but the principle of equality of opportunity.

In practice, the principle of selection—division into two classes in schools—has been rejected by virtually every progressive education authority in the developed countries.
Implicitly the Government case relates to the assumption reflected by Sir Cyril Burt and others on the testing of intelligence, as if such testing were in a genuine sense scientific at a particular age. One of the Sunday newspapers recently published a devastating summary of something that for all of us—not only the Opposition—has already become part of conventional wisdom—that such testing has no scientific basis, in a genuine sense, at or around the age of 11.

It is exceptional that Burt's findings, which entered into the conventional wisdom of educational philosophy in this country for several decades, have been so explicitly repudiated. He invented research assistants who could corroborate his case. When he found that his theories did not fit the facts... he twisted the facts to fit his theories.

It is surprising that despite the devastating repudiation of Burt and all he stands for the Government Front Bench are prepared to reintroduce selectivity into education rather than admit that the comprehensive principle—difficult though it may well be in practice—is the only one on which to achieve equality of opportunity.

Mr. Flannery

I was most interested in my hon. Friend's anecdote about Sir Cyril Burt, who at one stage had the whole of education plunged into fantasies about intelligence. Does my hon. Friend remember the great endeavours to define intelligence? First, we all said that it was inborn all-round mental capacity. Then we discarded that definition. Then the world of education alighted on a definition of intelligence. It was decided that it was that quality which was tested by intelligence tests. That was the definition at which we finally arrived from Sir Cyril Burt. That was his tremendous contribution (HC Deb 12 July 1979 vol 970 cc702-823).

Reasserting Differentiation in Higher Education Expansion

A primary claim of this dissertation, expressed in Chapter I, is that all advanced capitalist societies establish institutional mechanisms, generally in their education systems, to differentiate young people into separate categories that, in turn, structure the occupational pathways they will follow into adulthood. Societies may carry out this sorting at earlier or later stages of youth, with associated consequences for a range of social, economic, and educational outcomes. Countries that practice differentiate at later ages tend to have larger higher education systems than those separating students at an earlier age, largely because general access to post-secondary credentials in systems with late selection is determined by the individual preferences of students and their proven academic achievements. In such
countries, universities tend to have a hierarchy of prestige, with tight limits on access to individual institutions within the system. In countries that practice early differentiation, by contrast, selection on the basis of perceived ability at the younger age acts as a gatekeeper to higher education as well as secondary schooling. As a consequence, many countries with early selection for secondary schooling maintain university sectors in which no hierarchy of prestige exists among various institutions and a granting of admission essentially entitles students to study at any institution in the system.

British policymakers involved with the horizontal secondary school reforms of the 1960s were keenly aware that by eliminating the tripartite system they were not so much ending selection as postponing it. The same Labour Party that fought to eliminate selection for secondary education at age eleven would see no contradiction in firmly establishing selective mechanisms for higher education. And they would have the opportunity.

Concurrent to the national comprehensivization drive led by Labour in the mid-1960s would be a movement to expand radically access to higher education in Britain. Spurred by many of the same structural and ideational factors that moved the party to pursue the horizontal reorganization of secondary schooling and influenced by the momentum generated by several earlier policy decisions, Labour would significantly increase the size of its university sector through the creation of the so-called “binary system” of higher education in 1965. Yet where the party would reject stratification in the secondary sector, it would reassert it for higher education, ensuring that its universities and their graduates would maintain a clear hierarchy of prestige. In the end, egalitarianism would have its limits.

_Higher Education in Britain_
Prior to the Second World War, access to university study, much like secondary education, was limited to a small segment of British youth: in 1938, only two percent of 18 year olds in Britain attended university (Trowler, 2003: 48). Unsurprisingly, most university students were from the middle and upper classes – sociological studies of the period between 1928 and 1947 found that 8.9 percent of all boys whose fathers worked in non-manual labor professions attended universities, while only 1.4 percent of all boys from the significantly larger manual labor category had the opportunity to attend. Although working class youth were still disproportionately represented, this latter figure actually reflected a doubling in the size of their university population since 1910 (figures cited in Archer, et al, 2003: 27).

Long dominated by Oxford and Cambridge, the university system in Britain had a tradition of independent governance, with admissions, planning, and curriculum decisions made at the level of individual institutions. Although the establishment under the Treasury of the University Grants Committee (UGC) in 1919 created a formal institutional link to facilitate the provision of block grants to universities, funding for British universities remained largely private before World War II. In marked contrast to the state-funded (and directed) systems on the continent, only about one-third of university finances in Britain came from the government (Shattock and Berdahl, 1984: 472). Moreover, unlike other private institutional recipients of state funds, universities were not obligated to account to Parliament for their spending, a tradition rooted in the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Godwin, 1998: 175). Though clearly at the top of the hierarchy, the universities were only one part of the British higher education sector, which included a vast array of further education institutions, such as technical and regional colleges, which offered vocational and practical learning courses, and teacher training colleges to supply educators to
local primary and secondary schools. Significantly, these institutions were administered and
funded by local authorities and were not permitted to confer degrees or diplomas to students;
this privilege was reserved exclusively for the universities.

In the postwar period, the British higher education system would experience several
pressures to expand. First were the demographic pressures driven by the spike in births
immediately following the war. Based on the increase in births registered in the mid to late
1940s, policymakers anticipated that the number of Britons aged fifteen to nineteen would
increase significantly by the mid-1960s, rising by nearly 30 percent between 1955 and 1965.
Simply maintaining the existing population percentage enrollments would thus require a
considerable expansion in the number of university places.

| The 15-19 Cohort in Britain, 1955-1965 (in thousands. Index 1955 = 100 in brackets) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1955                           | 3366            | (100)           |
| 1956                           | 3304            | (99.0)          |
| 1957                           | 3303            | (99.0)          |
| 1958                           | 3357            | (100.6)         |
| 1959                           | 3459            | (103.7)         |
| 1960                           | 3585            | (107.5)         |
| 1961                           | 3770            | (113.0)         |
| 1962                           | 4058            | (121.6)         |
| 1963                           | 4206            | (126.1)         |
| 1964                           | 4266            | (127.9)         |
| 1965                           | 4287            | (128.5)         |


The “Baby Bulge,” however, was not the only factor driving the rise in projected
enrollments: the percentage of students achieving qualifications for university admission by
successfully completing the newly introduced O and A level examinations were also increasing dramatically. Whereas students staying on at school after completing the minimum requirements and seeking university admissions qualification comprised only 6.6 percent of the population in 1950, by 1962 it had almost doubled to 12 percent of the general population (Perkin, 1972: 113), with the total number of sixth formers obtaining two A-Levels required for university admission or more leaping from 27,000 in 1956 to over 60,000 by 1964 (Lowe, 1988: 152). The result was a rapid decline in the percentage of qualified students successfully obtaining university places, from 80 percent in 1956 to 65 percent in 1964 (Laylard, King, and Moser, 1969: 18-19). The termination of postwar national service, due to take effect in 1960, was also expected to cause a spike in university applications, as male sixth formers who previously would have begun their eighteen months in the armed services could expect to apply directly for university entry.\(^{90}\) Under these conditions, some type of expansion was inevitable: the existing system simply lacked the physical and administrative capacity to accommodate the projected influx of new students into the system.

Another factor driving changes in the British higher education system was tied to the growth of the British economy in the 1950s and early 1960s and the concurrent spike in demand for university education by both British industry and families. While Britain’s average growth rate of 2.8% during this period may not have been as impressive as some of the increases registered on the continent, it nevertheless fueled one of the largest economic expansions in the country’s history (Matthews, et al., 1982). Filling the skilled occupations of the growing and increasingly specialized postwar labor market number required a better educated class of new recruits and thus heightened the requirements of industry for more

\(^{90}\) Concerns about Soviet expansionism led the first postwar Labour government to issue the first peacetime conscription in British history, the 1948 National Service Act, which continued the wartime conscription policy requiring able-bodied young men between seventeen and twenty-one to serve.
highly trained university graduates. Of particular concern was the state of technical and scientific education in the country and perceived shortages of graduates in those disciplines; a common view among postwar planners held that the country would need significantly to improve the development and use of science and technology for both its economy and national defense. While other European countries shared this concern, it was particularly acute in Britain - technological education had long been relegated to second-class status in the country, while liberal and classical studies had traditionally been emphasized in universities over the applied sciences (Deakin, 1996).

Beyond the demands of industry, however, were the rising aspirations of the new postwar consumer class that saw expanded access to higher forms of education for their children as another postwar good to which they desired access and, for the first time in post-Industrial era, they could realistically hope to obtain. Although it would still be some years before university education would become, in Anderson’s words, “the essential badge of middle-class status itself,” the social appeal of a university degree was clearly growing alongside its attraction on purely economic or educational grounds (Anderson 2006: 144, Archer, et al. 2003: 34).

While demographic and economic pressures were significant, explaining the policy reorientation in higher education during the 1960s requires the addition of a third variable, namely new ideas about equality and “hidden talent” that drove secondary policymaking in the immediate postwar era. As with the secondary system, this concern was reflected for higher education in a number of government advisory studies, beginning in the 1940s. In making the argument for a renewal of science in British universities, the 1946 Barlow Report drew on the view, shared by designers of the tripartite system – and later the educational
sociologists – that wasted or underutilized intellectual ability among young people constituted a major impediment to the realization of economic success in the postwar era. To make this point, the report adopted the educational psychologists’ assumption that there existed a fixed store of intelligence in the nation’s youth population. Employing this assumption – and some basic algebra – the report sought to demonstrate how the present university system was not providing all intellectually-gifted young people the chance to live up to their own – and thus the nation’s – potential.

At present rather less than 2 per cent of the population reach the Universities. About 5 per cent of the whole population show, on test, an intelligence as great as the upper half of the students, who amount to 1 per cent of the population. We conclude, therefore, that only about one in five of the boys and girls, who have intelligence equal to that of the best half of the University students, actually reach the Universities (Barlow Report, 1946: par. 26).

Clearly there existed a large reservoir of untapped intelligence in the British population, but where precisely were these bright students to be found? Working from the assumption that intelligence was evenly distributed across the general population and not the dominion of a single economic class or social group, the report’s authors concluded that this reserve of intelligent but underutilized youngsters must be those shut out of higher learning opportunities by the old two-tier system of elementary and secondary schools.

There is also evidence that the great majority of the intelligent persons, who do not reach the Universities, are ex-pupils of the elementary schools. If university education were open to all on the basis of measured intelligence alone, about 80 per cent would be expected to come from those children who started their education in the public elementary school and only 20 per cent from those whose education had been in independent schools (Barlow Report, 1946: par. 27)

While the report does not make reference to the specific social standing of these “ex-pupils of the elementary schools,” it is reasonable to infer that the majority of them would be of working class origins, given class distributions in the wider population. Including talented
young people in higher education regardless of their social origin was necessary for achieving
the broader objectives for youth conceived by the country’s postwar planners and a natural
complement to the meritocracy being established in the new secondary system.

Initially, the planners hoped that the reorganization of secondary schooling in the
tripartite system would itself help to resolve the problem of under-representation at the
university level. By funneling academically-gifted children from all classes into grammar
schools, which served as the route to advanced certification and a university education in the
state system, tripartism and 11-plus selection would necessarily increase their representation
in British universities as well. Assuming secondary selection’s effectiveness, planning for
higher education would be a relatively straightforward process, and simply entail expanding
the existing system to make room for the increased enrollments resulting from early selection
in the tripartite system and the overall increases in young people due to the Baby Bulge. The
failure of the tripartite system, however, successfully to advance working class children
necessarily limited the effectiveness of this strategy, and thus while the overall number of
undergraduates increased significantly from prewar levels in the first postwar decade, the
social imbalances in recruiting that characterized the system before the war remained, and the
percentage of university students from working class backgrounds in the 1950s continued to
be low (Ainley, 1988: 37).91 Early selection, it appeared, was as problematic a sorting
strategy for higher education as it was for the secondary sector.92

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91 Young women also failed to see their enrollment numbers increase during this period and actually registered a
slight decline in their relative university population rates from 1930 through 1958, despite being specifically
marked for greater participation by the postwar planners (Anderson, 2006: 132).
92 Crosland, while generally sidestepping questions about higher education in his works in the 1950s, maintained
that an additional effect of comprehensive reorganization would be that all secondary students, not only those
attending grammar or public schools, would have access to university education (see also Anderson 2006: 155).
Under the weight of these accumulated pressures, the Conservative government under Harold MacMillan established a Royal Commission in 1961 led by London School of Economic Professor Lionel Robbins to examine the higher education system. In some respects, the report, published in October 1963, was a pure policy advisory document; it included some 178 specific recommendations on a raft of subjects ranging from improving teacher education to establishing stronger links between universities and secondary schools to developing broader based first year courses (see Robbins Report, 1963: 277-91). Ultimately, however, the government would reject most of its recommendations, but it the report would have arguably a more significant effect by serving to provide the economic, social, and educational rationale justifying the rapid and permanent expansion of British higher education in the decade. By maintaining that growth in the sector should be carried out in response to the population’s demand for places, rather than the anticipated needs of the state or industry, the report opened up the post-secondary education in the country and particularly its university sector to whole swathes of British society for whom higher education had heretofore been a decidedly unrealistic aspiration. In a statement that captured the

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93 The Committee largely bypassed issues related to manpower or the role of universities in supplying labor to industry – a fact reflected in the absence of testimony before the Committee of businesses or industry producer groups, such as the Federation of British Industry. The Trades Union Congress, however, did submit testimony and have representatives appear before the Committee for questions (see Robbins Report, 1963, Appendix II, Vol. B). For an alternate view on the role of business and economic factors in the Robbins Report, see King and Nash, 2001.

94 Although Robbins’ name would be tied to the policy changes in higher education that stemmed from the early 1960s, many of the reforms associated with the report actually predate its 1963 publication, including those dealing with university funding and admission. Before the 1960s, students could either pay tuition fees directly themselves or compete for a raft of different financial awards, including state or university-sponsored scholarships and funds provided by individual LEAs. Self-funding of higher education had been the norm prior to the war, but by the end of the 1950s, the number of students receiving some form of public or private assistance had risen dramatically (Chitty, 2004: 162). A new system of student financing was introduced in the Education Act of 1962, which established a national standardized benefit level, subject to parental means-testing, to cover a student’s tuition and independent living expenses. Although seen at the time as more of an effort to coordinate and streamline a disordered jumble of funding methods, the new arrangement would be a necessary
philosophy that would guide government policy for successive generations of young people in Britain, the report declared “courses of higher education should be available for all those who are qualified by ability and attainment to pursue them and who wish to do so” (Robbins Report, 1963: 8).

In helping to set this expansion into motion, Robbins would draw on many of the same ideas on the relationship among class, merit, and wasted talent that formed the core of the counter discourse in education. In great detail the report examined the differential educational trajectories of men and women and of young people of various social classes and found that both gender and social origin were highly significant in determining who in Britain was likely to obtain a university education. In an examination of grammar school students in England and Wales and senior secondary school students in Scotland, Robbins noted that children from families in which the father had a manual employment background were less than half as likely to attend university as those whose fathers had non-manual occupations, despite both groups studying in the same schools and having similar ability levels (as measured by the 11-plus, among other assessments). Despite the promises of tripartism and the “class-neutral” method of selection by examination, it appeared that little had changed since Glass’s study of the 1930s and 1940s – the working class was still vastly underrepresented in higher education. A similar disparity in university attendance was demonstrated between male and female students: while the number of female students achieving O-level passes at age 16 was equal to the male figure, the report found that far fewer girls were sitting for the college required A-level exams two years later and thus were not continuing to university study.

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step for the later development of a mass higher education system by creating the conditions in which paying for higher education ceased to be an obstacle to attending university for more than a generation of British families (Anderson 2006: 139).

95 Senior secondary schools are the Scottish equivalent to English and Welsh grammar schools.
The impact of new ideas regarding the nature of intelligence and its distribution in the population were clearly evident in the report. In providing estimates for the number of future higher education places that would be needed, Robbins extended the ideas of the educational sociologists to higher education policy and explicitly rejected the fixed-pool of ability arguments of the interwar psychologists.

It is sometimes argued that growth in the number of those able to benefit from higher education is something that is likely to be limited in the foreseeable future by biological factors. But we believe that it is highly misleading to suppose that one can determine an upper limit to the number of people who could benefit from higher education, given favorable circumstances. It is, of course, unquestionable that human beings vary considerably in native capacity for all sorts of tasks...But while it would be wrong to deny fundamental differences of nature, it is equally wrong to deny that performance in examinations or tests – or indeed any measurable ability – is affected by nurture in the widest sense of the word. Moreover, the belief that there exists some easy method of ascertaining an intelligence factor unaffected by education or background is outmoded. Years ago, performance in ‘general education tests’ was thought to be relatively independent of earlier experience. It is now known that in fact it is dependent upon previous experience to a degree sufficiently large to be of great relevance (Robbins Report, 1963: 49).

Crucially, expansion in higher education would coincide with a consolidation of university admission procedures. Prior to the 1950s, university admission standards and criteria varied widely from institution to institution, but this changed in 1951 with the introduction of A-levels. Grammar school students who had elected to continue studies beyond the minimum school leaving age of sixteen and complete two additional years of study in the non-compulsory sixth form were eligible to sit for the new exams, which provided universities with a common evaluative mechanism to use as the basis for selection decisions. Initially, A-levels were awarded either as pass or fail, with “distinction” later applied to high passes. The difficulty in differentiating student achievement on the exams under this system led to calls for a reform of the grading scale by the universities, leading to the establishment of a letter system in 1963 that awarded grades from A (highest pass) to E (lowest pass) to F (failure to pass). To prevent widespread local variation in the number of
students receiving specific marks and to ensure that only a small percentage of A-level examinees would receive top scores, a uniform distribution of awarded grades was also established.\textsuperscript{96} To oversee the new admission system, the Universities Central Council on Admissions was set up to as a clearinghouse for all university applications, including, after some initial hesitation, Oxford and Cambridge (Anderson, 2006).

\textit{Achieving Expansion: The Binary System}

Upon the publication of the Robbins report in October 1963, the Conservative government quickly accepted most of the general targets for higher education expansion, though decisions of whether to accept or reject the report’s specific policy proposals were generally set aside. The Conservatives’ defeat in the 1964 general election meant that the decision of how precisely to facilitate the expansion called for in Robbins would be left up to the incoming Labour government, which had called for the rapid expansion of post-secondary education in its 1964 electoral manifesto and had accepted the Committee’s expansion targets at the time of the report’s publication. As Driver (1972: 327) writes, the new government had three alternative policy options available with regard to Robbins upon taking office. First, it could make funds available to existing universities to invest in facility and staff expansions to accommodate the projected increases in students. Such a policy, however, would face obvious logistical and physical obstacles, as well as strong opposition from university administrators, who feared that surging enrollments would necessarily lead to a decline in standards and, perhaps more importantly, institutional autonomy. The second option entailed creating entirely new universities on Greenfield sites to meet the projected increases in

\textsuperscript{96} The system allowed for the following distribution: A-10 percent, B- 15 percent, C- 10 percent, D- 15 percent, E – 20 percent. A further 20 percent granted O-level pass equivalence for their efforts, while the remaining failed (Select Committee on Education and Skills, 2003).
student numbers. Plans for establishing seven new universities had already begun in the 1950s\(^97\) but even the addition of these institutions was not expected to be sufficient. New building had been the option supported by the Robbins Committee, which had called for the creation of six additional universities in its report. Ultimately, however, the Labour government not only rejected this option, but decided to place a ten year moratorium on all new university construction,\(^98\) and elected instead to pursue the third option available to them, namely to elevate the status a set of existing higher education institutions.

The result of this decision was the creation so-called binary system. Announced by Crosland in a speech at Woolwich Polytechnic on April 28, 1965, the new policy called for a system of higher education consisting of two separate sectors. The first was the autonomous sector, which included the traditional universities, as well as the leading Colleges of Advanced Technology, which were raised to university level in 1966. The second half of the binary system would be comprised of a non-autonomous state sector that included some thirty technical schools, renamed polytechnics\(^99\), and teacher training colleges, which were to be known as colleges of education. Although these institutions would continue to lack formal degree-granting authority, under the new arrangement, students could now obtain degrees for coursework completed in them, with the authority to confer degrees and diplomas for specific courses of study resting with the newly created Council for National Academic Awards, a government body whose staff consisted of academics but was not necessarily identified with university interests (Driver, 1972: 328).

\(^97\) Known as the “Shakespearean Universities” as a result of the number of prominent Bard settings in their ranks, these new institutions included Norwich (East Anglia) Colchester (Essex), Canterbury (Kent), Lancaster, Brighton (Sussex), Coventry (Warwick) and York. Stirling University in Scotland and the New University of Ulster at Coleraine also received charters during this period.

\(^98\) The ban would last well beyond ten years – it would not be until 1992 that a new university would be built.

\(^99\) The designation of some thirty institutions as polytechnics in the new non-autonomous sector was accomplished in the May 1966 White Paper, *A Plan for Polytechnics and Other Colleges* (DES, 1966)
By managing to meet the expansionary calls of Robbins (though not in the precise form that Robbins advocated) with limited government investment while maintaining traditional university autonomy, the creation of the binary system managed to transform British higher education nearly overnight at little cost or disruption to existing arrangements. The effects were quickly visible: in 1960-61, roughly 5 percent of eighteen to nineteen year olds were pursuing higher education in the country but by 1972-73, the figure had increased to 14 percent, and across the 1960s, the number of full-time students in higher education increased more than two-fold, from roughly 200,000 at the beginning of the decade to 430,000 at its end, with university enrollments jumping from 108,000 in 1960 to 228,000 in 1970 (Perkin, 1972: 111). While still short of the 30 percent attendance rate that characterizes “mass” higher education systems, Britain’s post-secondary institutions had clearly undergone a significant expansion and transformation in the 1960s.

In marked contrast to the national systems on the continent, the British university system would emerge from this process with a selective system of admissions that served to retain and reinforce the distinct hierarchy of prestige among its institutions, eschewing the policy of open enrollments that characterized many of the continental systems.100 Selection by exam, the introduction of which had served to generate such contention when applied to eleven-year-olds under the tripartite secondary system, became the norm for eighteen-year-olds seeking entry to university.

That the Labour government failed to see this as a contradiction was made clear by Education Secretary Michael Stewart during the January 1965 House of Commons debate on Labour’s education policy. Asked by Alan Hopkins, a Conservative MP for Bristol Northeast, about his policy towards separation of young people into different educational

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100 The Open University is the obvious exception to this.
establishments on the basis of their different abilities and aptitudes at all stages of the education process, the Minister replied:

My policy is to retain the comprehensive principle at the primary stage and to promote its development at the secondary stage because I believe it is better on educational grounds than separatism. Quite different considerations apply to institutions for higher and further education, many of which are training their students for particular courses and professions.

To a follow up question inquiring why, if he believed separatism was wrong at the age of 11, 13 or 15, he thought it would be right at any later stage, Stewart responded.

Because everybody goes to a primary and a secondary school but not everybody pursues courses of further education. There must, therefore, be some separation between those who do and those who do not. Perhaps the hon. Member will consider this. If separatism is in his view right at the secondary stage, does he also advocate it at the primary stage. (Hansard, HC Deb 21 January 1965 vol 705 c390).

Crosland, Stewart’s successor at DES and the architect of the national comprehensivization drive expressed this view more forcefully in a 1971 interview conducted while Labour was in opposition. Rejecting the view that the binary system and the retention of late differentiation in higher education violated the principles upon which the comprehensive secondary school was based, Crosland claimed:

Egalitarians who attacked the [binary] policy were wrong … they drew on a false analogy. They said that if you were against the 11-plus, you should be against an 18-plus. But at 11-plus an entire age group is moving up into a different stage of education, and the question is whether it does so in a selective or a non-selective fashion. At 18-plus nothing of the sort is happening. Most of the age group is not going on to higher education anyway, and also will not do so for a long time to come (quoted in Kogan, 1971: 194).

Conclusion

After decades characterized by stasis, the structure of British general education system would experience two major reorganizations within twenty years. The first involved the replacement of the class-based prewar system by the 1944 Education Act and the creation of
the tripartite school system characterized by practices of early selection. The second reoriented the tripartite system dramatically, eliminating its three-tiered system in the 1960s and 70s and establishing non-selective comprehensive schools in most of the country. What explains these twin transformations?

This case study has emphasized the paramount role played by policy discourses in both outcomes. The ideas of fixed, unchanging, and measurable intelligence of the interwar educational psychologists’ discourse, which would be largely adopted by political actors – including crucially the British Labour Party – during the interwar years, would be the basis of the tripartite system’s institutional framework. The interwar discourse coalition, however, would collapse rapidly in the 1950s and early 1960s and practices of early selection based on perceived ability would lose much of their legitimacy as the result of the rise of a counter discourse led by educational sociologists which challenged the assumptions of the psychologists with new ideas that emphasized the evolutionary character of intelligence and the effects of environmental factors in shaping individual ability. By the late 1950s, this shift would generate considerable uncertainty about the tripartite system among the public and political actors, most notably the Labour Party, which would seek to end early selection and replace the grammar, technical, and secondary modern schools of the vertical system with the mixed-ability comprehensive schools. Although this ideational shift was rooted in debates within secondary education, its effects were not limited to it, and the new beliefs would serve to shape the institutional framework of British higher education during the same period. In the case of the university system, however, policy actors would retain selective practices, ensuring that British higher education institutions would retain a hierarchy of prestige.
As the past three chapters have highlighted, the timing of developments in the British case was as important as their substantive content. The initiation of the national reform process by the mid-1960s would serve to “lock-in” horizontal reorganization movements at the local level before the shifts in social, economic, and political conditions of the 1970s that had the potential to undermine them would occur. As the next three chapters demonstrate, the West German system would also face pressures for change to its three-tiered vertical school organization in the immediate postwar decades, including a shift in policy discourses similar to the one that took place in Britain. Crucially, however, the emergence of the West German counter discourse would be delayed by a set of institutional factors related to the constitutional organization of the new West German state and structural legacies from the prewar era; as a consequence, reform proposals would miss the window of political opportunity in the 1970s, and continuity, rather than change, what characterize the postwar evolution in the structure of German general education.
Chapter VI
Germany Case Study I:
Policy Discourses and the Reconstruction of General Education, 1945-1949

Introduction

The political system of the Federal Republic of Germany has long been viewed as a model of consensus democracy (Lijphart, 1999). According to this conception, a combination of cultural preferences for cooperation rooted in Germany’s historical experiences and institutional features such as federalism and coalition governments that enable a variety of actors to exercise veto authority within the policymaking process has led to a political system in which adjustments occur only slowly and incrementally (Katzenstein, 1987). Even within this continuity-favoring context, however, the persistence of the practice of separating young people in the FRG for placement at age ten into different types of schools in the state administered general education system is remarkable. Many of the organizational characteristics of the system have changed little from arrangements that developed early in the nineteenth century, despite two world wars, several regime changes, occupation, division, and massive shifts in the country’s socio-economic structure.\footnote{Thelen makes a similar point regarding the country’s system of vocational training (2004: 7).} When examined from a comparative perspective, the perseverance of early differentiation in general education is all the more puzzling. The system, which achieved widespread adoption and institutionalization under an autocratic regime in Prussia and later in unified Imperial Germany, clearly reflected a view of social organization more consistent with the hierarchically-structured authoritarian political orders under which it formed than with more horizontal pluralist systems, such as the
one that developed in the West Germany after 1945. Moreover, while many other countries in
Western Europe traditionally practiced early youth differentiation in education, most,
including the UK, would amend these practice in the 1960s and 70s by delaying the age at
which separation took place and merging the various schools in their differentiated systems
into a single comprehensive unit attended by most or all students. Indeed, among the large
countries of the region, only West Germany would emerge from this reform era with the
vertically differentiated structure of its traditional system still largely intact (Levin, 1978: 440).

While one certainly would not anticipate a radical reconfiguration of all inherited
institutional legacies in the course of a country’s democratic evolution, one would expect
shifts to be more likely in those arrangements more reflective of the autocratic and elite-
oriented structure of the old order. By sorting young people into a system of different
occupationally-determinant schools that largely reproduced the existing social structure and
distribution of political and economic power in society, the traditional German general
education system reflected just such an old-order arrangement. As Nixdorf (1970: 2-3)
writes, the system “did not facilitate the much-needed process of social integration. It did not
socialize the students into a national political culture, but instead, socialized them into
compartmentalized sub-cultures. It divided students into three types of schools, primarily on
the basis of their social class background.” As such, he writes, the traditional system “did not
suffice for the new Republican regimes after 1918 and 1945” and the values of inclusiveness
and equal opportunity associated with liberal democracy. The practices that characterized
general education in the Imperial era would not only continue in the democratic West

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Germany but be extended to the regions of the former German Democratic Republic (where the traditional vertical system had been dismantled by the Soviets in 1946) following its reunification with the FRG in 1990. Explaining why such a system re-emerged after World War II and persisted in the FRG despite its apparent incompatibility the democratic political culture that emerged in West Germany after 1949 and the fact that similar systems facing similar pressures for change in other countries, including Britain, did transform requires, this chapter argues, an understanding of the interplay between institutions and policy discourses, and of processes of path dependence.

This chapter begins with an overview of the historical development of the practices of vertical differentiation and early selection before 1945. It then turns to an examination of the reconstruction process of the traditional system in the Western Zones of occupied Germany after World War II and the development of the broader institutional framework in which it would become anchored in the new Federal Republic after 1949.

**The Institutional Evolution of German General Education, 1871-1945**

Although the individual schools that comprised the German general education system existed in various forms before 1800, it was primarily in the 19th century that they would realize their “traditional” structure. The arrangements that would come to characterize the traditional system and in particular the Gymnasium’s elite standing in that system can be traced back to an interrelated set of pedagogical ideas and institutions that arose in the first half of that century. The ideational component was rooted in the educational philosophy of Wilhelm von Humboldt, a Prussian scholar and politician who served briefly but crucially as

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104 Institutions like the Realschulen that offered courses in both arts and sciences were not only unnecessary in Humboldt’s view but dangerous because the mixture of practical and classical served to dilute and contaminate each (Taylor, 1981: 14).
Minister of Culture following Prussia’s defeat in Jena at the hands of Napoleon in 1806. For Humboldt, true education had little to do with imparting practical skills relevant for specific productive purposes but was to promote individual self-realization and cultivation, a process captured by the German word Bildung, which can be translated as both “formation” and “education.” By studying the highest levels of humanistic culture, reflected by the language, literature, and history of ancient Greece and Rome, an individual could elevate himself to the highest achievable intellectual state and thus be prepared to assume the leading positions in society. Such elevation, however, could not be realized by all youth according to Humboldt, but only by a limited number of exceptional young people trained in exclusive institutions. Vocational education of the type emphasized in the technical and commercial schools of the time operated according to a different set of assumptions than those that stood behind the academic curriculum provided in the Gymnasium. While such schools were needed to prepare the majority of youth who were destined for manual occupations, Humboldt held that it was imperative to keep vocational training institutionally separated from general education. Different pedagogical assumptions and objectives required not merely separate educational tracks within a single physical structure, but a system in which vocational and academic schools would be entirely detached from one another, with different facilities, faculties, and administrations.

Humboldt’s ideas would become the basis for the Prussian (and later Imperial German) general education and university systems as they developed in the 19th Century and helped to cement the division between general and vocational education that exists in
Germany to this day.\textsuperscript{105} His success in separating the two spheres is evident even in the terminology used to refer to different types of education: in German, the expression \textit{Bildung} is reserved for that education offered in the \textit{Gymnasium} and the universities, while \textit{Ausbildung} refers to the practical training provided by apprenticeships and the vocational education institutions. The product of ideas and decisions located in a critical historical moment that predated by over a half century the creation of a unified German state, this division would continue to stand at the center of education debates from the Imperial era well into the period of the Federal Republic.

In the Imperial era, much of this debate would focus around the perceived social inequalities of the system; the division between the elementary (and vocational) schools and the secondary schools (and universities) tended to correspond to class divisions. While admission to the \textit{Gymnasium}\textsuperscript{106} was technically open to any student who could pass an exam administered after the fourth year in the \textit{Volksschule}, or around the age of nine, in practice, the imposition of tuition fees ensured that secondary schools in Germany were reserved almost exclusively for children of the wealthier classes. Further adding to class divisions was the existence of special \textit{Vorschulen}, fee-charging elementary schools common in the northern cities and areas of eastern Prussia that offered instruction designed expressly to prepare students for classical curriculum of the \textit{Gymnasium}. Unlike \textit{Volksschulen} students, the pupils

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesub{105} As Taylor points out, this split served to move vocational education into the hands of industry itself and almost entirely outside of the state education system, a development that relegated occupational training to a significantly lower level of prestige by the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century (Taylor, 1981: 14-15).

\footnotesub{106} The advanced secondary sector was itself actually split into three basic types for much of the Imperial period: the traditional classical \textit{Gymnasium}, the \textit{Realgymnasium}, which stressed the natural sciences, and the \textit{Oberrealschule}. This final type, established first in 1882 and designed to meet the demands of the country’s growing industrial sector, did not offer Latin or Greek, but stressed math, science, and modern languages. Although all three types were granted equal status after the Reich School Conference of 1901, students who wished to study certain university subjects such as law, medicine, or philology were required to attend a traditional \textit{Gymnasium} (Samuel and Thomas, 1949: 46).
\end{footnotesize}
at the *Vorschulen* were not required to take the standard entrance tests and by pre-
arrangement could proceed directly to *Gymnasium* at age nine (Lamberti, 2000: 29; 2002: 18).

For the vast majority of young people in Imperial Germany, general education ended,
as in Britain before the Second World War, with elementary school. Compulsory full-time
attendance in the basic *Volksschule* was mandated in most *Länder* from the ages of six to
fourteen, after which part-time study in a vocationally-oriented *Fortbildungsschule*
(Continuation School) was the only further educational option available outside of in-firm
apprenticeship training. Reflecting the country’s broader religious divide between Protestants
and Catholics, elementary students also often attended confessional-specific (and state-
supported) *Volksschulen*, which were typically overseen by church-administered
inspectorates.107

Calls for reform of the traditional system appeared periodically between 1871 and
1918. Most significant among the various reform efforts were those associated with the New
Pedagogy (*Neue Pädagogik*) movement within the German Teachers’ Association (*Deutscher
Lehrerverein* [DLV]), a professional association of elementary school teachers founded in
1871 and based in Berlin. Seeking to end what the group viewed as an elitist system designed
to keep lower class *Volksschule* students out of secondary education (and thus from reaping
its attendant socio-economic opportunities) members of the DLV called for new types of
socially and religiously integrated schools, including the *Allgemeine Volksschule*, or common
elementary school, and later the *Einheitsschule*, a fully horizontal school type in which

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107 Lamberti (2002: introduction) notes how the process by which the state achieved a monopoly over the
German education system during the 19th century actually resulted in a greater role for religious authorities in
public education. State authorities perceived that failing to incorporate the Churches in the state system would
lead to a separate sector of religious schools outside of the state’s competence. Such a sector, as developed in
France after the public education system was secularized during the Third Republic, would challenge the state’s
control over schooling in Germany and thus was discouraged by authorities.
differentiation would be eliminated entirely and all students would attend the same institutions from Kindergarten to university (Lamberti, 2002: 17).

Such proposals radically challenged the traditional institutional framework of Germany’s general education system and the beliefs of elite differentiation that had been at the heart of state educational policy since Humboldt’s Prussian reforms of the early 19th century. Standing to defend the traditional system were a set of powerful social and political actors, including the conservative political parties, the Catholic and Protestant churches,\textsuperscript{108} and, notably, the secondary school teachers and administrators. Mirroring the divides between school types in the general education system, elementary and secondary school teachers were not viewed as common members of a single profession, but as separate occupations that differed widely in terms of income and social prestige.

Until the 1920s, only teachers in the Gymnasium were recognized as members of the state civil service (Beamten), with commensurate benefits in pay, status, and employment protection (National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum, and Assessment, 1999: 214). Crucially, the required qualifications for each set of teachers also differed. Secondary school instructors were trained in the higher secondary schools and universities, while the elementary teachers obtained teaching certificates in Lehrerseminare, special teacher training institutions that were widely held in lower standing than the universities, and for which possession of a university entrance certificate, the Abitur, was not required for admission (Lamberti, 2000: 25, 34). Secondary school teachers would thus consistently resist the expansion of access to upper secondary general education and university study not only because it threatened the elite character of the institutions in which they taught, but also

\textsuperscript{108} The churches were doubly inclined to fight reform efforts, since they not only administered confessional schools in the state education system but also relied on the humanist curriculum of the Gymnasium to prepare future clergy for the seminary.
because it served to dilute the qualification that differentiated Gymnasiallehrer from “mere” schoolteachers.

General Education in Weimar

The establishment of the democratic Weimar Republic after World War I brought with it the possibility of significant reform in general education, and several key changes to the system would occur, including, most notably, a guarantee of free elementary education and, at least formally, an end to Vorschulen through the establishment of a compulsory common elementary school (die gemeinsame Grundschule) for grades 1-4. These reforms, while ostensibly geared toward the elementary sector, had significant implications for the secondary schools as well, since they effectively raised the age of selection to ten, when the period of common schooling ended and students destined for the advanced track left to begin their studies in the higher schools.

In most respects, however, continuity with Imperial-era arrangements characterized general education during the Weimar years. Despite significant debates, the basic structure of the Imperial system largely survived into the Weimar era, including the practice of selection at age ten for placement in one of the three traditional schools and the continued divide between elementary and the secondary education. Although the Social Democrats sought to end early selection and had adopted the Einheitsschule as their preferred school model for the general education system, they were unable to surmount the opposition of the middle class and religious parties, which remained faithful to the traditional arrangements. In negotiations over the Weimar Constitution, the two sides would ultimately reach a compromise by which

\[109\] In reality, many of these fee-charging preparatory schools would continue to operate until banned permanently by the Nazis in 1936 (Hearnden, 1976a).
the practices of selection and separate schools would be permitted to continue but in an
ostensibly new and more “meritocratic” form. Article 146 of the Weimar Constitution thus
reaffirmed the traditional split between the secondary schools and the elementary system, but
also indicated that admission to the advanced schools in the Republic was to be based on
students’ talents and motivation rather than their parents’ wealth, religion, or social standing.
The Constitution also called for grants to be made available to less affluent students to help
them afford advanced studies.

Continuity also largely reigned in educational policymaking arrangements. While
some movement towards policy centralization took place after the Republic’s founding in
1919, including the establishment of a new department for culture with competence for
education within the federal Ministry of the Interior and the creation of a commission of
federal and state officials to coordinate policy at the national level, the failure of the political
parties to agree on a central strategy ensured the continuation of the cultural federalism that
had marked the Imperial period and the perpetuation of considerable institutional variation in
the secondary education systems of the respective Länder\footnote{This variation, which also to a lesser extent has marked the Federal Republic, was evident both in the types of schools present in different Länder and the selection practices employed to place students in them. More conservative states such as Bavaria maintained a strict division between elementary and secondary levels, while others added more comprehensive elements into the organization structure of the education system. Notable in this regard was Thuringia, which under an SPD-led coalition adopted the Einheitsschule as the basis for the system in 1922, only to see it diluted beyond recognition after the central government removed the coalition from power in 1924 following the communists entry into the Landesregierung (see Mitzenheim, 1965).} (Hearnden, 1976b:3).

Like many other elements of Weimar democracy, however, such promises were never
translated into practice. The succession of financial crises that plagued the Republic
throughout its short life, along with a general reluctance on the part of authorities to provide
funds, sharply limited the availability of hardship-based tuition grants in the Weimar era
(Samuel and Thomas, 1948: 47). In the end, despite representing a critical juncture\textsuperscript{111} in Germany’s political and institutional evolution that provided a clear opportunity for actors to reform a set of secondary educational practices and arrangements associated by many with class division and elitism, the Weimar era saw the persistence of the traditional system and the continuation of parental wealth and status as the primary factor determining which young people would obtain access to advanced education and the manifold opportunities it offered.

\textit{The National Socialist Era, 1933-1945}

Young people’s role in the Nazi movement and the regime’s youth policies have been frequent subjects of study (see Rempel, 1991; Giles, 1992, Koebner, et al, 1985), generating a veritable sub-discipline within the already voluminous literature on the National Socialist period. This focus is certainly not without justification: the ideological, political, and practical significance of youth to the regime and Nazi party would serve to elevate young people to a position of marked significance and prominence within the Third Reich. Yet, somewhat ironically, developments in the practices of vertical differentiation and selection during the \textit{Nazizeit} were based more in the regime’s disinterest in the higher schools rather than in any grand philosophical design or political strategy. Organizationally, the Nazis’ targeting of young Germans would render the \textit{Grundschule} as the primary institutional arena for action. In addition to providing younger and presumably more ideologically malleable students, the \textit{Grundschule}, with its inclusive structure, fit nicely with Nazi rhetoric of classlessness and national unity, while the traditional secondary schools and particularly the

\textsuperscript{111} Or, in Samuels and Thomas’ less technical phrasing a “splendid opportunity. (1948: 47)
humanist Gymnasium were sharply at odds with the anti-intellectual and anti-liberal Nazi Weltanschauung (Samuel and Thomas, 1949).

Under the decentralized educational structure of Weimar, institutional diversity within the secondary sector had increased significantly, with some sixteen different selective secondary school types in operation by 1933; but under the Nazis, who had largely centralized education policy within the Reich Ministry for Science, Education, and Popular Culture (Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung), the system underwent significant consolidation, shrinking by the late 1930s to a more manageable three basic types. In addition to the traditional Gymnasium, these included the Aufbauschule, a secondary school located in rural areas that was designed to provide higher education to the children of farmers and small village families, and the Deutsche Oberschule, or German High School, which due to its emphasis on national culture, history, and geography, became the preferred secondary school type of the regime. Nazi consolidation efforts in the secondary sector would be so successful that by 1938 four out of every five secondary students were studying in the Deutsche Oberschule, while Gymnasium enrollments fell to around ten percent of the entire secondary population (Hearnden, 1976b).\(^\textit{112}\) Nazi conscription policies and youth labor programs also had an impact on secondary schooling, resulting in the shortening of secondary courses of study to eight years from the customary nine (Tent, 1982a: 265).

In addition to the reorganization within the state education sector, the Nazis established a new category of elite party-administered institutions, known as the National Socialist Selective Schools (NS-Ausleseschulen). These boarding schools, which were based on the English public school system and bore names such as the Adolf Hitler Schule and the

\(^{112}\) Ironically, both the Aufbauschule and the Deutsche Oberschule were originally products of the liberal Neue Pädagogik reform movement (see Lamberti, 2002: 18, 108).
Reichsschule der NSDAP, were designed to educate a new generation of party leaders and state officials. Unlike traditional secondary schools, however, selection to these institutions was based primarily on ideological and racial purity, as well as the standing of one’s family in the Nazi party (see Scholtz, 1973).

Whatever the Nazis’ impact on the organizational landscape of general education, the social composition of the differentiated school populations would remain largely the same during the Third Reich. Nazi rhetoric may have emphasized the importance of the “people’s community” (Volksgemeinschaft) over individual social groups, but Hitler’s regime did little in practice to change either the dominance of the wealthy classes in secondary schools or the long-standing division between elementary and secondary education (Tent 1982a: 265). Despite shifting conditions in the broader German class structure, no “social revolution” would be achieved through the education system in the Nazi period (see Schoenbaum, 1980).

Reconstituting the Traditional Education System under Allied Occupation, 1945-1949

In the immediate aftermath of Germany’s unconditional surrender in May 1945 and the division of the country into four zones of occupation, issues of basic survival demanded most of the Allies’ attention, with the humanitarian crisis compounded by the arrival of millions of refugees from the former Eastern territories of the Reich that had been overrun by the advancing Soviet Army in the winter and spring of 1945. Against this backdrop, the structure of the education system was not a particularly major area of concern for the Allies. By the fall of 1945, however, concerns over crime and delinquency among the itinerant young

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113 In later debates over the reconstruction of the school system in the Western Zones, the refugee representative groups would prove to be consistent advocates for retaining the traditional system, maintaining that a strongly selective system offered the most effective means for them to advance professionally and socially in the FRG (see Kuhlmann, 1970: 51).
people displaced by the war forced the occupying powers to address the issue of schooling and accelerate the implementation of plans to reconstitute the education systems in the respective occupation zones (Taylor, 1981: 91; Welsh, 1989: 88-89).

Among the occupying powers, central coordination in education and schooling was relatively weak, with planning and policy decided largely by local German authorities in the respective zones of occupation. Little collective Allied consideration had been given to the schools in early postwar planning; the Potsdam Agreement of August 1945, which set out the basic framework for governance and administration in occupied Germany, made reference only to the need for Allied control over education in order “completely to eliminate Nazi and militarist doctrines and to make possible the successful development of democratic ideas” (cited in Ruhm von Oppen, 1955). It would be 1947 before the Allied Control Council in Berlin would issue a common statement on education policy in the form Control Council Directive No. 54, which called for a “democratized” education system. In addition to a renewed emphasis on the teaching of democratic norms and civic responsibility, the Directive called for a more democratic organizational structure for German education. In language reflecting a significant American\footnote{114} influence, it stated that “schools for the period of compulsory education should form a comprehensive educational system. The terms “elementary education” and “secondary education” should mean two consecutive levels of instruction, not two types or qualities of instruction, which overlap” (Allied Control Council, cited in Ruhm von Oppen, 1955: 233-234).

Despite the fact that Directive No. 54 was issued by all four of the occupying powers, only the United States and Soviet Union would pursue policies of fundamental reorganization

\footnote{114} By this time, American authorities were pursuing a policy of fundamental reorganization of schooling along comprehensive lines within their zone (see below).
in general education during the period of occupation. In the Soviet Zone, the Law for the Democratization of the German School (Gesetz zur Demokratisierung der deutschen Schule) adopted in the late spring of 1946 replaced the traditional system and implemented an integrated eight year period of common schooling through age fourteen, followed by a period of upper secondary study at either a vocational training institution (Berufschule) or university preparatory school (Oberschule). The Law also abolished private education and sharply limited the role traditionally played by the churches in overseeing the schools (Günther and Uhlig, 1969: 11).

The related ease with which the Soviets successfully overhauled general education in the East was primarily rooted, as Hearnden (1976a: 46-47) points out, in two factors. First, the Soviets operated in a much more sympathetic environment to school reform than the Western powers. Berlin had been the center of activity for the school reform movements of the Weimar era and the Soviets found no shortage of educationalists in their zone sympathetic to school comprehensivization. Second, and more significantly, the 1946 Law was adopted by the provisional Land governments set up by the Soviets some five months before the October 1946 elections in the Eastern zone.\footnote{The autumn 1946 elections would be an embarrassment to the U.S.S.R.. Despite attempts by the Soviet occupation authorities to ensure the victory of the pro-Moscow German Socialist Unity Party (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, or SED), which had been formed in April 1946 by the Soviet-coordinated merger of the Social Democratic and Communist parties in the Russian Zone, the middle class parties led by the CDU and the Liberal Democrats actually gained majorities in the Landtag elections in Brandenburg and Sachsen-Anhalt (Creuzberger, 1999). In Berlin, where the SPD had managed to remain independent in the Western controlled parts of the city, the SED garnered a mere 19.8% of the popular vote in city-wide elections, which translated into 26 out of 160 seats in the city council. These elections would be the last competitively contested votes in the areas of the Soviet occupation until 1990 (Murphy, et.al, 1990: 399).} The success of a Soviet campaign to install members of the German Communist Party (KPD) into the leading positions in the educational departments and school councils in the Eastern Länder also facilitated the change by helping
to ensure that local education officials would be sympathetic to the Soviets’ horizontal reforms (see Welsh, 1989: 89-90).

By the time of the September 1946 elections, Soviet-directed changes to the structure of general education were viewed as a *fait accompli* by much of the population, since the school year under the new system had already begun by the time the elections were held. The timing of the reform limited the middle class parties’ attempts to rally opposition to the law during the campaign, largely neutralized public debate on the topic, and helped to ensure that the dismantling of the vertically integrated school system would proceed in the Soviet Zone without protracted conflict.

The 1946 Soviet reform would prove to have significant long-term impact on the general education system in the future German Democratic Republic (GDR), which would be established in the areas of the Soviet Zone in 1949. The school organization in the GDR would continue to maintain, in various forms, a largely horizontal structure throughout its forty-one year existence. Only after reunification with the West in 1990 would the Soviet-inspired system be eliminated and vertical differentiation in schooling return by way of institutional transfer from the West.

The early establishment of a comprehensive system in the Soviet Zone would have significant implications not only for successive generations of young people raised in the GDR, but for education reform debates within the FRG as well. Advocates of the traditional system in the West would consistently seek to associate comprehensive schooling with the Communist East, creating a link in popular and political debates that would cast not only attempts to implement the *Einheitsschule* (and later the *Gesamtschule*) as radical and
dangerous left-wing experiments, but any reform aimed at lessening differentiation in the
German education system.

In the western part of the country, the British and French authorities were for the most
part content to allow German authorities in the individual Länder to draw up the
organizational blueprints for the rebuilding of the educational systems themselves, though
they insisted, along with the other Allies, that most of the new school types either created or
emphasized by the National Socialist regime be abolished. In most instances, the British
and French policy of German autonomy in education resulted in a relatively unproblematic
return to the pre-Nazi traditional general education system of elementary Volksschulen,
intermediate Realschulen, and higher-level Gymnasia, along with the selection around the age
of ten for placement in one of the three school types.

In some areas of the British Zone, however, SPD-led Land governments initially
pursued secondary reorganization along more comprehensive lines, though these generally
met with little long-term success. In Schleswig-Holstein, the majority SPD government
argued that political democracy in the new Germany demanded an equally democratic system
of general education and passed a law in 1948 that ended the traditional practice of early
placement into separate schools and replaced the externally differentiated traditional school
structure with an “internally differentiated” but commonly attended three-year middle school.

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117 French policy would become somewhat more activist in the later years of occupation. As Taylor (1981: 101-103) notes, French authorities, spurred by the call in Directive 54 to democratize education in Germany, sought change in the curriculum of the Gymnasium, calling on administrators and faculty to shift the emphasis from classical language instruction to more relevant and practical ends. Employing a strategy also used against American reform efforts (see below), German authorities in the French Zone would simply delay implementation of any significant changes until the occupation mandate over education ran out.
Under the new organization, students would continue to be placed into separate academic and vocational streams, but significant portions of the curriculum would be the same for all students. The transfer of students between the two streams, a rare occurrence under the traditional system, would be facilitated in the middle school, thus softening the hard deterministic practice of relegating students either to the academic or the vocational path at age ten with little chance of transferring “up” the chain of prestige.

The experiment with this new type of middle school would ultimately be short-lived, however. The Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which had opposed the law when it was first proposed, argued that simply eliminating tuition and course material fees would end whatever inequalities were perpetuated by the traditional differentiated system. Following their victory in the 1950 Land elections, the CDU repealed the 1948 legislation.

In Hamburg, a 1949 law crafted by the coalition SPD – Communist (KPD) government called for the implementation of a three-tiered secondary system similar to the one proposed under the 1944 Education Act in Britain. The proposed law called for an extension of the period of common schooling in the Grundschule from four to six years, a move that would postpone for the selection process for students from age ten until twelve and delay their start in one of the traditional differentiated schools.

The proposal provoked a strong backlash from a powerful coalition that included civil servants, the Gymnasialverein, which represented Gymnasium teachers, and professors from the University of Hamburg118 (Hearnden, 1978: 21-29; Heidenheimer, 1974: 394). In a memorandum published by the University’s faculty senate, professors argued against the law

118 Hamburg was not alone among universities in its opposition to horizontal changes in the general education system and its support for maintaining the historical relationship between the Gymnasium and the German universities. Objections to changing the practices of early selection and school differentiation were voices by the rectors and faculty at a number of universities, including Munich, Heidelberg, Tübingen, and Erlangen, among others (Merkt, 1952: 187, 259; Kuhlmann, 1970: 39).
by claiming that it attempted, erroneously, to utilize a system founded on pedagogical 
principles as a tool for initiating broader social and political changes. As the faculty 
maintained in their public comments on the proposal, seeking to extend the principles of 
democracy from the political to the educational sphere would benefit neither.

Because the limits of education are not clearly marked [in the government’s reform 
plan], the school is attributed with socio-political functions, which are for it 
intrinsically unrealizable. At the same time, such an attribution results in a thoroughly 
undesired and significant deferring of political responsibility. The will of the people 
to achieve social unity depends on many forces and powers outside the education 
system. The school can support these forces to some extent or it can hinder them. It 
can, however, neither create nor destroy a political order. Thus in the weighing of 
motives and setting of goals, socio-political arguments should not have priority before 
pedagogical considerations, as they appear to have in the explanations [for the law], 
especially regarding the question of the Einheitsschule and the design of the secondary 
school (Universität Hamburg, 1949: 9-10).

The same memorandum included arguments in favor of continuing the practice of 
selection at age ten that drew heavily on conceptions of childhood and early adolescent 
intelligence from academic psychology. In response to a question submitted by the Northwest 
German Higher Education Council asking whether it was preferable “from a psychological, 
physiological, and pedagogical” standpoint to select students for transfer to secondary school 
at age ten as in the traditional system, or at age twelve as proposed in the SPD-KPD law, 
Hans Wenke, a professor of education and psychology at the University, maintained that 
nothing had contradicted the view of more than a century of experience that young people 
were sufficiently developed both mentally and physically at age ten to be identified for 
transfer to a secondary school (Universität Hamburg: 40-41).

The arguments put forth by the University and other opponents of the school reform 
would resonate with the larger population. The 1949 school law would become the central 
issue in the 1953 the campaign for the Bürgerschaft, the city’s parliament, and opposition to
the SPD-KPD school reform initiatives would contribute to the coalition’s defeat that year, leading to the repeal of the law by the new CDU-led government (see Lüth, 1971: 55-64). Even in left-leaning Hamburg, reform of the traditional education system in the early postwar years proved to be a politically untenable project.\(^\text{119}\)

One of the most significant British contributions to German education in the occupation period was their assistance in the creation of what we become know as the *Zweiter Bildungsweg* (ZB), or Second Educational Path. Although the ZB generally involved adult learners returning to school in hopes of expanding their career prospects, it would in time come to play a significant role in debates concerning separation of students at age ten for placement in one of the three traditional schools by providing supporters of vertical differentiation with an institutional corrective to the possibility of incorrect initial selection (Ertl and Phillips, 2000: 404). Although the term implies a single pathway, the ZB actually refers to a variety of arrangements that can lead to placement at a number of different levels in the German higher education system. Under the ZB, individuals who had not obtained the *Abitur* via the traditional route of the *Gymnasium* could still gain admission to a university in two basic ways. The first involved the direct transfer from a technical college to a university. Prior to 1939\(^\text{120}\) it had been common for students who has attended a *Realschule* to progress to postsecondary studies at colleges of technology, but opportunities for further technical education, since the *Abitur* was required for progression to a traditional university. At the suggestion of British education authorities in North Rhine Westphalia, the Land Ministry

\(^{119}\) The contention that characterized the debates of the late forties and early fifties would resurface in Hamburg in 2008, when plans to consolidate the secondary sector would generate another political row (see Chapter I).

\(^{120}\) The Nazis had sought to change this practice with an order issued in April 1939 that ordered all technical universities to accept students who had successfully completed final exams at their colleges of technology, but the order, like many others issued by the Reich’s Ministry for Education, was not implemented by all the *Länder* governments (Edwards, 1978: 186).
issued a regulation in 1948 that permitted technical college graduates in the Land who had passed their final examination to attend the University of Aachen, a practice that spread over time to the rest of the FRG (Edwards, 1978). The second method, which also had its postwar origins in the British Zone during the occupation period, involved the establishment of special institutions, including *Abendgymnasia* (evening gymnasium) and *Kollegs* (sixth-form colleges) that provided adults who had completed their general educations in the *Hauptschule* or *Realschule* with an opportunity to obtain the *Abitur* and ultimately attend a university (Führ, 1997: 161-163).

Like the British and French, the United States would begin the postwar occupation with a policy that largely left the organizational reconstruction of education in its occupation zone in the hands of local German authorities. Working within a set of vague guidelines for education policy articulated in JCS 1067, the Joint Chiefs of Staff occupation directive issued in April 1945 to the U.S. occupation commander that called for the denazification of the German schools, demilitarization of the curriculum, and the promotion of democratic ideals, American educational officials were at first willing to allow German authorities broad discretion to reestablish the selective system as it had existed before 1933. In Aachen, the first area under U.S. control permitted to reinstate schooling in June 1945, German officials reconstituted the traditional system with no registered American objection.\(^{121}\) At an educational conference in Frankfurt in December 1945, the head of the Bavarian division of the Education and Religious Affairs (E&RA) branch of the Office of the Military Government of the United States (OMGUS) announced that schools in the *Land* had reopened along traditional lines and even expressed concerns that an SPD proposal to end the long-standing

\[^{121}\text{Aachen would be under British control following the formal division of Germany into zones of occupation later in 1945.}\]
division of schools according to confession would be too radical and generate a backlash (Tent, 1982a: 264). By 1947, however, American policy would shift in the direction of encouraging, and then attempting to impose, large-scale institutional change within German general education in the areas under its occupation, including plans for the comprehensivization of secondary schooling based largely on the model of the American high school.

Much of the impetus for this policy shift came as a result of recommendations provided by a group of American education policy specialists who visited Germany in the summer of 1946 at the request of the State Department to examine the condition of the educational system in the country. The group’s report, delivered to the American Military Governor General Lucius Clay in September 1946, called for nothing short of a revolution in the organization of German education, including its general, higher, and vocational sectors. While members of the delegation were critical of a number of practices, they saved their most forceful objections to the practice of selecting students at age ten for placement in different schools. William Benton, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, maintained in the report’s introduction that the selective system in Germany was in reality a “caste system” in which “the overwhelming majority of pupils, a large proportion of whom deserve university education because of their ability, finish elementary school and then go on to vocational education, their adult potentialities frustrated by the early and undemocratic division of the educational stream” (United States. Education Mission to Germany, 1946: vi). The core report highlighted what Zook and his colleagues viewed as the dire political consequences of the practice. In it they argued that selection in Germany’s general education system “has cultivated attitudes of superiority in one small group and of inferiority in the
majority of the members of German society, making possible the submission and lack of self-determination upon which authoritarian leadership has thrived” (1946: 19). The delegation maintained that education in Germany helped to sustain anti-democratic beliefs and attitudes among the population, and urged the occupational authorities to replace the system with one organized along comprehensive, unified lines. To the extent that differentiation between vocational and professional tracks was necessary, the group argued that it should be achieved through a reorganized curriculum and the offering of elective courses, not through separate schools (1946: 22).

Despite objections from some members of the State Department, OMGUS adopted most of the Mission Report’s recommendations. The American blueprint for reforming the German education as it developed in late 1946 and early 1947 would call for several key changes to the traditional pre-1933 system. Under the plan, elementary education would be extended to six years, all of which would take place in the same school. Upon completion of elementary schooling, all students would further study together for three years of general education in a common lower secondary school. At the level of upper secondary general education, some differentiation would occur, with an anticipated minority of all students continuing in general education for an additional three years in an upper level secondary track in preparation for university entry. The American proposal stressed, however, that the upper level students should, whenever possible, be located in the same facility as those in the lower level. The plan further called for an end to fees for tuition and course materials and university-level certification for all teachers, not just those in the secondary schools.

In an action that marked the major turning point in education policy during the occupation, OMGUS sent a telegram on January 10, 1947 to authorities in the four Länder in
the American zone that called on them to draft and submit plans for reforming their general education systems in accordance with the newly articulated American reform objectives (OMGUS, 1947, in Merkt, 1952: 53-54; Müller, 1995: 126-133). The individual responses to OMGUS from the Ländere demonstrated significant variation, but were marked most notably by the opposition – if not outright hostility – towards the proposed reform in the southern Land of Bavaria. There government authorities led by Culture Minister Alois Hundhammer\(^\text{122}\) of the newly constituted Christian Socialist Union and backed by the powerful Bavarian Catholic clergy issued a counter-proposal in response to the Americans in which they offered to provide some secondary school tuition assistance to the children of poorer families,\(^\text{123}\) but insisted that the practices of secondary school selection, the separation of the elementary and secondary sectors, and training for elementary teachers not be changed. Stressing the need for the “internal” reform of schools, the Bavarian counterproposal centered instead on plans for re-injecting traditional moral and religious principles into education.

Commenting on the less-than-accommodating Bavarian response to the U.S. proposal, one contemporary observer reflected the beliefs of many southern Germans when he characterized the Ministry’s actions as essentially defensive if nature.

The departure point for the actions of the [Bavarian Education Ministry] is the view that the school system of a country and people cannot be dissolved from the larger culture, from which it has sprung and which it has bequeathed to coming generation. The basic principle of

\(^{122}\) A legendary figure in Bavarian politics, Hundhammer was a founding member of the CSU party and sat on the committee that drafted the state’s constitution before serving as Minister for Culture in the first Bavarian postwar government. Described by a sympathetic biographer as a Bavarian patriot, fundamentalist Catholic, and recognized monarchist who believed in a form of extreme federalism, Hundhammer was as a delegate to the conservative Bavarian Farmers Union before entering the state’s parliament as its youngest representative in 1932. Forced from politics after the Nazi takeover, Hundhammer was imprisoned for a period at Dachau in 1933 for publishing a pamphlet critical of the Nazi movement (O. Braun, 2007).

\(^{123}\) Such a measure had already been called for by the CSU in the thirty-point program the party had published the previous year. Point 7 reads: “The development of every true ability to be furthered regardless of the class and social position of one’s parents. No rank or class may have a monopoly on the higher secondary schools…sufficient public assistance must be made available to poor talented students” (CSU: 1946: 4).
any school reform proclaims that the reform has … to protect the uniqueness of school culture, which has its roots in national identity and the history of a country and its people and therefore must avoid any inorganic innovations (A. Braun, 1947: 144).

Minister Hundhammer further stressed the appropriateness of the traditional system on the grounds of accepted scientific understandings of performance and ability. In his initial response to the American proposal, he cited as reasons for the maintenance of vertical division and early differentiation the presence of immutable biological differences in the population.

The fact would have it that the ability for higher education aims is reserved by nature to a numerically limited circle; and the further fact that these abilities are distributed to all ranks and classes in the population, but not so that they are completely evenly distributed among the individual social classes. This biologically established inequality cannot be eliminated by civilizing measures, not even by a change to our so-called two-tier school system in favor of a unitary system… the beginning of secondary school may not be delayed beyond the age of ten for reasons founded in developmental psychology (Hundhammer, 1947 in Merkt, 1952: 63, 64)

The Bavarian opposition’s campaign124 against the proposed OMGUS reform, which included mobilizing popular opinion through carefully crafted radio appeals by Hundhammer, would ultimately lead American authorities to resort to ordering the Land government to implement the change, precipitating a political crisis that would only be averted with the personal intervention of General Clay and a compromise between the two sides (Jacoby, 2000: 113-114). In the end, Hundhammer and his conservative allies would win out and only the provision for free tuition and textbooks would be implemented. Despite a direct demand

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124 Among the more outspoken opponents of reform was the Bavarian Catholic Church, which, like the Protestant Churches in other Länder, opposed ending the confessional division of primary schools and ending the traditional practice of educating future clergy in the Gymnasium. As Tent (1982b, 139-140) points out, the Americans did not win much favor with the Bavarian Catholic community by appointing as their primary negotiator for school issues a former priest who had married a former nun.

126 In 1951, Württemberg-Baden would merge with Württemberg-Hohenzollern and Baden, two adjacent Länder from the former French Zone, to form the present Land of Baden-Württemberg.
for change issued by the occupation force of a conquering nation, the traditional selective system would endure in Bavaria.

In Württemberg-Baden, the official response to the American request for reform proposals seemed to contain all the elements sought by OMGUS, including plans for a streamed comprehensive system and financial assistance for students to attend secondary schools. The plan contained a significant caveat, however. Land officials maintained that any reorganization of education had to be in accordance with the new Land constitution, passed in November 1946, a determination that officials claimed would require a prolonged delay in the implementation of the new law while questions of constitutional compatibility were examined (Taylor, 1981: 67; Braun, 1947: 147). Authorities in Württemberg-Baden would employ other stalling tactics, including postponing the creation of local committees to facilitate curricular and organizational reforms, as OMGUS officials had demanded (Jacoby, 2000: 118).

Whatever the American concerns over the authoritarian qualities of the general education system in Germany, there was no groundswell for its reform from the population in Württemberg-Baden during the occupation; if anything, available data point toward a public preference for continuity with the past arrangements. A 1947 survey in the Land conducted by OMGUS found that nearly 2 out of 3 Germans who had indicated that they had opinion on schools at all (only 62 percent of those surveyed) considered their teaching plans and types of instruction “adequate” under the current framework (OMG- 61 in Merritt and Merritt 1970). The majority of students’ parents, the segment of the general population with the greatest potential for influencing any reform of schooling, were largely absent from debates over the American proposal. Württemberg-Baden’s Minister of Culture, Theodor Bäuerle later remarked on the general absence of parents from discussions during the occupation period,
noting that the only parent groups involved in any of the reform debates were those from the upper middle classes who generally supported the of the Gymnasium and the reconstitution of the traditional system (Kuhlmann, 1970: 163). With little domestic pressure for school reform, Land officials were able to avoid any significant changes to the traditional structure until the period of OMGUS’s authority over education expired. In effect, the American reform effort was killed in Württemberg-Baden by delaying it to death.

The reactions of the southern Land to the American reform efforts are arguably understandable given the region’s traditional conservative political and social cultures and the dominance of Christian Democratic parties in early postwar Land governments. Yet the SPD-dominated areas in the American occupation zone would likewise fail to see lasting institutional change as a result of the U.S. initiatives. In Hesse, where the Social Democrats led a government in coalition with the Christian Democrats after the 1947 Land election, the independent reputation of CDU Culture Minister Erwin Stein coupled with a progressive initial school re-organization proposal, gave U.S. officials hope for a more receptive audience to its reform ideas.

Such hopes were to go unfulfilled. A powerful resistance coalition to the American plan soon emerged in response to a law proposed by the coalition government that would have markedly reduced differentiation in Hessian schools. Particularly forceful in arguing against any “Americanization” of general education were groups representing the secondary schools, including teachers in the Landesverband Hessen für Höhere Schulen (the Hessian Association for Secondary Schools), which adopted the view that the vertically-differentiated system was not only academically superior to the more horizontal American alternative, but was a better organizational design given the biologically-rooted differences in talent and intelligence.
within the population. According to the Association’s members, criticisms directed at the social exclusivity of the secondary schools (such as those registered by the members of the U.S. Education Mission in their report) were fundamentally mistaken; students with lesser abilities and work-habits selected themselves for the lower school track, regardless of their parents’ social class (Jacoby: 2000: 119). The Hessian Branch of the Deutscher Philologenverband, which represented Gymnasium teachers, maintained for their part that any extension of the period of common schooling resembled “practices of the Third Reich” that would, if enacted, push in the Land “into the arms of the Communist Eastern Zone” (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970: 40).

Similar to their counterparts in Württemberg-Baden, parents involved in the Hessian reform debates tended to be those with children in the secondary schools who supported retaining the traditional system and as with other advocates of vertical differentiation, they drew on a combination of psychological and pedagogical arguments as justification for rejecting the American plans for a more horizontal general education structure. The parent councils of the secondary schools implored Minister Stein to retain the special position of the Gymnasium in the German education system because the human and social value of the five to ten percent of gifted students who attended the elite schools was equivalent to that provided by the remaining ninety to ninety-five percent of the student population. The councils further argued that psychological theories favored the separation of ten year olds into different school types because children at that age were not given to feelings of “bitterness” and thus could recover more quickly from placement in a less prestigious school than older students. The proposal of the Americans, with its plans for a comprehensive lower secondary school and a less differentiated upper secondary system amounted, in their view, to little more than an
assault on the country’s future, designed to bring about the “intellectual disassembly” of the new Germany (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970: 40).

Business leaders would also voice their objection to the U.S. reform plan in psychosociological terms. The Hessian Chamber of Commerce maintained that in proposing a less differentiated school structure, the Americans mistakenly assumed that the existence of additional *Begabungsreserven*, or talent reserves, within the youth population. Such a view, according to the Chamber, was based in an “unmerited generalization” that many students of advanced ability had not been given the opportunity to pursue higher education under the current system.

Significantly, the organizations with sufficient social and political bases of support to provide meaningful backing for the U.S. plan for the schools in Hesse were largely absent during the debate. The SPD, despite being the majority party in the coalition government and a traditional advocate for horizontal educational reform, failed to provide any systematic support for the new law and never attempted to mobilize its rank and file around the issue, letting many of the claims of the resistance coalition go uncontested. Joining the SPD on the sidelines were the country’s newly reconstituted trade unions. Unions had been vocal supporters of horizontal reform in general education in the pre-National Socialist era, but were largely disengaged on the issue in the immediate postwar period of reconstitution and played little role in the debates associated with the American comprehensivization plans. Jacoby (2000: 119-120) maintains that the trade unions’ non-involvement was due to concerns among unions that supporting the American-led school reforms would link them to U.S. plans to deconfessionalize schooling, thereby offending religious workers, a key target population for organized labor recruitment efforts after the war. Whatever the reasons,
German labor would largely be a non-factor in what would be the best chance to change vertical division in education in the 20th century.

By the fall of 1947 opposition to the American proposal was growing and even Stein’s public statements on the reform initiative would come to reflect the views of the resistance coalition that had formed in opposition to the law his government had proposed. In a report on the coalition’s efforts to rebuild the school system, Stein invoked not only the notion of different abilities in the population, but, ironically, the liberal and democratic terminology of the occupiers to argue for the appropriateness of retaining a differentiated system.

The creation of an inclusive education system for all young people follows from the democratic principle “equal educational opportunities for all.” It needs to be emphasized that equal educational opportunities for all are demanded here, not equal education. Democracy is not a collective; it recognizes the differences in human beings and their abilities. The democratic school, however, keeps open all paths to everyone in pursuit of the principle of equality in order to place each person on the path that accords with the type and extent of his capabilities and that leads him to his highest level of accomplishment and the best possible achievement in society…the democratic school is not the uniform Einheitsschule, but rather the one divided into branches.” (Stein, 1947: 174).

Stein would abandon active advocacy for the proposed law and ultimately adopt the same delaying strategy employed by his southern counterparts. When the Americans resorted, as they had with Hundhammer in Bavaria, to ordering Hesse to extend the period of compulsory elementary schooling (thereby ending selection at age ten) for the 1948-49 school year, Stein simply convinced the Landtag to delay the start date of the new school year by six months and dragged out subsequent negotiations with occupation officials. Although Hesse would ultimately end tuition and course material fees for secondary schools and seek to elevate the status of elementary school teachers by requiring them to study in special pedagogical institutes, which, though an improvement from the Lehrerseminare, still did not
provide the university-level education that teachers in the secondary sector obtained.\textsuperscript{127}
Stein’s strategy would find success: American occupational control over education once again would come to an end before significant structural changes were realized (Jacoby, 2000: 113).

In Bremen, where an SPD-KPD coalition ruled, the Americans seemed to have an even more accommodating partner and reform initiatives appeared to have, at least initially, a real chance of success. In May 1948 the government succeeded in passing a law providing for free secondary school tuition and course materials, followed up by legislation in March 1949 that created a six-year elementary school and a new “internally-differentiated” secondary school in which all students would attend the same facility but would be separated into one of four different educational streams. As with left-sponsored reform efforts in other Länder, the arrangements outlined in occupation-era legislation in Bremen failed to translate into a durable institutional design. Here it would be concerns among SPD officials over the potential difficulties that students educated in the city’s common schools might face when pursuing further education and employment in the rest of West Germany that helped to delay implementation of the comprehensivization plan, which in any event would be entirely scrapped when a separate nine-year Gymnasium was reintroduced in 1957 (Jacoby, 2000: 115).

By 1948, internal changes within the E&RA would lead to a deemphasizing of organizational reform and a refocus among American education officials towards creating cultural exchanges with West German educational institutions, reconstructing educational facilities, and establishing experimental schools, research institutes, and other aid programs (Tent, 1982b). In the end, the ambitious efforts of the Americans to change radically the

\textsuperscript{127} The tradition of training Volksschule teachers in separate non-university institutions would be maintained in nearly all Bundesländer into the 1950s with the exception of Hamburg and Berlin (Müller, 1995: 176-190).
structure of West German general education and particularly the practice of early selection, division between the elementary and secondary sectors would be largely unsuccessful and within the first few years of the new Federal Republic’s existence, a form of the traditional vertically differentiated system would – with the exception of Berlin – be re-established across the new Federal Republic.\textsuperscript{129} Despite having inflicted massive physical damage to Germany’s cities, industry, and infrastructure, helped to secure the country’s unconditional surrender, and imposed a military government over a large section of the nation upon whose aid millions of Germans depended for their very survival in the desperate years following the war’s end, American authorities, convinced that the differentiated school structure had abetted the rise of totalitarianism in the early 1930s, could not compel the Germans to abandon their traditional selective system after the war.

**Embedding Vertical Differentiation: Institutions and General Education in the FRG**

The traditional general education system and its vertical organizational structure that were recreated in the Western occupation zones between 1945 and 1949 would soon become embedded within a constellation of institutions in the Federal Republic of Germany that would significantly shape the system’s evolution in the second half of the twentieth century. Some of these arrangements were innovations in the FRG, while others were legacies of previous regimes. Much of this new institutional structure was enshrined in the Basic Law (\textit{Grundgesetz}) adopted by the new West German state upon its founding on May 23, 1949. Article 7 empowered the state to oversee the entire education system, reasserting the its

\textsuperscript{129} In Berlin, the extension to six years of the period of common schooling in the \textit{Grundschule} instituted during the formal occupation period would be maintained (see Hearnden, 1976b).
traditional monopoly over schooling. Although the Basic Law did allow for private schools, it required that they obtain the approval of state, conform to state standards, and, significantly, not select their students on the basis of family wealth or rank. This final requirement served to limit the development of an elite independent school sector of the type found in England. As a consequence, middle and upper class parents who wished to see their children attend more prestigious schools or secondary school teachers seeking employment would have few alternatives outside the state-run secondary sector. This provision also helped to ensure that secondary school teachers and parents of students in the higher schools, both of whom had been against horizontal reform prior to 1949, would continue this traditional opposition in the political debates over differentiation and selection in the FRG.\textsuperscript{130}

Beyond the provisions granting the state authority over education, the single most important constitutional measure for the evolution of differentiation policy in the FRG would be found in Article 30, which permanently designated the new republic a federal state in which powers not expressly granted to the central government – including education – were to be exercised by the \textit{Länder}. This arrangement, while both encouraged by the occupation authorities and reflective of pre-Nazi traditions, would ensure that the selective systems of general education reconstituted during the period of occupation would persist in the Federal Republic, along with some level of variation across the \textit{Länder}. Although cultural federalism would create authoritative space for experimentation and policy innovation in individual \textit{Länder} and \textit{Gemeinde} (municipalities), most notably through the establishment of the lower secondary comprehensive \textit{Gesamtschule} as an alternative to the traditional schools, its

\textsuperscript{130} Many private schools in Germany are church-maintained and offer students traditional educations taught along conventional pedagogical principles, but the sector also houses a number of progressively oriented institutions. In addition to Steiner Schools are \textit{Landerziehungsheime} (boarding schools) and \textit{Odenwaldschulen}, both of which were founded on progressive \textit{Reformpaedogik} principles in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries (see Hahn, 1998: 115).
primary effect was to limit the possibility of systemic horizontal reform efforts in general education by sharply curtailing the policy influence of generally more progressive federal authorities in Bonn and delegating authority to Länderr authorities, who, as Hahn (1998: 114) writes, “showed little concern for social and educational developments, either in their own schools or in a broader context.” While a decentralized educational structure in Britain would facilitate changes in the organization of schooling in the 1960s and 1970s, cultural federalism in the FRG would serve as a mechanism of institutional “lock in” in the FRG for the practices of vertical differentiation and early selection set up in the Länderr between 1945 and 1949, crucially shaping subsequent policy developments and the outcome of reform initiatives (see Chapter VIII).

While the Basic Law granted policymaking authority for education to the individual Länderr, an effort would be made to coordinate policy choices across the Bund through the Standing Conference of Ministers of Culture (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister or Kultusministerkonferenz [KMK]). Formed in 1949 with a permanent secretariat in Bonn, the KMK was, comprised, as its name implies, of the culture and science ministers from each of the individual Länderr governments. From the outset the KMK was relatively weak as a policymaking body; its resolutions were not legally binding since under the Basic Law decisions pertaining to education would require individual Länderr legislation.131 With hardcore conservative opponents to horizontal reform from some Länderr certain to be present for any decision, however, unanimity in decision-making – itself a product of the cultural federalism provided for in the Basic Law – made it unlikely that meaningful institutional change in the vertical system would originate with the KMK in the 1950s.

131 As Erk (2003: 303) points out, the requirement of unanimity for all KMK decisions provided them with de facto legal authority, since the Education Ministers would enact the provisions of any KMK agreements back in their respective Landtage.
The primary contributions of the Conference to policy in the 1950s tended to be more administrative and coordinative in nature.\textsuperscript{132} The Düsseldorf Agreement, reached in 1955 (and later expanded under the Hamburg Agreement in 1964), resolved issues related to different academic and qualification standards in the Länder, including harmonizing the grading system and establishing common start and end dates for the school year, but generally failed to address structural considerations relating to the practices of early selection and vertical differentiation (KMK, 1955 in DAEB, 1966: 1005-1008; Gass-Bohm, 2006: 131).

Parents figured into another significant set of provisions in the Basic Law. Given Nazi practices of youth indoctrination and mobilization, parents’ right to raise their children free from state influence would be viewed by many in postwar Germany as a fundamental liberty that demanded attendant legal protections. Article 6, Section 2 of the Basic Law stated that “the care and upbringing of children is the natural right of parents,” and Article 12, Section 1, granted all Germans the freedom “to choose their occupation or profession, their place of work and their place of training.”\textsuperscript{133} German courts would later cite these provisions as the constitutional basis of what would become known as the principle of parental choice (Elternrecht) in education.\textsuperscript{134} According to this principle the decision regarding which school

\textsuperscript{132} Such coordination was essential in ensuring that some level of homogeneity existed in the general education system in the FRG under conditions of Länder autonomy in education (Dohnanyi 1978: 17).

\textsuperscript{133} Article 12a of the Basic Law established the basic rules regarding military conscription. Under the article, later expanded on under the 1956 Conscription Law (Wehrpflichtgesetz), all able bodied young men were required to report for either nine-months military service or a period of alternate civilian service.

\textsuperscript{134} One of the earliest and most influential court decisions regarding the Elternrecht was rendered by a higher administrative court (Oberverwaltungsgericht) judge in Hamburg in 1953. Laid down at the height of the political debate over the 1949 SPD-KPD education reform law and only a few years after the Basic Law came into effect, the decision concerned a student whose parents had sought to enroll him in a 1953 equivalent of a Gymnasium called the Wissenschaftliche Oberschule. The student had been denied entry after an examination committee that included his elementary school teacher and principal decided not to recommend his placement. The parents then protested the examination committee’s decision in court, where a judge found in their favor. In his ruling, the judge maintained that the choice of school type was of such fundamental significance to a young person’s personal development that such decisions should, under the provisions of the Basic Law, fall to parents and not state officials. Only in instances in which it could be determined that a student attending a higher secondary school solely on the basis of his parent’s wishes would arrest the development of his classmates in the
a child attends is crucial for determining his or her future occupation but children are simply too young at age ten to make this decision themselves at the time of selection; as such, the right falls to a child’s parents to help determine the school best suited for him or her.\textsuperscript{135}

In the Federal Republic, the practice of including parental preferences in the selection process would become commonplace by the 1950s, although other considerations such as teacher recommendations and academic performance could also be factored into decisions depending on the particular \textit{Land}. The practice reflected a notable change from past arrangements, when selection was largely based on a student’s performance on an entrance exam or, more likely, parents’ ability to pay for a \textit{Vorschule}. The principle of parental choice would also influence the shape of political debates over the general education system in the FRG. Proponents of the traditional system would argue that ending differentiation would be both anti-democratic and a violation of the Basic Law, since it limited citizens’ freedom of choice in the upbringing of their children. As a consequence, the \textit{Elternrecht} would serve to curb the willingness of political parties to pursue major reforms in differentiation and selection practices, since advocating the dismantling of system would be sure to generate a backlash from a significant portion of parents in the FRG (Ertl and Phillips, 2000: 401). The \textit{Elternrecht} could also, however, serve as a source of change within general education; if significant numbers of parents chose either comprehensive schools as an alternative to traditional schools or began placing their children in the higher schools at the time of selection at age ten, the exercising of \textit{Elternrecht} could lead to a more horizontal distribution of students within a still formally vertical system. As discussed in Chapter IX, such change would ultimately become the adaptational response in West Germany to shifting conditions.

\textsuperscript{135}desired secondary could the student’s admission be declined for want of aptitude or ability (\textit{Die Welt}, 25 November 2008).
the 1970s and 80s, when the percentage of the student population attending either the
*Realschule* or *Gymnasium* would grow significantly and attendance figures for the
*Hauptschule* would commensurately decline.

A further institutional legacy of the occupation era and early FRG centered on the
continuing division between teachers from different school types. The general failure of
initiatives to raise the standing of *Volksschule* teachers relative to their *Realschule* and
*Gymnasium* counterparts in the occupation period helped to ensure the continued split
between elementary and secondary school teachers in West Germany’s emerging system of
interest groups.\(^{136}\) *Gymnasium* and *Realschule* teachers in the FRG would be organizationally
represented, respectively, by the *Deutscher Philologenverband* [DPhV] and the *Verband
Deutscher Realschullehrer* [VDR],\(^ {137}\) which both were aligned with Germany’s powerful state
bureaucrats in the German Civil Services Federation (*Deutscher Beamtenbund* [DBB]), a
peak labor association founded in 1950 as an alternative to the SPD-affiliated German
Federation of Trade Unions (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* [DGB]). As in the past, the
secondary school teachers would utilize this institutional position to maintain alliances with
state officials and middle class parents associations to combat horizontal change in general
education and maintain traditional practices (see Heidenheimer, 1974: 394).

Elementary school teachers in the new Federal Republic would be represented
primarily in the Education and Science Workers Union, (*Gewerkschaft Erziehung und
Wissenschaft* [GEW]), which would become the country’s largest labor union. Like many

\(^{136}\) Variation in salaries for teachers at different schools most plainly demonstrates this continued
disproportionality. In 1957, the average annual salary for a *Volksschule* teacher was 5,810 DM, while
*Realschule* and *Gymnasium* teachers earned 6,850 and 9,420 DM respectively (see Kuhlman, 1970: 19).

\(^{137}\) The *DPhV* and *VDR* would formally merge into a single peak organization for secondary school teachers
until 1969, when along with DBB-represented trade school and business school teachers, they formed the
German Teachers Association (*Deutscher Lehrerverband*, [LV]).
other leading sectoral unions, the GEW would align itself a year of its founding in 1948 with the DGB. Crucially, however, this affiliation would result in an exodus from the GEW of many conservative southern teachers, who had the option of joining the Union of Training and Education (*Verband Bildung und Erziehung* [VBE]), a second union representing teachers from the elementary schools which was itself an institutional member of the DBB (Markovits and Silvia, 1992: 177). In the FRG, *Volksschule* teachers would thus not only be divided from their secondary school counterparts but split among themselves.

Although elementary teachers had been key proponents for many of the horizontal reforms of the Imperial and Weimar eras, the combination of competition for members created by the existence of a rival union in the VBE, coupled with the presence of small but influential group of conservative secondary school teachers within the membership,138 would serve to limit GEW calls for changes to the vertically-differentiated system in the 1950s (Kuhlmann, 1970: 98; Heidenheimer, 1974: 394). As with the SPD, it would not be until the mid-1960s that the GEW would come to support fully a policy advocating fundamental differentiation practices in the FRG, helping to delay the introduction of reformist policy initiatives and reducing the possibility for structural change in the organization of general education.

**Conclusion: Policy Discourses and Institutional Continuity in General Education**

In a retrospective essay on the developments in the German educational system since World War II, the German education historian Hans-Georg Herrlitz writes:

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138 The secondary school teachers section of the GEW would veto a proposal put forth at the union’s 1954 conference that called for ending selection after fourth grade and establishing instead a two-year transitional period before student placement would occur. A similar idea would be proposed by the German Committee for Education and Training (*Deutscher Ausschuss für das Erziehungs und Bildungswesen*) a federal advisory body, later in the decade (see Chapter VII) (Kuhlmann, 1970: 36).
It is astounding how enduringly the conservative parties and associations succeeded in blocking a dramatic structural reform of the secondary sector along the lines of the obligatory Grundschule, especially if one considers just how strongly developed the German Einheitsschule movement already was in Weimar Republic and how sharply the Western occupation forces had criticized the selection practices of the differentiated German school system (2008: 16).

Why were the traditional practices of vertically differentiation and early selection successfully reconstituted in the newly democratic West Germany despite the presence of such seemingly favorable conditions cited by Herrlitz? The historical case analyzed in the preceding pages points to two sets of interrelated causes. The first set consisted largely of variables exogenous to Germany’s general education system. The inability of the Western Allies to develop and implement a common strategy for pursuing structural reform in education, despite collective calls for a democratized school system such as those found in Allied Control Council’s Directive 54, clearly impacted the outcome. The British and French, both of whom had established selective systems of their own after World War II, were less inclined to oppose the reconstitution of the traditional vertical structure in Germany, while the Americans, whose conception of a democratized school system was rooted in their own comprehensive high school, would pursue an ambitious set of reforms within their Zone. As the chapter documents, however, these efforts would largely fail and the three-tiered structure would return to the areas under American occupation as well.

Part of this failure can be explained by the flawed design and implementation of the American reform strategy; as Jacoby argues the inability of OMGUS education authorities successfully to mobilize the political actors or organizational resources successfully to implement their desired reforms allowed opponents of the reform to limit its appeal by characterizing it as the “Americanization” of German education, despite the indigenous traditions of the Einheitsschule and New Pedagogy movements (Jacoby, 2000). The period in
which the Allies could effect changes was also relatively brief - the end to the occupation powers legal authority over education caused by the rise in Cold War tensions and the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949 largely removed the occupiers as potential sources of institutional change in postwar Germany’s system of general education (see Lawson, 1965).

The policies and strategies of the Allies, while important for the restorative outcome, only represent part of the causal story. Exogenous factors alone cannot explain the strength of the preferences of the West Germans themselves for maintaining vertical differentiation and early selection and their willingness to risk a major political row with their occupiers at a moment when much of the population was relying on Allied aid for its basic survival. The American strategy to mobilize domestic actors to support their plans failed largely because there were few actors willing to be mobilized.

This dimension of the case is best explained through the conceptual lens of policy discourses and examining the role played by discourse coalitions in the relevant political debates. During the reconstruction process, an alliance of actors quickly formed around a shared set of assumptions, beliefs, and ideas associated with the interrelated notions that the supply of intelligent young people was fixed in the population and unlikely to expand as a result of education or other changes in the social environment. The German discourse, which strongly resembled the prewar discourse of the educational-psychologists in Britain that so strongly influenced the Education Act 1944, was perceived to have a “scientific” basis in pedagogical, sociological, psychological, and biological understandings of youth and ability in the immediate postwar years.
Placing ten-year-olds into the *Volksschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* was not, as the Allies maintained, undemocratic but was *more* democratic than the structure proposed by the American because the practice, if equally applied, would provide all young people with the opportunity to follow the most appropriate educational and occupational pathway purely on the basis of their natural endowment. From this discourse flowed a set of clear complimentary policy preferences that would be advanced by the actors in the West German discourse coalition during the occupation era. As Kuhlmann, (1970: 32) writes:

> Universities, churches and industry groups, the CDU and liberal groups as well the majority of surveyed parents, teachers, and scientific experts were unwilling to compromise in their support of early selection. Because they assumed that ability was inherited and essentially fixed, they held their concern for early ability and their objection to the idea of a common cultivation of talent, which by negating the natural differences in ability would in their view quickly lead to a general leveling of ability.

These ideas would strongly influence debates over general education during this time, providing not only the justification behind conservative calls for a return to the traditional system, but also limiting the extent to which proposed reforms would be accepted by publics and other actors involved in education policymaking. When coupled with the counter example of the horizontal system that been set up in the Soviet Zone, the West German ability discourse would provide policy actors with powerful rhetorical and ideational resources for collective action that would be deployed in the defense of an inherited institution and a collective identity to resist the imposition of an education system that most Germans considered vastly inferior to their own.

To be sure, the most committed and vocal members of this coalition were those whose clear political and material interests coincided with the policy positions advocated within the discourse. Were these conservative actors, who subscribed to an extreme version of the discourse that drew strongly on biological and psychological conceptions of ability and age as
justification for early educational separation, the only members of the coalition, one could argue that this account overstates the causal importance of the discourse as a causal factor or that disentangling the discursive from the materialist causes in the shaping of these actors’ preferences is effectively impossible, whatever the “reality” of the role the former played.

As the sub-cases of the individual reconstitution processes in the various Länder demonstrate, however, support for some form of differentiation during the occupation period existed largely across the political spectrum and not simply among those conservative forces who, in simple material terms, had the most to gain by the reconstitution of the traditional system. While the Social Democrats may have pursued changes in the organization of general education in Bremen, Hamburg, and Schleswig-Holstein, the party and its allies in organized labor never fundamentally challenged the basic principle of vertical differentiation during the occupation period. The SPD may have rejected the more extreme biological elements of the ability discourse, but the various proposals of Social Democratic governments for extending the period in the common Grundschule or creating separate streams within a common lower secondary school still contained versions of selection and vertical differentiation that stood at the core of the traditional organization, even if in a somewhat softened form. As Gass-Bohm (2005: 129) notes:

even if a willingness to reform was present at the beginning [of the postwar period] this hides the fact that reformers and conservatives in essential ways shared the same assumptions on key points that differentiated them from the Allies. A truly comprehensive school (Einheitsschule) such as the one preferred by the Americans and demanded in by German reformers in the Weimar period was never part of the debate in West Germany. German education officials were united in the view that mass and elite education were to be separated…a horizontal school system had no advocate.

Crucially for later outcomes in the organization of German general education, the reconstitution of the vertically differentiated system corresponded temporally with the
creation of the Federal Republic of Germany in the Western occupation zones. A new institutional framework for education that largely reflected the traditionalist views raised in response to the occupation forces calls for a more democratic education system thus emerged just as the political cycle associated with the restoration of the vertical system was nearing its end.

The ability discourse of the occupation period and the macro-institutional framework of the new German state would thus become mutually constituted in a manner that would serve to “lock” vertical differentiation and early selection in the general education system and establish a rather extreme form of institutional path dependence that would render the system particularly resistant to change. While a general discursive consensus on differentiation also existed in the UK around the establishment of the tripartite system and its methods of selection in the mid-1940s, no comparable institutional embedding or mutual constitution would be achieved. As such, changes in the policy discourse such as those that occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s could have a much more powerful and immediate effect on differentiation and selection practices. Beyond variation in the institutional framework of both countries would be variation in the strength and influence of the national discourse coalitions in the immediate postwar decades. The views of the educational psychologists in Britain and their reflection in institutional arrangements such as the tripartite secondary system would be challenged by academic researchers and politicians alike within just a few years after the passage of the Education Act 1944. In West Germany, as the next chapter examines, the ability discourse would retain its hegemonic standing among policy actors.
throughout the 1950s, crucially delaying the start of the public and political debates over the structure of general education in the FRG.
Chapter VII

Germany Case Study II: Historical Legacies and Discursive Insulation, 1949-1964

Introduction

In retrospect, the reconstruction of the traditional vertically differentiated general education system in the areas of the former German Reich under Western occupation in the immediate postwar years does not represent a particularly puzzling or unexpected empirical outcome. The fundamental conditions in place all pointed to a probable failure of horizontal reform initiatives during the occupation in the Western zones. The reemergence of a policy discourse that legitimized differentiation practices and the institutional and political strength of the restorative coalition coupled with a tacit acceptance of differentiation on the part of the Left, the relative indifference of a war-weary general population, and the counter-example of comprehensive school reforms in the Soviet sphere meant that even a more carefully designed and executed plan by the U.S. occupation authorities to end the three-tiered school system and practice of early selection would be unlikely to succeed. A comparative perspective further confirms the likelihood of this outcome. Many Western European countries, including Britain, had established or retained systems of state education after World War II that contained strong elements of selection and differentiation. Only the Americans, with their model of a comprehensive state high school, would view these practices in the German general education system as symptomatic of authoritarian attitudes and demand their fundamental reform.

But while the restoration of traditional general education system would not qualify as an unexpected outcome, the absence of change in the system over the first twenty postwar
years represents a puzzling one. As this chapter discusses, there would be some change in
German education in the 1950s and early 1960s, but overall the designation of the period as
“Two Decades of Non-Reform” is largely accurate. As Robinsohn and Kuhlmann note in
their article of that name, “in contrast to some other European countries, the adjustment of the
educational system to the socio-economic and cultural developments of the mid-twentieth
century have not really taken place in Germany” (1967: 311). During this period, the West
German general education system would remain largely unchanged from the Weimar or even
Imperial eras. “In virtually none of the Länder during the 1950s,” a 1973 OECD report noted,
“was any serious attempt made to reconstruct the school system on the basis other than that
extant in the 1920s. Indeed, some Länder appeared to have gone back to the years
immediately before 1914 for their models of reconstruction” (OECD, 1973: 18).

Why did traditional practices of vertical differentiation and selection persist almost
universally in West Germany during this time while the same twenty year period is marked in
Britain by a movement away from practices associated with the tripartite system created under
the Education Act 1944, which culminated with the 1965 decision to initiate national
comprehensivization of schooling? This chapter maintains that political debates in West
Germany were “frozen” by the continuing dominance of the fixed ability discourse that had
been such a powerful legitimizing force for the reconstruction of the traditional system in the
in the occupation period. In Britain, the primary agents of this discourse, the educational-

141 In a recent historical study of West German education in Hesse and West Berlin in the first two postwar
decades, Brian Puaca (2009) challenges the conceptions of Robinsohn, Kuhlmann and others that the West
German school system was “stagnant” between 1945 and 1965, arguing that significant changes did indeed take
place in areas such as political education, teacher training, and history instruction during the period.
Importantly, however, the changes documented by Puaca consist almost entirely of internal rather than structural
reforms; the external organization of general education, he acknowledges, remained largely unaltered into the
1960s. Moreover, in choosing Hesse and West Berlin, Puaca has selected the two West German regions with the
most progressive traditions in education in all of West Germany – as case studies they are almost certainly
unreflective of developments across the FRG.
psychologists, would begin significantly to lose influence in the 1950s within academic and political circles. For a host of reasons related to the dynamics of party competition, the institutional position of key political actors, and the reconstruction of educational sociology and psychology as academic disciplines after World War II, the German variant of the discourse would retain its hegemonic standing in the new Federal Republic, crucially insulating policy discussions from ideational trends in other European countries that challenged the static and hereditary view of ability and delaying the development of a German challenger discourse. As a consequence, while other countries initiated significant structural reforms in general education, West German policy continued to reflect the view that separate schools for students of different ability corresponded to the “natural” conditions in the population and was therefore the most appropriate pedagogical framework for the economic and intellectual rebuilding of the nation.

**Policy Change and Continuity in the 1950s**

The most important of the adjustments that did occur in the West German education system in the 1950s concerned the total elimination of the charging of tuition and other fees by state secondary schools. This practice, which – despite determined Allied attempts to end it during the occupation era – continued until late in the decade in some regions, had long had the effect of limiting the number of working class students studying in the higher schools and its repeal would contribute to the dramatic expansion in the percentage of these students studying at a *Realschule* or *Gymnasium* that would begin in the 1960s and accelerate in the 1970s.
A second modification was located outside of the general education system itself, but would hold significant consequences for it. Between 1955 and 1965, enrollments at Germany’s traditionally elite universities had doubled to nearly 300,000 (Katzenstein, 1987). Part of this expansion was due to the increase in the number of students obtaining the Abitur in the 1950s and part to demographic changes, but policy also played a role. To meet the anticipated growth in population, federal and Länders authorities began a building program in the early 1960s. Conducted in accordance with the recommendations of the Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat), an advisory body created in 1957 to provide recommendations on educational and research at the tertiary level, this coordinated effort would lead to the creation of over twenty new universities and other higher education institutions within a decade. In a further act of cooperation between Bonn and the Länders, officials agreed in 1955 to the so-called Honnefer Modell\textsuperscript{142} of financial aid, which provided individual fellowships to disadvantaged students, making university attendance possible.

The final modification concerned the expansion and consolidation of the Second Educational Path (Zweiter Bildungswe [ZB]), which had first developed in the British Zone during the occupation period. In 1957, the KMK established uniform standards for the Abendgymnasium, which ensured that an Abitur completed by a ZB student would be recognized across the Bund. This agreement limited admissions to students age nineteen or older who had either completed vocational training or had accumulated three years of work experience. It further required students who were not Realschule graduates to attend an additional six-month course before beginning studies in the Abendgymnasium. The KMK also established similar regulations for students studying at special university preparatory

\textsuperscript{142} Named after Bad Honnef, a spa town in North Rhine Westphalia near Bonn where Federal and Länders officials formulated the system.
academies (*Kollege*), which provided an additional alternate path to higher education (Führ, 1997: 162). Despite these efforts at standardization and mutual recognition, the number of students reaching higher education via the ZB remained small into the 1960s. The booming postwar economy and high demand for manual workers served to keep enrollments in ZB institutions down in the 1950s (Edwards, 1978). Among those who did enroll, a requirement that students also be employed in fulltime work during their studies helped to ensure that dropout rates would be high – during the period only one out of five participants actually completed their programs (Kuhlmann, 1970: 15).

While it would be inaccurate to characterize free secondary education, university construction, and the consolidation of the Second Educational Path as insignificant, one would be hard pressed to claim these collectively served to modernize the general education system. As Merritt, et. al. (1971: 127) note, until the mid-1960s, policy developments in schooling could be classified more as modifications rather than fundamental reforms. In the FRG, vertical differentiation and early selection would remain largely unchanged institutionally and unchallenged politically. As in the pre-1933 period, students generally completed four years together in the *Grundschule*, before being selected for placement in one of the three traditional schools types. Although it was technically possible to transfer “up” from a lower to a higher prestige school type under the principle of permeability, in practice this almost never happened in the first postwar decades.\(^{143}\)

**The Fixed Ability Discourse in Germany**

\(^{143}\) The percentage of students moving from the *Realschule* to the *Gymnasium* after initial selection was only 1.1 percent in the early 1960s (Kuhlmann, 1970: 13).
As in Britain, the general education system of West Germany as it was reconstituted in the late 1940s and early 1950s was rooted in a set of beliefs concerning the nature of human intellectual capabilities and its relationship to the structure of schooling that dominated thinking in the country during the period. The core of this hegemonic discourse consisted of three general beliefs. First was the view that talent or ability (Begabung) could be categorized into three different categories – the practical, practical-theoretical, or theoretical – each of which corresponded to a particular cognitive orientation and to a particular occupational role in the economy. According to this view, individuals of the “practical” type were best suited for manual labor, those with “practical-theoretical” orientations for mid-level supervisory and technical positions, and “theoretical”-minded for the guiding managerial and directorial positions in the economy and state.

The second assumption of the German discourse held that different ability types were generally determined at birth; individuals acquired their particular abilities hereditarily and were unlikely to possess skills and aptitudes that their parents did not also possess. This belief would be by supporters of vertical differentiation in the early postwar years to deflect criticism of any social bias in the practice of selecting students for school placement at age ten, since it provided a seemingly scientific explanation for the wealthier classes’ disproportionate levels of representation in the secondary schools. “The 1950s,” Gass-Bolm (2005: 133-134) writes, “were dominated by biological concepts of ability…. According to this theory, ability was a hereditarily conditioned factor. Individual advancement was thus only possible within tight limits, while selection for placement in different schools (Auslese) by contrast was a natural necessity. In particular the socially unequal division of school students from this view was not unjust at all, but rather a biological fact, since children of
parents from intellectual professions would have a higher probability of being talented themselves."

Finally, the discourse maintained that these inherited abilities were more or less fixed in set amounts within the population. The vast majority of individuals fell in the practical category, while a minority comprised the practical-theoretical group and an even smaller percentage the theoretical variety. One’s ability type was both identifiable at an early age and unlikely to change significantly over the course of biological maturation or exposure to education. The belief that individuals possessed inherently different and immutable ability types long preceded academic psychological or sociological classification or the rise of modern occupational categories; the distinction between *Ausbildung* (training) and *Bildung* (education) upon which the Humboldtian education system\(^\text{144}\) had been founded in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century rested on just such an assumption. Over the first half of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, however, the philosophical justification for differentiated ability that Humboldt and others had provided would become supplemented by more “scientific” argument. *Bildung* in the *Gymnasium* and university would be reserved for those students endowed with the “theoretical” type of mind, while *Ausbildung* in the *Volksschule* and dual system of education and vocational training would serve as the appropriate mode of education for the majority “practical” type in the German population (see Kuhlman 1970: 18).

The natural institutional compliment to this view of discernable, innate, and unchanging ability was a vertically differentiated general education system that included both separate schools designed best to suit each ability type and a process by which individual students’ ability type could be determined and school placement decisions rendered. General

\(^{144}\) See Chapter VI for a discussion.
education would serve as only the first, albeit most important, step along a set of relatively standardized educational pathways of secondary and post-secondary institutions that mapped to the proclivities of each of the three ability categorizations.

Further complimenting the tripartite conceptions of ability and schooling was the view that the structure of the labor market was premised on a tripartite division as well, with each ability type and corresponding educational pathway and qualification linked to a particular occupational category. As Kuhlmann (1970: 166) writes, “Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium are … geared towards three supposedly clearly separate ability types, which anticipate three career fields and three managerial levels … for finer gradations and transitions, this system offers little room.”

As chapter III demonstrates, the presence and influence of these beliefs were not unique to Germany, at least not in the 1940s, when vertical differentiation in general education was the rule rather than the exception and educationalists in other Western European countries argued in support of the system on the grounds of differentiated ability levels in young people. While American occupation forces might have considered the German practices of early selection and differentiation in general education anti-democratic and reflective of an authoritarian social order, for most countries on the continent – including those with democratic traditions such as Britain – such practices were viewed as scientifically valid and pedagogically sound.

Sweden provides another democratic example. As in many other northern and central European countries, the Swedish general education system had been based on the German traditional model and developed in the late 19th and early 20th century along differentiated lines. By the late 1930s, however, growing dissatisfaction with the system, mainly over the
admissions procedures for the secondary *realskola* and the division between general and vocational education, had led the government in 1940 to appoint a group of education experts known as the School Committee to examine general education and provide recommendations for future policy. In the course of the School Committee discussions, reforming the traditional system’s practice of early differentiation based on perceived ability quickly emerged as the primary area of disagreement within the group.

Significantly, the four educational psychologists on the committee recommended unanimously to the government that the traditional system of early differentiation be retained. In their reports, the psychologists maintained that reliable methods existed to identify at a fairly young age (around eleven) the roughly ten percent of young people with academic or theoretical abilities. Separating gifted children as early as possible was essential, they argued, from a pedagogical standpoint, since leaving such students in integrated classes with others of lesser abilities would fail to generate sufficiently the competition needed to motivate the talented cohort for future success.

The Swedish psychologists on the Committee held that vertical differentiation and early selection were not practices designed to maintain a monopoly on higher education and leading occupations for the upper classes (though they did acknowledge a positive correlation between academic ability and social class), but instead rooted in psychological understandings of intelligence and ability that were based on scientific findings. In making his case for selecting talented students for the academic track at age eleven, one psychologist on the Committee, a Professor Landquist, wrote in his testimony that he could not “remember any

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145 Under the traditional differentiated system in Sweden, all students entering the secondary sector began in a six year lower level *realskola* before either receiving a school leaving certificate or continuing on to the upper secondary *gymnasium*. 1940 survey data demonstrated the unequal social distribution of students in the classes in the secondary system: despite comprising only 42 percent of the total population, middle and upper class students occupied roughly 75 percent of all secondary school places (Husén, 1962: 10)
psychologist who has advocated the suitability of a six or eight year common school,” while his colleague, Professor Katz concurred, writing that "according to modern intelligence research no really weighty arguments can be stated in favor of a postponement of the selection of pupils” (quoted in Husén, 1962: 12). The psychologists opposition significantly impacted the 1940 debates, helping to create an impasse that would delay the start of the reform process in Sweden until the latter part of the decade (Heidenheimer; 1974: 389).

**Discourse Agents in the FRG**

The core ideas of the German version of the discourse owed their impact on general education to a set of academic psychologists, sociologists, and educationalists who were committed to maintaining the traditional structure of the system and whose influence within education policymaking circles would continue throughout the 1950s. As Kuhlmann (1970: 126) writes, “from 1933 to 1960, a committed set of scholars dominated the landscape of education policy, for whom no reform impulses were possible because they believed psychological and sociological natural laws and essential forms applied, which seemed to exclude a priori any changes [to the general education system].”

Within this group, one individual, Prof. Karl Valentin Müller, stands out as a particularly influential agent of the postwar German education discourse. Described by German-American sociologist Max Horkheimer as a specialist in the connection between talent and social environment (*Begabungssoziologie*) in a report commissioned by the American Library of Congress on the state of German social science in early 1950s (Horkheimer, 1952: 29), Müller served after the war as a Professor for Sociology and Social Anthropology at the Academy for Economics and Social Sciences in Erlangen-Nürnberg and
as the director of the Institute for Empirical Sociology (originally named the Institute for Talent Research) in Hannover. Tellingly, the Institute had been set up in 1946 not by the Christian Democrats, but with the support of Adolf Grimme, the SPD Minster for Culture for Lower Saxony who himself had been a pre-war member of the *Bund Entschiedener Schulreformer*, a progressive splinter group of secondary school teachers that had broken away from the conservative *Philologenverband* in 1919.\(^\text{146}\) Culture Ministries is several other *Länder* also commissioned researchers who shared Müller’s socio-biological views to prepare advisory studies on education policy for their governments during the same period (Gass-Bohm, 2005: 134).

In the 1920s, Müller had belonged to a right-leaning faction within the SPD that sought to mix biological and racial theories with Marxist conceptions of proletarian revolution, arguing that only white Europeans were capable of understanding – and therefore realizing – socialism, and providing as evidence for this theory data highlighting the relatively high percentages of blondes in positions of authority within trade unions. Müller had worked in the Saxon Ministry of Culture in the early 1930s but was stripped of his office by the Nazis after their seizure of power due to his SPD membership; later in the decade, however, he would be permitted to lecture at universities in Prague and Dresden. Müller also published widely during the Nazi era, promoting a theory that sought to explain ability differences in different racial groups and advocating the racial fusing (*Umvolkung*) of Germans and Czechs (Proctor 1988: 23-24; Gutberger, 2006: 75-88).

In the postwar era, Müller continued to expound on many of his prewar views on the innate nature of human talent, substituting the Nazi-tainted concept of race with the less

\(^{146}\text{ For a history of the *Bund*, see Neuner, 1980.}\)
ideologically discredited notion of class in his writings in the late 1940s and 1950s. Much of Müller’s postwar research examined the relationship among social standing, intellectual ability, and school placement in the vertically-differentiated system. Müller acknowledged that the German secondary schools were dominated by the higher classes, but maintained that this resulted “from the largely natural correlation between school screening and social screening” (quoted in Gass-Bolm, 2005: 133-134; see also Robinsohn and Kuhlmann, 1967: 325). The same talents that led individuals to attain higher levels of social rank led them to perform better academically, so it was not surprising that the upper classes would be overrepresented in the Gymnasium. To critics who would argue that a student’s relative performance in school was affected by environmental factors such as family conditions and upbringing, Müller countered that such considerations were irrelevant for determining scholastic aptitude, maintaining late into the 1950s that “ability is a biological category…unconditionally rooted in hereditary traits which are either there or not there” (Müller, 1959: 7). In his view, expanding access to the higher schools by allowing the entry of students who were not clearly members of the qualified intellectual elite or attempting as a matter of policy to make the Gymnasium more socially inclusive was both scientifically unfounded and certain to lead to a decline in educational quality.

If Müller contributed to emphasizing the axis of ability, education, and class within the discourse, Dr. Albert Huth would add the further element of economic productivity. Together the biological and economic views would have the effect of, in Kuhlmann’s terms, “doubly anchoring” (1970: 64) vertical differentiation in West Germany, creating two analytically distinct but mutually reinforcing sub-discourses that legitimized the traditional structure in general education and provided a set of ideational barriers to horizontal reform. Huth, an
occupational psychologist and former *Volksschule* teacher who had worked for the state employment office in Bavaria in the 1920s and 1930s and after the war served as Professor of Psychology at the Institute for Teacher Education In Munich-Pasing, argued in his research that the educational system preferred by West German industry the early 1950s “corresponded perfectly” with the findings of pedagogical psychology on vertical differentiation and ability. Based (according to Huth) on conversations with business leaders and the published comments of the Chambers of Commerce, he argued in a 1952 article that the optimal percentage of students from the total student population for each type of school matched the three general types of occupation demanded by industry. To impress this relationship upon his readership, Huth offered an easily accessible table that demonstrated the correspondence across categories. Significantly, these optimal figures roughly matched the actual distribution of West German students in the schools at the time, providing the impression that the three-tiered general education system that had recently been reconstituted in West Germany represented the ideal arrangement for the country’s economy. “If one wishes to reveal an occupational principle to guide decision for school tracks and career advice,” Huth wrote, “one will inevitably come to the same postulations, for the levels of ability of German youth correspond exactly to those percentages provided in this table” (Huth, 1952: 135).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optimal Percentage</th>
<th>Occupation Category</th>
<th>School Category</th>
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| 3-5 %              | Director, economic leader, department supervisor, lawyer, technical manager, sales manager, staff manager, etc. | Higher Education (academic track)  
*Gymnasium* and University |
| 10-12%             | Foreman, master craftsman, crew leader, administrator, small trade and retail shop proprietor | Middle School (*Mittelschule*)  
and Technical College (*Fachschule*) |
| 85%                | 25% Craftsman, skilled laborer, artisans  
30% Specialized workers, semi-skilled worker and craftsman | Elementary School (*Volksschule*) and Vocational |
The implications of Huth’s findings were clear enough: any change to the vertically differentiated system of general education would necessarily result in a distorted distribution of skills in the West German economy, limiting the country’s reconstructive and productive capacity just the country was returning to economic growth and stability.

Huth additionally played a key role in popularizing the view in the early postwar period that the total amount of “talent” within Germany’s youth population was declining. In a series of articles published between 1948 and 1952, he postulated that young West Germans in the postwar period were exhibiting significantly lower levels of ability than their pre-war counterparts. Drawing on seemingly reliable statistical evidence\(^\text{147}\) based on his own data collection, he maintained that along a range of academic performance indicators, fourteen-year-olds examined in 1946/47 school year demonstrated the same level of ability as twelve-year-olds in 1930. Accompanying this decline, moreover, was a clear movement of talent in Huth’s sample from the theoretical to the practical type. The general ability of young Germans was thus not only dropping, compared to previous generations, but fewer youth were demonstrating the aptitude traditionally required for study at the Gymnasium. As with the more economically-directed arguments, the implications were straightforward: selection needed to be applied more rigorously and school types needed to be more strictly differentiated if young people in West Germany were to make up their “talent gap” with past generations.

\(^\text{147}\) For a discussion of some of the inconsistencies, methodological problems, and spurious conclusions in Huth’s research, see Drewek 1989: 200.
The ideas of Huth and especially Müller dominated academic discussions of talent, ability, and education in the 1950s (see Zimmer 1975: 27-28). While a handful of researchers, most notably the sociologist Heinrich Roth, argued against the static conceptions of ability developments and distribution and highlighted the significance of environmental factors in shaping individual aptitudes, their findings had little impact on education debates or influence among policy actors (Roth, 1961: 81-113; Kuhlmann, 1970: 116; Gass-Bolm, 2005: 132). As Zimmer writes, “to the extent that scientific arguments where brought into the educational policy discussions, state education authorities relied almost exclusively on concepts of hereditary biology” (1975: 12).148

For the most part, even progressive German educationalists who in an earlier time may have advocated for horizontal reform largely acquiesced to the reestablishment of the vertically differentiated system. As Ebsworth (1961: 160-161) notes, “the more liberal-minded educationalists … wanted to see the Weimar system revived and perhaps further developed. Their attitude could be summed up as ‘on from Weimar.’ They were, naturally, very conscious of the leading position Germany had once held in the educational world and were therefore hypersensitive to new ideas from abroad.”

This situation stood in marked contrast to the developments in other European countries during the same period. In both Britain and Sweden, the ideas associated with the static and hereditary conceptions of ability that dominated policy discussions in the 1940s would by the late 1950s be challenged by new ideas regarding the nature of intelligence and its relationship to environmental conditions. These counter-discourses would strongly

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148 Drewek (1989) challenges the view of Zimmer, Kuhlmann, and Robinsohn that the ideas of Müller and Huth had few opponents during this time, highlighting critical work by Lehmensick (1950a, 1950b) and other contemporaries. While he demonstrates that such opposition was present, Drewek fails to make the case that the criticism rendered by its members had any real effect on the political debates concerning early selection and vertical differentiation or the policy positions of any of the major actors in education circles.
influence the re-organization of the education systems in both countries. By the mid-1950s the educational-sociologists in Britain such as Halsey and Floud were challenging the views of the interwar psychologists that had held individual intelligence to be a fixed and innate characteristic. In Sweden, a new generation of educationalists trained in behavior studies rather than psychology would likewise question the basic assumptions of fixed intelligence that had so sharply influenced reform discussions in 1940, creating a new consensus on education that would culminate in the wholesale comprehensivization of the system in 1971, when the three different types of traditional secondary institutions were merged into a single integrated Gymnasial school\(^\text{149}\) (Heidenheimer, 1974: 388-389, see also Paulston, 1968: 116).

Why did this paradigm shift bypass West Germany during the same time period? Much of the explanation is found in the disruption of the natural generational cycling of pedagogical academics and researchers in German universities and institutes caused by the National Socialist experience and its subsequent effects on the content of the postwar education discourse in the FRG. Given the restrictions of the National Socialist period, many German pedagogues had little exposure to new thinking in research that was developing outside of the country (Kuhlmann, 1970: 114). Allied denazification efforts led to the removal of many younger faculty members and researchers appointed after 1933, ensuring that many key academic positions were held after the war by a generation of older scholars.

In the area of education, Heidenheimer writes, “older pedagogical orthodoxies and traditions were re-established in Germany just when they were being challenged [elsewhere]” (1974: 389). This elder cohort would serve to carry many of the reigning biological and static

\(^{149}\) To the British and Swedish cases already discussed can be added comprehensive reforms in France. The College d’Enseignement Secondaire was created as a comprehensive middle school in 1963 and as an alternative to selection at age 11 for placement in one of three schools in the French differentiated system (see Gaziel, 1989).
conceptions of ability from the 1920s well into the postwar era. As such, ideas concerning
talent and school organization that dominated academic – and by extension policy –
discussions in the first decades of the Federal Republic’s existence continued to reflect the
views that ability was a hereditary trait and that only that small minority of young people who
were of a particular intellectual disposition should have access to advanced education.

Beyond the more unique characteristics evident in postwar West German sociology
was the more general condition of the field in Europe, where cross-national scholarly
networks remained relatively underdeveloped. This condition was particularly evident within
the sub-discipline of educational sociology, where academic discourses associated with
schooling were largely limited to individual countries and debates over new empirical
findings and their policy implications seldom spilled over national borders\(^{150}\) (for a
discussion, see Chisholm, 1997: 197). Hence while educational sociologists in Britain and
Sweden were publishing groundbreaking studies that were calling into questions many of the
psychological and pedagogical assumptions that had served as the foundation of their
differentiated schooling systems, their counterparts in West Germany were restating and
updating arguments that defended the arrangements of the traditional Germany system,
largely insulated from the revolutions taking place around them.

Despite the lack of cross-national exchange, it is conceivable that German researchers
would have reached similar conclusions themselves through their own examinations of the
FRG’s general education system as it re-emerged in the 1950s. Here too, however, the Nazi

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\(^{150}\) A case in point is the Central Advisory Council study *Children and their Primary Schools* (commonly
referred to as the Plowden Report) published in Britain in 1967, which examined how elementary education was
taught in the UK and assessed its impact on the transfer to secondary schools. The Report, which significantly
influenced the structure of the British primary system, found that the UK was in need of a wholesale
reorientation in elementary education and called for more “child-centered” approaches to teaching. Although the
report was published in abridged form in German in 1972, its findings were virtually ignored and its impact on
debates in the country were, in Gruber’s terms, “insignificant” (Gruber, 1987: 57).
legacy was influential. The National Socialist experience had retarded the development of educational sociology in Germany not only in terms of personnel, but also in the application of modern social scientific tools, such as survey and data processing methods, in studies of the education system. By the mid-1960s, West Germans would begin using such methods to demonstrate that certain groups, especially industrial and agricultural workers, were dramatically underrepresented in intermediate and secondary schools but during the crucial first years following the establishment of the FRG, researchers lacked the tools even to make such determination (see Strzelewicz, et al, 1966). As a consequence, policymakers had few ways of assessing the effects that measures taken in the late 1940s and early 1950s, such as the elimination of tuition and the provision of free textbooks and course materials, were having – or not having – on the social composition of the different schools (Gass-Bohm, 2005: 130).

**Political Actors and the Fixed Ability Discourse**

Views of the type articulated by agents such as Huth and Müller serve as the ideational foundation of policy discourses. As discursive institutionalists argue, however, in order to affect policy debates, such ideas require actors to communicate and legitimate them. And in the early postwar decades there was no shortage of powerful advocates of the static and hereditary conceptions of ability. As Kuhlmann observed, “the multiplied impact [on the coalition] from men like … Müller and others who made claims of objectivity and science, cannot be overestimated” (1970: 126). The discourse coalition that helped to ensure that the organization of general education reflected such conceptions included members of secondary school associations and the political parties, but also public officials in government ministries
and representatives of organized business. From their privileged institutional positions within the emerging West German polity, these actors would regularly draw on the core assumptions of the discourse to discourage even moderate proposals for change in the structure of general education for the first two decades of the postwar era. The belief that no more than five percent of the population possessed the abilities needed to perform the intellectual tasks demanded by the Gymnasium and university study was widely accepted and attempts to challenge traditional arrangements would be viewed as scientifically unjustifiable and a threat to pedagogical standards and industrial performance.

Among the various interests associated with education, the fixed ability discourse in early postwar West Germany was most prominently reflected in the policy positions adopted by the secondary school interest groups, and particularly the Deutscher Philologenverband, the influential Gymnasium teachers association. In the 1950s, the DPhV’s intermediation efforts were aimed primarily at defending traditional arrangements, including vertical differentiation and the administrative and academic separation of school types, conducting selection for these schools during the fourth year of the Grundschule around age ten, furthering the practice of requiring different educational standards for elementary and secondary teachers, and maintaining the exclusive character of the Gymnasium by keeping enrollment figures relatively low (Gass-Bolm, 2005: 120-135).

In the past, these arrangements would have been justified by reference to Humboldt’s pedagogical principles, but such elitist appeals would seem to conflict with the values of the new democratic West Germany. Given this altered political climate, the DPhV, Gass-Bolm

151 Joining Gymnasium instructors in opposing change to the vertically integrated system were the Realschule teachers. The increasing prominence of the Realschule as the result of its postwar spikes in enrollment during the 1950s, along with its growing ties with industry, in the immediate postwar decades served to raise fears among its teaching staffs that any significant reform would entail a loss of its distinctive position within the general education framework (Robinson and Kuhlmann, 1967).
(2005: 134) writes, “was welcome to the ideas of the biological argument, which provided seemingly scientific proof for the necessity of a three-tiered school system and the selection paradigm.” Indeed, the fixed ability classification scheme would regularly be drawn upon to support the continuation of selection practices and vertical organization in the German general education system, appearing regularly in the journals and meeting reports of the secondary school teachers associations throughout the early postwar period. The claims made by the Saarbrücken chapter of the DPhV in its 1957 conference report that “the three tiers of the school system [corresponds] to the natural distribution of ability” were common (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970: 18) and major fixed ability discursive proponents, such as former Saxon Nazi Minister for Culture Wilhelm Hartnacke,152 frequently invoked the core assumptions of the discourse in Philologenverband publications throughout the 1950s, attacking any suggestion of horizontal reform in education or the combining of students of “mixed ability” after initial selection at age ten (Gass-Bolm, 2005: 134).

Opposition to horizontal change was rooted not only in teachers’ concerns for their material interests but in an emerging ideology among groups like the DPhV that held it to be the responsibility of higher education institutions in the FRG to create a “leadership class” (Führerschicht) to helm the principal positions in the West German state and its newly-created social market economy. Such an elite would never be realized if the vertical system were to be dismantled and, as one writer in the Philologenverband’s trade journal put it, “the competent were smothered in the numbers of incompetent, the less talented, and the untalented … our future depends on the selection of the best” (Erdmann, 1948). As they had during the reconstruction debates in the occupation period, the Gymnasium teachers would

152 A former Dresden school inspector who had battled proponents of the Einheitsschule in the 1920s, Hartnacke also served for a period in the 1930s as the co-editor of Volk und Rasse (People and Race) a leading “scientific” journal that published research associated with Nazi racial theory.
continue to equate suggestions for more horizontal schooling arrangements with East German practices throughout the 1950s, characterizing any criticism or proposed change to the traditional system as reflective of communist thinking and a step towards the Einheitsschule model present in the GDR (Gass-Bolm, 2005: 132).

In the view of West German industry, the three-tiered school system was well suited to supplying the economy with the distribution of skills that corresponded to the requirements of German businesses during the 1950s and complimented the in-firm apprentice system administered by the German Chambers of Commerce (Deutscher Industrie- und Handelstag, [DIHT]). By limiting the period of fulltime mandatory schooling to eight or nine years for the majority of students and ensuring that most would graduate from the Hauptschule with no formal occupational or higher educational qualifications except for entry into the dual system, the differentiated school organization guaranteed that significant percentages of young people would enter into apprenticeships around age fifteen. For this reason, business interests generally opposed the few modifications to general education proposed during the 1950s, such as calls for extending the mandatory period of study in the Volksschule to ten years.\(^{153}\)

In the context of the Wirtschaftswunder and Germany’s postwar reconstruction, this economic rationale would have a powerful legitimizing effect on the traditional arrangements in general education and serve to deflect criticism of its perceived elitism and social bias (Taylor, 1981). Such criticisms as they existed tended not to be based in formal

\(^{153}\) A federal advisory body (the Deutscher Ausschuss für das Erziehungs und Bildungswesen - for more discussion see below) had recommended adding a mandatory ninth year of study at the Volksschule in 1954 and later a tenth year. By 1956 a number of Länder, including Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein, as well as West Berlin, had extended the period of mandatory study to include the ninth year but the tenth year proved more controversial. As Taylor (1981: 162-167) discusses, employers were split on the issue of the ninth year, with the craft sector completely opposed to any extension and industrial concerns more open to the idea. Both sectors, however, opposed the addition of a tenth year. The trade unions, for their part, supported the extension of general education, provided that students spent the time as students in state-administered schools rather than as apprentices in company training programs.
understanding of the links between and among education, qualifications and employment, which owing to the lag in the application of social science techniques in the early FRG were in any event lacking. As Kuhlmann (1970: 67) writes, “Because modern, sophisticated and comprehensives analysis of occupational qualifications [were] lacking, but at the same time profit margins and wages … were continually increasing, representatives from the peak industry associations could with clear reasons point to the success of the present day system of training and selection – and with them to existing education system” as justification for their support for the existing system.

The educational preferences of West German industry and the powerful employer associations that represented it in the consensual German policymaking system were not, however, shaped entirely by economic considerations. As with the secondary school teachers, industry’s views on education reflected, in Kuhlmann’s words, “a certain, relatively closed worldview” that saw the means to raising the standards of all students in the promotion of a small educational elite within the higher schools. For West German business groups, horizontal modifications to the school represented a threat not only to the success of the economic reconstruction but to the entire West Germany social framework and system of values. Virulently opposed to anything resembling GDR-style state intervention, business groups in the FRG maintained that in the education sector would amount to ‘a victory of centralized planning over the competitive market economy’ (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970: 67).

Such a view reflected Huth’s conception of a correspondence among ability, school type, and the economic needs of industry. Interaction between representatives of industry and the academic agents of the static and hereditary view of ability was common throughout the 1950s. Speaking before the DIHT in 1958, Frankfurt Pedagogy Professor H. Weinstock
reiterated Huth’s basic ability/occupation categorization – the West German labor force could be divided into three general categories, an “ordering and organizing class,” of workers, an “achieving” class of upper level managers and professionals, and a mid-level class of technicians and supervisors. This fact coupled with the state of technological development in the economy served, he claimed, as the “legal basis and necessity of the three tiers in our school system” and political attempts to change the basic structure of the vertical system, such as the introduction of comprehensive schools, amounted, in Weinstock’s opinion, to a “fool’s farce” (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970: 65). Such rhetoric aside, the politics associated with general education during the Federal Republic’s first decade were characterized largely by the absence of contentious and ideologically-charged debates over the reform and reconstitution of the traditional vertical system that marked the conflict between American and German education authorities during the occupation, and a relative lack of programmatic interest in the issues of vertical differentiation and selection on the part of both the Christian and the Social Democratic parties.154 This comparative absence of significant policy debates at either the federal or Länder-level was a reflection of two factors. First, shifting patterns of electoral competition and the concomitant process of de-ideologization that accompanied the movement from mass to catch all parties155 had served to moderate views on education, particular on the Left. In a political environment in which stability was highly valued, party

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154 The smallest of the three primary parties in the 1950s and 60s, the liberal Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei, [FDP]) would assume contradictory positions on the issue of horizontal reform in the different Länder during the occupation era and early years of the FRG. The party, which served as a junior coalition partner in most of the CDU-led federal governments between 1949 and 1965, supported the introduction of such reforms in Berlin in 1947, but voting against the same reforms four years later. While the party advocated for the extension of the Grundschule in 1947, it insisted a similar arrangement be ended in Schleswig-Holstein in 1951 (Robinson and Kuhlmann, 1967: 325-326). Under the influence of Dr. Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, a staunch supporter of comprehensivization and later State Secretary for Education in SPD-FDP coalition led by Willy Brandt (see Chapter VIII), the party would begin in the 1960s expressing more consistent support for dismantling the vertical system.

155 For the definitive early statement on this movement, see Kirchheimer, 1966.
programs promising fundamental changes were likely to be received with little enthusiasm from the electorate. Second, something approaching a consensus on the issue of vertical differentiation between the two major political parties emerged in the 1950s around a set of principles that reflected key assumptions within the West German fixed ability discourse, particularly those regarding the acceptance of inequalities in natural endowments. While this consensus was short-lived, it would prove to be pivotal for later reform debates in the FRG.

For the Christian Democrats, the party that would dominate federal politics throughout the 1950s under the chancellorship of former Cologne Mayor Konrad Adenauer, issues related to the structure of the general education system were not a priority, at least in terms of formal party pronouncements, during the early years of the Federal Republic. CDU/CSU education policy focused instead on the internal reform of schooling, and specifically the need to reestablish the relationship between churches and schools as a step towards rebuilding the spiritual and moral foundation of a generation of young people raised under the Nazi dictatorship and corrupted by forced exposure to National Socialist ideology. As the CDU’s foundational 1945 Cologne Principles stated:

Church-run religious education is an integral part of education. Through the pernicious doctrines of racial hatred and mass incitement, Hitler poisoned many youth. They must return to the realization of true moral values. Science and art should be free to unfold and the true teachings of humanity, whose German proclamations belong to the whole of humanity, should help to comprise the moral reconstruction of our people.” (CDU, 1945: 4).

The CDU’s first official program, agreed to at the party conference in Hamburg in 1953, made no mention of general education, despite devoting significant space to other youth concerns, including calls for young workers protection legislation and a new vocational training law (CDU: 1953). Following the pitched battles over the America reform proposals
of the occupation period, however, the party was, Hoffman writes, “inclined to maintain the conventional school structure: eight or possible nine years in the Volkschule; the Mittelschule, the nine year Gymnasium and the three year vocational school” (1968: 64).

The positions of the party’s two main constituencies, the churches and middles classes, certainly influenced the party’s continued support for vertical differentiation in general education in the 1950s. Beyond the role played by these groups, however, was the strength of beliefs associated with the innate talent and differential ability discourse. In the 1950s, the Christian Democrats would be the most faithful political adherents to the discourse, which was seen not only as scientifically legitimate but also a compliment to the party’s focus on the moral and spiritual rejuvenation of youth in the new Germany. “The organizational differences of the school system,” Jacoby writes, “were seen [by the CDU] to reflect natural differences of ability in the population but not to perpetuate such distinctions – which could in any event be transcended by common values” (2000: 101).

The views of the SPD were considerably more complex. Similar to the positions of first postwar British Labour government, the party believed young Germans to be a vital force in creating a new Germany along social democratic principles and considered the state education system to be a key site at which structural changes to the German economy and society could be effected. Support for comprehensive schools prior to 1933 and the attempts of various SPD-led Länder governments to legislate reforms in the immediate postwar years would make the party as the most likely source for politically-driven change in the traditional structure of the general education system in the FRG.

Yet external political considerations coupled with internal divisions limited the party’s ability to construct a coherent set of policy principles for the organization of general
education. The early postwar era was a time of considerable ideological and political uncertainty for the SPD, which faced the challenge of recreating German Social Democracy not only in light of the Nazi catastrophe, but the situation in the East, where the regional party had been forced to merge with the Communists to form the new Soviet-directed SED. As with their Christian Democratic counterparts, the SPD paid relatively sparse attention to schooling in its early policy documents, but such absences masked deeper conflicts within the party over education and its position in its vision of a postwar West German society. Throughout the 1950s, the SPD sought to reconcile its position on the relationship between the education system and social equality, on the one hand, with the distinctly inegalitarian beliefs associated with vertically differentiation in schooling that had reemerged in postwar Germany. The party’s traditional Marxist view that the structure of education would change as capitalism gave way to socialism began to fade as the SPD adopted a more pragmatic stance in the 1950s in the face of losses to the CDU/CSU in the first three federal elections. Under its “New Society” (Neue Gesellschaft) program, the party would begin to reject the demands for radical social leveling that had underlay its support for comprehensive organizational models such as the Einheitsschule before 1933, and would become increasingly open to the reality of an education system that generated unequal outcomes for the young people who passed through it (Jacoby, 2000: 103).

Still unacceptable, however for this new postwar SPD were differences in outcomes based in differences in wealth or social class; under the new thinking, students’ ascension to the higher secondary schools and the opportunities they offered was to be a function solely of their individual abilities. Much as their British Labour counterparts had done during the interwar period, the SPD moved towards the view in the 1950s that the elimination of class
and status factors from the selection process would make open new avenues for economic wealth and social mobility to the talented children of the working class.\textsuperscript{156} This new philosophy was described by Hoffman:

The way to leading professions would be principally opened to the gifted children of poor parents through state-funded education, which would make possible their social ascent. This would create a new talent and performance-based dominant class whose claim to power could not be refuted by the established classes. By replacing ownership with education-based performance, the classist systems would disintegrate and in its place would step a socially mobile meritocracy. The demands of equality within this group correspond exclusively to the starting point of each individual person,… The parity of starting conditions is just as fair socially as the social inequality that arises by reason of different performance abilities. What is decisive in this “New Society”-based on the equality of educational opportunity is that the social status of each individual is a function of his industriousness and ability and no longer rooted in the fortuity of his birth (Hoffmann, 1968: 393-394).

A school system structured on the principles of vertical differentiation could comport with such a philosophy provided that it was truly class-blind and meaningfully offered opportunities for social and economic advancement to even the less well off in West German society. While the more biological and psychological elements of the varieties of ability discourse would never play as significant a role in the party educational ideology, for the first time the SPD, Kuhlmann writes, “accepted, or rather tolerated, elite theories and at the same time overlooked the presented scientific works that questioned the authority of the school typology” (1970: 93). As with the Labour Party in the UK, the German Social Democrats would crucially give its assent to the three-tiered school structure in the 1950s. Even in Länder that were led exclusively by SPD governments in the 1950s, vertical differentiation would become legally and socially re-embedded. As Nixdorf maintains in his study of general education in SPD-dominated Hesse in the 50s and 60s, “the school bills of the 1950s

\textsuperscript{156} The view that differentiation in general education would be acceptable provided that it was based on ability would be reflected in the revolutionary Bad Godesberg program issued in 1959. The Program, which made no calls for change in the organization of general education, stated that, “all privileges in access to educational institutions must be abolished. Only talent and performance should make promotion possible” (SPD, 1959).
provided for an organizational consolidation of the traditional school system, with no
dramatic changes in the 1950s or early 1960s.” This consolidation took place despite the fact
that working class attendance levels at the Gymnasium, while increasing slightly, remained
extremely low during the period (1970: 154). What was deemed appropriate in the context of
the fixed ability discourse trumped what would appear to be the raw interests of the party,
namely the social and economic advance of its core constituency through horizontal reform

Public Opinion and Differentiation

The final and, arguably most important, segment of West German society to contribute
to the social embedding of vertical differentiation in the 1950s was the West German public
itself. A good deal of the credit – or blame – for the absence of higher educational expansion
and pressure for change in the vertical structure of schooling that took place in other countries
can be attributed to the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of the general population in the early
postwar decades. While the West German middle classes would seek to keep the Gymnasium
(and with it access to university-education) selective and elite, the weak educational ambitions
of the under-classes would render such seemingly democratic innovations such as the
Elternrecht ineffective as a mechanism for increasing significantly the number of students in
the advanced educational pathway.

Passivity largely characterized the attitude of most West Germans towards educational
change, particularly in the early postwar years. In surveys of individuals’ “greatest cares and
worries” during the late 1940s, education was never cited by more than one percent of
respondents, who were more concerned with basic provisions, such as food, clothing, and
access to employment, and the return of German prisoners of war (Noelle and Neumann,
1967). The reconstitution of the traditional vertical system may have faced opposition from American military authorities, but not from most ordinary Germans. Indeed, in the few examples of significant public mobilization over issues related to school organization during the occupation, such as in Hamburg following the 1948 SPD law (see Chapter VI), it would be proponents of educational traditionalism that had the support of the population.

As issues of basic survival began to fade the early FRG, they were quickly replaced with a new set of priorities. Rising incomes, high levels of employment, security, and political stability associated with the Wirtschaftswunder, the Western military alliance, and the Christian Democratic governments in the 1950s had led to changes in the attitudes of many Germans, particularly towards the possibilities of economic and social advancement. Although education issues has ascended on the public list of concerns during this era, most Germans continued to be satisfied with the existing structure of the vertically differentiated system.

This relative satisfaction stands in marked contrast to the situation in Britain, where increased overall wealth in the 1950s corresponded with growth in public support for changes in the postwar tripartite system. In the FRG, however, educational reform continued to have fairly low appeal with the many West German families despite the economic boom. Why were the responses so different? One explanation is rooted in the economic opportunities in the early FRG available to younger people of the “practically ability” type. In Britain, the educational pathway for such students had traditionally been much less developed, but in Germany, the Realschule and the dual system of vocational education were by the 1950s well-established institutions. In the postwar era, they would exercise a stabilizing influence on the structure of general education and the practice of differentiation and dampen calls for reform
in the early FRG.

In the postwar era, the presence of a strong intermediate sector in the West German education system – represented in general education by the *Realschule* – would provide an alternative to the *Gymnasium* and university that combined the prestige of a secondary school with a course of study designed to prepare students for employment in mid-level technical and administrative positions in the country’s booming export-driven economy. Unlike with the *Gymnasium*, where efforts were made to keep tight limits on enrollments, both the Christian Democrats and the secondary school associations actively promoted expanding the size of the student population in the *Realschule* during the 1950s (Ertl and Phillips, 2000: 399-400).

Structurally, the general and vocational education sectors as they were reconstituted after World War II were largely complimentary systems - as in the prewar era, the majority of young Germans in the 1950s would enter the dual system around age fifteen upon completion of elementary schooling in the *Volksschule*.157 Through a combination of part-time classroom training (usually between six and twelve hours per week) and in-firm apprenticeship, the dual system offered young people the opportunity to acquire the skills demanded by employers and provided a structured pathway to fulltime employment. Patterns of macro-industrial development in the early FRG also aided the rise in vocational training’s prestige. Many of the new areas of production associated with the high technologies of the postwar era, such as atomic power, space travel, and cybernetics were underemphasized in the FRG, in some cases because of Allied prohibitions but in others because the imperatives of rebuilding the country demanded that resources be deployed towards more traditional manufacturing sectors, the training for which had long been the cornerstone of the dual system.

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157 This pattern would change markedly beginning in the 1980s, when secondary school graduates, mainly from the intermediate school ranks but also from the *Gymnasium*, would begin entering the dual system in significant numbers (Ertl and Phillips, 2000).
During the 1950s, the contributions of apprentices and skilled craftsmen would be seen as key factors behind the reconstruction of the country’s devastated cities and production facilities and the rising incomes and standards of living associated with the economic miracle, creating a cognitive link in political and popular discourses between the dual system and economic growth that would serve to elevate the postwar prestige of what Taylor (1981: 280) reminds us was viewed as a “backwater” institution in the early 20th century. As long as vocational education and training could provide the skills in demand from industry and secure employment at high wages for that majority of the youth population who had followed the pathway from Volksschule to apprenticeship, policymakers would see little economic reason to modify either the dual system158 or the differentiated general education system.

The second factor contributing to the lack of correspondence between economic attainment and educational expansion in the FRG is found in what economist Friedrich Edding called “the low level of aspiration of the parents themselves.” (1967: 108). Parental involvement had long been a key feature of Gymnasium, with parents expected to help their children with assignments in the afternoons following end to the school day around noon. The possibility of having to provide such strict oversight presented problems for many working class families. Beyond the fact that such families were far more likely than their middle class counterparts to have both mother and father employed, many working class German parents were reluctant to send their children to higher school for fear it would, in Heidenheimer’s words “show up their own failings” and teach children “to think that they were their parents’ betters” (1974: 391). Such beliefs were reflected in a March 1958 survey, in which nearly

158 Up until the 1970s, the capacity of the state to influence the in-firm apprenticeship system was largely limited, since the system was self-governed by industry thorough local chambers of commerce. Despite calls in the early postwar era by organized labor and its political allies in the SPD for greater state oversight of the system and the extension of co-determination rights to firms’ training programs, efforts aimed at overhauling the dual system would produce few tangible legislative results (see Taylor, 1981; Thelen, 2004).
two out of three German parents with children attending the *Volksschule* indicating that they intended on keeping their children in the elementary education track (Noelle and Neumann, 1967).

It is important to note that the notion of education as an investment in one’s economic future – a concept that drives so much of the present day discussion of educational access and expansion - had yet to materialize in the FRG in the 1950s. West Germans would double their rates of personal consumption between 1950 and 1962, but most of their new income would go towards acquiring consumer goods, rather than investing in education (Kuhlmann 1970: 60). Increased access to the higher secondary schools for working class students might have resulted in improved economic and social circumstances in the long-term, but in the short-term it meant additional years studying in a classroom as opposed to earning a wage on a shop floor; such future-oriented choices were unlikely to be made by families that had come to rely on young members’ earnings in the manual economy to improve basic standards of living. While the percentage of students attending the secondary schools would increase during the 1950s and 1960s, fifteen years after the founding of the Federal Republic and ten years after the Hamburg court’s ruling on parents’ rights in the selection process, the *Volksschule* remained by far the most frequently attended school type in West Germany, with nearly 70 percent thirteen-year olds enrolled in the elementary school type (Nixdorf, 1970: 39).

**Policy Actors II: The DAES and the Rahmenplan**

At the federal level a new forum emerged in the 1950s that served as the most likely drivers of any future adjustments in the general education system and as a communicative
avenue for new ideas to enter policymaking discussions. The German Committee for the Education System (*Deutscher Ausschuss für das Erziehungs und Bildungswesen* [DAEB]) had been created by the federal government over the opposition of the Länder following a request made by the FDP faction in the Bundestag in 1953. The party had raised concerns over potential problems posed by the organizational variation in education across the Länder. Although such problems were significant (particularly before the standardization agreement of the KMK in 1955), the issues that the DAEB would focus on during the 1950s would ultimately be more macro in nature. The fundamental problem, as the Committee stated in one of its early reports, was that the German general education system “had not caught up with the changes which have altered the situation and consciousness of society and state during the last fifty years” (DAEB, 1955 [1966]: 27). In the mid-1950s, the DAEB promoted a range of measures designed to realign German schooling with political and social developments, including increased education for democratic citizenship, more academic training for elementary school teachers, lengthening the period of study required for elementary education, and the establishment of the *Hauptschule,* a more clearly differentiated and defined upper elementary school that the majority of student would attend before entering the dual system (DAEB, 1957 [1966]: 353-362).

Significantly, the DAEB members’ perceptions of the problems facing the system and the extent to which they could actually influence policy choices were themselves largely shaped by the discursive and institutional constraints outlined above. In Britain, expert bodies within the Central Advisory Council for Education such as those led by Newsom and Robbins

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159 The wide variation in standards among the Länder in the early 1950s, prompted a popular maxim, “Vater versetzt, Sohn sitzengelieben,” (Father moves, son is held back) to describe the situation faced by many West German families at the time (Friedeburg, 1989: 319).
160 Interestingly, the suggestion for implementing the *Hauptschule* was first made in 1942 by Hitler himself, who hoped to create a new secondary school in Germany based on an Austrian model (Lowe, 1992: 18)
had served as ideational transmission belts, moving the views of counter discourse academic
agents to state actors and the public and in the process helping to facilitate significant
institutional changes in the organization and expansion of education. Unlike their British
counterparts, the DAEB relied more on the personal knowledge of its members rather than
empirical research, was short of staff and funding, and very little power to influence
policymakers, particularly at the Länder-level (Robinsohn and Kuhlmann, 1967: 314).
Moreover, the primary recommendations the DAEB would make were not rooted in new
pedagogical ideas or empirical studies of the German educational system, but largely reflected
the hegemonic varieties of ability view dominant in the 1950s. As such, the group’s proposals
largely favored continuity with the basic framework of the three-tiered traditional system.

The most important contribution to structural policy debates the DAEB would make,
however, came in 1959 with the publication of the Framework Plan for the Reorganization
and Standardization of the State School System (Rahmenplan zur Umgestaltung und
Vereinheitlichung des allgemeinbildenden öffentlichen Schulwesens [Rahmenplan]). On one
level, the Rahmenplan was designed to address the tension that was being generated by the
combination of social change and institutional rigidity, but more immediately the Committee
was concerned with the growing problem of early school leavers and grade repeaters in the
general education system. The percentage of students required to repeat school years rose
markedly beginning in the mid-1950s, with nearly five percent of all Realschule students and
over nine percent of Gymnasium students needing to re-sit an entire grade, with many opting
simply to drop out entirely. In Baden-Württemberg in 1962 only about one in five of
Gymnasium students completed their course of study in the prescribed time period; students at
the Realschule performed better, but nearly half of all students still failed to finish on time

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These high failure rates amounted to a second round of selection that took place within the schools themselves after the *Auslese*; unlike with the selection at age ten, however, students who failed this second selection often ended up leaving school all together.

The solution offered by the DAEB to address this problem was the *Förderstufe*, a two-year common intermediate schooling stage to be completed after the first four years of the *Grundschule*. Under the proposal, all students except for a very small minority of young people whose advanced ability was beyond dispute would attend the intermediate stage. These manifestly gifted pupils would then move directly to a new type of academic secondary school, called the *Studienschule*, but the remaining students would continue in the new common stage. During the *Förderstufe*, the *Rahmenplan* argued, teachers would be better able to assess the specific abilities and talents of individual students than they could in the *Grundschule*, thereby improving the accuracy of their recommendations for placement in one of the three traditional schools, which would now occur after 6th grade, or when students were around age twelve. While implementation of the *Förderstufe* would clearly represent a change in the organization of West German general education, by most estimates, the proposals made by the DAEB in the *Rahmenplan* could be characterized as conservative, especially when contrasted with pre-1933 reform ideas such as the *Einheitsschule*. Though postponed for some students, vertical differentiation and early selection would still exist under the new plan.

Much of this conservatism can be attributed to the continued dominance of fixed ability assumptions within the DAEB itself, particularly those concerning the distribution of

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161 The increase in the percentage of dropouts and grade repeaters become a concern to university administrators as well as policymakers, since it contributed to spike in the average age of university students (Kuhlmann, 1970: fn 26).
talent in society and its relationship to the school system. The *Förderstufe*, the authors of the *Rahmenplan* explained, was not designed to dismantle vertical differentiation, but was rather:

…intended to preserve the current system of schools as it has proved to be worthwhile. The three-tiered system of Gymnasien, Volksschulen, and Mittelschulen corresponds to the three major layers of professions that modern life has developed: an intellectually leading, an executing, and a mediating layer of practical professions with increased responsibilities in between. This division into three layers also does justice to the three major types of talents: a theoretical, a practical and a theoretical-practical type (Deutscher Ausschuss 1959, [1966]; 68-69).

Despite their shared views with the DAEB on talent and differentiation, traditional supporters of vertical differentiation quickly lined up to oppose the *Rahmenplan*. While business interests maintained that the plan represented a dangerous attempt to infuse general education with a mission of social advancement, secondary school representatives implied that it reflected socialist ideologies by highlighting its similarities to certain education proposals made by the Trade Union Federation (Robinsohn and Kuhlmann, 1967). The *Philologenverband*, for its part, cited the talent distribution figures provided by Huth (see above) to justify their rejection of the *Förderstufe* (see Zimmer, 1975: 62). Whatever the criticism of organized interests, the suggestions provided in the *Rahmenplan* were near-universally ignored by the Länder in the 1960s. Although the KMK opened the door to the individual Länder to implement the *Förderstufe* in its 1964 Hamburg Agreement, by the end of the decade only Hessen would have instituted a mixed-ability intermediate stage in any of its schools and for only a small minority of students (Nixdorf, 1970).

**Conclusion**

In a survey of differentiation practices in Western Europe written in 1975, the educational sociologist Jürgen Zimmer noted the remarkable correspondence between the
structure of general education system and beliefs concerning the provision of ability and its
distribution in the population.

The tendency in countries with vertically organized school systems – to prepare particular
students for particular occupational categories – correlates closely not only with the
dominance of nativistic theories of ability, but also with the attempt to separate a
biologically determined, distinguished and easily identifiable elite as early as possible
through discriminating and permanent methods of selection and to provide it with an
appropriate secondary school education. As far, however, as dynamic theories of ability
influence school policy, they correspond with attempts to abolish vertical forms of
differentiation and to minimize the contingent academic inequality of opportunities of the
particular student populations with social handicaps (Zimmer, 1975: 6).

The dominant type of ability theory in a given country was not fixed, however, and
could – as the British case study demonstrates – change radically. In many nations of
Western Europe, a clear challenger to the nativistic inter-war and immediate postwar beliefs
on youth, intelligence, and educational institutional design would give rise to new discourse
coalitions that would challenge the economic, social, educational, and scientific rationale
behind secondary school selection and serve significantly to reconfigure the institutional
arrangements of general education. In West Germany, however, cultural federalism and
structural legacies from the Nazi era served to retard the application of modern social science
techniques to education and insulate policy actors from the new ideas developing elsewhere.

There were limits to West Germany’s insulation. By the mid-1960s, as the next
chapter discusses, challenges to the dominant policy discourse would also arise, with a range
of actors raising economic, sociological, and pedagogical objections to many of the
assumptions upon which the early educational separation of youth had been founded.
Crucially, however, this West German challenger discourse would – by virtue of the relative
lag involved in its emergence – arise in a vastly different political and cultural climate. These
factors would contribute significantly to the ultimate failure of structural reform initiatives during the 1970s.
Chapter VIII

Germany Case Study III:
The Failure of Reform, 1964-1974

Introduction

Beginning in the late 1950s and accelerating through the mid-1960s, a group of West German academics and researchers would begin to challenge the fixed ability discourse that dominated education thinking and policy in the first postwar decades and in the process would elevate the issue of general education in the FRG to a level of importance unseen since the days of the New Pedagogy movement some fifty years earlier. These agents were by no means members of a coherent movement – indeed public disagreement among them was common. Yet the overall effect of their individual attempts to draw attention to the drawbacks of the traditional German system would be to create the conditions for the first real political debate about education since the occupation period. Unlike the Allied reform initiatives of the late-1940s, however, the drive for change in the 1960s would be the result of domestic factors, most notably the emergence of a crisis discourse in West Germany that would recast a education system that had been viewed as a bedrock of stability, continuity, and past national greatness into a source of economic decline and social inequality that was premised on a set of false beliefs about the nature of human ability.

The West German counter discourse would directly influence political debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s. While it would be primarily political actors on the Left, most notably the SPD, that would seek to perform the transfer of the new thinking from the public to the policy sphere, the counter discourse, by challenging fundamental assumptions behind the traditional education system, would create conditions in which blanket opposition to reform of the type that characterized conservative positions in the early postwar era would be
viewed as distinctly anachronistic by the end of the 1960s. By then, some of the most hardened advocates of educational traditionalism would begin openly considering the possibility of institutional change in general education along more horizontal lines.

**The Challenger Rises, 1961-1968**

By any measure, the context in which West German political and social institutions operated had undergone a massive shift during the eighteen years between the Nazi surrender and the resignation of Konrad Adenauer as the FRG’s first chancellor. Occupied and physically devastated in 1945, West Germans would set about rebuilding their industrial and commercial base with such force (and Marshall Plan aid) that within five years of the new country’s creation, living standards would already surpass those registered just prior to the start of the war (Taylor, 1981: 121; Balfour, 1968: 174-181). Spurred by Ludwig Erhard’s 1948 currency reform and the rising international demand for German manufactured goods, the West German economy created some seven million jobs in 1950s, growing at an astonishing 7.96 percent during the decade and a still remarkable 4.45 percent in the 1960s (Smith, 1994: 9, 257). This dramatic surge in national wealth was reflected in the perceptions of ordinary FRG citizens of their own personal economic conditions— the percentage of West Germans responding that they were better off today than a year ago increased from 12 percent in 1951 to 25 percent in 1962, while the percentage claiming to be worse off dropped from 56 percent to 18 percent during the same time period (Noelle and Neumann, 1967: 374). By the time Adenauer stepped down at age 87 in 1963, the physical devastation, territorial division, occupation, and Nazi legacy that had served as the backdrop to the country upon his ascendancy to the chancellorship in 1949 had given way to the more “normal” concerns over
the future direction of a West German society that was more stable and prosperous than it had been at anytime since the days of the Imperial Reich. Debates that had been muted by the overriding common imperative of reconstruction in the 1950s spilled out into the political arena in the 1960s as actors would increasingly question the fundamental assumptions upon which the institutions of the postwar state had been built.

Geopolitical considerations would also affect the attitudes of West Germans towards domestic institutions, including the education system. As in Britain, the onset of the Cold War had caused policymakers in the FRG to consider the education system in terms of the strategic rivalry between the West and the Soviet bloc. In particular, the “Sputnik shock” in the West that followed the launch of the first satellite by the Soviet Union in 1957 convinced many in the FRG, including Chancellor Adenauer, that the Soviets had surpassed the West in the production of talent and help to generate a new focus on expanding education in the country (see Becker, 1989: 331).

As a result of the country’s growing prosperity in the 1950s, West Germany would experience a spike in its birth rates beginning late in that decade that would peak in 1965 with live births outnumbering deaths by over 400,000 (Federal Research Division – U.S. Library of Congress, n.d.). By the mid-1960s, these changes had begun to impact the total population of students in the general education system. While the total number of students starting their first year at the Volksschule grew slowly between 1950 and 1962 from 800,000 to 816,000, between 1963 and 1966, the number rose from 816,000 to over 937,000. Similar leaps were observed in the in the secondary schools, where the total student population increased from 117,000 in 1960 to 145,000 in 1966 (Kuhlmann, 1970: 51)
It was against this backdrop that a cohesive new discursive framework centered around the need to expand educational opportunities for young Germans would begin to emerge in the FRG. As the previous chapter discussed, the academic agents of the fixed-ability discourse and their counterparts in politics, business, and schooling explicitly rejected the notion that economic growth could be driven by educational expansion. In their view, national wealth was dependent on the cultivation of a specially trained educational elite. Limiting access to the secondary schools and universities to this biologically-endowed group not only reflected the distributional limits of intelligence and ability in West German society, but was the arrangement best suited for producing a leadership class to oversee academics, business, and state administration. Under such a system, the most appropriate educational path for the majority of young Germans consisted of eight or perhaps nine years of general education in the Volksschule/Hauptschule followed by three years of vocational training in the dual system. Expanding these students’ access to higher education would result in a massive decline in educational standards, a weakening in the quality of West German leaders, and an end to German economic competitiveness and productivity.

Within industry, new thinking about the best arrangements between education and the economy had begun to emerge in the late 1950s, reflected most notably in the Etlinger Circle (Etlinger Kreis), a group of industrialists and educationalists led by the Weinheim engineer and businessman Hans Freudenberg that produced a series of influential booklets examining the relationship between the changing conditions of economic production in Germany and the education system. In their writings, Circle members considered the effects of developments in production and technology that had occurred since the school system was formed in the 19th century on the skill demands of industry, concluding that there was now an urgent need to
improve the qualifications of the average worker and increase the percentage of students in the secondary schools.

Industry today needs not only increasing numbers of employees with middle school certificates or the *Abitur*, but beyond that a wide class of reliable employees with improved elementary school training, who are schooled in the skills of cooperation. The unqualified worker who goes through training in the present-day elementary and occupation schools (*Berufsschule*) is not at all sufficiently prepared for life the in the modern world (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970:)

    Although the Ettlinger Circle would advocate for improving and lengthening of elementary school and for greater ease of transfer between different school types in the general education system, the Circle, and business community more generally, remained largely ambivalent on the question of whether structural change in the vertical organization of the education system was desired. The needs of this new economy did not easily translate into clear pedagogical categories and a particular school structure (Kuhlmann, 1970: 57).

    By the late 1950s new theoretical conceptions and empirical studies also questioning the reigning view of education and the economy would begin to emerge in West Germany. Coupled with a new acceptance of governmental planning, the new thinking challenged the view that the West German economy demanded a small percentage of highly qualified elite to guide the economy and a much larger population of workers trained for employment in manual occupations. On the theoretical side, the most influential developments would be the ascendancy of human capital theory (HCT), which had originated among academics in the United States in the 1950s. The central tenet of the theory held that by creating skills needed for economic growth, investment in education should translate into higher personal earnings for the individual and greater overall productivity for the society (Williams: 1982: 98-99). In making this claim, the HCT approach directly contradicted the basic assumption of

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162 Major works in HCT include Mincer (1958) and Becker (1964).
the fixed ability view, since it held that the level of talent in the population was neither constant nor the primary determinant of economic wealth in a society; for adherents to the theory, both ability and production could be raised through a general increase in the provision of education.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the basic ideas of HCT would come to hold significant influence in policymaking circles within the Western countries. A milestone in this process was an OECD conference on education held in Washington, DC in October 1961 attended by most member states’ ministers of finance and – where such ministries existed – education. At the conference, a set of policy experts from European and American research institutes and universities would present the economic case for expanding access to secondary and higher education. True to the Keynesian thinking dominant in economic policymaking circles at the time, conference presenters argued that long-term growth could be enhanced by a greater governmental role in educational forecasting, planning, and investment.

These arguments appeared to fall on receptive ears. In the words of Phillip Coombs, the conference’s chairman and an American assistant secretary of state, the OECD conference represented a “breakthrough” in how governments considered the relationship between education and economic growth and demonstrated the benefits of extending practices of state intervention and long-term target setting from the economic to the educational sphere, particularly among the European members in attendance (quoted in Elvin: 1961: 98).

For West Germans, the conference also highlighted how far the country was falling behind other European nations in training advanced manpower, a fact widely publicized in the FRG by a 1962 report by the KMK on the proceedings of the conference, which on the basis of the conference’s findings called for the rapid further development of school and higher
education policy (OECD-Konferenz et al. 1962; Merritt, et al, 1971: 129). Such expansion had already begun in the West German general education system, albeit at a significantly lower rate than in other countries. The percentage of all 7th graders enrolled in Realschulen jumped from 9.6 percent in 1954 to 17.1 percent in 1966, while the percentage of school graduates who completed studies at Realschule increased from 8.7 percent in 1954 to 12.4 percent in 1963. For the Gymnasium, the percentage of thirteen-year-old boys and girls in attendance increased from 13.1 to 18.3 percent and 10.3 percent to 14.2 percent respectively between 1952 and 1957 and the percentage of the eighteen-year-old cohort completing the Abitur rose from 4.2 percent of the population to the 6.9 percentage between 1950 and 1965 (OECD data, quoted in Robinsohn and Kuhlmann, 1967: 329; Kuhlmann: 1970: 25, Gass-Bolm, 2005: 135). 163

While the 1962 KMK report helped publicize West Germany’s poor comparative performance in education, such findings had been discussed in academic circles for some time. Since the late 1950s Friedrich Edding, an attendee at the Washington conference generally regarded as the FRG’s first professor of Bildungsoekonomie, or economics of education, had demonstrated in his research that education in the FRG was both underperforming and underfunded relative to other nations (Edding, 1959; Hahn, 1998: 118). The significance of the OECD meeting and KMK report lay in how they would communicate the education system’s shortcomings from the academic sphere to the public and political circles.

This communicative process would accelerate significantly in the spring of 1964 with the publication of a series of articles in the German Evangelical church’s popular weekly

163 Enrollment rates at the Gymnasium actually experienced a decline in the late 1950s, as young people opted out of higher education to enter a booming postwar economy in which advanced general education was not a prerequisite for high earnings (from Friedeburg, 1989: 347.)
journal *Christ und Welt* written by Georg Picht that carried the dramatic title “The German Educational Catastrophe” (*Die Deutsche Bildungskatastrophe*). Picht, a theologian and director of an education research institute in Heidelberg who was a former member of the DAEB, translated the empirical findings of Eddings and the OECD and the abstract economic arguments of HCT into language that resonated with the larger public. In so doing, he helped to generate an impending sense of crisis in Germany in a remarkably short time over a system that until recently had been viewed as model for other countries to emulate.

In his analysis of the situation in the FRG, Picht invoked the fundamental HCT premise of the direct relationship between the level of education in a society and its economic growth. Through the Weimar era, he argued, Germany’s education system had performed magnificently, producing the optimal mix of skills and abilities needed to guide the nation from its pre-unification condition as a loosely-affiliated confederation of largely agrarian kingdoms and duchies and a handful of independent city-states to a modern unified and industrialized nation-state in the center of Europe that had quickly risen to the ranks of the world’s great powers. By the 1960s, however, the last generation of Germans to be educated during this golden age was leaving the workforce *en masse*. According to Picht, this development had in fact been underway since the early 1950s but had been masked by the influx of educated East Germans fleeing the DDR. With the newly erected Berlin Wall keeping Easterners from replacing retiring Westerners, the FRG would soon face an enormous dearth of educated labor, endangering everything that had been achieved during the period of postwar reconstruction. As Picht wrote, “An educational crisis means an economic crisis. The economic boom that has lasted up until now will come to a sudden end we lack qualified young workers, without whom no system of production can be successful in the technological
age. If the education system fails, the continued existence of the entire society is threatened” (1964:17).

To avoid this fate, Picht argued that the FRG needed more young people obtaining a secondary qualification for entry into the university. Contrary to the elite notions that held the Gymnasium’s purpose was to produce a small and exclusive cadre of future leaders, Picht directly associated the size of the higher school-leaving population with the country’s prospects for future economic growth. “The number of Abiturienten,” he wrote, “signifies the intellectual potential of a people, and in the modern world the competitiveness of the economy, the level of GNP, and the political position depend on intellectual potential” (Picht, 1964: 26).

According to Picht’s data, nearly every other West European country would be producing significantly higher percentages of Abiturienten than West Germany by 1970, despite the increases in German figures during the first two postwar decades, with countries like Sweden, Norway and France anticipating roughly one in five of their young people would obtain a college entrance certificate, around one in ten in Denmark and Italy, but just over one in twenty in the FRG (Picht, 1964: 25). Not only was a smaller proportion of youth completing academic secondary schooling in West Germany than in other countries, but the foreseeable supply of German college students would not suffice even to fill 1970 requirements for teachers, potentially leading to a shutdown of the system that would deprive the German economy of skilled labor. To avert this doomsday scenario, Picht called for a doubling of the number of Abiturienten the country was producing each year, arguing that significant talent reserves (Begabungsreserven), existed in the FRG, particularly in rural areas.
While Picht’s primary argument for school reform was rooted in economic considerations, he also highlighted the role played by the education system in determining the social configuration of society. In his view, the relationship between and among education, class, and wealth had changed markedly in the 20th century. With the breakdown of the strict social hierarchies and the rise of the modern “performance society” (*Leistungsgesellschaft*), social ascendancy and the distribution of income had largely come to be a function of educational chances. “The school,” Picht wrote, had become “a socio-political direction mechanism, that determines the social structure more strongly than all the social legislation of the last fifty years combined” (1964: 32)

In emphasizing the social consequences of the general education system, Picht was going against a long-standing taboo in German pedagogy. For most of the 20th century, German educationalists had argued that social questions should not enter into education discussions, and certainly not those related to policy (Kuhlmann, 1970: 75). But by the mid-1960s, the manifold social inequalities present in the general education system could no longer be ignored. In the wake of Edding and Picht, a new generation of sociologists educated after the war and trained in modern statistical and surveying methods would begin to demonstrate that entire subpopulations within the FRG were being excluded from higher education. In so doing, they would openly question whether the system’s traditional focus on cultivating a small elite in the Gymnasia and universities corresponded with the modern democratic society that the FRG was purported to be.

The most prominent and influential member of this new generation would be Ralf Dahrendorf, a Tübingen sociology professor who would briefly sit as member of the

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164 An example of this reaction against considering social questions in education is clearly demonstrated in the response of the University of Hamburg to the proposed school reform during the occupation era, quoted in Chapter VI.
*Bundestag* for the FDP during the first SPD/FDP coalition that took office in 1969 and serve in the European Commission before becoming chancellor of the London School of Economics (and later a British citizen\(^\text{165}\)) from 1974 to 1984. In Dahrendorf’s view, the emphasis by Picht, Edding, and others on the economic implications of Germany’s educational shortcomings highlighted only one part of the problem with the system. More important than issues of labor supply and demand was the function of the school in creating equal life chances for the entire population. “A country can neither become nor remain free,” he wrote, “if it seals off from its people the opportunities that general and higher education offer them” (Dahrendorf, 1965: 9).

Such a sealing off was, according to Dahrendorf, just what certain groups in the population were experiencing. Young women, rural and working class youth, and, to a smaller degree, young Catholics, were all significantly underrepresented in higher education, while other groups, most notably the children of civil servants and academics, were dramatically overrepresented (Dahrendorf, 1965, 48-53). For Dahrendorf, the formal equality of opportunity provided for under the Basic Law had clearly been insufficient to stop such gross disparities in the allocation of life chances. Insufficient were the “passive” measures proposed by Picht in reaction to the problems an unmodernized education system; the FRG, in Dahrendorf’s view, required an active education policy (*aktive Bildungspolitik*) that expanded access to higher education for underrepresented groups by establishing education as a fundamental right of the citizenry. Only then could true equality of opportunity (*Chancengelegenheit*) be achieved in West Germany and a democratic society be realized to go alongside the country’s democratic political system.

\(^{165}\) Dahrendorf received a life peerage in 1993 and sat in the House of Lords until his death in 2009.
Like Picht, Dahrendorf’s advocacy for educational expansion offered a challenge to
traditional arrangements. Yet Dahrendorf went considerably further than Picht in engaging
the assumptions of the proponents of static and limited ability, maintaining that such beliefs
were manifestly indefensible from a scientific standpoint and systematically citing and
refuting them in *Bildung ist Bürgerrecht*.

The first of these arguments is directed to the question of the education reserves… Is
there enough talent available to double the number of Abiturienten? Won’t an active
education policy run up against the natural boundaries of ability? And up crops the
ominous number of 5 percent “theoretical ability types” in the Federal Republic, which
alone is to indicate the reservoir of *Abiturienten* and by whose measure there are already
too many students in the higher schools today – a conclusion reached not only by vulgar
pedagogues.

…It is necessary first to recognize that alleged facts such as the discourse (*Rede*) of a
determined percentage of theoretical or some other kind of ability type are not provable
in a scientific sense. Such declarations not only already contain assumptions … that must
be examined, but they are premised on an untenably discontinuous distribution of ability.
The laws of probability suggest that ability of any tendency is arranged on a continual
scale, so that the determination of whether one wants to consider 5, 10, or 15 percent
sufficient for specific purposes is in any event arbitrary. There is no test whose
conclusions permit that only 5 percent – or, in the other extreme 20 percent, have the
ability to complete the *Abitur* successfully, except the experiment of reality itself, namely
allowing as many as possible to take the *Abitur*.

…If the modern ability research has yielded anything clear, it is this: that ability cannot
be statistically seen. A fundamental and clear configuration of the individual that is
present a *priori*, that allows for him to classify once and for all and then filled with
knowledge according to a fixed capacity. Talent is in fact a potential, a highly dynamic
factor. It can be developed; under unfavorable conditions, it can remain unawakened
and even regress. The discourse that ability was a fixed and clear factor is thus pure
vulgar psychology and is at best connected to the science of the turn of the century…the
conclusion remains justified that each operative thesis based on a static conception of
ability with definitive numbers is certainly false (Dahrendorf, 1965: 54-55, 56).

If theoretical ability types were truly fixed in the population, Dahrendorf asked, what
explained the wide variation in the in the percentage of the West German population
obtaining the *Abitur* in different *Länder*? In Rhineland-Palatinate, the figure stood at four
percent, but in the neighboring state of Hesse, eight percent of the same population had passed
the exam, while the number of female *Abitur* holders in West Berlin was twice the number as
in Hamburg. No one, Dahrendorf maintained, could seriously claim on the basis of these facts that the hereditary endowment of talent was double in some Länderv what it was in others. Whatever their acknowledged influence, arguments against expanding access to higher education rooted in claims of fixed and static ability were manifestly false (Dahrendorf, 1965: 55).

It is hard to overstate the effect of Dahrendorf and especially Picht’s writings on the public and political debates over education in West Germany. As Hahn (1998:121) notes, the latter’s German Educational Catastrophe created a veritable panic, complete with a media frenzy, the calling of emergency sessions in both the federal and Land parliaments, and a spate of quickly formulated government programs designed increase the number of Gymnasium students and assuage public concerns. In Bavaria, education authorities established a contingency program to tap its educational reserves, distributing 500,000 brochures with the title “Something Should Become of Your Child” (Aus ihrem Kind soll etwas werden) meant to encourage parents to pursue higher education options for their children. In accordance with Picht’s recommendation, Baden Württemberg education officials pledged to double the number of Abiturenten and began a campaign called “Students to the Countryside” (Studenten aufs Land) that sent secondary school pupils into rural areas to try and convince parents of the benefits of higher education (Hahn, 1998).

In 1965, a group calling itself “Aktion Gemeinsinn, e.V.” (Campaign Public Spirit) began a public relations campaign to boost higher education participation rates, particularly among traditionally underrepresented social categories. The group, whose members included such notables as Peter von Siemens, former Prussian Prince Wilhelm Karl and the wives of both Federal President Heinrich Lübbe and Chancellor Ludwig Erhard, published ads in West
German newspapers calling on parents of middle and lower classes to use their Elternrecht to send their children to better schools and encourage them to seek greater levels of education. Noting how only eight percent of young people in West Germany (compared to 31 percent in France and 64 percent in the USA) spent longer than eight years in fulltime education, the ads highlighted the benefits of extended schooling in terms of increased financial returns. As one of the psychologists commissioned by the group’s advertising company to work on the campaign stated, such convincing was needed among lower class Germans because, “common people think little about higher education” (Der Spiegel, 1965, 12/58).

Young people themselves also became involved. In July 1965, 100,000 German university students held a demonstration in Bonn that called on the government to improve the state of education in the FRG by increasing levels of national planning and enhancing cooperation between the Bund and Länder in financing schools and universities. The protest was the direct result of the Christ und Welt articles, which had, according to Der Spiegel, “inflamed” the Freiburg students’ association and inspired its members to arrange a meeting with Picht and later organize the July demonstration (Der Spiegel, 1965: 31/24).

Within a period of just a few years, education, which had been an issue of comparatively minor importance for most of the FRG’s existence, was suddenly thrust to the fore of the domestic policy agenda, unleashing a reform cycle that would last for the next decade. To be sure, the DAEB had identified serious structural problems in the West German general education system as early as 1955, but it was only with Picht and Dahrendorf that closed discussions among academics and policy experts would become open public debates that would create the opportunity space for political reform.
It is important to note that in terms of policy recommendations, the first wave of reform advocates in West Germany focused largely on expanding the number of high school graduates within the existing structural framework of vertical differentiation. As Herrlitz points out, “Even the education reformers Picht and Dahrendorf in their well known polemics at the beginning of the 1960s were still far from considering a structural reform of the selective system” (2008: 16). In their view, developing talent and expanding opportunity in German education was essentially a quantitative problem, that could be solved by boosting higher education attendance rates – especially for traditionally underrepresented groups – and limiting the percentage of drop-outs (Friedeburg, 1989: 372). For this second wave of reformers, however, neither the economic dimension emphasized by Picht nor the social one highlighted by Dahrendorf would be possible to address without a fundamental reform of the school structure. Simple numerical expansion without structural change would fail to address the problems of a system founded on a set of assumptions that were increasingly being discredited.

Dahrendorf’s attacks on these assumptions in Bildung ist Bürgerrecht reflected a larger trend, particularly within academic sociology, towards reconsidering ability as a biological phenomenon and questioning the influence of the fixed and static viewpoint on the German educational and occupational frameworks (Kuhlmann, 1970: 119). Empirical support for this reconsideration would come from a raft of new studies carried out in the late 1960s that cast serious doubt on the dominant understandings of the relationship between and among social environment, academic aptitude, and selective school systems. In North Rhine Westphalia, one study demonstrated that some 40 percent of Realschule students had the ability – measured by standardized tests – to attend the Gymnasium, while under the existing
placement practices, only six percent of them would be deemed suitable by teachers for entry into the higher school.¹⁶⁶ Other studies also identified the presence of similarly talented students who had been placed in the Hauptschule after the initial selection and were cut off from further educational opportunities (Kuhlmann, 1970: 13).

Observers would also begin to raise doubts not only about whether the three-tiered system was reflective of the ability types present in the population, but whether in a period of technological automation and shifting production techniques it really corresponded to West Germany’s occupational structure as well. If anything, some argued, the relationship had become inverted, with continued vertical differentiation in education actually propping up an outmoded conception of the types of occupations in the West German economy and in so doing delaying necessary adjustments in the labor market and economy. As the sociologist Helmut Schelsky explained it, “three types of occupation do not determine the school system, rather the three-tiered division of schools carries a social and education taxonomy into the system of occupations, that socially and occupational are becoming increasingly questionable” (quoted in Kuhlmann, 1970: 17).

The most influential of this second wave of studies, however, would be the result of the creation of a new federal advisory body on education, the German Education Council (Deutscher Bildungsrat [DBR]) in 1965. While the new commission technically replaced the DAEB, two factors would render the DBR a significantly more powerful body with a clearer mandate and greater influence in shaping political debates. First, the new commission included representatives from the political parties and other interest groups, including trade

¹⁶⁶ Technically, Realschule students believed to be capable of performing at higher levels would enter not the same Gymnasium attended by other students who had taken the traditional route of selection at age 10, but instead would study in the Aufbauf orm, a special transitional type Gymnasium, usually after completion of 8th grade or around age 14 (Kuhlmann, 1970: 13).
unions and churches, in addition to educational researchers and academics. Second, the environment in which the DBR would carry out its charge in the 1960s was radically different from the one in which the DAEB had operated in the 1950s, marked by a much greater sense of urgency among politicians and the public as a result of the debate unleashed by Picht, Dahrendorf, and other agents of the West German counter-discourse (see Hahn, 1998: 117).

Reflecting the tight interlinkages between academic conceptions of talent and the structure of general education, the first report produced by the DBR summarized the current state of research on ability and learning (*Begabung und Lernen*). Edited by the Göttingen pedagogy professor Heinrich Roth, one of the few academics to challenge the reigning static views of talent in the 1950s (see Chapter VII), the report offered the clearest and most comprehensive repudiation of the conceptions of fixed and inherited ability yet articulated. In the report’s introduction, DBR chairman Karl Dietrich Erddmann, a historian from Kiel, provided a vision of a German education system founded on the new principles articulated by the report’s authors. “School organization and didactics will not originate in the idea of a preformed constant quantity of ability,” he wrote, “but will rather be oriented around how ability can be developed, furthered, and guided.” In the future school, Erddmann maintained, the old correspondence between three dominant ability types and three kinds of occupation would give way to a new arrangement in which, “the individual will be helped to find the path to self realization in the highest possible individual performance he can achieve and society will find on the basis of a wide and differentiated promotion of ability those forces which it requires for a variety of functions and occupation” (Erddmann in Roth, 1968: 6).

The 1968 DBR study represented a decisive break from the thinking that had dominated academic and political discussions of education in Germany for decades. As
Ludwig von Friedeburg, a professor of sociology at Free University of Berlin in the 1960s who later became Culture Minister in Hessen (see below) described the findings, “the report compiled by the Bildungsrat from a variety of disciplines laid out a striking compendium on the connection between ability and learning that would be decisive for the broader discussion. Ability was not to be understood as an isolated statistical factor, determined by genetic endowment. In terms of the learning process, it proved to be changeable under the influence of many factors, that together determine whether cognitive capabilities and the potential for performance will develop or not.” For the organization of general education, the implication of these findings was clear: “for the separate school types there is no hereditary biological justification” (Freideburg, 1989: 374).

The new discourse in education in the FRG would be decisive in launching the political reform movement. As Freideburg claimed, “The impetus (to reform) came not from politics or administration but from engaged researchers who drew educational policy conclusions from scientific analyses… the concept of ability (Begabungsbegriff) moved to the center of academic discussions with considerable consequences for education policy” (Freideburg, 1989: 370). Among the political parties, all would ultimately undergo major policy reorientations by the end of the 1960s, though the adjustment process would be particularly divisive and ultimately incomplete for the Christian Democrats. At the time of Picht’s article’s publication, the tacit consensus on differentiation that had existed since the late 1940s had yet to be broken. Picht himself had maintained in the German Educational Catastrophe that while some individual politicians had shown leadership in education, the West German parties in general had largely failed to respond to the problems his work had highlighted, writing that “the only real interest that can be detected [in debates on education
policy] is the interest in not committing oneself. In this point there exists between the federal chancellor and all factions of the Bundestag an unclouded harmony” (Picht, 1964: 93). In a 1965 interview, he accused the parties of reaching a “standstill agreement” (Stillhalte-Abkommen), in which they secretly promised each other not to publicly argue over the issue in the run up to the 1965 federal election (Der Spiegel, 1965: 28/25).

Whatever Picht’s assessments of the parties, it was clear that of the two Volksparteien, the Social Democrats were the more sympathetic to his conclusions and recommendations. Indeed, inside the SPD a fundamental policy had been taking place since the early 1960s that would move the party from its passive acceptance of the reconstituted education system premised on vertical differentiation and its relative indifference to education towards a more reformist policy orientation and the elevation of education – along with science and research – to the top of the party’s priority list. This party’s new reformist stance was evident in a debate on education policy in the Bundestag in the spring of 1964, when Ulrich Lohmar, an SPD MdB and academic sociologist quoted directly and at length from Picht’s Christ und Welt article on the need for greater coordination and planning in education by federal agencies. Lohmar further drew on Picht’s argument on the need for accessing the reserves of talent available in the population, comparing attempts in the FRG in this regard unfavorably with those in Britain, where the Robbins report had recently been published.

There are reserves of talent within our people that have not been sufficiently tapped in many Bundesländer… We can learn something … from our British neighbors. The British government found it necessary some three years ago to appoint a commission designed to address the state and developmental possibilities of the education system in Great Britain…Lord Robbins and his colleagues calculated considerable reserves of talent among the young people of England. They sought these reserves among young women, manual laborers, and the population active in the rural economy. Great Britain is an industrialized country like the Federal Republic. What suppositions support the view that matters in our country should be different than in Great Britain? …The Social Democratic fraction of the Bundestag is of the view that we collectively must
consider how the “education emergency” in our country can be overcome as quickly as possible (Verhandlungen des Bundestages, 4 Wahlperiode, 118th Sitzung, 4 March 1964).

A major turning point for the SPD would come later in 1964 with the publication of the party’s Bildungspolitische Leitsätze (Education Policy Principles). Noting the comparative underdevelopment of the West German school system emphasized by the OECD and KMK reports, the document called for a systemic reform of the system around the principle of “sufficient freedom of choice, in order for each young person to be able to allow for the corresponding encouragement of his abilities and interests” (SPD, 1964: 17). The Leitsätze proposed a new and more horizontal structure for general education, centered around the implementation of the Mittelstufe, a two-year middle stage similar to the Förderstufe proposed by the DAEB in the 1959 Rahmenplan in which core courses would be offered to students of mixed-ability. Like the Förderstufe, this Mittelstufe was to be a probationary period of observation, which was intended to allow those students who demonstrated “practical” abilities to develop alongside those with more “abstract” thinking skills. Following the Mittelstufe would be parallel academic (Studienstufe) and vocational stages (Berufstufe). While the former could lead to the traditional upper level (Oberstufe) of the Gymnasium and the Abitur and the latter to the dual system, it would also be possible under the proposed framework for students in the vocational pathway ultimately to obtain a university entrance qualification, thereby eliminating the Gymnasium’s monopoly on access to university study.

Harmonizing the positions of the Bund faction and the party members in the individual Länder around the proposals suggested in the Leitsätze proved, however to be problematic for the party leadership. Sensing the growing political salience of education
policy, the SPD sought to better coordinate its disparate positions and update its policy again, giving the task at its 1966 conference to its Education Policy Committee, led by future FRG president Johannes Rau and Carl-Heinz Evers, who oversaw school policy in the West Berlin Senate.\textsuperscript{167} Unchained from the need for consensus that tied the hands of the party while in government with the CDU/CSU during the Grand Coalition (1966-69),\textsuperscript{168} Rau and Evers sought to formulate a policy that took into account not only the opinions of academic and policy experts, but the demands of the burgeoning student protest movement, which by 1967 had emerged as a significant political force (Friedeburg, 1989: 395). The result would come in January 1969 with the party’s adoption of the Committee’s “Model for a Democratic School System” (\textit{Modell eines demokratischen Bildungswesens}). Citing the need to “secure equal start and education opportunities for young people, independent of the income of their parents” (SPD, 1969: 9), the Committee’s document called for a radical change in the general education system of the FRG.

Under the proposed model, the \textit{Hauptschule} and \textit{Realschule} would be merged with the \textit{Gymnasium} to form a new type of lower secondary school that all students would attend, known as the \textit{Gesamtschule}. Following this lower stage would be a mandatory two-years in upper secondary school in which students could pursue both academic and vocational courses of study. The SPD model also called for the transformation of post-secondary and tertiary education, proposing that the various types of vocational and technical schools – which had long held significantly lower prestige than the traditional universities – be merged with the universities to form new comprehensive higher education institutions, or \textit{Gesamthochschulen}.

\textsuperscript{167} Evers had been the driving force behind the introduction of experimental comprehensive schools in West Berlin in 1964 (see Kuhlmann, 1970: 44).

\textsuperscript{168} The Federal Republic’s first Grand Coalition of Christian and Social Democrats was formed following the departure of the FDP from its coalition with the CDU/CSU and the resignation of Chancellor Erhard.
In an interview Evers claimed that the entire education system in the FRG merited such a dramatic overhaul because it met neither democratic principles nor the demands of a modern industrial society. Germany, in his view, had been in a “deep freeze” in its thinking about education, and continued to rely on antiquated conceptions of vocation in debates over schooling, practical training for professions, and the universities (Der Spiegel, 1969, 42/102).

In the evolution of the SPD’s position on the organization of general education between the early 1950s to the late 1960s, we see significant parallels with the trajectory followed by the British Labour Party between the Education Act’s passage in 1944 and the mid-1950s, when Labour formally adopted the comprehensivization of secondary schooling as a policy aim. In both instances, the shift in party position would coincide with the emergence of new ideas that challenged the traditional justifications for separation according to perceived ability in general education. The crucial difference between the two party’s positions would not be about policy, but about the timing of their respective adoptions. Upon achieving power in Bonn, the West German Social Democrats would encounter a markedly different political, social, and economic climate than their counterparts across the North Sea had.

For the FDP, which had been power at the federal-level with the Christian Democrats for much of the FRG’s existence, timing was also crucial. The party’s new found independence in 1966 from the limits imposed by serving as a junior partner in the CDU/CSU coalition coincided with the emergence of the new education discourse. Up until then, only a handful of Liberal party figures, most notably Dahrendorf himself and Hildegard Hamm-Brücher, a secretary of state in the Culture Ministry in Hesse, had called for major changes to the education system. In its 1967 Aktionprogramm, however, the party would assume a far
more reformist stance, adopting Dahrendorf’s slogan “Education is a Citizen’s Right” as the guiding principle behind its new policy.

Significantly, the new FDP program went beyond calling for an increase in the number of Abiturienten, proposing instead the structural reform of the vertically organized system. As Hamm-Brücher argued, “the raising of the Abiturienten quota to 9, 12, or 15 percent will not solve our problem – our problem concerns identifying the education system with the democratic form of state and its societal conditions” (quoted in Friedeburg, 1989: 396). The program called for the implementation of the mixed-ability stage for grades 5 and 6 and a much more cautious carrying out of the selection process. In line with the new thinking, the program maintained that such changes were needed to provide students’ with later opportunities to demonstrate aptitudes for particular courses of study, since “ability is not only a hereditary disposition but also a developmental process” (FDP, 1967: 10).

The FDP program also called for experimental deployment of differentiated Leistungsschule (performance school), a type of comprehensive secondary school in which students would be separated into different tracks on the basis of ability and performance but would have access to the same types of courses, including the traditional Gymnasium curriculum of ancient languages and mathematics, as well as technical and vocational courses (FDP, 1967: 10). The call for a more democratic school was reiterated in the party’s 1969 electoral platform, which placed education at the center of its policy and again called for the establishment of a type of differentiated Gesamtschule (FDP, 1969).

Among the Christian Democrats, the response to the new education discourse was significantly less welcoming than within the SPD and FDP, at least initially. Answering a query put forward by the SPD in the Landtag in Baden-Württemberg on Picht’s reform
proposals, CDU Culture Minister Dr. Gerhard Storz ceded little ground, challenging both Picht’s forecasts on the future need for Abiturienten and his understanding of the role of the Gymnasium as a quality assurance mechanism in the West German education system.

before one calls for a doubling of Abiturienten, one should consider anew the purpose and the actual function of the Abitur… now and in the future it will depend on allowing through into our overfilled academic institutions to the greatest extent possible only suitable and well prepared new students.

Plans,… of such an ostensibly revolutionary sort, run the risk of leaving out of consideration the freedom of the individual, the freedom to select a profession, and lastly the right of parents (Elternrecht). Eventually, total planning is part of the total and authoritarian state…the German education system is structured in some ways differently than those in other European countries. It is not, however, also worse and more backwards, as today so often is incorrectly concluded. Abroad, at least in the USA, people hold a rather high opinion of it (Landtag von Baden-Württemberg, Beilage 4005, 27 February 1964)

Chancellor Erhard, who himself had helped to elevate the standing of education as a state priority by claiming in his inaugural address in 1963 that education had become as important in modern times as the social question had been in the 19th century, did little to counter Picht’s assertions regarding the indifference of West German political leadership to the school system. Asked about the June 1965 student protest in Bonn inspired by Picht, Erhard claimed it had not made “the slightest impression” on him (Der Spiegel, 1965, 28/29). He later stated that the discussion of an educational catastrophe was becoming a “giant nuisance,” and argued that that it was the result of “intellectualism tipping into idiocy, when intellectuals only fuel dissatisfaction, but understand nothing of the issue.” Equally harsh in his assessment of the public debate that Picht’s writings had set off was CSU Chairman Franz Josef Strauss, who claimed that the warnings of a coming crisis in education were nothing more than “idiotic claptrap” (Der Spiegel, 1965: 34/24).

Within just a few years, however, the Christian Democrats, like the British Conservatives in the early 1960s, would be unable to ignore the reformist momentum inspired
by the changing discursive conditions. The same party whose leader had so thoroughly
dismissed the findings of Picht and other critics of the educational system in 1965, would by
1969 have carried out, if not a U-turn, then at least a hard left on the question of horizontal
reform. The first signs of a programmatic shift had come in 1968, when the party dropped
their longstanding support for the confessional separation of schools in their Berlin Party
Program. Fearful of being labeled “an enemy of reform” in the late 1960s, the party raced to
reformulate its positions on educational policy to better suit the shifting public attitudes in the
run up to the 1969 federal elections.169

The most dramatic display of this new found enthusiasm for reform in the party took
place at its cultural policy congress held in March 1969 in Bad Godesberg. Here leading
party figures members, including CDU General Secretary Bruno Heck, indicated their
willingness to consider for the first time establishing the two-year mixed ability stage and
even the introduction of the Gesamtschule, though Heck went to lengths to emphasize that the
party would consider it only on an experimental basis and not support its general introduction
as a new school type in the general education system. He did, however, pledge that the party
would “accept good results,” an indication that the Christian Democrats would be open to a
more widespread deployment of comprehensive schools in the future. As the party’s federal
executive committee (Bundesvorstand) expressed its position, “the three-tiered system should
not be viewed as a taboo that must be treated as something given to us by God.” (quoted in

Not all Christian Democrats were sympathetic to this newfound party progressivism
on education. Bavaria’s CSU Culture Minister Ludwig Hubner rejected in general terms any

169 Such perceptions of the party were particularly strong among first time voters. In a survey taken prior to the
start of the 1969 federal campaign, new voters indicated that they considered the SPD to be more competent on
education issues by a margin of 44 to 26 percent (Edinger, 1970: 564).
introduction of the *Gesamtschule*, calling them “hotbeds for performance neurotics” and indicated his unwillingness to consider the results of any scientific study of their efficacy. Other CDU figures were less colorful in expressing their opposition, citing concerns with the costs of introducing the *Gesamtschule*. Representatives of the *Gymnasia* within the party, for their part, fought to ensure that the party pledged to retain vertical differentiation at least for the period after the two-year observation stage. Whatever the divisions within the CDU/CSU over the issue, the fact that party leaders were opening up to the possibility of horizontal reform represented a significant change from the past. As *Der Spiegel* reported, “the formerly wide defensive front of the CDU/CSU against the *Gesamtschule* has, as [the cultural congress] demonstrates, begun to waver” (*Der Spiegel*, 1969: 11/83).

By 1969, the CDU/CSU seemed to be in a position similar to that of the British Conservatives in the early part of the decade. While some factions remained as resolutely opposed to any change in the three tiered system, the general trend was towards accepting horizontal reforms, at least on an experimental basis. The discursive shift that began with OECD conference in 1961 and was accelerated by the writings of Picht, Dahrendorf, and the new pedagogues had suddenly and sharply influenced what actors perceived to be appropriate in the organization of general education. Under the new conditions, the Christian Democrats could no longer simply appeal to the “natural” biological basis of vertical differentiation and early selection or Adenauer-era slogans of “no experiments” as the basis of its support for the traditional school structure.

The cracks that were appearing within the Christian Democrats previously united front were mirrored in those of other core members of the reform resistance coalition. Conditions for reform of the type initiated by Crosland in 1965 in Britain and carried out in other
European countries during the decade seemed to be present in the FRG. Writing at the apex of the counter discourse’s influence at end of the 1960s, Kuhlmann (1970: 45) captured this sense that change was coming, at long last, to Germany’s 19th century education system.

For the first time since 1949 the political coalitions in the question of comprehensive schooling can no longer be predicted. Liberals and Christian Democrats, church leaders, and Catholic teacher associations, farmer associations, businesses and also Gymnasium teacher associations are now open to discussion and even to individual trials. The educationalists and sociologists are in the meantime in a position to contribute practical arguments, if not yet scientifically controlled experiments in schools. The conversation is now nearly back where it was when it was cut off after 1949.


In October 1969 Willy Brandt assumed the chancellorship as the first Social Democratic leader of the West German Republic, governing in coalition with the FDP as a junior partner. In his government declaration presented in the Bundestag on October 28th, Brandt spelled out his agenda for reforming education, emphasizing the need for cooperation across levels of government in creating a common long-term plan for the system and calling for the universal acceptance of a tenth year of mandatory schooling and the highest possible percentage of students receiving education up until the age of eighteen.

The tasks of education and science can only be solved collectively by the Bund, Länder, and Gemeinde (communities)... serious problems in the entire education system result from the fact that it has hitherto been unsuccessful in coordinating the four primary areas of our education organization – schools, colleges and universities, vocational training, and adult education – according to a transparent and rational conception. As long as a common plan is lacking, it is not possible to engage the people and resources needed to achieve optimal results...the Federal Government will be led by the knowledge that the central mission of the Basic Law, to give all citizens equal chances, has not come close to being fulfilled. Planning in education must contribute decisively to the realization of social democracy (Verhandlungen des Bundestages, 6 Wahlperiode, 1 Sitzung, October 28, 1969).

Brandt’s government would enter office on the heels of three major developments in the education policy, all of which took place earlier in 1969. In February, the DBR published its recommendations for the introduction of comprehensive schools in the FRG in the report
On The Establishment of School Experiments with the Comprehensive School (Einrichtung von Schulversuchen mit Gesamtschulen). The title of this report alone revealed a great deal about the differences between the British movement to comprehensivization and the West German process that the DBR report would initiate. Although the British central government would begin the national drive to dismantle the tripartite system with the publication of Circular 10/65 in 1965, comprehensive secondary schools had been operating in local areas in England and Wales since the early 1950s and expanding in number ever since. In the FRG, by contrast, only ten Gesamtschulen existed in the whole country at the time of the 1969 DBR report’s publication. On the eve of a reform initiative to remake the West German general education system along more horizontal lines, the comprehensive school would still be considered an experiment in the FRG, even to many of its supporters. Such was the view of the DBR report itself, which made clear that the pedagogical arguments for establishing comprehensive schools in the FRG were only hypotheses that still required testing under scientific controls (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1969: 21). The report called for the pilot deployment of some forty Gesamtschulen across the Länder, with a major evaluation and appraisal scheduled for 1976.

Whatever the limits of its proposals, the report also conveyed a clear sense of the potential benefits of horizontal change in the West German education system. According to the study, under the traditional system too many children were denied an academic type of education, with students’ school achievement largely dependent on their social background. In the view of the Council, the Gesamtschule could – in theory – help working class students overcome this cultural disadvantage and provide greater equality of opportunity. The report postulated that early selection could lead to errors in school placement and that the
Gesamtschule, by delaying differentiation, could provide students with the opportunity to
demonstrate their “true” aptitudes before they were locked in to a specific educational,
occupational, and social class-determining path.

It is the danger of selection that the individual very early in his self-consciousness is
committed to a certain performance category through the perceptions and judgments of
others. Even if this determination is objectively false or becomes objectively false by the
further development of the pupil, the opportunity for the individual to assert himself against
such a determination in his self-assessment or the assessment of others is very small… For this
reason, performance differentiation is not carried out too early in the Gesamtschule and first
in few subjects and there in small measure… Such a progressive differentiation can hinder
the premature determination of the pupil for a particular performance level. Selection takes
place, but it does not have the character of finality; it can be revised more easily and for a
longer period of time than in the present system (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1969: 27).

The DBR suggested that the experimental schools be set up as “integrated”
comprehensives, in that is, schools in which most courses would be attended by all students
regardless of ability levels and each student would obtain the same qualification at the end of
10th grade. Under the integrated model, students had the option of continuing their studies
in the equivalent of an upper-level Gymnasium or an advanced secondary level that included
both general and vocational courses. When the KMK approved the experimental program in
November 1969, however, Christian Democratic Land education ministers insisted that the
“co-operative” type of comprehensive school, in which the three different schools of the
traditional system would be merged into a single facility but differentiation otherwise largely
retained, also be permitted. Students in co-operative comprehensives would still be placed in
separate tracks based on traditional selection criteria, although faculty and staff would work
together to facilitate transfers across the different tracks (Führ, 1997: 125-126).

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170 Some differentiation does persist in the integrated model through the provision of advanced-level courses in
certain subjects, including math, German, and to a lesser extent the natural sciences (Führ: 1997: 125).
171 Also known as an “additive” comprehensive school (OECD, 1973: 33).
The second development preceding the ascendancy of the SPD-FDP coalition in Bonn concerned a change in the distribution of educational policymaking power between the Bund and Länder. The exclusive and jealously guarded authority of the Länder over education had been an obstacle to educational change since at least the Weimar Republic. But as Hahn notes, the Grosse Koalition between the CDU/CSU and SPD that assumed power in 1966 helped to reduce tensions between federal and regional administrations, opening the door to greater coordination in issues related to the school system (1998: 117). Some of the groundwork for this coordination had already been laid by the joint efforts in the expansion of higher education facilities under the advice of the Wissenschaftsrat. This increased role for the federal government would be formalized in May 1969 with the passage of an amendment to Article 91 of the Basic Law that enhanced the power of the Bund in educational planning and budgeting and led to the creation of a new Federal Ministry for Education and Science in Bonn. To help facilitate coordination between state and the newly empowered federal authorities, the Federal-State-Commission for Educational Planning (Bund-Länder-Kommission für Bildungsplanung, [BLK]) was also established (OECD, 1973: 34).

The final development in 1969 was the passage of a law overhauling the governance of the West German vocational training system. Since at least the 1950s, West German trade unions had been pushing for a new vocational training law that would provide for a greater state role in regulating the in-firm training component of the dual system, but had faced resistance from both the industrial and craft sectors, which wished to retain their traditional autonomy in overseeing apprentice programs. The issue would remain alive, however, in the 1960s, partly due to pressure from the SPD and growing public concern with the system,

Upon joining the Grand Coalition in 1966, the SPD proposed a new law, forcing the CDU/CSU to offer its own legislation and leading to the passage of a compromise bill (*Berufsbildungsgesetz*) in August 1969. The law contained several changes to the existing system, marked most notably the creation of a new Federal Institute for Vocational Training Research (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildungsforschung*, [BBF])\(^{172}\) to advise the federal government on all issues related to vocational training and set standards for the skill content and length of apprenticeships for particular occupations. The law also created committees at the *Länder*-level to oversee planning and classroom training and help ensure that curricula and standards remained uniform across the country. While many of these provisions were novel, the new framework also demonstrated significant continuity with traditional arrangements, especially regarding the role of local chamber of commerce (*Industrie- und Handelskammern*), which largely retained competence over firm-based component of training, including the administration of certification exams (Thelen, 2004: 262).

The effect of the vocational training law on general education debates was significant. Increasing the state’s role in the provision of vocational education provided a new institutional site through which state actors could seek to harmonize the social and economic objectives that the counter discourse had highlighted in the 1960s, shifting the campaign for “equality of opportunity” to the vocational sphere, where it would face less opposition from resistance actors than in general education (Hearnden, 1976b: 56).

\(^{172}\) Later the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (*Bundesinstituts für Berufsbildung* [BIBB]).
Beyond the formal legal and institutional changes that took place in the FRG in the late-1960s was the more general shift in the attitudes and expectations of the population. West Germany in 1969 was in many ways not the same country is had been in 1964 when the “crisis” in general education has first erupted. The student movement and the rise of the so-called Extraparliamentary Opposition (Außerparlamentarische Opposition [APO]) had reached its peak in the intervening years. Protesting conditions in universities, the American war in Vietnam, and emergency legislation passed by the Grand Coalition\textsuperscript{173}, and seeking to confront older generations on their roles during the Nazi era, West German students were the most visible symbol of a broader transformation that was taking place in society. Within a few short but dramatic years, the political climate in the FRG had radically and unalterably changed.

It was within this new context that the SPD-FDP government would begin its reform initiatives. As Minster for Education and Research, Brandt selected Hans Leussink, a nonpartisan academic, and as State Secretaries Hamm-Brücher of the FDP and Klaus von Dohnanyi, then a relatively junior SPD minister.\textsuperscript{174} The education policy team tasked with carrying out this ambitious agenda would be noted for both its zealous commitment to horizontal reform in education and its relative lack of political skills needed to carry out such changes (Heidenheimer, 1974).

The reform process developed rapidly after the SPD-FDP coalition took office. In April 1970, the DBR released its Structural Plan for the Education System (Strukturplan für das Bildungswesen [Strukturplan]) a far-reaching advisory report that provided recommendations for changes in all aspects of the German education system except higher

\textsuperscript{173} The emergency acts (Notstandsgesetze) passed in 1968 amended the Basic Law to provide the government with authority to, in effect, suspend the Law’s rules the event of a natural disaster or military crisis.

\textsuperscript{174} Dohnanyi would later serve as mayor of Hamburg from 1981 to 1988.
education, which remained under the purview of the *Wissenschaftsrat*. While advocating significant changes to the traditional education system, the plan was, in the words of the DBR Chair Helmut Becker, nevertheless a “fundamental consensus program” that sought to balance the range of opinions represented in the Council (OECD, 1973: 35). Instead of calling for a full comprehensivization of the secondary sector, as many Social Democrats wished to see, the *Sturkturplan* instead proposed a complicated new arrangement that sought to lessen the degree of stratification in the system while at the same time retaining its basic differentiated structure.

The most controversial element of the *Sturkturplan* was also its least original. As the DAEB had with the *Förderstufe* a decade earlier, the DBR similarly proposed ending selection at age ten by introducing a common orientation stage (*Orientierungsstufe*) for grades five and six, in which all students would be taught according to the same curriculum. A students’ performance during the orientation stage would form the basis of teachers’ recommendations for placement in one of the officially recognized school types, which now – befitting earlier DBR recommendations from its 1969 report – would include the *Gesamtschule* in addition to the three traditional schools.

The *Sturkturplan* also called for the establishment of a truly “permeable” (*durchlässig*) school system, in which “no educational track should lead to a dead-end” and shut students out of further advancement possibilities (Deutscher Bildungsrat, 1970: 38). It also proposed that all students be awarded the same qualification, the *Sekundarabschulss I* (Secondary Leaving Certificate I), following completion of the tenth school year, or what the Council termed *Sekundarstufe I* (Secondary Stage I). Significantly, the certificate was to be awarded

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175 In the first version of the *Sturkturplan*, the names for the qualifications granted upon completion of the lower and upper secondary stages were *Abitur I* and *Abitur II*, but appeared to have been changed in later versions in deference to traditional terminology (see OECD, 1973: 35).
to all students regardless of the school type they attended and was to be based on their performance in nine commonly taught subjects. Following this first stage would be the upper level *Sekundarstufe II*, where students could take general or vocational courses of study but in either instance would again obtain the same qualification, the *Sekundarabschluss II*, a broader version of the traditional *Abitur*. The DBR expressed its hope in the *Strukturplan* that by 1980 roughly one-half of a given age group would be attending an upper level secondary school. The report also proposed that differences in the training of elementary and secondary teachers, another long-standing contentious feature of the traditional German system that would finally be resolved by the state’s requiring that all teachers obtain a university qualification.

While a step in the right direction, the *Strukturplan* simply did not go far enough for the new Brandt government. In its June 1970 Education Report (*Bildungsbericht*), the SPD-FDP coalition issued a significantly more extensive set of reforms. The report acknowledged the contribution that the differentiated education system had made to the country in the past but maintained that under the conditions of democracy and social change a new system was merits.

The German educational system, which was established in the 19th century not according to democratic, but class and authoritarian state ideas on order and education, produced achievements acknowledge throughout the world under the social conditions and criteria pertaining at that time. However despite many partial reforms and individual corrections, this system no longer meets the demands of present social development (Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft, 1970: 6)

Invoking from the language of Dahrendorf, the report maintained that the reform of the education system was not merely to be carried out for the purposes of technical progress or economic efficiency, but to achieve the goals of social policy and the realization of the fundamental right to education thorough the establishment of a system in which “equality of
opportunity through the individual promotion of talent” rather than the cultivation of an elite class of well-educated was the primary principle (Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft, 1970: 9). The Bildungsbericht noted that since its founding the FRG had experienced significant increases in the number of pupils across the institutions of higher education, including the Gymnasium and Realschule, full-time vocational schools, and traditional universities, but that this expansion had taken places with reform to the education in “neither in substance nor in structure” (Bundesminister für Bildung und Wissenschaft, 1970: 14, 39).

Expanding on the recommendations provided in the Strukturplan and the 1970 study by the Wissenschaftsrat on the reform and expansion of higher education,176 the Bildungsbericht endorsed three primary changes to the education system. First, it called for the universal provision of pre-school for children ages three and four and a lowering of the elementary school starting age from six to five. For the secondary sector, the report proposed extensive changes, marked most notably by the establishment of a system of integrated comprehensive schools. As the OECD noted in a report on the German reforms, this recommendation indicated “an explicit break with the traditional tripartite school system” (OECD, 1973: 38). Finally, the report called for a system of integrated comprehensive institutions of higher education (Gesamthochschulen), eliminating the elite standing that the traditional universities had held since at least the era of Humboldt’s 19th century reforms.

It is important to note that the SPD-FDP proposals were not “simply” about reforming the structure of schooling, but at another level represented an attempt to change a key element

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176 In its 1970 report, the Science Council provided estimates for the expansion of higher education in the coming decade, estimating that the population would more than double between 1970 and 1980 from 450,000 to around one million students. To meet the varied demands of this expanded student body, the Council called for a reorganization of higher education, including the creation of “comprehensive” higher education institutions advocated in the 1969 SPD education model (OECD, 1973: 35-36).
in the West German model of capitalism, namely the tight interlinkages between educational qualifications and the occupational labor market. Such a change, moreover, would not be a by-product or unintended consequence of school reform, but stood as an explicit goal of policymakers in the coalition. In an interview with OECD representatives in 1971, Hamm-Brücher acknowledged that a loosening of these linkages was a fundamental aim of the SPD-FDP reform effort (OECD, 1973: 125). The realization of the coalition’s proposals, would inject, by German standards, a radical degree of flexibility, mobility, and autonomy into the labor market at a crucial period for advanced industrialized democracies. By the early 1970s, the “Golden Age” of European postwar capitalism that had been characterized by high levels of economic growth, employment, and state welfare benefits was coming to a close. The final three decades of the century would be characterized by a significantly different set of conditions, most notably the end of the Cold War and the division of Germany, the acceleration of global and European economic integration, the rise of the knowledge and service economies, and increased levels of state austerity in the face of slower economic growth and declining birthrates. Were it to be achieved, structural reform in education along the lines of the Bildungsbericht would fundamentally alter Germany’s late 20th century adaptation to these macro-level changes.

Such an achievement, however, would not come to pass. Despite the increased power of federal education authorities as a result of the amendment to the Basic Law, changes to the education system would still require the approval from the CDU/CSU-led Länder. In the first meeting of the BLK in July 1970, sharp disagreements between the CDU/CSU and SPD/FDP representatives emerged over which type of Gesamtschule should be deployed in the pilots and the speed at which such schools would be introduced. Whereas the 1969 Bildungsrat
report had recommended experiments with different types of Gesamtschule models, including the less-horizontal “additive” type favored by the Christian Democrats, the government’s own Bildungsbericht had envisaged a single “integrated” model for the entire country. The CDU/CSU representatives in the BLK also called for longer periods of experimentation with the Gesamtschule, pushed for the use of pedagogical – rather than social – standards to be used in evaluating their performance, and emphasized the need for greater permeability in the existing system as a solution to rigidities in the existing three-tiered system (OECD, 1973: 40).

In practice, the Christian Democratic-led Länder would demonstrate considerable variation in their experimental implementation of Gesamtschulen called for by the DBR. Some Länder, such as Rhineland Palatinate, led by CDU party chairman and future chancellor Helmut Kohl, simply elected not to establish Gesamtschulen on even a small-scale basis. In others, significant number of comprehensive schools were created alongside traditional schools and even provided with significant levels of funding. As Heidenheimer points out, however, such generosity may well have been part of a CDU strategy to demonstrate just how expensive the new schools would be relative to the benefits they provided (Heardenheimer, 1974: 400). The cost of the reforms proved to be another issue of contention between the governing coalition and the Christian Democratic opposition. The Bildungsbericht had called for education investments to increase dramatically from 20 billion DM in 1969 to 100 billion DM in 1980. Although much of this increase would be due to inevitable rises in teacher salaries and the effects of general inflation, the figure of 100 billion DM quickly became a “political football, ” seized by the CDU/CSU and the conservative press as the “cost of education reform” in the Federal Republic (OECD, 1973: 39).
While cost would continue to be a concern, SPD and FDP reformers were facing a further challenge to their plans from a growing conservative backlash in the country. As Hahn writes, “the various reform projects were gathering momentum at a time of change in the intellectual climate. The student protest had run its course and was succeeded by an isolated, extreme left-wing terrorist movement, provoking hysterical overreaction in society” (1998: 126). By the early 1970s, many Germans had begun to associate education reform more generally with demands from the radical student movement and come to distrust “progressive” educational ideas, regardless of the specific sector. In this context, the SPD-FDP’s strategy of “bundling” its reforms for secondary, higher, and vocational education in a single sweeping change initiative – which may well made sense in the late 1960s when the resonance of the education counter discourse was at its strongest among politicians and the population – would by the early 1970s prove to have serious drawbacks. This backlash would begin to spill out in political debates over the structural reforms in the general education system proposed by the DBR and the coalition.

In a Bundestag debate on the Bildungsbericht on June 9, 1971 held following the first assessment report on the new Gesamtschulen, the SPD-FDP reform proposals came under attack by the Christian Democrats, who and sought to link the coalition’s plans for school change to the radical student movement in urging rejection of the government proposals (see Heidenheimer, 1974: 399). The CDU/CSU parliamentary faction even raised the subject of government funding of left-wing student groups and the affiliation between the SPD its student organization (Verhandlungen des Bundestages, 6 Wahlperiode, 126 Sitzung, June 9, 1971, 7251-7266).
During the debate on the *Bildungsbericht*, Anton Pfeiffer of the CDU outlined the party’s opposition to the government’s reforms, arguing that their enactment would not only be excessively expensive but would create an unmanageable glut of *Gymnasium* graduates. As an alternative, he advocated reforming the system around principles of greater permeability and transfer within the traditional framework.

I believe [ideological beliefs] are seen most clearly [in the views of the SPD-FDP] that differentiation in the present school system simply allocates particular social classes just like that into the individual school types, that it is outdated, that it is judged to be oriented on a reputedly non-democratic social order, and therefore is to be liberalized to the point of dissolution. This would mean however that billions should be invested in these newly recommended and, as previously stated, untested institutions.

We ..support that the reform be carried out in a flexible system .. and that this system seeks the realization of horizontal and vertical permeability.

The federal government proposes in their Bildungsbericht that in the future one-half of the children in a given age cohort finish Abitur II or complete the Sekundarstufe II. About this let me say briefly the following. From 1952 to 1969 … we have succeeded in raising the percentage of Abiturienten from 4 percent to approximately 10 percent. Everyone in this parliament welcomes this. However, on the other side we know quite certainly that this increase in the Abiturienten rate could be purchased only through bottlenecks and difficulties. If we make the attempt to raise this number still further in the next ten years to 40 percent, it can lead ultimately to catastrophic conditions in the Gymnasia, in the secondary schools; it can only lead to a lowering of standards, which means less equality of opportunity and fewer education chances for the individual…

The question of how the 100DM Billion annual that had been named before or the other not minor amounts that are mentioned today should be broken up, remains to today unanswered. It was not asked by us, but by the finance ministers of the SPD in the Bundesländer. Instead of giving a concrete answer to this question, State Secretary von Dohnanyi accuses us in the debate over reform policy of lacking the courage to modernize, as if the success of education reform depends not on the admittedly arduous calculation of financial means, but on factors such as courage and modernity (Verhandlungen des Bundestages, 6 Wahlperiode, 126 Sitzung, June 9, 1971, 7268 - 7269)

By the early 1970s, many of the moderate CDU voices of the late 1960s had been silenced and fallen in line behind more conservative (and generally southern) anti-comprehensive forces in the party. On such voice, Rhineland-Palatinate State Secretary for Education Hanna-Renate Laurien, performed a particularly public *volte face* when she
declared her opposition to the federal government’s plans for horizontal reform in a 1971 television interview in which she maintained that contrary to SPD and FDP claims, the traditional vertical system did not simply reproduce existing class structures, highlighting how more working class students than ever were studying in the Gymnasium (Heidenheimer, 1974: 399).

While the Christian Democrats were uniting in their opposition to horizontal reform, the exact opposite was happening in the SPD. The first blow came with the resignation of Leussink as Minister in March 1972. The experience of the past three years had clearly demonstrated that reform on the scale proposed in the government’s Bildungsbericht required that a seasoned senior party leader with experience negotiating the hard politics of Bund-Land relations head the Education Ministry. Unfortunately for Brandt, no such figure was readily available, leading him to select the reform-committed but politically-inexperienced Dohnanyi as his new minister. In Dohnanyi’s view, reform had stalled because the opposition had managed to convince much of the population that experiments in the Gesamtschulen had been failures and that the overall effort was futile. Invoking successful comprehensivization movements in other countries, he argued in a 1972 press release that the realization of the Bildungsbericht recommendations could, from a comparative perspective, hardly be viewed as a radical development.

Because there exists a real chance for educational reform for the first time in the history of the Federal Republic, conservative forces have formed a massive counterattack.

These were not findings of the Federal Republic or the educational ideologies of the Social Democrats, but the agreed-upon requirements of not only the majority of our population, but also the education experts among us and in other countries.

…certainly on the question of the Gesamtschule there is public dissension. But the integration of the three-tiered school system (Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium) into a single differentiated school is certainly not utopian; from Tokyo to Oslo and anywhere else
this was realized, where a fundamental reform of education has taken place in this century (SPD, 1972).

Crucially, however, conservative forces were not the only ones attacking the SPD-FDP proposals. Criticism had also come from the Left by neo-Marxists within the student movement, who saw the Gesamtschule as little more than a means of training workers to be maximally adaptable to the needs of the economy. As Bühlow writes:

The leftist criticism on school reform in the FRG has the important task of destroying the illusion – spread by the SPD above all – that society can be changed through education reform. As the limits of such a reform are being demonstrated… approaches to social changes are being relegated to those areas in which they actually can be successful: in businesses and political organizations, not in schools and colleges, which at best can assume preliminary tasks (1972: 135-36).

Unlike in Britain, where the Left had adopted the view that large-scale social change could be effected by educational reform up to and during the period of policy reform, the German Left, radicalized in the late 1960s, maintained no such view. By 1972, the SDP-FDP coalition had few allies upon whose support it could count in realizing its reform vision.

Opposition soon arose even within those SPD- controlled Länder with progressive education traditions. Under Culture Minister Ludwig von Friedeburg, Hesse had taken the lead in the deployment of Gesamtschulen after 1969, but within a few years local attitudes were turning against it as a general model. In a Spiegel interview, von Freideburg acknowledged that the “wind is blowing in different strengths from different directions” and “the mood may have changed here and there” but claimed that in Hesse the idea of the Gesamtschule had nevertheless found remarkable support from parents and teachers in only two years. To those on the Left who claimed that the Gesamtschule was little more than a

\[177\] By 1974, the 64 integrated and 53 additive Gesamtschulen in Hesse together amounted to more than in the rest of the Länder combined (Der Spiegel, 1974: 27/42).
“trick of the establishment” designed to give workers the appearance of equality, von Friedburg replied, “the Gesamtschule certainly won’t further the revolution. It furthers the equality of opportunity and it gives the individual better possibilities.” To conservatives who argued that the Gesamtschule would lead to a weakening of performance incentives and a Socialist-style egalitarian leveling, he claimed that “such arguments are structurally no different from the arguments that were put forward in the 20s again the common Grundschule and still earlier in the 18th and 19th centuries against mandatory schooling. The conservatives have always been against greater equality of opportunity and against higher education for all.” (Der Spiegel 1972, 33/44-45).

At the federal level, the issue of comprehensive school reform became downplayed, especially during the 1972 election campaign, which was largely a referendum on Brandt’s foreign policy and specifically his controversial Ostpolitik. Although Brandt cited the need for increased cooperation between Bonn and the Länder, the Gesamtschule failed even to merit inclusion in the January 1973 government declaration following the reelection of the SPD-FDP coalition victory in the November 1972 election.

Chances for reform diminished rapidly after the election. Dohnanyi’s impolitic public forcefulness, already a liability in the government’s negotiations with the opposition, soon began negatively to impact his relationship with the SPD caucus in the Bundestag and Land ministers as well. By late 1972, fissures were also emerging between the coalition partners. In formulating their coalition agreement following the elections, FDP negotiators rejected Hamm-Brücher’s calls for a recommitment to reform, including the demand for a constitutional amendment giving the federal government even more authority in education. Instead the party contented itself with the rather uninspired call for a “furthering of education.
within the window of financial possibility.” The FDP claimed that the downgrading of
education in the 1972 coalition agreement was actually due to the position of the SPD, which,
in the words of one liberal negotiator, was not “federal enough” and too bound to traditional
structures and divisions of authority between the Bund and Länder. Minister von Dohnanyi,
for his part, commented that the “Free Democrats could have advocated for much more in the
coilition conversations if they had wanted more” (Der Spiegel, 1973, 2/24).

The final phase of the SPD-FDP reform effort came in 1973 with the ratification by
the BLK (after five previous attempts) of the Bildungsgesamtplan (Comprehensive
Educational Plan). Reflecting the newly polarized political environment, the report noted that
government leaders had declared “that it was still not possible to arrive at agreement on the
issues of the Gesamtschule, the Orientierungsstufe, and the education of teachers” (BLK,
1973: XII). Although technically outlining a long-term program for the implementation of the
Strukturplan recommendations, the Bildungsgesamtplan was in fact considerably less
ambitious than it predecessor (Hahn, 1998: 124). Yet even these scaled-back proposals faced
resistance. While the cost estimates offered in the Bildungsgesamtplan were significantly
lower than those that had appeared in previous proposals, Land education ministers
nevertheless expressed concerns even with the reduced spending targets.

With the federal debates at a standstill, even the most optimistic of reform proponents
were forced to acknowledge by 1974 that the government’s hopes for realizing the proposals
for transforming the West German education system it had laid out four years earlier were
fading. Speaking in May before the Non-Profit Organization for Comprehensives Schools
(Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft Gesamtschule), a pro-reform advocacy group, von Friedeburg
and Joachim Lohmann of Schleswig-Holstein admitted that “the defenses against the
restorationist forces have been breached in several places... Apart from the strangulation of
comprehensives in several CDU-Länder, there are signs of desertions in several SPD
Länder... Political goals are being scaled down – and only in a few Länder, especially Lower
Saxony and Hesse is the reform genuinely being carried further!” (quoted in Heidenheimer,
1974: 403).

Yet even in the reformist-Länder new obstacles to comprehensive reform would
continue to appear. In Lower Saxony, SPD Education Minister Peter von Oertzen sought in
early 1974 to assuage conservative fears in the debates over legislation that implemented the
Gesamtschule by accepting the CDU-preferred cooperative type of Gesamtschule in addition
to the integrated variant favored by the SPD and insisting before the Landtag that he had no
intention of replacing the Gymnasium with comprehensive schools. Given the anti-reform
backlash of the time, however, such efforts at consolation would go unrequited. The CDU
forcefully attacked von Oertzen’s plan, claiming it would lead to the end to the Gymnasium,
even appointing one of its teachers as its shadow education minister. In a state election held
in June 1974 in the wake of Chancellor Brandt’s resignation over an East German spy
scandal, von Oertzen would actually lose his constituency seat and be forced to reenter the
Landtag through the party list. Following the SPD electoral victory, he was not reappointed
as education minister (Heidenheimer, 1974: 402).

In Hesse, parents of children in comprehensives began to complain that the continuing
existence of Gymnasium alongside the Gesamtschule presented a significant problem since it
served to diminish the value of their children’s qualification. Some parents’ also moved to
block the replacement of Gymnasia with comprehensive schools in the Land by bringing suit
in court, obtaining favorable rulings in from a panel of judges in Darmstadt. Claming that
they had “nothing against the Gesamtschule,” the judges cited the “constitutionally anchored Elternrecht” as reason for their decision (Der Spiegel, 1974: 27/42). At the federal level, any lingering enthusiasm for the structural reform of education would end with the accession of Helmut Schmidt to the Chancellery in May 1974. Stung by conservative criticism over SPD handling of education, Schmidt would drop it as a spending priority and replace Dohnanyi as education minister with Helmut Rohde, a union politician from the Labor Ministry with no background in education.

The Brandt reform initiatives would represent the last comprehensive movement to reform the structure of education in the postwar period. As Kloss presciently wrote in the mid-1980s, “One has the impression … that the great fundamental debates, for example about the principle of the Gesamtschule are finished for the time being. The Gesamtschule has been officially recognized, equivalence has been confirmed, it will continue to exist as one of several forms of secondary school in some Länder whilst others will probably gradually abolish the few ‘experimental’ schools of this type within their area: the issue is unlikely to excite anyone any more” (1985: 9).

Conclusion

In his analysis of how market economies became institutionally “embedded” in Japan and Germany in the 19th and 20th centuries, Gerhard Lehmbruch argues that economic arrangements in both countries were not merely historical legacies of past decisions, but were actively supported by a set of hegemonic policy discourses, or “sets of basic beliefs and assumptions about the normative values, objective, and regularities underlying the formation of public policy,” that were shared by actors (2001: 41). In his view, the path dependence of these arrangements resulted from the interplay between discourses and institutions, with
challenges to and innovations in arrangements following comparable shifts in the hegemonic discourse.

For Lehmann, discursive shifts would be achieved only during periods of upheaval, notably economic depressions in the nineteenth century and the two world wars in the twentieth century. As the current chapter demonstrates, however, the rise of counter discourse in West German education took place, as in Britain, during a period marked not by turmoil, but by stability, peace, and prosperity. It was the communication of the ideas of counter discourse agents such as Picht and Dahrendorf that served, in effect, to create a crisis that convinced many political actors and the public of the need to elevate education as a priority, increase the number of students advanced qualifications, and initiate a structural transformation to the system of general education. Unfortunately for advocates of reform, the movement for institutional change launched by the discourse-inspired crisis would encounter the twin realities of economic and social crisis in the early 1970s, limiting the potential for reform in the organization of West German general education and helping to ensure the persistence of early selection and vertical differentiation into the 21st century.
Chapter IX

Conclusion

Introduction

This concluding chapter begins with a review of major developments in the policies and politics associated with general education in Britain and the FRG since the 1970s. As the section highlights, the basic structures of the systems in both countries have endured since the transformative battles of what Crook (2002: 154) refers to as the period of “bloody revolution” in secondary education in the 1960s and 1970s but there have also been important changes of a more incremental nature. The second section reviews the explanations provided in the dissertation for the empirical puzzle of variation in British and German differentiation practices, analyzing the impact of policy discourses in shaping the differential trajectories in the development of general education in Britain and Germany observed in the postwar era. The final section provides a more general consideration of some of the findings of the study.

Developments in Britain and Germany since the 1970s

Germany

Without question, the most important development in the organization of general education in the Federal Republic of Germany in the past thirty years concerns the extension of the practices of early selection and vertical differentiation to the new Länder of the former German Democratic Republic following reunification in 1990. Prior to then, East German general education was horizontally-structured, with students commonly educated in polytechnic secondary schools (Polytechnische Oberschule) through age fifteen. As Wilde writes, “in many respects [the East German system] was more in line with the educational
norms of European countries in the 1990s than western German schooling provisions.” (2002: 44).

In typical German federalist fashion, the vertical education systems established in the first year after reunification in the five new Länder demonstrated significant variation. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, the standard three-tiered Western structure of Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium with a small percentage of students attending a parallel Gesamtschule was adopted, but in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia, the Hauptschule and Realschule were merged into a single school type, creating, along with the Gymnasium, a bipartite structure.¹⁷⁸ In Brandenberg, the only new Land in which the SPD emerged as the largest party in the Landtag after the first election, an attempt made to model the new system around the Gesamtschule, but this failed largely because of the FDP’s insistence that the system contain the business-friendly Realschule. Whatever the differences in the specific form, all five new Länder of the East would the basic framework of the West’s vertically-differentiated system: selection between ages ten and twelve for placement in a specific school type (Wilde, 2002).

While the structure of the general education system has not changed dramatically in Germany since the 1970s, the distribution of students in the various schools has shifted markedly. In the 2004/2005 school year, some 33 percent of 7th grade students attended a Gymnasium, while 27 percent studied at a Realschule and 23 percent at a Hauptschule¹⁷⁹ (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006: 54). In the first postwar decade, by contrast, fewer than five percent of students were placed in the Gymnasium following selection at age ten. As chapter

¹⁷⁸ These combined lower and intermediate schools would go by different names in the Länder of the former GDR, including Mittelschule (Saxony), Regelschule (Saxony-Anhalt) and Sekundarschule (Thuringia).
¹⁷⁹ Only 9 percent of 7th graders were enrolled in a Gesamtschule in 2004/2005 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2006: 54).
seven notes, this number would already begin to rise significantly beginning in the 1960s, as would the number of students in the intermediate Realschule. The increase in attendance figures for the higher schools in the secondary sector has corresponded with a commensurate decline in the percentage of students attending the basic Hauptschule. While four out of five young West Germans completed their general education in this school type (or its equivalent) in the 1950s, by the 1990s this figure had fallen to one in four. These developments, coupled with a perceived decline in standards, has led some to label the Hauptschule a “Restschule,” or remainder school, suitable only for students incapable of making the cut in the higher school types (Ertl and Phillips, 2000: 406; Junge Union, 2006: 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Orientation Stage</th>
<th>Hauptschulen</th>
<th>Schools with multiple tracks</th>
<th>Realschulen</th>
<th>Comprehensive Schools/Steiner Schools</th>
<th>Gymnasium</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>&lt;1.0%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52.3%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>&lt;1.0%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>30.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1 These schools provide common mixed ability study for students from 5th through 7th grades, after which placement into tracks leading either to the Hauptschulabschluss (after successful completion of 9th grade) or Realschulabschluss (after successful completion of 10th grade and a qualification examination).
2 Steiner schools, known as Freie Waldorfschulen in the FRG, are private schools founded on the spiritual and philosophical principles articulated by the Austrian Rudolf Steiner in the early 20th century.
3 Figures include students in the New Länder of the former GDR.
For Germany’s large migrant population, however, the *Hauptschule* remains the primary secondary school type. In a survey of migrant education in Nuremberg conducted in 1999, nearly 65 percent of second-generation Turkish youth indicated that the *Hauptschule* represented their highest completed level of education (compared to only 25 percent of native Germans in the city), with only 16 percent of the Turkish respondents reporting they had completed the *Realschule* and 13 percent the *Gymnasium* (compared to 32 percent and 40 percent of the native population) (Worbs, 2003:1020). This disproportionality also exists for the foreign population more generally at the national level; nearly half of all migrant family students in Germany attend a lower secondary or special school, while only 18 percent attend the *Gymnasium*, compared to 40 percent of German students (Sinn, 2006: 250).

As the debates over the school system in Hamburg (see chapter two) demonstrate, early selection remains a highly charged political issue in the FRG, particularly in the context of the country’s weak showing on OECD PISA exams (see chapter two). In light of PISA, some have recommended horizontal reform as the best solution for both the academic deficiencies and social inequalities resulting from the traditional vertical system. As Professor Hans-Werner Sinn, president of the Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich wrote:

there is no empirical evidence that the early separation of pupils has a positive influence on the average PISA test results. In fact, there is even some evidence that the early separation tends to reduce average pupil performance. In any case the early separation leads to a massive increase in the performance differences of the tested pupils...

Germany must again debate the benefits of the comprehensive school. In principle the comprehensive school that some states had introduced in the 1970s on an experimental basis was not a bad idea. The problem was that the idea was burdened with the ballast of an antiauthoritarian educational philosophy and was not successful as a result. It is now time to forget the old ideologies of the left and right and to adjust the German educational system to international standards (2006: 250).
Whether such an outcome is a possibility is open to question. The SPD, along with the Green and Left parties, continues to support in principle the dismantling of the three-tiered system and the general establishment of the *Gesamtschule*, while the Christian Democrats maintain their support for the traditional system. For its part the FDP has shifted its view on comprehensive schooling since it shifted coalition allegiances from the SPD to CDU/CSU in the early 1980s, and now supports the three-tiered system, though it is open to the *Gesamtschule* on a limited basis. In many ways, the political divide over the question of the comprehensive school remains as sharp as it was thirty years ago.

*Britain*

While there has been nothing like a return to the tripartite system and 11-plus in Britain since the 1970s, selection in more minor forms has made a bit of a comeback in recent decades. Following the failure of Thatcher’s drive to convince LEAs to reinstate early selection in 1979, the issue largely disappeared from national political and policy discussions. By the late 1980s, however, the Conservatives would reopen the question of selection in the state school sector. In the Education Act 1988 – generally characterized as the most important piece of education legislation since the 1944 Act – the government established a new variant of selective practice by extending parental choice in English and Welsh general education and sharply reducing the power of local authorities. Where determinations of what schools students would attend was previously made by local authorities, the 1988 Act gave parents the right to send their child to any state school with space available. It also allowed them to decide by secret ballot if they wished for their children’s school to “opt-out” of LEA control and become “grant-maintained,” obtaining funding directly from the central government in London. The Act further reduced the authority of local actors by granting
power to the Education Ministry to establish a national curriculum for all students in the state system through age sixteen and established city technology colleges (CTCs), new secondary schools that emphasized technology, language, business and commerce (Trowler, 2003: 10-11).

In the third Thatcher government, new provisions would be introduced allowing for comprehensive schools to select a small percentage of their students on the basis of ability, with higher levels permitted at CTCs and the new grant-maintained schools outside of LEA control. While only a few comprehensives would follow through and become “partially-selective,” many more have come to practice “internal selection,” by which students within a formally non-selective school are streamed into groups of comparable ability that sit in the same classes and study common subjects (Trowler, 2003: 156).

Despite Labour’s long standing support for comprehensive schools, under the New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, many of the Thatcher-era policies would persist and even be furthered. Much of the current selection debate focuses on so-called specialist schools, a new school type that receives its funding from private as well as public sources and emphasizes one of ten curriculum specialties, including arts, business & enterprise, engineering, humanities, languages, mathematics & computing, music, science, sports and technology (DCSF, n.d.). First introduced by the Conservatives in 1994, specialist schools selection would be attacked by Labour Shadow Education Minister David Blunkett in 1995, but the School Standards and Framework Act 1998\(^\text{180}\) passed under the first Blair government made it possible for specialist schools to select up to 10 percent of their intake on aptitude for some specialties (Trowler, 2003: 20-21; Crook, 2007: 154). The City Academies,

\(^{180}\) The 1998 Act also gave parents in LEAs power to abolish by ballot any of the roughly one hundred and sixty grammar schools that had survived from the horizontal reorganizations of the 1960s and 1970s, though by 2007 none had done so (Crook, 2007: 154).
secondary schools with corporate sponsors first proposed by Labour in the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to replace failing inner city comprehensives, would technically be non-selective, but would later accused of practicing “covert” selection in the form of “fair-banding,” in which pupils are tested and placed in one of a number of ability bands from which set numbers are selected for admission. While supporters of the practice maintain it ensures that a schools intake is truly comprehensive, critics argue that it is a “cover selection process” designed to ensure the enrollment of more high-performing pupils (Yorkshire Post, 28 August 2006).

From John Major to Michael Howard, Conservative Party leaders in the 1990s and 2000s would continue formally to voice support for expanding the number of grammar schools (Crook, 2007: 153). Under David Cameron, however, this long-standing commitment was dropped in 2007. While promising to keep open the grammar schools still in operation, Cameron argued that selective education did not help children from disadvantaged backgrounds and was "unpopular with parents,” who did not “want children divided into successes and failures at 11.” His announcement that there would be no return to the selective system or 11-plus exam and no expansion in the number of grammar schools under his government, triggered a minor revolt among the Conservatives, including a protest resignation by Graham Brady, the party’s spokesperson for European affairs. Cameron, for his part, dismissed the criticism, saying that his opponents were "clinging on to outdated mantras that bear no relation to the reality of life" (BBC News, 22 May 2007).

**Explaining Variation in the Structure of British and German General Education**

Why did the practices of early selection and vertical differentiation endure in West Germany but not in Britain? In contrast to conceptions of institutional development that
attribute outcomes to the material power and preferences of actors operating within structural constraints, this dissertation maintains that fully answering this question requires an understanding of the role played by policy discourses, that is the basic beliefs and assumptions that underlay the institutional and policy choices made by actors and the process by which those ideas were communicated and accepted, during a crucial period in the immediate postwar decades. As the preceding case studies outline, in the interwar and immediate postwar periods, discourses rooted in notions of fixed intelligence and ability were developed by academics, adopted and legitimized by political actors and government advisory bodies, and realized by policymakers in the form of general education systems organized around the practices of dividing students at age ten or eleven for placement in vertically differentiated systems of separate schools that varied in terms of academic instruction and advancement opportunities.

Within two decades of the war’s end, counter discourses rooted in dynamic understandings of intelligence that emphasized the social inequalities and economic inefficiencies of early selection arose in both countries to challenge the fixed-ability view and undercut the legitimacy of the structure of general education. These counter-discourses served as the ideational equivalent of an exogenous shock to the British and German systems of general education, creating, in effect, a critical juncture in their institutional development. Although the discursive shifts in 1950s Britain and 1960s West Germany affected a targeted set of arrangements located in the secondary and higher education sectors, much like the more general shocks such as war, economic crisis, and sudden technological change often invoked in punctuated equilibrium models employed in historical institutional analysis, they served to relax the structural constraints in place around existing arrangements, helping to create an
atmosphere of what Blyth (2002: 9; see also Schmidt, 2008a: 319), drawing on an earlier
tradition in economics, has characterized as “Knightian” uncertainty,\textsuperscript{181} or conditions in which
events have made agents not simply unsure about how to achieve their interests but unsure of
what their interests actually are. While creating such conditions of uncertainty, the counter
discourse simultaneously helped to determine the path actors would view as the best way out
by giving them critical knowledge that could be used to fill in the ideational hole left by the
previous conception’s delegitimation.

Unlike, however, the economic policy arrangements and institutions discussed by
Blyth in which uncertainty is generated by exogenous factors, the uncertainty associated with
differentiation practices discussed in this dissertation was largely the result of endogenous
sources, most notably processes of learning by actors as they came to know more about the
institutions of early differentiation as the result of direct observation.\textsuperscript{182} In opposition to
gradualist conceptions of endogenous change such as conversion or drift (Streeck and Thelen,
2005; see chapter II), the impact of this learning in both countries was remarkably sudden:
within just a few years of each country’s respective shift, the assumptions, beliefs, and
preferences of key actors would be reoriented, discourse coalitions that had supported early
selection in the immediate postwar period would be shaken, traditional adherents the practice
would find themselves on the political defensive, and change, generally focused on policy
solutions such as the comprehensive school proposed by counter-discourse agents, would
move to the top of public debates and the fore of the policy agenda.

While a discursive shift was a necessary condition for institutional change in British
and West German differentiation practices, it was not, however, sufficient. Four additional

\textsuperscript{181} Named for Frank Knight, an economist at the University of Chicago who introduced this conception in his
1921 book \textit{Risk, Uncertainty, and Profit}.

\textsuperscript{182} For a discussion of types of endogenous change, see Caporaso, 2007
factors would also help shape the outcomes of change in Britain and continuity in Germany. The first involves variation in the substantive emphasis of the education policy discourses in each country and how this variation was reflected in the practices associated with early selection. The interwar fixed-ability discourse in Britain would emphasize the measurability of intelligence through the use of psychological tests in a way that never figured into discussions in West Germany, where the principle of parental choice in education was established in the Basic Law as the primary method for selecting students for placement in one of the traditional system’s three schools. As chapters three and four demonstrate, the focus on measured intelligence had the effect of rendering the British discourse more vulnerable to challenges since the test could and did serve as a political focal point for broader rhetorical attacks on the overall tripartite system that would resonate with many in the population, most notably parents for whom a poor 11-plus performance could mean a dramatic curtailing of child’s opportunity in a society that otherwise held possibilities for mobility and economic advancement that had never before existed. The general absence of intelligence tests as a selection method in West Germany would deprive political actors of a comparable target around which publics could relate and rally in opposing early selection and would serve as a built-in limitation to the transformative potential of the counter discourse launched by Picht and others in the early 1960s. Indeed, by equating early selection in education with parents’ right to raise their children as they saw fit, the practice in West Germany could and would be framed by political actors and decision makers as a fundamentally democratic institution and held in contrast with the coercive state intrusions into the family that characterized both the Nazis and the Communist regime in the East.
The second factor highlights how key agents of the West German counter discourse were never as strongly united behind the comprehensive school as the solution to the inequalities and inefficiencies of the education system that they themselves had helped reveal. While the Gesamtschule would receive backing from political actors and government advisory bodies such as the Deutscher Bildungsrat in the FRG, figures responsible for popularizing the counter discourse such as Picht and Dahrendorf would stop short of advocating the dismantling of the vertical system and argue instead for expanding the number and diversity of higher school graduates within the existing three-tiered structure, a development that would, as the previous section discusses, come to pass in the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the prewar existence of Einheitsschule, many actors in West Germany would continue to view the comprehensive school as a foreign model, a radical experiment, or the school type of the GDR, and many Christian Democratic Länder would refuse to set up Gesamtschulen on even an experimental basis. Partly as a consequence, comprehensivization as a solution to the problems raised by the counter discourse in the FRG failed to capture public and political opinion in the same manner as it did in Britain, where from early on counter discourse agents would identify and promote the comprehensive school as the most appropriate remedy to the deficiencies of the 11-plus and the tripartite system; as chapter five highlights, even the Conservatives would be impacted by this change and approve more local comprehensive reorganizations during the early 1970s than any other government before or since.

The third factor revolves around the role played by actors on the political left in the respective discursive movements. Under the leadership of the Labour Party, the British Left would adopt and promote vertical differentiation during the interwar years, with Labour

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serving in many ways as the political leader of the discourse coalition that would drive the reorganization of general education brought about by the Education Act 1944 and the implementation of the tripartite system. This interwar leadership position would be crucial for developments that occurred later in the historical narrative. By virtue of its renunciation of early selection in the 1950s and its exit of from the fixed-ability discourse coalition, the Labour Party would seriously undercut the foundation of political support for the tripartite system, greatly facilitating its dismantling in the ensuing decades. In the FRG, the SPD and its trade union allies would turn against vertical differentiation in the early 1960s after a period of tacit acceptance in the late 1940s and 1950s, but significantly the reorientation of left actors in West Germany failed to create the delegitimizing effects of Labour’s comparable turn, since the primary supporters of the traditional three-tiered structure in Germany had been conservatives who largely maintained their support for the system.

The final factor concerns when the British and German counter discourses emerged and the associated policy reform consequences in both countries. In analyzing this factor, a key insight from historical institutional analysis on the importance of timing and sequence for outcomes is relevant. As Pierson notes, the time at which an event occurs may be crucial for the development of path dependent processes; as he writes, “earlier parts of a sequence matter much more than later parts, an event that happens ‘too late’ may have no effect, although it might have been of great consequence if the timing had been different” (2000: 261). Crucial for the institutional outcomes in Britain and Germany was not that an education counter-discourse arose in opposition to the fixed-ability view, but when it arose. As chapters four and five examine, agents of the British counter-discourse would claim by the early 1950s that the country’s tripartite school system was predicated on erroneous “scientific” assumptions
about the determined and fixed nature of ability. Within a decade, this view had come seriously to undermine the justification for political support of the system in the country, contributing to the rise of a separate process of experimentation with comprehensive schools in several local education areas that would accelerated markedly within a few years. By the time the Labour Government would begin its national comprehensivization drive under the Wilson government in 1965, the comprehensive school would have lost much of its experimental status in Britain and gained considerable legitimacy among educationalists, politicians, and the general public.

As chapter seven documents, however, the German variant of the fixed-ability discourse that emerged in the immediate postwar years retained its dominant standing in the FRG significantly longer than in Britain as the result of factors tied to the experiences of the National Socialist regime, namely the return of an older generation of educationalists, psychologists, and sociologists to leading positions in universities and research academies after 1945, the underdevelopment of modern social scientific methods of analysis in education, and the comparative isolation of West German educational research from broader European currents. German political actors and discourse agents in academia whose British equivalents had long abandoned notions of fixed and biologically-inherited intelligence continued to draw on such views as justification for differentiating young people in education at age ten well into the 1960s.

Critiques of this perspective, as chapter eight examines, would ultimately emerge in West Germany as new social scientific investigations revealed major flaws in the FRG’s education system, generating a public debate on education that would lead to a loosening of the anti-reform militancy within the resistance coalition that had contributed to the lack of
structural change since the end of World War II. By virtue of this lag, the effect of the
discursive shift on policy arrangements the FRG would be considerably more limited than in
Britain. By the time a horizontal policy reform movement would arise in the early 1970s in
the form of the Gesamtschule pilot deployments\textsuperscript{183} and the changes proposed in the
Strukturplan and the SPD Bildungsbericht, national economic conditions had declined, new
social rifts had opened, and the political climate had become significantly more polarized.
The proposed reforms further coincided with the rise of a new movement in the FRG centered
around educational traditionalism that originated largely in response to the student movement
and political upheaval of the period. This movement would serve to limit the institutional
reform potential of the education counter discourse in West Germany by providing supporters
of the traditional three-tiered system with powerful ideational resources to mobilize actors
against the SPD proposals for change. A similar traditionalist movement, reflected most
visibly in the Black Papers and Callaghan’s “Great Debate” on education, and a hardening of
anti-reform attitudes inside the Conservative Party would arise in Britain in the 1970s, but by
this point comprehensivization was well underway in the country and its effects on the
horizontal reorganization process would be minimal.

The effects associated with the timing of counter discourses also interacted with the
organizational structure of educational governance in the cases to affect the observed
outcomes. In both countries, education was largely decentralized, with significant
administrative and policy competence provided to the regional Länder and local Gemeinde in
the FRG, local authorities in England and Wales, and a regional authority in Scotland.

\textsuperscript{183} This comparative delay in the introduction of West Germany’s comprehensivization program was noted by
Hearnden, who commented that “it must appear surprising that it has taken so long for the idea (of the
comprehensive school) to be taken seriously and advanced as a practical policy objectives” in the FRG (1976b:
106).
Whether decentralization helped or hindered horizontal reform in the causal narrative was dependent, however, on when a country’s respective counter discourse emerged. In Britain, decentralization in education governance both reflected and reinforced the counter discourse that arose in early 1950s with the first studies of the educational sociologists. LEAs would begin to reorganize around horizontal lines in a process that paralleled the ascendancy of the counter discourse, helping to legitimize the comprehensive school model for nearly a decade before the Wilson Government would launch its national campaign. In the FRG, by contrast, the formal introduction of comprehensive schools as alternatives to the traditional three-tiered system followed the rise of the counter discourse; prior the public and political ascendancy of the ideas of Picht and others in the mid and late-1960s, few such schools existed anywhere in the country. Reform–oriented political actors in the FRG would thus have to act under conditions in which the policy change they advocated would be viewed as untried and the legitimizing conception of dynamic ability that supported it could be characterized by opponents as an untested assertion.

Timing in the FRG case also contributed to the outcome by affecting patterns in school construction initiatives during the key period just prior to the abortive reform era of the early 1970s. As chapter eight examines, large scale school construction designed to accommodate the rising population of young people within a traditional three-tiered structure had already taken place by the time of the Brandt reform initiatives. As a result, any widespread horizontal reorganization of secondary education would be significantly more costly for German local and regional authorities than for their counterparts in Britain, where comprehensivization would begin largely before a similar program of school building
designed to accommodate the expected influx of new students from the 1950s baby bulge was launched, thereby limiting the “sunk costs” associated with horizontal change.

Conclusion

Institutions can change because of ideas. As the study of the British case in this dissertation demonstrates, a comparatively rapid transformation in the structure of general education took place because actors readjusted their expectations of the system on the basis of new beliefs, understandings, and values. The rise of a counter discourse spearheaded by educational sociologists created a juncture in the evolution of the system, opening the door to the ultimate outcome: the introduction and widespread acceptance of comprehensive schooling and the shift from early to late practices of differentiation in education.

At the same time, however, the German case reveals how ideas can inhibit change. The frozen discourse in the FRG characterized most notably by the continuing dominance of fixed notions of ability and intelligence well into the 1960s proved to be a powerful mechanism for ensuring path dependence in the structure of German general education. The notion of “freezing” is an old one in comparative politics and conceptions of path dependency, utilized most famously by Lipset and Rokkan in their study examining party systems in Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s continued to reflect cleavages spawned by the processes of modernization and industrialization that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (1967; see also Pierson, 2000). Lipset and Rokkan’s study highlighted the potential significance of historical development in social relationships, but as the case of postwar West German general education demonstrates, ideas can also become frozen within institutional structures, with significant consequences for politics and policy. By ideationally
shielding arrangements from pressures, a frozen discourse can perpetuate arrangements that, according to materialist conceptions of politics, could be expected to undergo significant adjustment. During the period examined in this study, the FRG faced many of the same material pressures for change as Britain, including a growing middle class, a spike in the youth population, and shifts in the nature of production that demanded class of new skilled workers. By shaping actors’ perceptions and understandings of these developments, the frozen discourse in West Germany would, for a crucial period, limit their impact, setting the stage for the persistence of the traditional German vertical school structure into the 1970s and beyond.
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