1865 And The Changes In Education Policies
by L. A. WICKREMERATNE

In the study of education policies in the second half of the nineteenth century the period 1865-1885 is of vital importance. It marked a clear break with the past - although exaggerated by contemporaries - and it laid the fundamental principles of educational development which remained unaltered throughout the nineteenth century. By 1865 dissatisfaction with the Central School Commission which had been smouldering for some time, had come to the surface. The Central School Commission which had been established by the Government in 1834 to regulate education, had at first consisted of Anglican clergymen living in Colombo. In 1841 the Commission had been remodelled to include nonconformist and Catholic clergymen in the hope that this would lead to greater progress in the spread of education. In the event, however, bitter sectarian differences manifested themselves and questions of policy were settled not according to principle, but according to the views of this or that faction that was able to dominate the proceedings of the commission.

The presence – as ex-officio members – of the Colonial Secretary, the Government Agent of the Western Province, and a civil servant who was the Secretary to the Commission, added to the differences within the Commission. These officials were bound to be more aware of secular considerations in education and probably for this reason, the Colonial Secretary and the Secretary in particular were accused of acting arbitrarily by the clergymen. Their presence in the Commission was also objected to on the ground that unlike clergymen, they had no idea of what education was about. But the sectarian differences among the representatives of the various Christian denominations – barring the Baptists

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1 This article is substantially based on material abstracted from my thesis - *The Policies of the Government of Ceylon concerning education and religion, 1865-1885* - submitted for the D. Phil. degree in Oxford University in Michaelmas, 1966.
2 Governor Sir Hercules Robinson in apprising the Legislative Council of the fact that a Sub-Committee appointed by the Council to consider reforms in education in 1865 had finished its work, remarked that the scheme proposed by the Sub-Committee would affect "the well-being and happiness of future generations", and would be gratefully remembered "years to come". *Ceylon Observer*, 19 December 1867.
3 C. O. 57/37. Minutes of the Legislative Council, 14 October 1865.
4 C. O. 57/44. Report Legislative Council Committee, p. 345.
who were not given a seat in the Commission because their educational activities were negligible—were so great as to prevent the Commission from splitting into two clearly demarcated factions.

Moreover the Commission met only once a month and this fact in itself predetermined the tempo of its operations. Matters which required an immediate decision were put off and even the recommendations which the Inspector of Schools had made were ignored. The Colonial Secretary who was the President of the Commission, and the Government Agent of the Western Province were key officials of the Government who could not give their undivided attention to the Commission. Purely routine matters which could have been handled by the Secretary as well as vital questions of principle encumbered the Commission. The Government’s directive in 1855 that the Commission should leave routine administration to the Secretary was ignored because the clergymen in the Commission were jealous of the Secretary’s influence.

Other weaknesses too impaired the effectiveness of the Commission. For one thing it lacked a focal point of responsibility. The Colonial Secretary was obviously the most important member of the Commission. But decisions were reached by majority vote and it was possible that the Commission could reach a decision which was unacceptable to the Government thereby embarrassing the Colonial Secretary who was a member of the Executive Council. Secondly, the Commission was an unpaid body. Often vacancies which occurred in the seats for the Christian denominations, and even in the seat for an unofficial member of the Legislative Council could not be filled. From 1862 there is no record of a Roman Catholic member of the Commission. In 1865 the seats of the Anglican, Wesleyan, and that of the Unofficial member of the Legislative Council remained vacant. In the circumstances it was not surprising that the Colonial Secretary could wield an unusual degree of influence. The missionaries for their part responded but feebly to the Commission which was consistently refusing to give financial assistance to their schools other than on conditions which severely restricted religious teaching.

As one might expect the Commission had a poor record. In 1867 when the Commission submitted its final report it was found that since 1840 the Commission had been able to establish only 64 boys’ schools and 22 girls’

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid. Appendix. See views of John F. Dickson who was the Secretary of the Commission
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
16 Sessional Papers 1863, no. 7, p. 50.
17 See p. 89 of this article.
schools, although the money made available to the Commission by the Government had increased by as much as over £12,656 during the same period. To make matters worse, W. J. Sendall, the Government Inspector of Schools had been devastatingly critical in his reports. Sir Hercules Robinson the then governor who in forwarding the Report of the School Commission for 1865 to the Colonial Office, drew particular attention to Sendall’s description of the product of the Commission’s English schools as “the unhappy victims here of fatal half measures, there of misguided zeal and mistaken philanthropy.”

Robinson also referred to a general impression in the Island that the Government’s efforts in education were misdirected and that the Government was beginning to have doubts about “the large sums of public money” spent on education. It was characteristically Muthu Coomaraswamy – a key figure of this period who represented the Tamils in the Legislative Council – who gave positive expression to these misgivings when in 1865 he moved a resolution in the Legislative Council calling upon the Government to appoint a Sub-committee to investigate education. Under the chairmanship of Richard Morgan, the Queen’s Advocate, this Committee submitted its report in 1867 having gathered a mass of valuable evidence by circulating a questionnaire dealing with all aspects of educational policy.

The Sub-Committee recommended that the School Commission be abolished and that instead, as in the presidencies of India, a single Director of Public Instruction responsible to the Government should be appointed. On the question which had significant implications for the future – whether the Director should be assisted by a Board - the Government was divided. Robinson, the Executive Council, and the School Commission urged that the Director should be assisted by a Board consisting of the representatives of all races and religions in the island, provided these representatives were not ministers of religion. It was also stipulated that the Director should consult the Board on all matters of principle and that in the event of a difference of opinion the Executive Council should be consulted. Those who favoured the creation of a Board feared that a single Director would be susceptible to the influence of pressure groups. An Unofficial member of the Legislative Council sarcastically remarked that a Director who was able to act judiciously on his own must possess “the wisdom

18 Robinson to Granville, 113 of 9 October 1869, enclosure 4 for Twenty Fifth Report of the Central School Commission. See Blue Book of Ceylon for year 1868.
19 Ibid.
20 Robinson to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, 210 of September 1867. See Blue Book of Ceylon for year 1866.
21 Ibid.
26 Ibid. C. O. 57/42. Minutes of the Executive Council, 17 December 1867.
27 Ibid.
28 Ceylon Observer, 19 December 1867, gives account of debate.
of an archangel".  

Coomaraswamy himself declared that a Director of Public Instruction in India who followed educational developments in Ceylon closely had told him that a Director unassisted by a Board was not suitable for Ceylon. 

But Morgan succeeded in persuading the Legislative Council to vote for a Director of Public Instruction who was not fettered by a board. 

What probably swayed the Council was the awareness that in the School Commission responsibility for educational decisions had been diffused.

It was no doubt because of this decision that in the period after 1867 the Department of Public Instruction was able to make adjustments in the implementation of educational policies to suit changing conditions thereby giving a certain permanence to the great policy decisions of 1867. In the event too the gloomy forebodings about the concentration of power in the hands of a single official were falsified. Both Sendall, who became the Director of Public Instruction in 1872, and Charles Bruce who held the post from 1878 to 1882, showed that although they sympathised with the educational efforts of the missionaries, they could well resist missionary pressures. Bruce in particular was so scrupulously impartial in the implementation of the grant-aided scheme that the missionaries unreasonably accused him of being hostile towards them.

But the real achievement of the Sub-Committee was that it defined clearly the fundamental aims of educational policies following a comprehensive survey of the state of education in the island. It declared unequivocally that the Government was obliged to educate the people especially as there was a gulf in the standards of “civilization” dividing the rulers from the ruled. As it was plainly impossible to educate all classes of the population to the same level, the problem was to define priorities. According to the Sub-Committee the main object of the Government in education was to provide an elementary vernacular education for every child in the country. It was not the business of the Government to foster classical vernacular education with its “antiquated literature”, nor to attempt to achieve the ideal of universal elementary education through the English language. The Sub-Committee which quoted Indian Education reports, believed that it was difficult for the Ceylon child to acquire even a modicum of English which would be necessary for elementary education. Instead it declared that the Ceylon child with his horizons limited to the boundaries of his village

29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Richard Morgan, who was easily the most distinguished Ceylonese of the time, was as the Queen’s Advocate, the chief legal adviser to the Government. A member of the Legislative Council he was also a member - a rare privilege for a Ceylonese - of the Governor’s Executive Council.
33 Annual Letter. T. P. Handy to C. C. Fenn, 4 January 1880, C. M. S. Archives.
should be taught the three R's with the rudiments of history and geography.\textsuperscript{36} The Sub-Committee quoted with approval Bishop C. Bonjean of the Roman Catholic church who declared that the mass of the people should be given an elementary education suited to requirements of "a life of toil".\textsuperscript{37}

But on grounds of practical expediency and abstract principle the Sub-Committee urged the Government to pay some attention to superior education in English as well.\textsuperscript{38} The Sub-Committee and the Government were considerably influenced by Sendall who ridiculed the idea that the Government might provide universal elementary education but deliberately refrain from establishing higher schools for fear of stimulating a "demand" for higher education.\textsuperscript{39} Sendall argued that analogies drawn from the laws of supply and demand in economics had no relevance to education especially in an Eastern country where there was no spontaneous demand for education as such. On the contrary it was the duty of the state to stimulate a demand and give the people "a helping hand, to lead them from low to high from high to higher". Sendall believed that in the ultimate analysis elementary and superior education were but two stages in a single process of lifting a people from a state of ignorance to one of enlightenment. He also stressed that it was morally wrong for a Government which was ruling a multi religious population to leave superior English education in the hands of the missionaries.\textsuperscript{40} The Sub-Committee itself urged in addition that the benefits of superior education would filter down to the masses and that the extension of elementary education was itself dependent especially as regards the demand for more teachers on the maintenance of a system of superior education.\textsuperscript{41} The Sub-Committee did not add—probably because that fact was so well known—that the maintenance of the superior schools was connected with the requirements of an expanding administration.

Clearly the assumption was that only a minority would require a superior education. Hence the Sub-Committee did not urge the Government to establish new English schools but declared that the Central Schools—superior schools teaching English—which existed in some of the provincial towns, would be adequate.\textsuperscript{42} Moreover superior education was to be confined to the class that could pay high school fees, and throughout this period—in sharp contrast to its policies of doing away with all fees in vernacular education—the Government consistently took the view that those who wanted a superior English education must be prepared to pay for it.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, the primary aim of Government educational

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. p. 344.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. p. 343.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid. p. 343.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. p. 343.
\textsuperscript{42} C. O. 54/432. Robinson to the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, 9 of 14 January 1868.
policy in the period after 1867 was to retain this bifurcation with its implied class overtones. But the desire for an English education which paradoxically existed even in areas where the popular enthusiasm for education was lukewarm, was a constant challenge to this policy.\textsuperscript{44}

It was in considering the means by which the ideal of elementary universal education was to be achieved that the Sub-Committee defined the place of the missionary societies in the new education set up. It pointed out that the lack of teachers made it impossible to extend vernacular education, although the adoption of certain measures which it proposed could ultimately lead to an increase in the number of teachers.\textsuperscript{45} The Sub-Committee suggested therefore that the Government should secure the co-operation of the missionary societies by providing them with the means of extending their educational operations.\textsuperscript{46} The adoption of a grant-aided system on the lines suggested by the Sub-Committee – the payments of grants to be determined by the results of secular instruction alone without imposing any limitations on religious instruction - put an end to decades of bickering that had gone on between the missionary societies and the School Commission. It also opened a new chapter in the relations between the Government and the missionaries in education.\textsuperscript{47}

But in spite of the co-operation of the missionaries the difficulties of realizing the ideal of universal education soon became evident. The Sub-Committee obsessed with the means of securing the co-operation of the missionaries had evidently assumed that if schools were merely established, the people would flock to them. In fact, however, in the backward regions especially in Central and North Central provinces, the people were reluctant to send their


\textsuperscript{45} C. O. 57/44. Rept. L. C. Comm. p. 356.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} The various missionary societies working in the island had for some time been emphasizing the need to adopt a system whereby the missionaries would receive government grants for their schools. These demands grew more insistent by 1865 when the Protestant and Catholic missionaries were clearly facing a financial crisis. Consequently they found that although they could maintain the schools which they had already established there was little prospect of expansion. What aggravated the difficulties of the missionaries was their constantly proclaimed unwillingness - on principle - to accept monetary assistance from the government under a grant-aided scheme which the government had begun to enforce after February 1861. The grant rules stipulated \textit{inter alia} that religious instruction was to be confined to the first hour of teaching each day during which time attendance could not be made compulsory. To the Central School Commission which was entrusted with the responsibility of implementing these rules, grants-in-aid on any other basis was tantamount to encouraging proselytisation. To the missionary societies however the all too evident restrictions on religious teaching were wholly repugnant to their basic objectives. See Chapter II of my thesis.
If education made any progress at all in these areas it was because of the Government Agents who influenced the people through the headmen and the Gansabahavas or Village Councils. The virtual dependence of the Department of Public Instruction on the Government Agents is a significant feature of this period.

The Government might have made its task easier had it devised some means of utilising the indigenous pansala schools which were attached to Buddhist temples. But unlike in Burma and India where the modern departments of education used the indigenous schools in rural areas to spread education, in Ceylon religious prejudices among officials and missionaries alike were too formidable a barrier for policy makers to overcome. Had the Government taken the pansala schools in hand, the sum annually voted by the Legislative Council for education might have been more effectively used.

Indeed educational policy was as might be expected influenced by finance. At first however there was no question of cutting the coat according to the cloth. The reforms of 1867 coincided with a remarkable period in the Island's economy. The revenue which was £ 978,492 in 1865 rose steadily and by 1873 it had reached the unprecedented figure of £ 1,290,918. The revenue continued its upward climb until by 1877 it reached £ 1,596,205. But the tide turned and in successive years the revenue steadily declined due largely to the failure of the coffee industry.

The annual expenditure for education also increased. This increase was due largely to the development of the grant-aided scheme. By 1880 however inspite of denials that it was motivated by financial considerations the Government was anxious to control expenditure in education. Hence the changes, which came

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49 The officials of the Department of Public Instruction constantly acknowledged that but for the Government Agents, the petty officials who worked under them and the Village Councils, there would be no schools in many areas. In 1871, the Governor Sir Hercules Robinson, stated that vernacular education could be effectively extended only with the assistance of the Gansabahavas. C. O. 57/38. Twenty Second Report of the Central School Commission 1865, p. 85 ff

50 I have dealt with this aspect in some detail in my thesis. See Chapter IV - The ideal of vernacular education and the Pansala school.

51 See Appendix.

See also C. O. 57/82. Rept. Dir. P. I. 1880, p. 8 c. Also p. 86 c.

53 C. O. 54/529. Longden to Kimberley, 283 of 27 December 1880.
into force in 1880 - known as the “Revised Code” which Charles Bruce drew up -
made the conditions governing grants more strict. 54 But despite the misgivings
of the missionaries who resented any changes in the rules governing grants and
who strongly believed that the Government was “obliged” to pay grants for their
schools, the Revised Code did not lead to a reduction in expenditure. On the
contrary, in 1880 over and above the vote provided by the Legislative Council
the Government was compelled to table a supplementary vote of Rs. 45,000, specifically to meet the cost of grant payments. 55 In seeking the approval of the Colonial Office Longden mollified Kimberley with assurances that he had cau-
tioned Bruce against exceeding the annual vote in future and that he had urged Bruce to defer paying grants to the new schools which the missionaries might establish in anticipation of grants. 56

Bruce, who was urged by Kimberley to suggest means of reducing expend-
diture, submitted a series of memoranda which won for him the praise of the Colonial Office and which probably weighed in his favour in his promotion to
the post of Colonial Secretary of Mauritius in 1882. 57 Bruce argued that it was impossible legally to reduce grants to missionary schools if they qualified for them. Instead he favoured a thorough reappraisal of the existing scales of pay-
ment. 58 Like Longden, who privately believed that the grant aided system was farcical as it enabled the missionaries to maintain their schools without commit-
ing their own resources, Bruce showed that the grants were far in excess of
the strict requirements of the missionaries in education. 59 He devised a
means of ensuring that the Government grant was used by the missionary schools only for the teachers' salaries, school furniture and for books and stationery issued free to the pupils. 60

The more fundamental proposals made by Bruce however were rejected
by the local Government and the Colonial Office. Bruce showed that despite the efforts of the missionaries and the Government since 1869, a vast proportion
of the population was left uneducated. 61 Only 1 in every 34 of the population of
2,758,529 in the Island went to school. 62 In the North Central Province where there were only 12 schools, the proportion was 1 in 204 and in the Central Province 1 in 123. 63 Moreover, although in 1867 the missionaries had claimed that the adoption of a grant-aided scheme would lead to an equitable distribution of schools throughout the Island, by 1880 the majority of the missionary schools as well as the Government schools were found in the Western and Northern

54 Ibid.
55 C. O. 54/529. Longden to Kimberley, 284 of 28 December 1880.
56 Ibid.
57 See C. O. 54/533. Douglas to Kimberley, 232 of 19 August 1881, for draft of despatch.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 C. O. 54/539. Longden to Kimberley, 194 of 4 May 1882.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
provinces. Bruce calculated that if the ideal of universal education was to be made a reality, the Government would have to make provision for the education of 50,000 additional pupils in the period 1880-1890. He also suggested - evidently hoping that the financial position of the country would improve - that the Government should set aside 5 per cent of the gross revenue for education and this should be the permanent ceiling limit on expenditure.

Longden thought that Bruce's proposals were impractical. The estimated revenue for 1882 was Rs. 13,025,000. Out of this sum the military contribution, interest on loans, and the liabilities incurred by the Government on account of railway construction, absorbed a good slice leaving only Rs. 9,210,925 for the administration as well as for schemes of redevelopment. Ironically, Longden's simple calculations revealed that the Government was already spending over 5 per cent on education. The education vote for 1882 was Rs. 500,978. Kimberley thought that the ceiling should be permanently fixed at Rs. 500,000. Bruce's proposal that a local cess should be levied was also rejected. John Douglas who was acting for Longden during the latter's absence in England, cautioned Kimberley against the proposal. He feared that a cess would be unpopular and that it might be even evaded. There was also the possibility that the people would construe the cess as a tax designed to aid the missionaries. Kimberley upheld Douglas' objection.

Financial exigencies however continued to have their impact. In October 1882 a select committee of the Legislative Council was appointed to review the entire field of public expenditure and to recommend economies. The Select Committee which gave considerable attention to education, urged that the annual vote should be reduced to Rs. 300,000. The Legislative Council supported the Select Committee although Unofficial members with the exception of the member representing the planting interests opposed the proposal. Ponnambalam Ramanathan who had taken Coomaraswamy's place in the Council forwarded to the Colonial Office an able memorandum criticising the reduction. He showed that in 1872 a sum of Rs. 300,000 had been sufficient to cover the cost of grants as well as administration costs - including the cost of inspecting the grant schools - of the Department of Public Instruction.

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64 C. O. 57/82. Rept. Director Public Instruction. See Appendix E - VIII.
65 C. O. 54/539. Longden to Kimberley, 194 of 4 May 1882.
66 Ibid.
67 C. O. 54/539. Longden to Kimberley, 194 of 4 May 1882.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid. See minutes, Kimberley to Longden, 219 of 27 June 1882.
71 Ibid. See minutes. Kimberley to Longden, 350 of 4 November 1881.
72 C. O. 54/546. Longden to the Earl of Derby, 155 of 14 April 1883.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 C. O. 54/546. Longden to the Earl of Derby, 158 of 14 April 1883.
grant-aided and Government schools had been 769. How was it possible, Ramanathan asked, to budget within Rs. 300,000 when the cost of administration had risen to Rs. 67,120 and the number of Government and grant-aided schools was 1,237? 76

Ramanathan’s protest had its effect. In the Colonial Office C. B. Lucas minuted powerfully against the reduction. 77 Lord Derby in a lucid despatch to Sir Arthur Gordon, who had succeeded Longden, opposed “this sweeping retrenchment”. 78 Indeed his task was made easier by the inconsistencies of the Select Committee which had recommended that the salaries of the Director and the other officials of the Department should not be reduced although it had no qualms about axing the education vote drastically. 79 Moreover, despite itself the Select Committee had admitted that the reduction of the education vote would paralyse “that excellent system” which had been the result of the reforms of 1867.

**APPENDIX**

**Revenue Of The Government Of Ceylon**

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76 Ibid.
77 C. O. 54/546. Longden to the Earl of Derby, 155 of 14 April 1883. See minutes.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.