

## POLITICAL EDUCATION IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS

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At each General Election called by a full-term government, some two-and-a-half to three million new voters become eligible to vote. Since May 1969, when the voting age was reduced to eighteen, this has meant that that number of eighteen to twenty-three year olds have been asked to participate in deciding the United Kingdom's political course for the immediate future. Considering how influential such a number of voters can be in determining the results of elections, it is remarkable how little attention has been given as to what factors determine the voting patterns of this "new elector" group. Moreover, experience of previous generations has suggested that voter preferences, once established in favour of any given party, are hard to alter, so that these first-time voters may be establishing a trend for their particular generation which may continue throughout its lifetime.

If we accept the assumption that voters tend to vary their votes at least partly according to the performance, and events during the lifetime, of the outgoing government (an extension of the old "oppositions don't win elections, governments lose them" adage), then we can see that the years leading up to the election – anything up to five, in some situations possibly even more – are vital in shaping the views of this new electorate. In turn, what this means is that some new voters are being asked to judge the record of an outgoing government which took office when they, the voters, were as young as thirteen – in other words, in their early years at a Scottish secondary school.

Britain has an education system which ensures captive pupils and students between the ages of five and sixteen, and provides for a further variety of educational experiences in schools and colleges up to and beyond the age of eighteen, yet it is the case that, particularly in Scotland, very little is known about the ways in which young voters receive the rudiments of a political education in these environments, or even about the level of commitment that the state gives to developing political literacy in schools.

This article will attempt to begin to fill some of these gaps. It will try to

examine and assess the contribution of the Scottish education system towards creating a politically educated electorate – the historical development of political education in Scottish schools, the nature and provision of this political education, and, finally, some of the political and financial influences in Scottish schools. Throughout this article, we will assume, rightly or wrongly, that it is desirable that the electorate should be politically literate so that it can play a full part in a democratic system of government. Schools have a unique – and almost certainly the best – opportunity to ensure this aim is achieved. Yet as we shall see, the development, provision, and nature of political education in the school curriculum appears to depend less on the educational justification of preparing pupils for playing a full role in adult society than it does on expediency, economic viability, and, in some cases, actual political pressures. In short, this article will examine the politics of political education in Scotland.

### The Historical Development of Scottish Political Education

Historically, there is little tradition in Scotland of schools making a conscious attempt to include any form of political education at any level of compulsory schooling before the 1950's and 1960's. Parents and teachers alike tended to assume that, like one or two other important things in life, children would eventually "pick up" the important bits of information if they needed to. Some teachers did feel that their pupils should know about their contemporary environment, though, so that, for example, some primary classes made regular studies of the news – cutting out newspaper articles and putting them on a wall and so on. In secondary schools, such little political education as there was could appear virtually anywhere, usually reflecting individual subject teacher's interests at the same time, but most often occurring in English, history, geography, or religious education lessons. Almost without exception, secondary school political education dwelt on current affairs and had almost one aim only – to show that what happened in the news, however boring it might seem to the adolescent child, was in fact rather "important" and could even be quite interesting from time to time. Except in perhaps a few cases, no attempt was made to study political processes, either of the United Kingdom or of foreign governments. Such matters were treated as almost trivial because they were so "modern". These were the days, after all, when history courses in Scottish schools stopped at 1914.

It would be nice to think that the changes in thinking which took place in the 1960's and early 1970's were purely the result of an educational renaissance which thrust political education more into the limelight.

However, it is probably truer that some more basic factors were of greater significance, though it would be wrong to write off totally the work done by educationalists in the field. Three important factors combined around this time to make circumstances ripe for a re-appraisal of the need for some kind of direct "preparation for society". Firstly, in the 1960's, the Scottish system of secondary education was reorganised to usher in a truer comprehensive education. What this in effect meant was that most of the old junior secondary schools closed, and merged with the senior secondary schools into large "high schools". Secondly, population trends in general – and the post-war baby boom in particular – bulged its way through secondary schools at this time, so that school rolls swelled still further. Finally, in the early 1970's, the school leaving age was raised to sixteen, by and large compelling all children to stay at school until the end of their fourth year at secondary school.

These changes did three things. The raising of the school leaving age increased the number of reluctant school attenders dramatically, and it was clear that such pupils, who were only in school because they had to be, simply would not tolerate yet another year of education unless it was at least of clear relevance in preparation for outside life – the old traditional curriculum simply would not do. Early in the 1960's, recognition had already been made of the need to provide certification for more school leavers with the discontinuation of "Lower" Grade examinations, sat in the fifth year<sup>(1)</sup> of secondary school, and its replacement by "Ordinary Grade", sat a year earlier. This created an examination framework in which new ideas could be developed. Secondly, the emergence of schools with bigger rolls created an environment in which a greater variety of courses became viable, and so, of course, new courses could also be considered for inclusion in the curriculum for the first time. Finally, although the secondary schools grew in size, there were fewer of them, and this created a shortage of promoted posts in schools, including at departmental head level. In the field of social studies there was, in some parts of Scotland at any rate, an immediate need to find jobs for many teachers of history and geography which acknowledged their experience in the junior secondary schools. The answer to all these problems was the development of a new subject in the Scottish curriculum – Modern Studies. The choice of the name itself was significant. It was neutral, could mean virtually all things to all people, and – most of all – the word "modern" suggested relevance and usefulness. Thus because early heads of Modern Studies departments were converted history and geography teachers, the subject itself was at the outset simply a mixture of both; it was very much associated with the less able end of the pupil spectrum; and it was confined to pupils in their last years of schooling.

However, the early efforts of many of these new Modern Studies teachers brought a great deal of praise, especially in that it forced curriculum thinkers to rethink the purpose of social studies provision in schools. Modern Studies rapidly ceased to be merely a history/geography hybrid, since the concentration on contemporary history and social geography clearly led teachers and examiners of the subject<sup>(2)</sup> towards the areas of politics, sociology, and political economics. Teachers emerged new out of teacher training college with degrees and backgrounds in sociology and, especially, political science, and by the late 1970's Modern Studies had clearly identified itself as the subject of "politics and a bit more". Its protagonists, keen to advance the cause of their subject, began to articulate the value of educating pupils to understand political institutions, political processes, and the important contemporary issues. The status – and profile – of political education rose enormously in these years; and in 1977, the Munn Report declared that

"It is of the utmost importance that pupils, as members of a society, should be made fully aware of the forces which shape it, and that they should come to understand the operation of our own social and economic institutions, and the pattern of life in other human communities as well. A democratic society needs citizens who have been properly educated in these matters."<sup>(3)</sup>

Other endorsements of political education came from businessmen, trade unionists, and government ministers, and served to emphasise the fact that, officially at least, political education was both educationally valuable and academically respectable. The Pandora's Box of political education had been opened.

#### **The Nature and Provision of Political Education in Scottish Schools**

When analysing any programme of political education, however formal or informal it may be, it is always worth bearing in mind that what is understood by "political education" can be subdivided into different types. There are various ways of doing this, but since this article is not the place for debates on educational theories, we can restrict our categories of political education to two crude types.<sup>(4)</sup> Firstly, the student, however young or old, can be informed of, or given an understanding of, the political processes of governmental systems. This area is often known as "civics", and would normally include such elements of the United Kingdom system as voting procedures, powers of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, role of the Member of Parliament, functions of local government, House of Lords; and it might also include a study of other systems of interest – the EEC, United Nations,

the USA, the Soviet Union, or China, to give but a few examples. The second type of education can be described as "current affairs" and would cover contemporary issues, which students discuss and about which they may or may not be invited to reach conclusions – this can be absolutely anything from political policies or the role of women in society, to nuclear disarmament or the roles of the superpowers in the third world. These two elements make up the body of knowledge on which political education draws, but in the course of their study, students should also be attempting to develop certain political skills to a greater or lesser degree – skills such as "critical analysis", "reporting", "decision-making", and "problem-solving".

The opportunity to begin political education, whatever type it is, begins, of course, in primary schools. Exactly what happens here is very hard to determine, and certainly varies not only from region to region but also from school to school. It would appear that any political education which takes place does so because of the personal interest of a local headteacher, or even of a class teacher. Most commonly, current affairs are discussed in a "what's in the news?" lesson, a lesson about newspapers or television, or in a classroom debate. This type of education hardly ever seems to have system or structure, and the express aim of "developing political literacy" certainly does not exist. Even the most enlightened teachers seem to justify such political education as they do in the classroom as an attempt to "to put classwork into perspective" or "keeping the children informed of the world about them". One might even say that this kind of activity is best described as a subsection of an environmental studies programme which might also include science, geography and history. No Scottish authority claims to have any specific policy pertaining to political education in primary schools. This is surprising – and possibly even a little irresponsible – given that most educationalists agree that the primary school provides essential frameworks and foundations for all future learning experiences. The danger of failing to offer guidance in political education at least to classroom teachers is that it opens the door wider still to uncontrolled political indoctrination; yet education authorities seem to take the view that this will not happen in primary schools, perhaps on the questionable grounds that children of that age are somehow not fertile for political moulding.

But in the secondary sector, the situation is very different. Here we have the formal, as well as the informal, aspects of political education to consider, because one of the most important features of the development of Modern Studies as a school subject has been that it offers the outsider a method of measuring fairly precisely any given school's commitment to

formal political education – the element wholly absent at primary level – and also to examine the nature and structure of such courses.

The provision of Modern Studies in secondary schools seems to vary greatly from school to school and from region to region, but, broadly, one typical pattern can be identified. In the first two years of secondary education some schools include Modern Studies as part of the curriculum for all pupils; while at third, fourth, fifth and sixth year levels Modern Studies is offered as an optional choice (in most schools as an alternative to history or geography). What this means is that, from third year (roughly aged fourteen) onwards, formal political education is only given to those who already show an interest – in other words, those arguably most in need of “political educating” are allowed to opt out of it. In first and second years, while this is not the case, Modern Studies is available only at the whim of each individual school. Generally, though, some regions clearly offer much better provisions than others; it appears best in Grampian, Strathclyde, Central and Fife, and patchiest in some of the smaller, and island, authorities. Even size, though, is no guide; Lothian, which one would expect to have a provision similar to that of Grampian or Strathclyde, was reported as having 20% of its secondary schools with no Modern Studies teaching whatever. (see table)

**THE PROVISION OF MODERN STUDIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
(Selected Scottish Regions)**

Region	No of Secondary schools	% schools offering Mod. Studies	% schools offering S1/2 Mod. Studies	% schools with full status Mod Studies departments
Borders	9	100	56	22
Central	19	89	63	53
Fife	20	90	90	85
Grampian	39	97	90	85
Lothian	51	78	65	35
Strathclyde	189	88	55	46
Tayside	32	88	44	41

(Information as supplied by regions listed.)

Part of the problem for Modern Studies is that formal political education in Scotland suffers from something of an identity crisis. In allowing itself to be identified as “a social science” it tends to fall into competition in schools with history and geography (and occasionally economics) as an academic discipline, yet because the subject is called

Modern Studies – a name which fails to appear in the tertiary education sector, or anywhere in England for that matter – it lacks an air of total academic acceptance at times. Indeed the subject has experienced difficulties with universities, even north of the border, which have been reluctant to grant Scottish Examination Board examination passes the same status as their equivalents in history and geography. Partly in an attempt to gain greater credibility, the SEB revised the Higher Grade Modern Studies syllabus for the 1981 examination, but in so doing, created a test which has proved monstrously difficult for school-age candidates. Yet despite successive years of poor results, it still seems impossible to provide an examination which both satisfied the expectations of employers and universities, and also offers students a fair chance of passing. What this suggests is that the educational establishment is unable to accept that the levels of political literacy which teachers currently help their pupils to achieve are actually worthy of proper recognition. Presumably this also casts a shadow of doubt over their ability to accept political education in general.

It is also worth noting what kind of political literacy is encouraged by the examination system. Since teachers tend, rightly or wrongly, towards achieving success in an examination rather than to a specific syllabus, the formal examinations in Modern Studies tend to dictate the style of political education which takes place. By and large, the examination system encourages a passive observation of the institutions and issues deemed relevant in the modern world, rather than an active participation in them. Pupils, for the most part, analyse, criticise and discuss, and without doubt these are important; generally, though, they develop few of the skills necessary to play a directly productive role in a democracy. There are a few exceptions.

The Ordinary Grade examination includes a project in which direct research (including such items as survey and interviewing techniques, and letter writing) is assessed, as are features such as originality and presentation; the Sixth Year Studies Examination includes a decision-making exercise; and it is possible that, if suitable resources are made available, some of the new Standard Grade courses in Modern Studies will move a little more in this direction. But it is clear that pupils taking Modern Studies examinations are expected to demonstrate that they know why their world is the way it is rather more than they know how to change it. As a result, attempts to develop the skills of political participation – debating, decision-making, visual and oral presentation of cases, and even voting – are largely only seen in areas of the curriculum where outside examinations are not dominant. This usually limits such experiments to the first and

second years.

Pupils are also informally politically educated, of course, in the secondary sector throughout the school day and in all types of subjects. Many teachers feel free to express their own political views in classrooms, and those that do not almost certainly do so despite themselves. Certain issues seem particularly popular subjects for classroom discussion, in particular nuclear defence and unemployment, for the obvious reasons that these seem most relevant to adolescent school students. Teachers are naturally concerned to emphasise the relevance of school work in general, and their subject in particular, in order to maintain class morale, and this trend becomes even more marked as pupils progress up the school. It is safe to assume, then, that even in schools where Modern Studies is not part of the curriculum, the political awareness of the pupils is, after a fashion at least, being developed.

The problem with relying on such informal education, however, is that it is hard to be sure exactly what political education is being taught. A structured course of any sort has recognisable aims and objectives, and attempts can be made to measure the extent to which these have been attained; moreover, the type of political education taught in this way can be altered and controlled in a visible way. Unstructured, informal education processes, on the other hand, are as uncontrollable as they are indefinable. Another factor is that Modern Studies in Scotland is taught by specialist registered teachers, who have had some degree of specialised training in political education and are aware of some of its pitfalls. Teachers of other subjects, lacking this background, are less aware of the dividing line between political education and political indoctrination, and may drift across it quite easily. The irony is that many individuals in influential positions in education suspect that formal political education and political indoctrination are one and the same thing; yet by excluding Modern Studies from the curriculum they may in fact be creating the very seed-bed for political education which they seek to avoid.

#### **Political and Financial Constraints on Formal Political Education**

When examining the politics of political education, it is hard to escape the influences of finance on the curriculum. We have already seen that formal political education developed rapidly only when schools found themselves in a position of expansion in general; as school rolls fall, and pressure is made on schools to trim staffing levels to match, so subjects find themselves competing with each other to maintain the viability of their courses and departments. Modern Studies, History and Geography

departments regularly find themselves struggling to share a shrinking market of third and fourth year pupils, and since Modern Studies is frequently taught less than the other social subjects in first and second years (or not at all), pupils often perceive Modern Studies as a "less important" subject as well. Surveys by the Modern Studies Association in Strathclyde and Lothian have shown a direct link between a school's level of commitment to formal political education in the first two years, and the numbers of pupils opting to continue study in later years. Naturally, all teachers wish to protect their own jobs, so that, by and large, the further expansion of Modern Studies in first and second years – at the expense of other subject teaching time – is quietly resisted. This especially applies to history and geography teachers, who feel, perhaps rightly, that they have most to lose.

Another problem caused by the lack of finance is the lack of money available to create separate Modern Studies departments, with fully paid promoted staff responsible, in all schools. As with the provision of Modern Studies in general, the region-by-region position is very variable. Comparing two fairly similar-sized regions, for example, reveals that Lothian has only 18 separate departments of Modern Studies with fully-paid heads out of 51 secondary schools (as opposed to 49 history and 50 geography), while Grampian claims such departments in 38 out of its 39 schools. In many schools, formal political education is the responsibility of either the history or geography department – for whom, as we have already noted, flourishing Modern Studies courses are a decidedly mixed blessing.

Although commitment to Modern Studies programmes varies from authority to authority, it is less easy to establish a definite statement that political education is actually a "party political" issue at local level. The Labour Party in Scotland appears to have shown more interest in developing political literacy than the other parties, but individual politicians of all parties, when asked, say that they believe that political education, usually Modern Studies, should be in the school curriculum. However, the process of transferring this informal support into a written commitment has proved more difficult. It seems that in only one instance has such a statement been made – albeit an important one; Strathclyde Labour Party included a strong commitment to Modern Studies in their most recent regional election manifestos. Yet even such a commitment still has, at time of writing, to be fulfilled by the Labour Strathclyde Regional Council.

It is probably true to say that Modern Studies is more likely to prosper in a high-spending education authority than in a low-spending one, and that

of course Labour councils tend to be associated with high spending more than other parties. Parties' enthusiasm or otherwise for Modern Studies seems less important than their willingness or capacity to spend money to create the conditions in which it can flourish. Contrary to what one might expect, political education courses can be quite expensive to run, because of the ephemeral nature of their content; in concrete terms, Modern Studies books get thrown out because they go out of date, not because they wear out. In particular, it is hard for schools to build up satisfactory reference libraries, so that they depend on the proximity, convenience, and co-operation of good public libraries. Specialist "Modern Studies" books as such are in any case rather thin on the ground because there is no direct equivalent in England, and the schools market in Scotland alone is too small for publishers to be able to make a reasonable profit margin.

The fact that, in England, there is less tradition of teaching political education in general, and no direct equivalent of Modern Studies in particular, no doubt partly explains why political education is so little taught in the independent secondary sector, since many independent Scottish schools still prefer to offer GCE 'A' Levels and 'O' Levels than SEB examinations. Modern Studies is taught in some schools, but rarely throughout all six years, and more usually the subject is offered as an alternative "interest" option for senior pupils. Perhaps, of course, the lack of enthusiasm in the independent sector also reflects a parental suspicion of a subject which many still feel is either frivolous or even in some ways subversive. Yet it has to be said that parents in general tend only to ask questions about political bias in teaching, or else they ask for reassurance that qualifications will count for entry to careers; thus it often seems that headteachers worry more about what parents think of political education than they really need to.

We have seen, then, that parental pressure and party political attitudes have so far been less important influences on the development, degree, and style of political education in Scottish schools than are the financial constraints and education structure. But it would be a mistake to see formal political education in Scotland as being totally free from political direction. If there is one common aim that almost everyone involved in the education of individual children can unite upon, it is success in examinations. These examinations, along with the skills and knowledge that they test, are in Scotland devised by what may well be the most powerful policy-making organ of educational policy – namely, the Scottish Examination Board. If the Scottish Education Department wants to change the emphasis or styles of teaching, then its most effective method is to encourage the examination board to alter the examinations so that those candidates being taught the

approved topics in the approved manner will score the highest marks.

In the first instance the Scottish Education Department sees the function of education, and in particular of political education, as being to prepare pupils to "take their place in society" and "play a full part in the British democratic system". Yet as Colin Wringe has pointed out<sup>(5)</sup>, this is in itself a very political objective, since this aims to produce future citizens who will have perceptions of democracy and of society which broadly match those of existing society. It is, in short, a very conservative objective, and one which implies that many educationalists, especially in government circles, feel that a pupil population which is being politically educated in this way is likely to add stability to our current social structure. Yet it is at least arguable that pupils should be educated for change in society as much as for its conservation.

This conservatism pervades all political education, particularly the formal type. Teachers are well aware that the public sometimes suspects that political education in schools is really political indoctrination, and tend to "play safe" by stressing relatively "moderate", centrist, or conservative views. Moreover, many teachers also believe that it is harder in practice to gain high marks in SEB examinations by answering questions from an extreme viewpoint than from a centrist one. Certainly, such an approach can be successful, but in general one suspects that only the best candidates have the skills necessary to convince markers that they really understand what they are writing about, whereas more conventional approaches tend to be accepted more readily. Pupils are extremely vulnerable at this stage of their school careers; paramount, of course, is the need to achieve good grades to maximise job and further education prospects, and few candidates are prepared to risk failure for the sake of upholding principles, however strongly felt.

Many assumptions in fact underpin the philosophies of political education as recommended for schools by the Scottish Education Department. Some of these can be seen from the aims and structures of courses in general, while others have to be gleaned from trends in the examinations themselves. SEB syllabuses are highly compartmentalised in their approach to the study of British society – it is clear that "women", "unemployed", "ethnic minorities" and "the elderly" are perceived as four separate topics, for example – and this in turn emphasises the pluralist features of United Kingdom society and, by implication, the suitability of a pluralist democratic system.

The SEB and SED are also quite open in declaring that one aim of

Modern Studies is to create a more racially tolerant society, and while almost everyone accepts that this is a worthy aim, it remains a political objective for all that.

But one of the interesting features of Modern Studies examinations is the way in which certain topics and controversial issues appear. The SEB has obviously always felt that study of the EEC is important, and has rewarded those who do so by including a question on the Common Market in every Ordinary and Higher Grade examination set since the two syllabuses were revised in 1976 and 1981 respectively. By contrast, the examinations show little interest in the problems of the third world, and in general the subject is examined in the context of support from and involvement of the United Nations Special Agencies or the superpowers.

Exactly where the educational establishment (i.e. SED, SEB and the Consultative Committee on the Curriculum) stands on the political spectrum is hard to establish exactly, except that, as one might expect, it appears to have centrist tendencies. Examinations at Higher level, especially, though, have shown a particular interest in the rise of the SDP and the possible unfairness of the electoral system, implying a significance possibly out of proportion to the performance of the SDP at the 1983 General Election. By contrast, the SNP barely rates a mention in the main part of the Higher paper, although there is an optional area of study (not often taken up by teachers) in Scottish politics. Taken along with the previously mentioned compartmentalisation of the syllabus, it seems reasonable to deduce that the SEB's view (at least as represented by the examination panel) is that a pluralist democracy and consensus politics are the most suited to United Kingdom society. The two main parties are clearly seen as fragmented – questions on divisions within the Labour or Conservative parties are far more common than on problems within the Alliance or the SNP – and they are also seen as being increasingly polarised. This is clearly intended as part of the answer to a question such as “Account for the rise of the SDP.....”, for instance.<sup>(6)</sup> In general, a thorough study of the examinations of the 1980's would suggest that the SEB – and therefore presumably the SED, since it is in a position to inspect and influence the SEB – believes that the rise of such new centre parties is more significant for students of politics than are the issues and frustrations which led to the Conservative and Labour Parties diverging from the centre in the first place. It is, however, probable that this does not happen consciously; the examining panel does contain teachers, including the principal examiner himself or herself, and a more powerful influence is likely to be the pressure from teachers to make the examination more predictable, and therefore easier to teach towards. This in turn means the examinations tend

to keep to “safe” topics (such as the EEC or the electoral system) which they can be sure all teachers will include somewhere in their courses; and of course, their repeated inclusion tends to encourage even more teachers to teach these topics in later years. But to a certain extent, the reasons for the nature of the examinations are less important than the effects of them on political education in Scottish schools, no matter what the cause.

If one suspects that, consciously or subconsciously, the Examination Board promotes the view that a harmonious, consensus-based society is both natural and appropriate to the United Kingdom, then for final evidence one need only look at the SEB's approach to Northern Ireland. Although observers abroad would probably regard this as the United Kingdom's most serious, intractable, and pressing problem, it hardly ever appears in the examination at all – never in the Ordinary grade, only once in each of Higher Grade and Sixth Year Studies papers in recent years. No official statement has ever been made on the subject but many teachers believe that the subject is too sensitive for younger children, especially, to handle. Certainly, omitting questions from the examination ensures that, at least at certificate level, teachers are unlikely to spend valuable class time discussing certain issues. The exclusion of Northern Ireland as a topic – and therefore from the de facto syllabus – also strengthens the image of the United Kingdom as a society in which consensus politics prevails, in stark contrast to the visions of conflict and polarisation elsewhere in the world – the arms race, Middle-East, Central America, South Africa, communist/capitalist conflicts and so on.

Many Modern Studies teachers believe that the Examination Board itself is suspicious of the academic value of political education. The SEB has its own index of the comparative difficulty of subject examinations, called the Kelly Index, which in recent years at least has shown Examinations in Modern Studies to be of well above average difficulty, particularly in relation to other social subjects.

Despite its own evidence, the SEB has for the most part insisted that the reasons for the low pass rates in Modern Studies are connected with teacher mismanagement of the syllabus and other errors in preparation of candidates rather than any over-difficult examinations or severe marking. The real reasons for this low pass rate may be extremely complex, and may have something to do with the large percentage of mature students who sit the examination and who therefore artificially raise the quality of the “average” paper. But the educational establishment's lack of open attention to the problem still leaves the impression, rightly or wrongly, that it is felt that political education examinations need to be of slightly greater

degree of difficulty than for other subjects in order to validate good passes to higher education establishments or employers.

This impression is enhanced by study of the Scottish Education Department's plans for curriculum development at Standard Grade and 16 level. The Munn Report on "The Curriculum in the Third and Fourth Years of Secondary Schools" argued that all pupils should be educated to understand the political, economic, and social influences of our society; but it did not recommend Modern Studies as such for all. A new subject created partly to meet this need, "Contemporary Social Studies", contains no more political education than history or geography, and, more tellingly, is only deemed suitable for the less able. Indeed, the Conservatives' drive towards a technologically-orientated society may have offered one of the few instances of direct party political influence on the development of political education. While the Munn Report, published during the Labour Government's term of office, laid stress on developing political education for all, the suggestion was quietly dropped in the Conservative's plan for implementation in 1982, re-interpreting the Munn Report's statement (see above) as ".....a strong case for courses.....which would broadly be orientated to the study of contemporary society and to preparation for adult life and work".<sup>(7)</sup> The SED's plans for education after sixteen likewise show political education is held in low esteem – relatively few modular courses are currently prepared for the field of political education, or even public administration.

A final – and perhaps the most significant in the last analysis – influence that the examinations exert over political education is in its general style – namely, it is what was earlier described as a "passive" form. Political education of this nature encourages students to observe trends, implications, and causes, but not, as a rule, to develop the skills of active participation in politics or in becoming an active part of the political system – pressure group skills, canvassing, and so on. Indeed, a preamble to the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies syllabus suggests that students should develop "a healthy scepticism" towards politics. Thanks to the examination system pupils and students spend far more time critically analysing politics at school than they do in offering alternative strategies. It may well be that the current style of political education creates a contempt for politics which discourages some students from taking a more active role in politics in later life; but of course such a suggestion can at present only be mere speculation. Given that most Scots who have formally studied political education already presumably did so because they were already interested enough to choose the subject, it is interesting at least that no obvious link has stood out between those active in one form or another of politics, and

those who received a formal political education. This has been studied very little, however, and it surely merits a careful survey in the future.

So what picture of Scottish political education in Scottish schools are we left with? Firstly, we can see that, for all the lip-service and testimony paid to the value of a politically literate society, formal political education remains a low priority and has developed in Scotland only where financial constraints and structure of Scottish secondary schools has suited. Consequently, provision varies from the carefully-considered to cavalier. Secondly, we can see that the Scottish Education Department, deliberately or otherwise, heavily influences the style and content of formal political education in schools, partly through influence on course syllabuses, but more particularly through examinations in Modern Studies. By remote control, it directs a curriculum which is passive in style, concentrates heavily on "civics" and the mechanics of formal government, appears to avoid certain controversial topics, and above all presents a centrist view of a pluralist consensus society with a democracy to match. Moreover, the SED currently appears less concerned with the development of social sciences in general, and political education in particular, than some outsiders have suggested it ought to be.

Finally, we can see that, although the Labour Party seems perhaps marginally more interested and concerned with creating a politically literate electorate, no party has actually done very much, and in fact party politics is a relatively minor influence on political education.

Perhaps this is not so surprising; it is probably true that party machines are less interested in dealing with a politically literate electorate (who might talk back) than a politically *receptive* electorate. Political parties presumably would prefer the electorate to know why things have to be the way they are rather than how to change them. If ever the United Kingdom electorate were to become truly politically educated – in all aspects of politics, in the sense that it could act independently as well as listen – then the party system as we know it might well be in real danger. In the meantime, it may well be that professional politicians would prefer that political education widens from its present extent, but retains its present form.

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References

1. Some readers may not be familiar with the standard Scottish school structure, in which pupils normally attend primary school for seven years (usually termed P1, P2 and so on), then go on to anything up to six years of secondary education (S1-6). Thus pupils normally sit Ordinary Grade examinations in “fourth year”, Higher Grade in “fifth year”, while in “sixth year” they may take further “Highers”, or the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies.
2. The first Ordinary Grade examination was offered in 1962, the first Higher in 1968.
3. Scottish Education Department Consultative Committee on the Curriculum (Chairman, J Munn), *The Structure of the Curriculum in the Third and Fourth Years of the Scottish Secondary School*, HMSO, 1977, p.25.
4. Although it is not within the scope of this article to discuss political education methodology extensively, readers who wish further reading on this subject are referred to the extensive bibliography in Colin Wringe *Democracy, Schooling and Political Education*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1984.
5. *ibid.*
6. From the Scottish Examination Board Higher paper in 1983.
7. Scottish Education Department *The Munn and Dunning Reports: Framework for Decision*, (consultative paper circulated to schools and other relevant bodies), 1982, p.11.