

## Times Were When

# An occlusional series from the archives

From the pages of *Education*, the predecessor of this magazine, from 5 July 1963. Its lead article reported on the presidential address of Alderman Jack Wood of Birmingham, president of the now sadly long abolished Association of Education Committees, which, in those days, *Education* was “the official organ” of. *Education* reported on Alderman Wood delving into the mysteries of selection and social class.

**H**e showed how closely selective procedures reflect underlying social distinctions which are themselves reinforced by slum schools in the inner city areas and brave new buildings in the areas of better housing. He referred to an inquiry carried out at his request in Birmingham. “I asked for selection figures of three groups of junior schools 1 in the congested areas near the city centre; 2 in the council house estates; and 3 in the owner-occupied ‘semi-detached’ areas ...

“In a total age group of nearly 16,000 last year, 27 per cent were awarded selective school places and only one per cent of them at an age higher than 11-plus. A sample was taken of 30 junior schools, 10 in each of the three types of area, and each ten comprised 15 forms. The results were that:-

“1. 11 per cent of children from the central areas were awarded selective places; 2. 20 per cent from the municipal housing estates were successful; and 3. 53 per cent managed it from the suburban middle-class area schools ...

“Our City Statistician has confirmed that the differences revealed, taking into account the numbers of children involved, were statistically significant. It should be added that staffing difficulties were on the whole worse in the central area schools, leading to larger classes there.”

Mr Wood went on: “At a higher academic level I have the selection figures from one direct grant school which is taking about one-third of its ten-plus to 11-plus entry on the governors’ examination from a very few private or preparatory schools that cram for the purpose, and the remainder from the hundreds of maintained junior schools in a populous cluster of towns with an age group of well over 20,000.

“The maintained grammar schools, I find from figures at my disposal, get 80 per cent more from the estimates in the cost per pupil as compared with non-selective schools, taking no account of their superior provision for recreation and the fact that their pupils get nearly all the awards for higher education at Universities, etc. It is evident that vastly more is coming from public funds for the education of the middle-class child than for the less-privileged working-class child. As the class war, we are told, did not exist, we had to invent it.

“I have drawn my conclusions from University research in the hope that no-one would accuse me of political or class bias, but I could not make political capital out of the situation if I would, as my own party colleagues seem determined, in many authorities that they control, to maintain segregation.”

As a trade unionist, Mr Wood had a word to say about adult education and in particular about the WEA, and the educational activities of the TUC which are now being expanded. He hoped LEAs would support them by letting them use classrooms free of charge.

In conclusion he took a few pot-shots at random, scoring a few bullseyes in the process. He contrasted LEA expenditure on education (£800 million) with £1,050 million for alcohol and £1,200 for tobacco. He compared the maintenance allowance for an undergraduate living at home (£240 plus vacation earnings) with the single unemployed man’s benefit of £175 a year. And he queried, following the State report the wisdom of multiplying university places which one year of a three-year undergraduate course was spent on vacation.

Having loosed off his cartridges and put away his fishing tackle, Alderman Wood took up his presidential mantle for what may well be a year of decisive importance for the AEC. [The reference to fishing tackle was contained in the introduction of the article which is not reproduced here for reasons of space.]