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The Inner London Education Authority and the William Tyndale Junior School Affair, 1974–1976

JOHN DAVIS

ABSTRACT *The William Tyndale Junior School affair marked a turning point in modern educational history. The affair, in which one north London primary school was paralysed by internal arguments over teaching method, is here analysed as a product of the pressures prevalent in Inner London education, and the article assesses the attempts of the Inner London Education Authority to contain those pressures. A necessary deference to the autonomy of teachers led to the adoption in the school of adventurous didactic methods which proved unacceptable to many parents. The unfolding of the affair widened divisions within the authority, between the authority and the teachers, between radical and traditional teachers, between teachers and managers, between teachers and parents, between different groups of parents and between the ILEA and the Borough of Islington. The Tyndale controversy was thus very complex, but its outcome is relatively straightforward: the apparent failure of ‘progressive’ methods in one London school prompted the adoption nationally of a more interventionist approach to methods and standards by central government and, in the process, a diminution of the autonomy of LEAs.*

For some 18 months, between the spring of 1974 and the autumn of 1975, the William Tyndale Junior School, off Upper Street in Islington, north London, became the focus of probably the most embittered educational controversy in post-war Britain. The controversy originated in a dispute within the staff room over the introduction of innovative didactic techniques by a radical majority of the staff, led by the headmaster Terry Ellis and the former deputy head Brian Haddow. Their experiments in classroom democracy, and in the widening of children’s choice in work and play, were criticised by a part-time remedial reading teacher, Annie Walker, on the grounds that they neglected educational basics and denied pupils the opportunity for academic progress. During the summer of 1974 Walker issued a manifesto attacking the methods practised at the school. She carried her campaign to the parents, and the radical teachers were subjected to strong parental criticism at public meetings in June and July. The public controversy led to a sharp fall in the school roll, as parents transferred their children to other local schools or declined to transfer them from the Infants School—a separate institution sharing the same building—to the Juniors. Mounting evidence of staffroom conflict and parental disquiet led to the involvement of the school’s managing body in the dispute, and for the remainder of the dispute the managers became, still more than Mrs Walker, the principal antagonists of the radical teachers. During the months of ‘open conflict’ that followed, the managers sought to enlist the Inner London Educa-

tional Authority (ILEA), ultimately responsible for the school and what went on inside it, on their side. Though manifestly reluctant to get involved, the Authority's principal spokesman during the affair, the Chairman of the Schools Sub-Committee, Harvey Hinds, apparently urged the managers to produce evidence of local concern which would justify ILEA action. The managers responded in March 1975 by launching a local petition calling upon ILEA to 'take urgent action to re-establish public confidence in this junior school' (ILEA, 1976, para 668). With the affair attracting widespread coverage in both the high- and middlebrow press and in the London evening papers during the summer of 1975, the Authority gradually acknowledged the need to act. With hostility between managers and teachers reaching a level which made mediation impossible, it determined upon a local authority inspection of the William Tyndale schools and a public inquiry into their operation. In practice it was the Junior School which was under investigation, and the radical teachers at the school sought to thwart the inspection by withdrawing their labour and setting up an alternative 'strike school' in nearby Gaskin Street. On arrival at the Junior School, therefore, the inspectors found themselves called upon not only to inspect but also to teach children in 'an atmosphere of chaotic violence'; the return to the chalk face provided one of them with 'the most challenging professional experience of my life' (Report of John Welch, Staff Inspector, English, 28 September 1975, and note from Norman Geddes to G.V. Pape, n.d. but September 1975, ILEA Files, 1975b). The staff returned to the Junior School in October, and the inspection resumed, though by now only 55 children remained at the school [1]. The public inquiry, conducted by Robin Auld QC, ran from October 1975 to February 1976. Working to his brief, Auld produced a lengthy exposition of the whole episode without specific recommendations, but even in this form his report was coruscating, and few of the participants escaped unscathed. It would provide the basis for disciplinary action by ILEA against Ellis, Haddow and five of their colleagues, who were all dismissed, but the ILEA itself became Auld's principal corporate victim. Hinds' actions were vigorously criticised, as was the inertia of the inspectorate and the inadequacy of communications between the divisional office and County Hall, but above all the Authority was censured for neglecting its ultimate responsibility, under the 1944 Education Act, for the conduct and curriculum of the school (ILEA, 1976, paras 888–896, 875–884 and 826–831). Already under fire for its 'profligacy' in the mid-1970s, ILEA had spent £55,000 of public money [2] advertising its own shortcomings.

'The education world knows that it is the workings of the Inner London Educational Authority which is being inquired into as much as the workings at William Tyndale school', wrote one professional journal as the Auld Inquiry approached its close (*Education*, 6 February 1976). In a sense ILEA had been on trial since its creation as part of the reform of London government in 1965. The 1960 report of the Herbert Commission, on which the 1965 reform had been based, had criticised the education service provided by the London County Council for the inner London area, suggesting that the unmediated control of education by a single local authority in a large urban area ran counter to the intention of the 1944 Act to inject 'local interest at a level between County Hall and the school'. The LCC's education system was 'huge and monolithic' and afflicted by an intrinsic 'rigidity and apparent inhumanity'. The Commission recommended the replacement of the LCC by a Greater London Council, covering outer London in addition to the LCC area, and the creation of large second-tier London Boroughs with extensive powers. On education Herbert proposed an awkward two-tier division, with the GLC responsible for funding and strategy but

the boroughs looking after 'the day-to-day running of the schools'. The intention was to reconcile the administrative advantages of a large authority with the accountability and involvement offered by local management: 'it seems to us that in regard to the daily conduct of the schools, parents and other people like to be able to go to the Town Hall, or to approach their local councillors'. An explicit division of functions was intended to avoid two-tier friction (Herbert, 1960, paras 454, 517, 520). There was, though, more enthusiasm within the Ministry of Education for large educational authorities in principle and for the LCC's record in particular, and the Ministry succeeded in preserving the unitary service for inner London both in the 1963 White Paper and in the legislation of that year (Rhodes, 1970, pp. 106–10; Ministry of Housing and Local Government, 1961, paras 9, 39). With the county boroughs in outer London reluctant to see any dilution of their existing education powers, Herbert's proposals were completely overturned: the outer boroughs received full education powers while the Inner London Education Authority replaced the LCC as the sole education authority for the inner area. ILEA was thus an anomaly in a measure which generally strengthened the borough authorities: indeed, the legislation underlined ILEA's fragility by providing for a review of its performance after five years (Rhodes, 1970, pp. 187–9. The review provision was repealed in 1967).

The choice before the Macmillan government had not been a straightforward one. Education was indeed, as Herbert said, a personal service, but it was also a very expensive one, and there was room for concern that some of the poorer inner London boroughs would find the cost hard to bear. But the decision, in effect, to perpetuate the LCC type of education service left open the questions of accountability that Herbert had raised. ILEA resembled the old LCC more closely than the new GLC. Under almost exclusive Labour control, it displayed the features of single-party urban authorities: oligarchic management by a small group of leading politicians and senior officers, and relative invulnerability to electoral punishment. Continuity was emphasised by the fact that the Authority's first two Education Officers, W.F. Houghton and Eric Briault, were long-serving LCC men.

ILEA also inherited the LCC's system of divisional offices, which Briault in particular considered a solution to 'what might otherwise be problems of very large size' (Briault, 1971). Ten divisional offices covered the routine of local administration. Their territories corresponded roughly, though not precisely, to the new inner London boroughs, but there was no horizontal integration of divisional and borough authorities. The LCC's administrative system had been, as Briault's successor acknowledged, 'designed to distribute decisions from the centre', (Newsam, 1982, p. 2), and this was the structure that ILEA inherited. Mindful of Herbert's criticism, the Authority had enjoined its Divisional Officers to 'preserve the personal touch that it would not be easy to keep with an entirely centralized administration' (K.C. Culverwell, D.O. for Southwark, quoted ILEA, 1976, para 40), but even by 1970 the Divisional Officers had come to be seen as part of the problem of ILEA's inaccessibility: 'most are scarcely known outside professional circles' (Corbett, 1970). Hinds acknowledged in 1977 that 'very often the divisional office is just one more obstacle in getting an answer to your complaint' (quoted by Mack, 1977); one of the Tyndale managers told the Auld Inquiry that she had 'consulted the divisional office until I was blue in the face' without satisfaction (Stella Burnett, quoted in *The Times*, 5 December 1975) [3].

More serious from the Authority's point of view was the tendency of divisional offices to filter the upward flow of information to County Hall, a habit which both Auld and the Tyndale teachers believed to have contributed to ILEA's slow response to the

Tyndale crisis (ILEA, 1976, para 878) [4]. Divisional insecurities perhaps reflected a deeper problem of bureaucratic morale, rooted in the Authority's growing tendency to cut through its 'hopeless Byzantine mess of divisional and central administration' (Brighouse, 1992, p. 59) by bypassing the divisional level. As ILEA grew into its role, a pattern emerged by which the major strategic decisions were taken at County Hall while detailed policy issues were devolved not to the divisions but to the schools themselves.

Early in its life ILEA had engaged a public relations firm to advise on public information policy. Its report, stressing that 'first, of course, the ILEA is in a special position by reason of its size', had argued that:

Headmasters play a vital role in their own communities which cannot be taken over at the centre and it is essential that clear lines of ILEA policy in this area are explained to headmasters and all necessary assistance afforded them on a continuing basis. (ILEA Files, 1966, C2)

As Hinds later put it: 'you appoint a good headteacher, and then he runs the show' ('William Tyndale, School or Scandal', *Public Affairs*, BBC Radio 4, 1990). The *de facto* autonomy of headmasters had been an established feature even of the LCC service (Newsam, 1982, p. 2): the case was self-evident for entrusting them with practical power within a budgetary and organisational framework determined at the centre. This approach crystallised in Briault's most important innovation, the Alternative Use of Resources (AUR) scheme, applied to primary schools from 1972 and secondary schools from the following year. Schools' overall budgets were, of course, determined centrally, with an eye to ILEA's overriding concern for positive discrimination in favour of disadvantaged areas, but AUR allowed schools considerable discretion in the expenditure of that part of their budget beyond basic staff and capital costs: money could be spent on additional teaching staff, specialist teachers, ancillary staff, books, teaching aids or even minor works as the school saw fit (Briault, 1973, pp. 12–15).

Briault stressed that these decisions should be made by heads 'in full consultation with their staffs' (Briault, 1973, p. 12), and ILEA remained conscious of the danger of reinforcing the power of the autocratic head. Devolution to the schools was accompanied by an emphasis upon the need to involve the staff: 'the role of the teacher is fundamental', as Hinds put it (Hinds, 1973, p. 13). The Authority commended schools in which 'matters [were] discussed in departmental, pastoral or team staff meetings, with views forwarded as necessary to a higher decision-making body or to the head' (Report of the Working Party on the Internal Government of Schools, January 1974, Auld Inquiry Documents (2) 32a). ILEA was bound to show sensitivity to the self-esteem of the ordinary teacher. Teaching in inner London was acknowledged by the Authority's inspectorate and by many others to be exceptionally stressful; Marie Maxwell's survey of Southwark teachers in 1974 found that nearly a quarter had been hurt attempting to control their children (Maxwell, 1974; Pape, 1975). The rigours of the job, combined with the expense and difficulty of living in London on a teacher's salary, combined to produce a very high teacher turnover in the ILEA area—around 25% p.a. before the Houghton pay award of 1974 (Bramall, 1976)—and a severe teacher shortage. A degree of deference to the autonomy of the individual teacher made sense in these circumstances, and squared with the professional demands of the teachers themselves. The inner London teaching body was disproportionately young, not least because the cost of housing in London tended to drive out those intending to raise a family—'sharing a flat and enjoying "swinging London" is fine, but when it

comes to settling down, it's back home to the provinces where a schoolmaster can live reasonably decently and buy quite a fair house on his salary', wrote a 29-year-old teacher in 1969 (*Centrepoint*, 1969b). It was also disproportionately radical: those who chose to endure the rigours and poor rewards of the job were often—like many of the Tyndale teachers—driven by a concern for working-class children and with the wider wrongs of society. The Inner London Teachers' Association and its local branches became regular critics of their parent union, the National Union of Teachers, and the demand for staffroom democracy figured frequently on the London agenda in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hierarchy in the common room was depicted as anachronistic in the post-Plowden age of child-centred education: 'as long as teachers have to be controlled from above, how can we expect our pupils to begin learning to think for themselves?' (*Centrepoint*, 1969a). In encouraging the involvement of teaching staff in the running of its schools, ILEA was swimming with a strong professional tide. In the larger secondary schools unlimited teacher consultation was doubtless impracticable, but it was feasible with a small primary staff—one of many reasons why a crisis like Tyndale was always more likely at primary than at secondary level. At Tyndale Ellis and his colleagues carried staffroom democracy to its logical conclusion, with 'frequent and lengthy staff meetings' to discuss issues of educational philosophy (ILEA, 1976, Appendix XV, p. 2) [5]. In such a forum it was possible for an inbuilt majority consistently to override opposition: it was Walker's sense that she was a victim of the 'tyranny of the majority' that led her to carry her fight to the parents and the wider public.

Devolution made sense as a means of demonstrating that ILEA valued its teachers, but it carried the obvious risk, in a period of high teacher turnover, of empowering individuals with very little professional experience. Some 14% of ILEA teachers in 1972–1973 were said to be in their first year of teaching, while in the more challenging inner-city areas the figure was much higher (*The Teacher*, 1974). Michael Marland, a north London headmaster and author of a much cited work on teaching technique, believed that London possessed 'large numbers of young teachers, highly intelligent, committed and imaginative, but without proper training in their craft' (Quoted by Macpherson, 1975). Newsam later maintained that 'in the late 1960s and early 1970s there were [in London] only a few hundred experienced primary teachers standing between the schools and breakdown' (Newsam, 1983, p. 4). This situation accelerated the movement of the ILEA inspectorate away from a coercive and towards an advisory—even pastoral—role in dealing with teachers.

'I do think that the inspectorate pussy-footed around it', claimed Hinds, with hindsight (*Public Affairs*, BBC Radio 4, 1990). To a generation accustomed to the iron hand of Ofsted, the apparent passivity of the inspectorate during the Tyndale affair appears striking; even at the time, critics of the authority pointed to the decline in school inspections from around 40 per annum in the 1960s to a dozen or so in the mid-1970s (Macpherson, 1975). The ILEA inspectorate accepted that it had always played 'a dual role', combining monitoring and 'quality control' on the one hand with teacher support on the other, and that 'there has always been a tension between these functions' (Birchenough, 1975). From the late 1960s the balance had shifted markedly towards teacher-support. There were other factors at work, of course. The upheavals in British education during the 1960s and 1970s—the end of the tripartite division at the secondary level and the spread of Piaget-based child-centred methods in primary schools—had undermined the traditional certainties by which teachers had once been assessed: 'with the coming of the comprehensive school', wrote the ILEA's Chief Inspector in January 1975, 'and the advent of an era in which there is much less

agreement about what the objectives of education should be, comparisons are much more difficult' (Birchenough, 1975). London's size was held to make a full inspection régime impracticable—even at 40 inspections a year, it would take 30 years to cover the whole ILEA area (Birchenough, 1975). Full inspections became still more daunting as the financial constraints of the mid-1970s began to bite: by 1973–1975 only two or three full primary inspections occurred *per annum*, though there were almost 900 ILEA primary schools (Briault, Disciplinary Tribunal, 13 December 1976, p. 28). Paradoxically but comprehensibly, ILEA concluded that the problems faced by London primary schools in the early 1970s made full inspections otiose: 'the trouble large numbers were in (shifting pupils and shifting staff) was immediately evident and this meant that propping them up rather than recording their problems was the priority' (Sir Peter Newsam to the author, 16 September 2001). It is clear, though, that these pressures reinforced an established trend in the inspectorate's practice, deriving ultimately from the policy of positive discrimination. The inspectorate's response to the Plowden Committee's advocacy of educational priority areas in 1967 had been to stress its own role in providing in-service training to primary teachers and to lament the number of teachers not making use of such training (ILEA Files, 1967). Briault made the point more clearly in 1973, arguing for an increase in inspector numbers to deal with the special needs of the inner city:

As the stresses of living in an urban area press harder on pupils, parents and teachers in general, it becomes even more important than before to provide good support for the teachers (ILEA Files, 1973)

He suggested to the Tyndale disciplinary tribunal that the Authority's instinctive reaction to managerial and press criticism of the school had been 'a greater defensiveness of the staff than was probably right', which 'led us to be more tolerant of the real state of the school than we should have been' (Disciplinary Tribunal, 10 December 1976, p.m., p. 6).

Even before Tyndale became a national issue, the inspectorate was aware of growing pressure to tilt the balance once more towards monitoring (Birchenough, 1975), but it was reluctant to yield. It was moving, in fact, towards a system of self-appraisal by schools, in line with the overall policy of devolution [6]. In the Tyndale affair the efforts by individual managers to enter classrooms and observe lessons in person—criticised both by the teachers and by Auld [7]—might be taken as an attempt to invoke a form of traditional inspection which the Authority had largely abandoned. ILEA's decision to implement a full inspection at Tyndale represented a stark departure from established practice, at the apparent behest of the managers. It goaded the teachers into their tactically suicidal withdrawal of labour (Waghorn, 1996, p. 38) [8] and extinguished any faint hope of a compromise solution.

During its first decade, then, the particular pressures associated with inner London education lay behind ILEA's gradual evolution away from the LCC model. The Authority devolved power to school level and the inspectorate moved from a corrective to a supportive role. Internal checks and balances were, in effect, diminished. Hinds rather sanctified this state of things in his evidence to the Auld Inquiry, asserting that 'in the English system the attitude of the education authorities is one of leaving teachers to teach and managers to manage' (quoted in *Times Educational Supplement*, 5 December 1975) [9]. His words were generally taken as evidence of ILEA's 'hands off' approach to its duties, but they did suggest the extent to which the Authority's policy depended upon 'a mutual confidence which in experience is rarely shown not to exist'

(*ibid.*) [10]. The ILEA system was no longer the LCC system that Herbert had attacked, but it was scarcely less of a producers' collective. Questions remained as to how far it satisfied the test of external accountability that Herbert had posed.

During the 1970s these questions came increasingly to be asked by the second-tier authorities to which Herbert had intended entrusting education. With the rapid rise in local taxation in the mid-1970s the question of accountability became more than an abstract issue. During the period of the Tyndale dispute ILEA's demands upon Islington rose as a proportion of the Borough's total expenditure from 16% to 19%. The percentage had been higher in the past, but the Council's total rate rose by 66% in those two years (London Borough of Islington, 1975–1976, F). Coming under local criticism for its own expenditure, (e.g. *Islington Gazette*, 1975), it inevitably stressed the 'profligacy' of the precepting authorities, of which ILEA was the most rapacious. Islington was the first London Borough to put in place a consultation group, in which borough councillors held regular meetings with ILEA members and officers to discuss educational matters of local concern. Hammersmith, Camden, Greenwich and Hackney followed suit. Though giving this development a fair wind in public, ILEA was privately unenthusiastic, and resolved to 'sit tight and hope that it doesn't extend beyond four or five [boroughs]' (ILEA Files, 1974c). It was still less happy about the further developments in Kensington and Chelsea and in Islington, where standing Education Committees were appointed by the Borough Councils in 1974 despite the Boroughs' lack of education powers. Conservative Kensington was irredeemably hostile to Labour ILEA, but that Labour Islington should 'find itself in bed with the devil' worried the Authority (ILEA Files, 1975d). The Islington Education Advisory Committee, established in November 1974, appeared to reflect 'the feeling, among Islington Borough members, of loss of confidence in the authority and efficiency of the ILEA' (F.G. Smith to Hinds, 3 July 1975, Auld Inquiry, Documents (6) 263). It certainly reflected the belief that ILEA was unnecessarily secretive in its attitude towards the Borough (G.D. Southgate to Bramall, 2 September 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (7) 340). ILEA, in turn, believed Islington and several other inner London boroughs to be poorly run (Sir Peter Newsam to the author, 16 September 2001). The ILEA leader, Ashley Bramall, responding to the Islington developments, did little to promote harmony, stressing that 'co-operation between our authorities will best be furthered by mutual respect for the autonomy of each in carrying out our respective statutory functions' (Bramall to G.D. Southgate, 18 October 1974, ILEA Files, 1974a).

Bramall's advantage was that Islington had no statutory education functions. The situation was more complicated, as Tyndale would show, in the one area where the second tier did have education responsibilities: the appointment of members of the managing and governing bodies of schools. The 1944 Act required that boards of governors be appointed for every secondary school, and boards of managers for every primary school, in an LEA's area. These bodies were conventionally seen as worthy but inert, concerning themselves with the condition of the buildings and the state of the lavatories, but the upsurge of popular interest in education in the 1960s was reflected in a growing interest in governors' and managers' roles. Resuming control of ILEA in 1970, Labour had caught the mood, overhauling the system in 1971 and introducing courses for managers and governors at its adult education institutes in 1972 which soon stimulated a healthy demand (ILEA Files, 1975e). The author of the only contemporary study of the system assured Auld that ILEA differed from 'many other urban authorities who have thought of managing bodies [as] ineffectual, expensive and a waste of time' (D.A. Howell, Auld Inquiry Proofs (1) 26). This doubtless gratified the

Authority, but this political initiative appears to have stimulated ingrained misgivings amongst ILEA's principal officers about encouraging lay involvement. Briault, for one, displayed a caution common amongst local government officers in the early 1970s in the face of the current vogue for participation: 'how in fact can you effectively consult and enable many hundreds of parents to participate in any real sense in the decision-making?' (Briault, 1971). Beyond that question lurked, perhaps, a fear that power-sharing threatened the Authority's strategic role: 'resources for education are limited and an education authority must be free to be put them where they are most needed' (ILEA Files, 1975e). Fortunately, from this point of view, governing and managing bodies did not offer a very direct form of popular control: of the 19 members of a primary school managing body 12 were political nominees—seven being chosen by the ILEA ruling party's whips, five by the party controlling the relevant London Borough (ILEA, 1976, paras 60–1). ILEA remained wedded to this political control; at the height of the Tyndale affair, which had demonstrated how independent-minded even party nominees could be, it reaffirmed its belief that 'the majority view of the local education authority should prevail' on managing bodies (ILEA Files, 1975e). Similar considerations doubtless influenced the Authority's reluctance to spell out managers' powers. The Authority's revised Rules of Management of 1971 required them to 'exercise the oversight of the conduct and curriculum of the school', which would be determined in detail by the head; Houghton's covering letter emphasised that they 'would very properly wish to associate themselves as much as possible with its corporate life' and that 'they would probably wish to visit the school from time to time' (ILEA, 1976, Appendix VII; ILEA, 1971, 1). Beyond that was 'a great fog about what school governors are entitled to do', particularly in the event of dispute (Corbett, 1972). Doubtless a reluctance to feed barrack-room lawyers on managing bodies lay behind the Authority's conviction that the balance of power between ILEA, governors/managers and teachers 'should not be defined too precisely' (ILEA Files, 1975e), but ambiguity carried risks. 'The stepping down of responsibilities to the school level might be acceptable, if at the school level it was clear who was ultimately responsible, but it is not', complained the most vocal of the Tyndale managers (Robin Mabey, Auld Inquiry Proofs (1), 13). Back in 1966 the public relations consultants engaged by the new ILEA had stressed that their recommendations for 'decentralisation with co-ordinated direction from the centre' implied a 'context of clear lines of responsibility and policy, established and maintained by the ILEA' (ILEA Files, 1966, D1). The Tyndale affair would prove them right.

Newsam emphasised to one of the Tyndale Managers in October 1975 that 'the Authority does not lay down an overall policy on curriculum, organisation and methods of teaching' (Newsam to R. Mabey, October 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (9), 488). This was necessarily so. It was true that if there was a battle between 'progressive' and 'formal' methods in London education, ILEA was not a neutral observer: the LCC's evidence to the Plowden Committee had anticipated the Committee's eventual endorsement of 'child-centred' methods and this remained ILEA orthodoxy. But the implication of the Authority's devolution policy was that it had no chance to dictate didactic method, which was determined in practice by heads and staff. A striking proportion of the 'experimental' schools—progressive or traditional—prominent in educational discussions of the period were London schools. They included the showcase comprehensives at Holland Park, Kidbrook and Tulse Hill, Michael Marland's Woodberry Down, Margaret Maden's Islington Green, even

Rhodes Boyson's Highbury Grove. At the primary level were the modern Eveline Lowe and Vittoria schools in Camberwell and Islington, purpose-built for team teaching, Henry Pluckrose's Prior Weston in Islington, which Walker admired (Pluckrose, 1975), the John Milton School in Battersea, where Haddow studied new teaching methods (Auld Inquiry Proofs (4), 85b)—even Tyndale itself under Ellis's predecessor, the eponymous Alan Head, which drew outsiders to observe its experiments in team teaching (I. Chowles, Auld Inquiry Proofs (4), 95).

In this sense Ellis's Tyndale was another experimental London school, though nobody maintained that the experiment had succeeded before it was forcibly terminated. It is not adequately described as an experiment in progressive methods, since the radical teachers themselves rejected mainstream progressivism, which they considered 'often simply traditional education in disguise' (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 42). In fact the figures in the whole affair most loyal to Plowdenite principles were the majority of the managing body, the teachers' most persistent opponents, who feared that 'the existence of William Tyndale Junior School is a handicap to the cause of "progressive" education' (D. Dewhurst, V. Fairweather, A. Gittings & E. Hoodless, 'William Tyndale Schools—27 February 1975', Auld Inquiry Documents (5) 177, also Dewhurst, Auld Inquiry Proofs (1) 12a, Aelfryth Gittings, *ibid.* (11)). The radical teachers were, ironically, in unacknowledged agreement with the conservative Walker that progressive methods benefited 'the children of the better-off parents who can give their children educational help at home' (A.D. Walker, 'A Criticism of the "Free Choice" Method of Education Based on Total Children's Rights as at William Tyndale Junior School', Auld Inquiry Documents (2) 51a) [11]. In his previous post, as deputy-head of the Charles Lamb primary school, also in Islington, Ellis had practised team teaching and other progressive techniques in 'an open-plan building which almost forced on you these much more liberal methods', and had found that 'we were still missing out with so many of the children, especially those in the low ability band' (Ellis interview) [12]. He and his colleagues believed that 'many forward-looking ideas thrown out in the balmy air of the 1960s were in the process of freezing to death in the cold, uncomfortable climate' of the mid-1970s; as a result 'the underachieving ones were not catered for' (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 42; Ellis interview). Thus while Walker believed that:

the backward child who is a problem socially in the school must be tackled first in his backwardness. Once he is reading and able to catch up with his peers, the social/behavioural problem evaporates (A.D. Walker, 'Motion: That this school is suffering from a malaise ...' (Notes for Staff Meeting), Auld Inquiry Documents (2) 49c)

the radical teachers considered treatment of the social causes of backwardness to be a precondition of educational progress.

This reflected the teachers' position on the educational left in London. Union politics at that time was monopolised by varieties of the far left, with differing approaches to educational practice. The ILTA was dominated by the Communist Party, who were the conservatives in this context (Wright, 1973). Their anomalous alliance with the Labour Right (Boyson, 1975) was reflected in the co-option of ILTA Communists onto ILEA's Schools Sub-Committee. With a strong tradition of auto-didacticism, the CP remained loyal to the belief that education could improve society and hostile to the view ascribed to 'the International Socialists and other super-hyper-ultra Left' groups that:

Such are the deprivations suffered by some children before they even attain school age ... that it is impossible for schools to compensate to any significant

degree. (Colin Yardley's presidential address to the ILTA, *Centrepint* 8(1), March 1975)

The new left gained recruits among young London teachers in the early 1970s. Its most visible manifestation was the International Socialist mouthpiece Rank and File which, like Militant in national Labour politics, campaigned largely through a newspaper (Seifert, 1984, p. 375; 1987, pp. 124ff). ILEA's management was concerned that the spread of Rank and File in London would mean that 'some of our schools are going to be increasingly difficult to manage' (Newsam, ILEA files, 1974b), but the hunt for Rank and File involvement in the Tyndale case would prove something of a distraction. Only one member of the Tyndale staff belonged to Rank and File—the mathematics teacher Dorothy McColgan, already a leper in ILEA eyes after two earlier disputes with the Authority—and she was, according to Walker at least, a minor player in the episode (Walker to Rice, 30 September 1974, Auld Inquiry Documents (4) 126a) [13]. Though the Tyndale teachers received much support from Rank and File and Ellis contributed a piece on the affair to the newspaper (Ellis, 1976), they considered the Trotskyite left to be tainted by conservative didactic methods and by its preoccupation—'economistic', in Haddow's term—with teachers' material demands (Ellis interview). Whilst sharing the new left view that education reflected rather than shaped capitalist society, they did not infer from this that innovation in the classroom was pointless. Conventional schooling was, in the teachers' view, 'a matter of conditioning those schooled into the acceptance of such modes and thinking as society deems proper' (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 43). Schools were 'run for the middle classes at the expense of the socially deprived child', while Tyndale 'geared its main educational effort towards the disadvantaged' (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 2). There was accordingly a visible emphasis upon children from poor backgrounds and a therapeutic concern for those with behavioural problems. The latter were catered for by two conspicuous innovations: the 'sanctuary' in a converted cloakroom where up to 25 disturbed children were looked after by a teacher engaged under ILEA's Children with Special Difficulties scheme (ILEA, 1976, paras 482, 599) [14], and the celebrated steel band. In the band 'discipline is iron-hard (quite enough to please Rhodes Boyson)' (Maddicott, 1975) [15] and a level of undisputed excellence was achieved by up to eight hours' practice per week. The steel band derived, in Haddow's words, from 'our policy of trying to find a skill which each individual had: something he or she did well and which we tried to develop' (Haddow, 14 December 1975, Auld Inquiry Proofs (4), 85). Applied more generally this policy produced the 'options scheme'. By this scheme the school day was divided into alternating 'open' and 'closed' one-hour periods, the closed periods being devoted to basic skills of language and mathematics, the open sessions offering children a free choice from around a dozen activities chosen from a longer list by Haddow—swimming, cookery, woodwork, watching television, playing games, etc. (Haddow's Inquiry evidence, *Times Educational Supplement*, 23 January 1976). The benefits of this scheme were held to lie not merely in the activities themselves, but in the self-confidence bestowed by the process of choice. Haddow accepted the need to acquire literacy and numeracy, but believed that 'there are also skills that perhaps the traditional educationalists would ignore ..., of children being able to make decisions and participate in a decision-making process' (*Public Affairs*, BBC Radio 4, 1990). The scheme came into full operation in the Autumn Term, 1974, following the departure of 'almost all the academically able and socially privileged children' after Walker's campaign in the summer. Haddow claimed

that all the remaining children showed signs of behavioural improvement as a result (Haddow, Auld Inquiry Proofs (4), 85).

Briault freely acknowledged that 'no policy statement of the Authority' existed to prescribe the means by which ILEA expected primary children to gain knowledge (Disciplinary Tribunal, 2 December 1976, p. 14). The Tyndale affair demonstrated how far ILEA depended upon primary teachers accepting certain core didactic objectives. Haddow could be said to have extrapolated from the Plowdenite rejection of formal primary education to reach conclusions which Plowden had never intended, and which Briault found alien. At the disciplinary tribunal, counsel for the teachers put to Briault Plowden's argument that 'the distinction between work and play is not necessarily something which can be drawn in particularly rigid terms, that play relates to work and work often relates to play' (Nash, *ibid.*, 19 November 1976, a.m., p. 11). Briault was described on his retirement as 'a Plowdenite years before Plowden' (Braide, 1976, p. 3). He did not believe that education should consist 'merely [of] the acquisition of facts', and agreed that the 'emotional development of children is assisted by a range of learning experiences', but found it 'difficult to maintain that table tennis is a learning experience that is vitally important to primary school children' in comparison with history or geography (Disciplinary Tribunal, 2 December 1976, p. 14; 29 November 1976, p. 9; 19 November 1976, a.m., p. 11). He feared that Haddow 'did not mind in the end if a child did not gain certain educational experiences that I regard as essential because he rated the importance of the child having free choice above the gaining of those experiences' (Disciplinary Tribunal, 2 December 1976, p. 12). He expressed his own educational philosophy with much clarity at the tribunal, but it was equally clear that he possessed no machinery to constrain those who carried informal methods to Haddow's lengths: indeed he acknowledged that without consulting the inspectorate he could not even say whether Haddow's methods were practised in other ILEA schools (Disciplinary Tribunal, 6 December 1976, pp. 15-16).

The advantages of the Tyndale approach were those to be expected from this very intense form of child-centred education. Some children clearly received an unusually close personal attention from their teachers: 'my children were given the choice of Mr Ellis or a new school', one sympathetic parent wrote to the Inquiry, 'and they wanted Mr Ellis, who loved and cared for them' (A.J. Smart, Auld Inquiry Proofs (3) 59). He sent his children to the 'strike school'; it is significant, as Peter Wilby pointed out at the time, that the parents of 28 Tyndale pupils sent their children to Gaskin Street in the teeth of the severe press criticism of the teachers since the summer (*New Statesman*, 7 November 1975). While it lasted, the strike school offered an exceptionally favourable teacher-pupil ratio along with vichyssoise and similar chattering-class delicacies prepared by a sympathetic Canonbury parent (Ellis interview), but commitment to the strike school still required a substantial commitment to the cause of the radical teachers. In most cases this presumably reflected the children's devotion to them. Haddow, whom one colleague remembers keeping order by sheer 'force of personality' (Austin interview), appears to have exercised a particular magnetism: perhaps half the Gaskin Street children were from his class [16].

The disadvantages of Tyndale were also inherent in the method. It was not possible to offer such personalised attention to every pupil in the school—at least before the fall in the roll became catastrophic—and the radical teachers made no attempt to conceal their preference for the disadvantaged. Much faith was placed in the view that high achievers could look after themselves, and parents of able children were angered by the

sense that their children were at the end of the queue for teacher attention. As Ellis later put it:

What normally happens is that certain children are pushed and the under-achievers are just coped with. And we reversed that polarity and I think that's partly what brought down all hell on our heads because high-achieving children usually have articulate parents whereas under-achievers don't. (Ellis interview)

'State education ... should work for everybody', insisted one Tyndale parent (F. Goldfinger to H.W. Wales, 2 July 1974, Auld Inquiry Documents (10) 503h); the parent-manager Denise Dewhurst feared that the exodus of able children threatened the creation of a 'ghetto school' at Tyndale (Auld Inquiry Proofs (1), 12a).

Such fears were reinforced by the suspicion that the Tyndale teachers had no concern for conventional educational values. It is now impossible to form an objective conclusion on the academic outcome of the Tyndale experiment [17]. The waters were muddied at the time by recurrent claims that the teachers were bent on 'the "indoctrination" of children with extreme left-wing politics'—that 'Rank and File members and supporters took over a school to run it as a commune' (*Daily Express*, 30 September 1975; Boyson, 1975). The evidence for this charge was generally thin and sometimes absurd [18]. It is impossible to prove the negative, but virtually none of the parental criticism of the teachers at the Auld Inquiry alleged political indoctrination, and Briault accepted that there was no evidence of any (Disciplinary Tribunal, 13 December 1976, p. 38). The concern of the parents was not that their children were being taught Maoism but that they were not being taught anything—'my son's education consisted of playing in the classroom or the playground, lessons hardly existed' (R.A. Robinson (parent), Auld Inquiry Proofs (3), 54). Life at Tyndale was depicted at the Inquiry as one long playtime from which 'the children only seem to bring home silly drawings or messy paintings'; in words attributed to one pupil, 'you don't get learned nothing at this school' (Lorna Irving (parent) and Christine Mabey, Auld Inquiry Proofs (3), 55 and 46). The accuracy of these claims depends upon the rigour with which the alternation of closed and open sessions in the options scheme was observed in practice, which is again hard to establish at this distance. To some extent the teachers invited the charge. Haddow's philosophy, in direct opposition to Walker's quoted above, claimed that under-achievers needed the self-esteem to be derived from success at something they could do well before they could make academic progress. Confidence-boosting therapeutic activities such as the steel band were therefore promoted 'even if it means some relaxation for a time in standards of reading and of numeracy' (Haddow's Inquiry evidence, *Times Educational Supplement*, 23 January 1976). By extension the teachers argued:

that 'work' and 'play' were indivisible activities, that formal skills could be learned through games, practical equipment and indirect methods. Knowing how to play was seen as a valuable skill; education was not seen as a process of producing young people to fit into convenient industrial niches. (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 46)

Behind this approach lay the new Left's rejection of the idea that education could change society: 'there is no evidence that literacy is a solution to social problems' (Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 49). It is not hard to see why many parents saw this as a mark of defeatism. Haddow nonetheless claimed that the number of non-readers in his class fell sharply with the introduction of his system (Inquiry evidence, *Times Educational*

Supplement, 23 January 1976), and Auld's failure to seek concrete evidence of literacy levels remains frustrating to the historian.

That many parents lacked the teachers' faith in their educational innovations is unsurprising. They were being implemented in an atmosphere of disciplinary chaos which the Inquiry would lay bare. Briault—not a stickler for old-fashioned methods—acknowledged that 'in a formal situation, where all the children are all the day close up, in separate classrooms, with individual teachers, differences of disciplinary approach are less risky than in a more open situation' (Disciplinary Tribunal, 19 November 1976, p.18). The Tyndale experience supported him. 'Things were raving mad at times, they were totally out of control', Ellis remembered (Ellis interview). Walker, whose Froebelian training had left her with a profound sense of children's original sin, criticised Ellis for attributing all misbehaviour to 'some psychological *causa* always having its origin outside the school' and for consequently making no attempt to curb it (Walker to Rice, 30 September 1974, Auld Inquiry Documents (4), 126a). In fact another teacher, David Austin, remembered several staffroom discussions failing to solve the discipline problem (Austin interview [19]). The teachers would not and could not resort to physical punishment [20], and moral suasion quickly became wearing; Austin described the Tyndale teachers as 'busy surviving until the end of term' (Auld Inquiry transcript, 2 January 1976, 18). Ellis's principal response was to write to the parents of miscreants describing the misbehaviour of their children and urging them to curb it. The teachers submitted several of these letters to the Auld Inquiry to show that they were not unconcerned about discipline. Predictably, these letters provided further ammunition for their opponents, but they also provide the historian with an insight into the difficulties of daily life at Tyndale:

[Marian] bit one of my dinner helpers who tried to stop the fight. The helper still has the marks on her hand ... I was also not impressed by Marian's attitude when I talked to her about this. She told me that she didn't care, she would bite who she liked ...

This morning, in assembly, Dale walked in and flung himself onto another group of children sitting on a bench. I removed him and told him to go to my room. His only response was to say "Fuck off". I immediately took him to my room and told him that I intended to inform you about his reaction. He then informed me that he didn't care and that I couldn't prove it anyway.

Dale's behaviour in school at lunch-time is fast becoming intolerable ... He came into school today long before he was due to queue up for his dinner and managed to get involved in a soap-throwing fight. A bar of soap thrown by Dale smashed a window of the hall where children were eating their dinner. Glass showered everywhere.

Roy today gambled away his dinner money, then insisted he was home dinners, but finally came into school dinners and tried to get a meal without anyone knowing. Paul lit a fire in a washroom at playtime by poking towels into the heater. I am afraid that if he does a dangerous thing like this again I will have to send him home. (Ellis to parents 24 April 1975, 2 July, 11 November, 30 April 1974, 21 March 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (11) 529/13, 19, 49, 57 and (2) 73).

The impression is one of parents and school urging each other to control the unruly; Ellis complained to the parent-manager that 'all parents wanted was for teachers to do

a child-minding job' (D. Dewhurst, Auld Inquiry Proofs (1) 12a). One mother told the *Sunday Telegraph* in September 1975 that her son had received no homework—'all he has learned is how to bang a drum in a steel band'—without adding that the same child had earlier boiled dry a tea urn, banged a girl's head against the school wall and flooded the middle hall with foam and water from a fire extinguisher (Davies, 1975; Ellis to parent, 2 April 1974, Auld Inquiry Documents (11) 529/38).

Discipline problems were familiar in many inner London schools, but they are likely to have been exacerbated by the transformation under way at Tyndale. Similar problems had been encountered at the Infants School when it first adopted progressivism a few years earlier (A.J. Smart and Mrs Eldridge, Auld Inquiry Proofs of Evidence (3) 59, 60); the Tyndale juniors who gained revenge on their *alma mater* by lobbing filled milk bottles into the Infants' playground may have been products of that period of chaos (Evidence of Mrs J.R. Gaylor, Auld Inquiry transcripts, 29 December 1975 (1) [21]. 'We wanted to try and make the children more autonomous', Ellis recalled, 'and you do risk that things go a bit barmy now and then' (Ellis interview). He and his colleagues faced the problem faced by all those seeking to implement new teaching methods in the years after Plowden—that it was easier to reject the 'old régime' principles of children in rows, rote-learning and strict discipline than it was to devise replacement methods (Dearden, 1978, p. 28). This meant in practice that 'trendy' progressivism was less widespread than might be imagined (Bennett, 1976), as teachers shied away from the traumas of innovation. The Tyndale system was adapted several times in the course of the five terms of Ellis's headship, and had not been finalised by the time the crisis exploded. Haddow maintained that given time, the experiment would bear fruit (Austin interview); parental patience expired well before then.

Even in 1960 the growing parental interest in education, particularly in state education, had been apparent to Herbert (Herbert, 1960, para 518). Growing parental assertiveness was a feature of the 1960s and 1970s. It was particularly evident in inner London, where the phenomenon of gentrification left many articulate and influential middle-class parents facing the realities of inner-city education. The Tyndale dispute gained much of its edge from this factor. The school stood at the edge of one of London's deepest social chasms. To the south lay several large GLC estates, to the north fashionable Canonbury Square, an area of early 19th-century houses rehabilitated by a property company on the break-up of the Northampton estate and 'frankly aimed at relatively well-to-do middle-class buyers' (Redevelopment and Rehabilitation: Three Case Studies, Appendix VI to Milner Holland, 1965). The Tyndale parent-manager once told Ellis that though she sympathised with his concern for the deprived, 'his school had to serve a socially mixed area, and he also had a responsibility towards the "more privileged" children' (D. Dewhurst, Auld Inquiry Proofs of Evidence (1) 12a). The combination of middle-class parents aggrieved at the reverse discrimination practised at Tyndale and working-class parents suspicious of modern methods would prove particularly potent.

ILEA had recognised parent power in the reorganisation of managing and governing bodies in 1971, when a parental representative was added to each body. The lone parent was heavily outnumbered, though, by the party nominees, and faced 'a lonely and somewhat daunting job' (Reid, 1978). This muted reform was soon overshadowed by the furore in the same year over ILEA's revised proposals for transfer from primary to secondary school. The abolition of the eleven-plus in 1965 had enhanced the Authority's discretion in the transfer process. The scheme bequeathed by the LCC had

relied on heads to ensure a reasonable spread of ability in each school while respecting parents' wishes; by 1971, though, it had become clear that 'the system reinforced the growth of "Popular" or "Fashionable" schools and "Sink" schools' (George, 1972). ILEA felt concerned that the existing system was failing to counter parental suspicion of large non-selective schools and thus threatened to discredit comprehensivisation (London County Council, 1964; ILEA Files, 1971). A degree of central direction was proposed to prevent the polarisation likely to result from complete parental freedom of choice. ILEA had apparently been somewhat reticent about explaining the new scheme to parents (it was claimed that the scheme was explained in a leaflet given to children to take home: Stone & Taylor, 1972), and when it came into effect in 1972 parents denied their first choice of school resorted to direct action. Several Parents' Action groups sprang up across London, and 300 ILEA children were withheld from school in the autumn of 1972 (Cameron, 1974). Each year's round of secondary allocations in the early 1970s led to disgruntled parents withholding their children from school—50 families in Camden were threatened with prosecution in 1972 (*Hampstead and Highgate Express*, 29 September 1972). The Islington and Hackney Parents' Action Group, formed in 1972, was particularly active, setting up its own school for transfer victims in 1974 (in the Gaskin Street Chapel that would later be used by the Tyndale strikers) and demanding 50% parental representation on governing bodies (*Islington Gazette*, 8 November 1974; Islington and Hackney Parents' Action Group, Manifesto, November 1974, in ILEA Files, 1974a).

The emergence of parent power now appears as one of the forces behind the revival of the Right in British education over the last quarter-century, but in the early 1970s militant parents tended to support the demands of London teachers for better pay and cheaper housing, and were not obvious allies of the Right. The Tyndale teachers enlisted Annie Spike, of the Hackney Parents and Teachers' Action Group, to speak in support of their strike action over London weighting at the meeting with the parents on 13 June 1974. This catastrophic meeting marked a turning point in the Tyndale affair, and arguably in modern educational history; it was 'like the Titanic', said Spike, 'nobody forgets that' (Auld Inquiry transcripts (1), 6 January 1976, p. 18). Though the meeting had been called to explain the teachers' proposed industrial action, the parents 'kept on and on about discipline' (Spike, Auld Inquiry Proofs (3) 50) and shouted down the teachers, most of whom responded by walking out.

The Tyndale teachers were uncomfortable with organised parental opposition, feeling, correctly, that most parents would not understand their teaching philosophy. Haddow would discuss his ideas with parents, but felt that 'in the end teachers are professionally trained people with a specific job to do' (Haddow's Inquiry evidence, quoted in *The Teacher*, 23 January 1976). They had opposed the creation of a Parent-Teacher Association at Tyndale for fear that it would be middle-class dominated (it was for this reason that the managing body became the chief mouthpiece for parental protest—Ellis *et al.*, 1976, p. 2).

In this respect, at least, the teachers' attitude was mirrored by the Authority. The militant actions of some PAGs, which included locking a divisional officer in his office (M. Lightfoot to Hinds, 29 November 1974, in ILEA Files, 1974a), hardly commanded ILEA's affection, and Briault was 'conscious of the threat to some parts of the service, arising from extreme pressure groups who were not, in my view, really representative' (interview in Bush & Kogan, 1982, p. 187). Even without such militancy, though, ILEA remained sceptical towards parent power. It had drawn very clear lessons from the furore over secondary school transfer in 1971–1972. Then it had

maintained its determination to retain ultimate central control over secondary allocations, knowing that a school could be damned on little more than parental gossip, or that a school with genuine problems might be prevented from correcting them if parental distrust left it to fill its places with problem children. There were also potentially nasty racial implications to unfettered parental choice. Briault made the point deftly when he told of a West Indian parent who had objected to one school because there were too many blacks in it (Briault, 1979, p. 12), but the Authority's real worry was that white parents would do the same, adding racial to social polarisation and creating real 'ghetto schools'. Tellingly, when the results of the new transfer scheme were compiled in 1972, it emerged that the percentage of children securing their first choice of school was only marginally lower than in earlier years[22]. 'Bussing the bright' had been minimal, with only 60 children in the top ability band failing to get into their chosen school, but the concentration of low-ability children in particular schools had been significantly diminished (Hinds, 1973). A strident parental and press campaign had been revealed as insubstantial, and it would be surprising if Hinds had not carried the lesson over to Tyndale.

In one respect, though, ILEA might have drawn the wrong conclusion from the transfer controversy. It was reasonable to infer that parental grievances over secondary transfer betokened still more public controversy over secondary school reorganisation and comprehensivisation. 'It is this issue above all others which attracts bad publicity', ILEA's chief officers were warned in 1975, 'and it is here that our major PR effort is concentrated' (ILEA Files, 1975c). Newsam, writing in 1995, felt that emerging crises over secondary reorganisation in 1975 helped deflect ILEA's attention from Tyndale (Newsam, 1995, p. 85). With hindsight, though, a parental explosion was always more likely at primary level. Plowdenite principles remained experimental and contested, yet if progressivism failed at primary level, its failure could blight children for life. There was no significant escape route into private schooling. Instead, though, London's primary school parents exploited the power that came from their growing freedom of choice. This was down to the overriding 'fact' of inner London education in the 1970s—the demographically induced contraction of school rolls, which obviously hit the primary sector first[23]. Parents were entitled to ask that their children be moved to another school if that school was not full; the energetic provision of elementary schools by the London School Board in the late nineteenth century led to an over-provision of inner London primary schools as the population thinned in the 1970s. The wife of one of the Tyndale managers, herself an ILEA research officer, told the Auld Inquiry that she lived within ten minutes' walk of five schools, all with places: 'North-East London, and in particular the Islington area, is exceptional in the extent to which parental choice under the 1944 Act can operate. Perhaps nowhere else in the country can parents really choose the school to which their children go' (Christine Mabey, Auld Inquiry transcripts (1), 5 January 1976, p. 20).

The drawback lay in the danger that falling rolls could lead to school closures. Generally this outcome was a last resort. Falling numbers usually eased the strains within a school and improved the pupil-teacher ratio; a problem school might thus become steadily more efficient even as it became technically unviable[24]. Closure in these circumstances was politically difficult; by 1976 Bramall accepted 'the reality of the fact that public opinion does not favour the closure of schools on any significant scale' (Bramall to G.D. Southgate, 11 November 1976, ILEA files 1974a). It was a different matter when, as at Tyndale, demographic decline was reinforced by the active withdrawal of pupils by their parents. Then meltdown threatened. By 1975 it was clear

that Tyndale was taking the full force of falling rolls in the Canonbury area, as numbers in neighbouring schools were buttressed by Tyndale refugees[25]. Robin Mabey suspected ILEA of dragging its feet over Tyndale in the hope that 'the problem would be solved by the closure of the school'[26]; other Tyndale managers testified that they had been motivated above all by the fear of closure (Mabey and Elisabeth Hoodless, Auld Inquiry Proofs (1) 13 and (2) 30a; A. Roberts to Hinds, 22 September 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (7) 399).

ILEA had long feared that Islington's Education Advisory Committee would provide a platform for local parental malcontents, noting the attempts by the Parents' Action Group to secure representation upon it (M. Lightfoot to Hinds, 29 November 1974, ILEA Files, 1974a). In the event the Labour Council leader, Gerry Southgate, was reluctant to encourage a public row with the Labour ILEA, and kept Tyndale off the agenda at the Advisory Committee's meeting in October 1975 (Southgate to Bramall, 17 October 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (10) 494). No such solidarity inhibited the junior school managers. Nominees of the largely middle-class executive of the South Islington Labour Party, several were Blairites *avant la lettre*, contemptuous of the old guard at County Hall. Brian Tennant, the management consultant who became chairman of the managers in February 1975, was said to have considered Bramall and Hinds 'failed politicians' (Ellis, Auld Inquiry Proofs (2) 34, p. 63). Such attitudes encouraged the managers to by-pass ILEA: as the chairman of the disciplinary tribunal put it to Briault, who agreed, 'the Managers were taking over the role of the Authority in taking decisive action and doing it in a very clumsy way' (Flather, Disciplinary Tribunal, 13 December 1976, p. 39).

Having been caned by Auld for their freelance inspections and other provocations, the managers left muttering that 'if the Managers had done nothing then no one else would have acted' (ILEA Files, 1976b). It is perhaps closer to the mark to say that the managers made themselves the spokesmen for discontented parents who could find no other outlet. These parents, in a school with no PTA, gained little satisfaction from ILEA's divisional officers, from its inspectorate or from its top brass, or even from Islington's Advisory Committee. It is unlikely that anybody considered managerial intervention the best means of addressing the Tyndale problem. The uncertainty surrounding the managers' powers—an uncertainty which ILEA had been reluctant to dispel—became critical as the dispute deepened. Houghton's advice in the 1971 guidelines for managers—that 'it is to the managers that a head looks naturally for support when difficulty arises' and that 'it may be confidently assumed that the head and the staff will welcome [managerial] visits as evidence of interest in their common task'—rang hollow in the circumstances of the dispute. Robin Mabey even appealed to the Islington Borough Solicitor for further guidance, to learn that 'the only guiding factor would be the test of reasonableness' (R. Mabey to the Leader of Islington Council, 27 June 1975; Borough Solicitor to Chief Executive, L.B. Islington, 4 July 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (6) 250, 268). But the Tyndale dispute revolved, as all acknowledged, around big issues of educational principle—issues which would not simply disappear. In the absence of clear procedural remedies, the managers—well connected with the media, in the manner of the Islington middle class—pursued their campaign through the national press, hardening the teachers in their opposition. In the meantime Hinds, lacking a procedural solution to a problem that would not go away, was driven to the expedient of asking the managers for evidence of local anxiety that could justify the Authority in taking exceptional action. This injudicious step strengthened the teachers' conviction that a conspiracy had formed against them and brought

censure from Auld (ILEA, 1976, para 644). In the longer run it led to the public inquiry which displayed ILEA's dirty washing in such painful detail.

'The forces of reaction will take great heart from the fate of William Tyndale School', predicted David Austin (Auld Inquiry Proofs (3) 42). Of course the right-wing challenge to educational progressivism had been audible before 1974, and undue significance should not be ascribed to events at one north London primary school, but it does appear that the Tyndale affair, and the attention that it aroused, played a part in pushing the state towards an acceptance of the Black Paper counter-revolution. The autumn of 1976 saw the 'Great Debate' on education and James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech. Behind them lay the departmental thinking laid bare in a leaked memorandum of October. In terms that clearly echoed the Tyndale controversy, the paper suggested that Plowdenite methods 'could prove a trap to less able and experienced teachers' and that some primary teachers had allowed performance in [formal skills] to suffer as a result of the uncritical application of informal methods'. It called upon the Prime Minister 'firmly [to] refute any argument ... that no one except teachers has any right to any say in what goes on in schools', and contemplated a core curriculum (*Times Educational Supplement*, 1976).

In 1976 the Department recognised 'the basic problem' facing these proposals to be that of 'how to secure acceptance of these ideas by local authorities and in schools'; it also recognised that maintenance of standards would necessarily depend upon the local inspectorate, which was four times larger than the national one ('Meeting with the Secretary of State, 22 November 1976, "Schools in England and Wales. Current Issues. Suggested Points for Discussion"', in ILEA Files, 1976a). It was clear even then, though, that the local autonomy that Hinds had considered central to the British way of education was being tolerated on grounds of convenience rather than principle. In July 1976 the Journal of the Association of Education Committees predicted acutely that 'following Tyndale and the Auld Report ... interventionism seems due to make a comeback, perhaps in a big way' (*Education*, 30 July 1976). The last quarter-century has seen the development of national standards in education go hand-in-hand with the curtailment of LEA autonomy. Even in 1987, Roger Seifert could describe the Tyndale affair as 'part of the process that has taken us to the brink of central control of all aspects of school and teacher existence in the state sector' (Seifert, 1987, p. 134).

These developments did ILEA little good; Sir Peter Newsam maintains that 'the William Tyndale incident did not cause reform; it delayed it' (Newsam, 1983, p. 5). Reappraisal had been imminent anyway, with the retirement of Briault, the last of the LCC men, in 1976. Newsam, who succeeded him, spelled out the case for internal reform on his accession (Brighouse, 1992, p. 61). He argued that 'the idea of ILEA as a disproportionately huge education authority is rapidly losing any possible basis in fact'; falling rolls would within a decade reduce its primary school population to a level scarcely larger than Birmingham's. Newsam envisaged a system both less rigid and more efficient than before. He called for extensive decentralisation of what was still, in essence, the old paternalistic structure of the LCC, with the creation of up to 100 'community education centres' and argued that, rather as falling rolls facilitated improvement in individual schools, so the decline in the ILEA school population could raise standards across London: 'Tyndale caught ILEA at a period of transition (from a time when the alternative to poor education was even worse education to a time when improvement is possible)' (Newsam, 1977)[27].

Few would doubt that ILEA was a more imaginative and a more successful authority after the mid-1970s than in its first decade[28], but internal reform was achieved against a background of mounting external criticism—itself a symptom of the growing confidence of the educational Right. In November 1975, as the Tyndale affair reached its climax, the leader of Kensington and Chelsea Royal Borough Council assailed Bramall for ILEA's profligacy, suggesting that his ratepayers would not be prepared indefinitely 'to finance schools which appear to be run on the basis of allowing politically motivated teachers to experiment with their way-out ideas on innocent children' (Sir Malby Crofton to Bramall, 18 November 1975, in ILEA Files, 1975f, 12). The charge of extravagance was standard fare with ILEA's Conservative critics, but the suggestion that the Authority's precepts were funding chalk-face Trotskyists gave it added bite. The return of the Conservatives to national power in 1979 enhanced the threat to ILEA's survival, and the Authority was left dangerously isolated by the abolition of the GLC in 1986. If ILEA contributed to its own downfall in 1988, there can be little doubt that the dismemberment envisaged even at the time of its creation was rendered more probable by the events of 1976. The ramifications of Tyndale damaged all LEAs, but none more than the Inner London Education Authority.

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NOTES

- [1] In May 1974 the roll had been 212: Report based on visits by the Authority's inspectors to William Tyndale Junior School during the week beginning 22 September 1975, ILEA, 1976, Appendix XIII, p. 2.
- [2] Costs from the note by J.C. Swaffield on the inside back cover of the report. 90% of the cost was accounted for by legal fees, which ILEA paid for all parties represented at the Inquiry: Gretton and Jackson, 1976, p. 105.
- [3] For all its expenditure on lawyers, the Auld Inquiry commissioned transcripts of proceedings only for the sessions at Islington Town Hall and for the closing submissions. Reports of proceedings at earlier sessions are therefore necessarily taken from the press.
- [4] 'The divisional people were trying to keep control of the situation and not letting anyone above know in case they felt they couldn't control it. I mean Harvey Hinds came down to see us at the school and he said "what's this all about?". And we thought: hasn't anyone told you? There's rubbish flying about everywhere—hasn't anyone told you? He was just bewildered by it all'—interview with Terry Ellis, 6 February 2001.

- [5] The Deputy Head, Irene Chowles, Walker's closest staffroom ally, thought these meetings 'time wasted': Auld Inquiry Proofs (4), 95.
- [6] 'The aim was to relate monitoring to the curricula and aims in particular schools', Birchenough, addressing the Conference of Members of HM and ILEA Inspectorates, County Hall, 14 January 1976, with ILEA files, 1976a.
- [7] ILEA, 1976, para 900, pp. 300–1. Irene Chowles, not generally sympathetic to her radical colleagues, also objected to 'the idea of any Manager taking upon himself the right to "inspect" the school': Auld Inquiry, Proofs of Evidence (4), 95.
- [8] It was illegal to obstruct an inquiry, and this would be the foundation for the charge of indiscipline brought against the seven teachers at the subsequent disciplinary tribunal. The additional charge of inefficiency was brought only against Ellis and Haddow, and would have been hard to sustain on its own in the light of Auld's and Walker's recognition of their competence: ILEA, 1976, para 862, p. 286 and 864, p. 287; Walker described the pair as 'very competent and capable teachers' who had 'made a shambles of the school, not because they could not teach, but because they would not'—Auld Inquiry transcripts, 3 February 1976 (2), p. 85.
- [9] The Auld Inquiry paid for shorthand transcriptions only late in its proceedings, for the Islington sessions with parents and for the closing submissions. Evidence given at earlier sessions has therefore to be taken from press reports.
- [10] See also Hinds' submission to the Inquiry: 'the ILEA places great confidence and trust in all those groups of adults'. Auld Inquiry Proofs (1), 7.
- [11] This was a first draft. The passage was omitted from later versions.
- [12] Interview with Terry Ellis, 6 February 2001.
- [13] Ellis believes that Stephen Felton joined Rank and File after the Tyndale events: Ellis interview.
- [14] ILEA, 1976, para 482, p. 154, para 599, p.188.
- [15] Maddicott claimed to have been a temporary teacher at Tyndale early in 1975.
- [16] Eighteen had their reading skills tested after the teachers' return to the school and ten were from Haddow's class: 'Analysis of Reading Attack Skills ... 21–22 October 1975', Auld Inquiry Documents (10) 503h.
- [17] Comparison of reading ages in 1974 and 1975 was rendered impossible by the use of different forms of reading test at different times. A sharp drop in the quality of Tyndale pupils between 1974 and 1975 was registered by the tests administered for transfer to secondary school, but the later sample was held to have been skewed by 'the loss of middle-class children in 1974' (Auld Inquiry, Exhibited Documents (3), 113b). Auld referred more diplomatically to 'a much higher proportion of less able children in the school year 1974–5: ILEA, 1976, para 851, p. 280). Auld understandably refused to place any weight on the sporadic evidence offered to him of ex-Tyndale pupils' performance in secondary school (ILEA, 1976, para 852, 280), but did not attempt to make any more systematic measurement while it was possible to do so. The teachers' strike in protest at the September 1975 inspection made it 'difficult to form a judgement of standards' (Report based on visits by the Authority's inspectors ... 22 September 1975, ILEA, 1976, Appendix XIII, p. 6), though the delphic comment of the Staff Inspector (Primary) that 'apart from the falling roll one would rate this a thriving school' (observations by G.V. Pape, 30 September 1975, ILEA files, 1975b) was omitted from the published report.

- [18] E.g. Robin Mabey's claim that the children were being encouraged to play Monopoly in order that they should learn to destroy capitalism, which Briault thought 'rather a ludicrous remark' (Disciplinary Tribunal, 10 December 1976, a.m., p. 6), and the significance attributed to Haddow's selection of a quotation from Blake's 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell' as a text for illustration (ILEA, 1976, para 202, p. 62 ff). Blake's line 'The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction' was transformed by a process of Chinese whispers until in the hands of the *Daily Mail* it emerged as a 'Thought of Chairman Mao—The Smile on the Face of the Tiger is Revolution': *Daily Mail*, 23 September 1975.
- [19] Austin, described by Ellis as 'a good liberal teacher', sympathised with the educational innovations at Tyndale but parted company with the radical teachers over their strike action, which he considered 'so completely witless I couldn't have anything to do with it' (Austin interview).
- [20] 'A child hit a teacher with a chair. The teacher cannot hit the child': Ellis at the meeting of 9 July 1974, Auld Inquiry Documents (3), 86b.
- [21] Brenda Hart, head of the Infants School, kept a log of Junior School misdemeanours in the summer of 1974: 'missiles landed in children's custard at lunch time—Junior children locking smaller children in lavatories', etc, Auld Inquiry Documents (2), 61.
- [22] 85.8% in 1972 against an average of 87.0% between 1965 and 1971: calculated from Table 1(a) in ILEA Files, 1972.
- [23] Between 1970 and 1976 the 5+ year group in inner London fell by 28%, the 11+ year group by only 2%: from Table 4 in *Centrepont*, 1977.
- [24] For this effect in one Islington school see Devlin, 1970.
- [25] During 1974–5 Tyndale's roll fell by 30% while numbers rose in each of the four neighbouring junior schools: figures in the Addendum to the Managers' Meeting Agenda, 19 May 1975, Auld Inquiry Documents (6), 204.
- [26] 'Robin Mabey was right. I recall the EO saying (not knowing what Hinds was doing) that parents should be made aware that they could move their children if they wanted to' (letter from Sir Peter Newsam to the author, 16 September 2001).
- [27] The reference to Tyndale was omitted from the final draft, which is dated 28 January.
- [28] The low point in verbal reasoning scores came in 1974; by 1985 the performance of ILEA children in these tests was above the national average: Newsam, 1983, Appendix.

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