

1983

## Technical Education, Essays Dedicated to The Memory of Michael Clune: Pamphlet

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### Recommended Citation

Parkes, S., Byrne, K., Hyland, A., West, T., Cooke, J., "Essays dedicated to the memory of Michael Clune", Dublin, c1983. <http://doi.org/10.21427/D7159N>

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**TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

**ESSAYS**

**DEDICATED TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MICHAEL CLUNE**

TECHNICAL EDUCATION

ESSAYS

The contributors wish to acknowledge the support of  
the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee,  
the Teachers' Union of Ireland and  
the City of Dublin Post Primary Branch  
of the Teachers' Union of Ireland  
towards the publication of this collection.

MICHAEL CLUNE

visitors club

# DEDICATION – MICHAEL CLUNE

Following the death of our colleague, Michael Clune, in 1983, it was decided by a group of his friends to produce a collection of essays in his memory.

For many years Michael was a teacher with the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee but also had a wide intellectual interest in the political and social questions of Irish society. As part of his M.Ed. degree in Trinity College, Dublin, Michael wrote a thesis on the topic Horace Plunkett, the origins and development of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction and the political context, 1895-1907. He delivered papers at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland conferences and his paper entitled 'The inquiry into the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction and Horace Plunkett's resignation as Vice-President, 1906-1907' was published in the Proceedings of the 5th. Annual Conference of the E.S.A.I. (1980). Michael wrote both in English and in Irish and was an active member of the Society for Co-operative Studies in Ireland and of the Teachers' Union of Ireland.

Michael's pioneer research work into the long neglected origins of technical education in Ireland and his keen grasp of political issues and his incisive prose made his writings a valuable contribution to the history of education. We feel that his work can best be constructively acknowledged by this group of essays.

**SIGNED:**

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DEDICATION  
MICHAEL CLUNE

Following the death of our author, Michael Clune, in 1982, it was decided by a group of his friends to produce a collection of essays in his memory.

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# APPROACHES TO TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN NINETEENTH- CENTURY IRELAND

Kieran R. Byrne

Like all engaging and enduring parodies Thackeray's creation of Mr. Molony's stunned reaction to the spectacle of the Great Exhibition in 1851 was an exaggerated and jocular commentary which was earthed to a particular reality. The object of ridicule celebrated on that occasion was the comical projection of an industrially-backward Ireland. Well indeed might the allegorical Molony, with an obvious agrarian-rural pedigree, have been aghast at the diversity of international exhibits assembled, to say nothing of the Crystal Palace itself. The breezy couplets admitted as much.

**Amazed I pass  
From Glass to Glass  
Doloighted I survey 'em;  
Fresh wondthers grows  
Before me nose  
In this sublime Musayeum! 1**

Analysed at another level there is a more subtle truth to be found in **Mr. Molony's Account**. For if Molony marvels at a new world and expresses incredulity at the promise of prospects to come there is a certain mocking antipathy to be detected in the tone as well.

**There's taypots there  
And cannons rare;  
There's coffins filled with roses;  
There's canvas tints,  
Teeth instrumints,  
And shuits of clothes by Moses. 2**

On leaving the Palace Molony is to be found more amused than he is impressed, reflecting in turn an uncertain Irish attitude to the prevailing turmoil of industrialization and urbanization. That attitude was one more suspicious than it was ambitious; one more reticent than responsive.

For those in Ireland who sought to secure industrial development through educational means that outlook was a matter of frequent commentary. William Hickey (1788-1875), one of the pioneers of Irish utilitarianism, argued provocatively that the classical learning indulged at the hedge schools was a 'bad education I would have you avoid.... it makes a man think the handles of the plough or the business of the counter would disgrace him'.<sup>3</sup> Taking up the same theme at the founding of the Dublin Mechanics' Institute in 1824, one member exclaimed that Ireland had 'her Goldsmith, her Swift, her Burke and her Sheridan, but she had not an Arkwright, a Jameson or a Watt.'<sup>4</sup> Robert Kane (1809-1890), the prince of Irish utilitarianism, was to devote constant attention to that deficiency as well. In his most noted work **The Industrial Resources of Ireland** Kane dwelt at length on the question of industrial education. He argued trenchantly that the advancement of Ireland depended not only upon those who persued liberal humanistic studies, but more importantly, upon those who could apply the theories of new scientific research towards industrial development.<sup>5</sup> Persuasively presented though these arguments may have been the task of conversion remained difficult and one witness to the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction 1881-1884 could still bemoan the fact that:

**The general impression is that it is degrading to enter anything which smacks of trade or handi-work and great sacrifices are made to put children to College where they will get what is called a profession.... a change in the habits and customs of the people is the first step towards altering that state of things and we can only do that by increased primary education and good sense.**<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding the attitudinal obstacle, however, and despite an industrial climate that was both arid in tradition and prospect, a century-long campaign, comprising an aggregate of advocates and a complex of movements, was undertaken to secure for Ireland an educational system that chimed more harmoniously with the country's industrial potential. It will be the purpose of this article to focus and comment on these developments; to trace their origin and track their evolution.

Retrospectively perceived that whole movement may be seen to have evolved over five different but pleated phases. It can be said to have begun with the establishment of the Royal Dublin Society

in 1731. Secondly, and stemming from that initiative, came the growth of regional scientific institutions and these in turn paved the way for the emergence of the more popularly supported mechanics' institutes. Fourthly the Department of Science and Art, 1853, began the process whereby technical education was to become more formally supported for the contribution it had to make towards industrial expansion. But, finally, and most distinctively, there was the 30-year period 1869-1899. Motivated by the bitter disappointment of having the promise of a separate Irish Science and Art Department reneged upon, those years witnessed the expression of more cohesive policy demands for a system of technical education which eventually came to fruition with the passing of the Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act in 1899.

It is essential as well that the broader context of the United Kingdom be taken into consideration in this summation. The campaign for a system of technical education in nineteenth-century Ireland was part of the wider concern for the introduction of an industrially-related educational system which became increasingly manifest in England after the Great Exhibition in 1851. The Irish demand for technical education was trust forward, then, on the current of that more vigorous course of action, and benefited accordingly. Moreover, the expectations of technical education in Ireland were heightened by the glow of what was seen as the exemplar prosperity of the English industrial achievement.

It was for the purpose of 'improving Husbandry Manufacture and useful arts'<sup>7</sup> that the Royal Dublin Society was founded in 1731. Very quickly it was agreed that 'sciences'<sup>8</sup> be appended to the originally stated objectives. With its expressed utilitarian purpose the society marked the beginning of a new departure in the Irish educational tradition while at the same time it signalled an Irish response to the ambitious course charted by the enterprise of the 'new learning'. The society's constitution kept faith with the Baconian creed, with the importance of, and obligation to, experimentation, and the empirical collection of data enshrined in the nineteenth and twentieth rules respectively.<sup>9</sup> Soon the papers and findings of each scientific meeting were to be collected and published throughout the country.<sup>10</sup> In a further attempt to stimulate a native inventive genius a premium system was introduced with awards being made in a growing number of categories, hops, flax, earthenware, malt liquor, lace, new modes of agriculture and 'instruments lately invented'.<sup>11</sup>



In 1749 the society obtained a Charter of Incorporation and was hence known as the Royal Dublin Society. Previous to the incorporation, however, the society was in receipt of government grants. The average annual grant for a number of years amounted to £5,000. After the passing of the Act of Union that sum was increased to £10,000, and in subsequent years it fluctuated between £10,000 and £7,000.<sup>12</sup>

One of the earliest and more direct educational undertakings on the part of the society was the establishment of drawing classes in 1746.<sup>13</sup> To accommodate this new venture premises at Shaws Court in Dublin were procured, and Mr. West of Waterford was appointed first drawing master.<sup>14</sup> The main emphasis was placed on ornamental drawing initially, but subsequently the curriculum was extended to include figure drawing, architectural drawing and modelling in clay.<sup>15</sup> In 1757 a second teacher was employed and a scheme of premiums and scholarships was introduced for promising students.

If the original aim of the Royal Dublin Society, as already observed, was the improvement of husbandry, manufacture and useful arts and sciences, the opening decades of the nineteenth century saw the society alerting itself to the upsurge of interest in scientific matters elsewhere. Conscious, no doubt, of the many newly-founded scientific societies throughout the United Kingdom, the society appointed a committee in 1800 to report on the direction and progress of the London Institution. While the findings of this committee revealed the Royal Dublin Society to be abreast of current developments, a more total approach in the area of science was called for.<sup>16</sup> Motivated by this outcome, immediate reform was initiated in Dublin. Accommodation was set aside for a professor to lecture on hydraulics, mechanics and allied subjects.<sup>17</sup>

Between the years 1800 to 1804 a sum in excess of £17,000 was expended in the renovation of premises at Poolbeg Street (Dublin) to facilitate this new scientific enterprise<sup>18</sup> and the invitation of the noted scientist Sir Humphrey Davy as guest lecturer in 1810 and 1811<sup>19</sup> provides further evidence of the newly placed emphasis on scientific study. Concurrent with this new policy Professor Jameson of Edinburgh<sup>20</sup> was appointed professor of minerology in 1812. Richard Griffith was engaged as mining engineer in the same year,<sup>21</sup> and in 1834 Robert Kane was appointed lecturer in natural philosophy.<sup>22</sup> As subsequent events would prove, this was a prudent appointment, for Kane was to become the leading proponent of technical and scientific education in the nineteenth century.

While cultivating its own enterprise the Royal Dublin Society was active as well in fostering the growth of kindred institutions elsewhere and the establishment of the Royal Cork Institution in 1799 readily attests to that commitment.

Cognizant of the growing interest in scientific inquiry Thomas Dix Hinks (1767-1857), a former pupil of the Dissenting Academy at Hackney, sought to include his adopted city of Cork among the centres where scientific institutions were established.<sup>23</sup> With the financial aid of other interested parties, the first beginnings were made with a course of lectures delivered by Hinks himself in 1802.<sup>24</sup> The syllabus of this course is remarkable for its inclusive content, natural history, astronomy, electricity, hydrostatics and mechanics.<sup>25</sup> Sustained by public subscription and popular interest, the novel venture grew in stature and quickly took on a more permanent appearance. The years between 1803 and 1807 were years marked by expansion and growth.<sup>26</sup> The Royal Dublin Society expressed support for the initiative, furnishing duplicates of specimens held in its museum, the first presentation containing 300 specimens.<sup>27</sup> In an attempt to sustain the initial growth parliament was petitioned with a request to allocate the institution an annual grant. This request was acceded to with an annual grant of £2,000 - £2,500, and in 1807 the institution was incorporated.<sup>28</sup>

The purpose of the institution, it was stated, was to teach 'by courses of Philosophical Lectures and Experiments the application of Science to the common purpose of life...'<sup>29</sup> The syllabus comprised four main areas: chemistry, natural philosophy, natural history and agriculture.<sup>30</sup> In addition to lectures, a library and model room were opened.<sup>31</sup> Attention was also focused on agricultural development. New modes of agriculture were encouraged by awards offered by the institution for new inventions or improved agricultural implements.<sup>32</sup> Inventions and new models were put on display, and this proved a particularly successful strategy. The annual report 1813 recorded that 'the number of workmen who came to examine them, and who may be often seen measuring the particular dimensions so as to copy them is very great.'<sup>33</sup> Samples were also made available on loan.

In keeping with this precedent and consistent with a more widespread pattern of development throughout the United

Kingdom similar regional scientific institutions were founded at Belfast, Galway, Limerick and Waterford. Not surprisingly it was at Belfast that the most prolific growth took shape with the founding of the Belfast Academical Institution in 1807. The original plan of this institution envisaged two departments - a school and a collegiate. The school was to be sub-divided into two sections, with syllabuses for a 'complete English and Mercantile education' and 'Classical Literature' respectively.<sup>34</sup> The syllabus of the collegiate was to constitute mathematics, natural philosophy, logic, metaphysics, **belles lettres**, moral philosophy, chemistry, botany and agriculture.<sup>35</sup> A public appeal for funds to finance the institution met with a generous response and a parliamentary grant of £1,500 **per annum** was acquired.<sup>36</sup> Despite this financial support, however, the institution was insufficiently endowed to carry all of its original objectives into effect and subsequently other societies emerged to fulfil the requirements neglected. In 1821 a Natural History Society was founded while the Art Society, founded in 1836, promoted another original aim of the institution, the fine arts.<sup>37</sup>

Given the record of the scientific institutions that were established in Ireland during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it will be readily evident that an important basis had been established for the further development of scientific and technical education for the remainder of the nineteenth century. It may also be said that, if this enterprise did not flourish on a national scale, it asserted that Ireland was slowly welcoming the introduction of the utilitarian rationale in educational policy-making. The regional institutions already considered provided a platform from which further initiatives were to be launched. In this regard it may not be altogether insignificant that when centres for the establishment of the utilitarian Queen's Colleges were being considered in the early 1840s Cork, Galway and Belfast were eventually selected. The influence of the scientific institutions already established at these centres, with their combined weight of precedent and tradition may well have legitimised their claims for a university college.

Among the more penetrating forces to contribute to the emergence of a system of technical education in nineteenth-century Ireland was the mechanics' institute movement. With its objective of instructing the artizan (mechanic) in the scientific principles

underlying his trade, this departure is noteworthy for a number of reasons. The movement was not of Irish origin, but in an offshoot of the parent movement in Scotland and England and in this way it is indicative of the extent to which educational developments elsewhere were closely monitored in Ireland and converted to meet Irish requirements. Additionally, there is the promptness with which this occurred. Less than one year had elapsed since the inauguration of the London Mechanics' Institute in 1823 when a similar idea was mooted in Dublin, and by 1825 institutes had been established in other urban centres, notably Armagh, Belfast, Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.<sup>38</sup> While the onset of industrialisation in England proved a receptive environment for the movement Ireland was clearly not so fertile. Yet, industrialisation in England served to provoke an Irish response, which became manifest in a fringe resolve that the nation should not be left behind in the drive for industrial prosperity. While an educated work-force was acknowledged elsewhere as a means by which industrial advancement might be sustained, in Ireland it was regarded as a power by which it might be initiated. Consequently, as the pace of industrialisation quickened in England, the potential of education also assumed grander proportions. The impetus, therefore, to establish mechanics' institutes in Ireland sprang more from an act of faith in education, and economic ambition, than it did from any overt industrial need or function.

The original aims of the mechanics' institute movement were primarily devoted to the industrial education of the artisan.<sup>39</sup> This more purist approach, which especially characterised the initial phase of the movement, was gradually abandoned in favour of a more varied programme including literature, drama, poetry, history and geography.<sup>39</sup> The means by which this range of objectives was to be realised was threefold: lectures, library and reading room. In some of the bigger institutes, and closely resembling the Liverpool model,<sup>40</sup> a fourth element in the strategy - a school - was included. In Cork a science school was attached to the institute with a syllabus which included 'Algebra, Geometry and their different applications, particularly to... Architecture, Mensuration, Surveying and Navigation'.<sup>41</sup> The annual fee of ten shillings was to be paid quarterly, in advance. Certificates of merit were awarded pupils who attended the school for a year or more, provided they satisfied a board of examiners.<sup>42</sup> Evidence that the school attracted considerable support will be found in the accompanying table.

CORK MECHANICS' INSTITUTE: SCIENCE SCHOOL 1836

SYLLABUS AND NUMBER OF PUPILS

43

SUBJECT	NUMBER OF PUPILS
Euclid	56
Algebra	24
Mensuration	21
Land Surveying	14
Conic Sections	16
Navigation	8
Trigonometry	15
Arithmetic	98
Book-Keeping	22
English Grammar	90
Geography	94
Globes	32
Drawing	34
French	19

From a very early date the directors of the Dublin Mechanics' Institute placed a clear emphasis on class teaching as a prologue to attendance at advanced lectures. The annual report for 1841 reveals, for example, that close to 200 pupils were afforded lessons in practical architecture, mechanical, ornamental and figure drawing, natural philosophy, writing, arithmetic, mathematics, English grammar, vocal and instrumental music, French and dancing.<sup>44</sup> Throughout the 1840s the demand continued to grow with 108 pupils attending the drawing class, 100 the mathematics' class and 78 pupils learning French by 1847.<sup>45</sup>

Classes were established at other centres also. A mathematical night school was established in connection with the Galway Mechanics' Institute as early as 1828. For the sons and apprentices of members, instruction in arithmetic, geometry and algebra was available free of charge.<sup>46</sup> At the Ennis Mechanics' Institute pupils were taught arithmetic, euclid and English

grammar.<sup>47</sup> At the Waterford Mechanics' Institute classes were regarded as integral to the success of the institute and comprised reading, writing, arithmetic, practical geometry, navigation, English grammar, euclid, geogrpahy, book-keeping and drawing.<sup>48</sup> As an inducement to aspiring pupils it was pointed out how in the past a number of pupils had 'gained certificates in the examinations of the Society of Arts.'<sup>49</sup> At the Clonmel Mechanics' Institute the average attendance at the evening school was stated to be 24. It was declared that 'the proficiency attained by many of them in Mathematical Science would reflect credit on a much higher educational establsihment.'<sup>50</sup> In 1854, a school of art, in accordance with the regulations of the Science and Art Department, was opened.<sup>51</sup>

The provincial lecture scheme organised by the Royal Dublin Society in the early 1840s served as a considerable auxiliary to the objectives of mechanics' institutes throughout Ireland.<sup>52</sup> An annual allocation of £500 was set aside by the society to fund this undertaking whereby the society's lecturers were made available to lecture at provincial centres.<sup>53</sup> Demands upon the scheme were never less than pressing with institutes keenly competing for the services of the society's eminent scientists, especially Robert Kane and Edmund Davy. The schedule for the year 1844 provides a typical example of the scheme's popularity. Twelve lecturers addressed institutes at the venues Cork, Portlaoise, Nenagh, Carrick-on-Suir, Waterford, Galway, Killarney, Coleraine and Clonmel.<sup>54</sup>

In tracing the evolution of technical education the role of the mechanics' insitutue movement in Ireland should not be underestimated. These instututes provided the junction point where theoretical science was translated into practice. They were furthermore a link between the more formal scientific research of the earlier seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the applied sciences of the nineteenth century. They arrested widespread popular support and due to their influence the interdependence of science and industry, and subsequently art and industry, was consolidated. As a result of this enterprise science became organised in such a fashion as to facilitate its teaching. This was perhaps the most outstanding contribution, since a body of knowledge uncoverted to a teaching formula would have made the task of trnsmission well nigh impossible. All teaching and

lecturing were to be conducted through a rhetoric commonly understood.

It becomes clear, therefore, that the Irish educational response to fresh industrial challenge was prompt and ambitious, and a further advance was secured with the introduction of schools of design under the new Department of Practical Art<sup>55</sup> in the 1850s. The first schools were established in Belfast, Cork and Dublin, and by 1860 that number had increased to include Waterford, Clonmel in association with the mechanics' institute, and Limerick in association with the Athenaeum.<sup>56</sup> These schools provided a remarkable impulse for the teaching of industrial art and design and particular care was taken to ensure that the syllabus was signed into the industrial needs of the immediate hinterland. The annual report of the Belfast School in 1850 recorded that:

**The manufacture of 'linen bands' and 'headings' has very greatly increased probably threefold, since the establishment of the school; and the improvement of the quality of these articles in a still greater proportion is directly due to the pupils of the school. The embroidered waistcoat trade is also increasing, and the school has undoubtedly contributed to its advance. 57**

The establishment of the Science and Art Department in 1853 marked the beginning of a more direct involvement on the part of the state towards the promotion of scientific and technical education.<sup>58</sup> The administrative jurisdiction of the department, with its central headquarters at South Kensington, included Ireland. The principal purpose of the department was to supplement scientific and technical education by means of museums, schools, public examinations, payment by results' fees and the compilation of scientific models.<sup>59</sup> The new system was to be largely self-supporting, with the department insisting that local initiative and voluntary aid be a prerequisite for state support.

On appearance at least, the inauguration of this new administration had obvious benefits for Ireland. Under the aegis of the department, Ireland's science and art schools and her other scientific institutions were now afforded greater opportunity to expand under a department established for that specific purpose. Within a decade, however, that policy of developing industrially-related education from the South Kensington institution was seen to have neglected its obligations to Ireland.

It was in evidence to the Inquiry of the Select Committee on Schools of Art 1864,<sup>60</sup> that rumbling Irish discontent became more manifest. In evidence James Brenan, Headmaster of the Cork School of Art, expressed criticism at the lack of sensitivity and enthusiasm of the Science and Art Department. That lack of enthusiasm manifested itself most in the area of financial assistance, he argued. The Cork School was poorly funded since the department did not give a grant equivalent to that raised locally.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Brenan argued that the department's payment by results' system served only to provoke cynicism among pupils who readily detected that teachers confined their attention to the prescribed course, since their salary was dependent on the results of the examinations set on that official course.<sup>62</sup>

An inevitable contrast to Brenan's critical remarks was the defensive evidence of Henry Cole, Secretary to the Science and Art Department. He was adamant that the department had served Irish interests well, and that the number of schools of art had increased from 3 to 6 during the period 1853 - 1863.<sup>63</sup> When questioned more closely on these figures, Cole admitted that the Belfast School of Art had closed in the mid-1850s. In response to the suggestion that it was a fault of his department that the Belfast school had lapsed was a clear indication of the department's insistence on 'self-help' he stated bluntly:

**I should say that it was better for the Belfast School to cease to exist than for it to have been maintained upon its former vicious principle of a subsidy of £600 a year from public taxation. ....If Belfast is not alive to its own interest then we have nothing further to say about it.<sup>64</sup>**

At a time in the 1860s when constitutional nationalists in Ireland were turning their attentions increasingly towards the prospect of Home Government,<sup>65</sup> an analogous campaign was being initiated by the champions of technical and scientific education for the establishment of a separate Science and Art Department for Ireland.

Proposals for the establishment of what was entitled the Royal Institute of Science and Art were first considered in Dublin in 1862, when the Dublin Exhibition Palace and Winter Garden Company was floated.<sup>66</sup> The company was to establish in Ireland a voluntary institution similar to the state institution at South Kensington. Through public subscription and with the support of



Dublin's leading merchants and bankers a sum of £50,000 was raised.<sup>67</sup> By 1865, when the palace was formally inaugurated with the hosting of an international industrial exhibition, a sum of £95,000 had been expended. Fortunately, the proceeds of the exhibition proved adequate to offset the difference between seed-fund and expenditure.<sup>68</sup>

By 1867, however, the Exhibition Palace Company was recording a loss of £42,000 and its pleas for further public subscription went unanswered.<sup>69</sup> The resources of the treasury were therefore appealed to.<sup>70</sup> Throughout 1867 a campaign of pressure was orchestrated from Dublin to secure the much needed state funding. Through memorials, memoranda, suggestions and deputations, the Palace Exhibition Committee argued its case as it fought for survival.

The proposed Royal Irish Institute of Science and Art, it was suggested, should be placed under a resident Irish Board, in communication with the Irish Government, and responsible to Parliament. Links with the Science and Art Department were to be severed, and the Irish Institute requested an annual grant of £100,000. Its functions were to be analogous to those of South Kensington: it was to co-ordinate the work of all related science and art institutions in Ireland; opportunities to avail of the institute's resources were to be afforded the nation's schools and colleges; a travelling museum was to be set under way and thus science and art instruction were to be brought to the country in a more practical manner.

By 1868 it seemed as if the Irish demand had been conceded. The London **Times**, 27 March 1868, reported that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had given an undertaking to an Irish deputation that the government was prepared to 'give to Dublin an institution analogous to South Kensington and which should be a sister to and not a subordinate of the English establishment.'<sup>71</sup> The jubilation expressed in Ireland at this announcement was of short duration, however.

In the Autumn of 1868, a Commission of Inquiry on the Science and Art Department was charged with a two-fold brief. Firstly, the commission was to ascertain the best means by which a separate department might be established in Ireland. Secondly, a scheme by which those institutions in Ireland which were grant-aided and by the department might be more effectively

co-ordinated, was sought.<sup>72</sup> Subsequently, however, the commissioners, arguing that they were not in agreement with the decision to grant a separate department to Ireland, requested a more open-ended brief.<sup>73</sup> The objection was conceded and a significantly different set of instructions was issued the commission entitling it to report on the virtue of a separate department for Ireland. The commission found against the proposal<sup>74</sup> and the critical importance of that decision was lost in the vortex of Gladstone's disestablishment measure.

The campaign to have a separate department established in Ireland, which brought the commission into existence in the first instance, had lost the first 'battle', then, but not the 'war', and the claim for 'independence' remained central to subsequent pleas for reform in the sphere of technical education for the remainder of the century.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century English manufacturing industry had been overtaken by foreign competition. The Paris Exhibition, 1867, had served due notice that Britain was no longer to enjoy primacy of position in the race for industrial prosperity. Lyon Playfair (formerly secretary of the Science and Art Department, science division), a juror at the exhibition openly conceded defeat and demanded:

**an inquiry which should tell the people of England authoritatively what are the means by which the great states are attaining an intellectual pre-eminence among industrial classes and how they are making this to bear on the progress of their national industries.<sup>75</sup>**

The Playfair challenge was not to go unanswered and further goaded by the provocative writings of John Scott Russell<sup>76</sup> the government responded with a major sequence of investigations, two select committees of inquiry and a royal commission. Of this trilogy the one to have most implications for Ireland was the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction 1881-1884 under the chairmanship of Bernard Samuelson, ironmaster and M.P.<sup>77</sup>

The commission was directed to make a comparative analysis between the technical instruction undertaken by the industrial classes of certain foreign countries and that of their counterparts throughout the United Kingdom. Additionally, the effectiveness of technical instruction facilities in relation to industry and

manufacture 'at home and abroad' was to be measured.<sup>78</sup> Judiciously, the commissioners elected to examine the prevailing conditions in Ireland within that frame of reference as an issue separate from the rest of the United Kingdom.

Viewed retrospectively, the evidence presented to the commission represents a major critique of educational provision in Ireland during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Close scrutiny of that evidence is revealing of a number of persistent themes. It was argued that Ireland, because of her industrially underdeveloped status, must be afforded state support commensurate with her unique underprivileged conditions. The Science and Art Department was yet again singled out for attack as a rigidly centralised institution whose failure to cope with the disparate demands of industrial Ireland was a persistent defect. The failure of the national system of education as a preparatory agent to subsequent technical instruction courses was firmly condemned. The intermediate system of education, with its emphasis on a classically oriented curriculum, was equally criticised. These inadequacies at the lower educational levels, it was asserted, hampered the prospects of higher level institutions which were endeavouring to promote industrially related courses of study. Industrialists, high-lighting their dissatisfaction, related how the dearth of adequately qualified artisans proved a severe handicap to industrial development. Finally, the nature and purpose of technical instruction proved a subject of diversified debate.<sup>79</sup>

In search of a masterplan towards the establishment of a scheme of technical instruction relative to Irish requirements the Royal Commission solicited the views of William Kirby Sullivan, president of Queen's College, Cork, and a noted proponent of technical instruction.<sup>80</sup> This was not the first time that Sullivan addressed himself to this question. In 1855, in conjunction with Tristram Kennedy, M.P., Sullivan compiled a work entitled **On the Industrial Training Institutions of Belgium and On the Possibility of Organising an Analogous System in Connection with The National Schools of Ireland.**<sup>81</sup> Sullivan's report to the Royal Commission differed only in detail from the original comparative study and reiterated demands for a new coherence in the teaching of art, agriculture and applied science at all levels of the educational system.<sup>82</sup>

Having assembled the evidence the commissioners made a

number of recommendations which proved alert to Irish needs. With regard to the national system of education, a diverse range of reforms was recommended. It was declared that a revision of the text-books used in the teaching of 'industrial processes' and 'rudimentary science' merited immediate attention.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, a programme in the use of tools and manual work was recommended. To properly facilitate that plan it was proposed that teachers be afforded appropriate courses at the central teacher training institution in Dublin to qualify them for their expanded assignment. One of the principal benefits to be derived from that policy, it was believed, was the reinvigoration of 'home industries' and 'handicrafts'.<sup>84</sup>

Predictably, the commission advised 'that the Board of Intermediate Education take steps to ensure the provision of adequate means for the practical teaching of Science in the schools under their direction.'<sup>85</sup> Adverting to a need for a more vigorous commitment to the teaching of science at a popular level, the commission stated that the Royal College of Science ought to play a central role in the preparation of science teachers for Ireland.<sup>86</sup>

The immediate outcome of the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on Technical Instruction was the Technical Instruction Act of 1889 which included Ireland. Under its provisions, county councils and borough councils were given authority to raise a 1d in the £ rate in aid of technical instruction. The act placed the control of technical instruction in the hands of the Science and Art Department.<sup>87</sup>

With regard to Ireland, however, the new legislation was less than effective. While the Local Government (England and Wales) Act of 1888 provided a delineated framework for the raising of a rate and for the local administration of technical education, no such facility as yet existed in Ireland. This administrative *cavum* robbed the act of much of its impact. Some municipal authorities, notably Cork, Belfast, Limerick and Dublin, did avail of the provisions of the act. In the counties where local authority was under the control of the Boards of Guardians the proportion of finance that might be raised by rate levy was insufficient to fund technical instruction.<sup>88</sup>

One other negative feature of the Technical Instruction Act 1889 must be registered. From Ireland's viewpoint the act failed to

tackle a long standing cause of discontent. Since the mid-nineteenth century it was persistently argued that the Science and Art Department was far too centralised and detached an institution to accommodate the peculiar needs of local industrial requirements. requirements.

The Technical Instruction Act, 1889, did little to change this policy. By handing over the control of technical instruction to the Science and Art Department the traditional failing persisted. For Ireland that policy had acute implications. The nature and structure of the Irish industrial framework was uniquely diverse in that few national industries existed and the country's industrial prosperity, such as it was, derived its sustenance from small local industries. In that instance a technical instruction policy that failed to acknowledge the principle of decentralisation as an inherent component of its administrative structure went little way towards meeting Irish requirements.

Over the final decade of the century the quest for an Irish system of technical education intensified. The **Irish Builder** contributed forcefully and consistently to the debate, placing the issue before the public in a frank and plain-speaking manner. Moreover, the **Builder** proved a fertile agent in delineating the varying concepts of technical education which were finding plural expression at that time.<sup>89</sup>

In the political context policy-making was to become more accommodating as well. The strategy of 'coercion and conciliation' under chief secretary Arthur Balfour flanked subsequently by the campaign of 'constructive unionism' combined to secure for Ireland a sequence of reform measures, particularly in the areas of land, local government and education.<sup>90</sup>

It was perhaps Horace Plunkett (1854-1932) who brought the most powerful and distinctive voice to bear on the educational challenges of this period. A man of action, it was his assembly of the Recess Committee (1895)<sup>91</sup> and its report, which quarried the hitherto elusive solution which was to find vital expression in the establishment of a decentralized Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland in 1899.<sup>92</sup> The long-cherished ambition for a separate Irish department had been realized and the bonds with a feudal South Kensington finally severed. Meanwhile, the Belmore<sup>93</sup> and Palles<sup>94</sup> Commissions respectively had insisted that the national and intermediate boards address their curricula to

the area of practical education. The slowly flooding tide had reached its high water point. The ghost of Thackeray's **Molony** was laid as the new department set diligently to work.

#### NOTES

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12. Report of the Select Committee appointed to Inquire into the Administration of the Royal Dublin Society with a view to the wider extension of the advantages of the Annual Parliamentary Grant to that Institution and to whom the Return of the Charter, Rules and Regulations of the Dublin Society was referred; 1836 (445) XII, 335, p. iii. Worthy of note also was the unprecedented grant of £12,000 to the society by the Irish Parliament in 1761.
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15. Ibid., pp. 111-112.
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Recommending Edmund Davy for the position in Cork Sir Humphrey wrote: Mr. E. Davy was for eight years my assistant and Chemical Operator at the Royal Institution. He is well acquainted with the present state of science and is a very neat manipulator and I have no doubt will make a very pleasing lecturer and I should think in public delivery he will be impressive. He read well and has no defects of enunciation.....

I wish he may be successful in his application to your body because I think it will be for the interest of science and of your institution.....

H.Davy to T.D. Hincks, 6 March 1814, (MSS 17800 N.L.I.)

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# THE BELMORE COMMISSION AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION, 1898.

Aine Hyland

During the second half of the nineteenth century, technical instruction became part of the educational system of many European countries. In Ireland in the 1880s and 1890s there was growing pressure on the government to make provision for such instruction. Sir Horace Plunkett was among the most vocal and effective proponents of this cause and it was largely as a result of his work that the Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act was passed in 1899.<sup>1</sup> Under the terms of this act, a new department - the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction - was set up with responsibility, *inter alia*, for technical instruction in Ireland. The new department funded technical instruction committees in county and county borough areas throughout the country and these committees set up and administered technical schools where young people were prepared for agriculture and trades.

During the same period, pressure was also mounting for a revision of the national school programme to include some element of manual and practical instruction. The momentum in favour of introducing a practical element into the curriculum of primary schools both at home and abroad had grown during the final two decades of the nineteenth century. With growing industrialisation in England and other European countries, the industrial and economic argument in favour of introducing manual instruction in primary schools was voiced in Denmark, Germany and France. At about the same time, a different argument in favour of the same end was being discussed in Western Europe and the United States. This argument was based on physiological and psychological rather than on industrial and economic grounds. It was maintained that manual instruction ought to have an important place in the curriculum as a corrective to book studies, on the grounds that book learning alone tended to be one-sided development of the child. This view had earlier been expressed by Comenius, Locke and Rousseau. Others went farther than this and contended that not only was manual training a necessary element of education, but

that it should be an integral part of the education of primary school children. Both Froebel and Herbart had insisted on the necessary connection between handwork and other lessons in the school. Manual training had been introduced in schools in the United States, France, Germany and in the Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, a very successful programme in Educational Handwork (or Sloyd as it was called there) had been introduced as an optional subject in the primary school curriculum and was in operation in almost 2,000 schools by the mid 1890's.<sup>2</sup>

The idea of introducing children at primary school level to practical education was not a new one in Ireland. As far back as 1837, the commissioners of national education had announced that their Training College for teachers would contain a department for scientific instruction, the object of which would be "not to teach trades, but to facilitate a perfect learning of them, by explaining the principles upon which they depend and habituating young persons to expertness in the use of their hands."<sup>3</sup> In 1886, Right Rev. W. Walsh, D.D., Roman Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, who in 1895 became a member of the Board of National Education in Ireland had stated that:

**This system of national education is wanting in two requirements essential to every system of national education. One of these is, of course, the freedom of religious training. The other is the training, not of the intellectual faculties, but of the eyes, the hands, the fingers; such training as will serve to prepare the school boy for that which is to be his work in life.<sup>4</sup>**

Some years later (in 1894), Arnold Graves, who had been Secretary to the Commissioners of Education (Endowed Schools) for seven years and who was involved with Horace Plunkett in the movement to introduce technical instruction to Ireland, presented a memorandum to the National Board on behalf of the Technical Education Association for Ireland, urging the board to include practical subjects on the national school programme. He argued that such subjects would complement purely literary work and stated that:

**The importance of manual instruction, from an educational standpoint, is very great. It teaches us to express our ideas in the concrete; develops the constructive faculty so much neglected in modern education; enables the development of the physical as well as of the mental powers; and while it is a**

**pleasing alteration to purely literary work, it creates habits of order and industry and encourages a respect for honest work.**<sup>5</sup>

The curriculum in Irish national schools from 1872 to 1900 was narrow and rigid and emphasised the three R's. The small government salary paid to national teachers was supplemented by a system of payment by results, whereby fees were paid to teachers on the basis of the results of their pupils at an annual examination carried out by the inspectors. The obligatory subjects of the examination programme were reading, writing, arithmetic and spelling for all grades; grammar and geography for pupils in fourth grade and above; needlework for girls and agriculture for boys in rural schools taught by a master. Besides these obligatory subjects, a large number of optional subjects could be taught, mostly outside school hours. Results fees were also payable for these extra subjects.<sup>6</sup>

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was a widespread feeling that the results system was no longer a suitable basis for primary education. This system had been discontinued in England and Scotland in the 1890s. In Ireland, the results system had been criticised by teachers, inspectors and others interested in education.<sup>7</sup>

In 1896 the National Board responded to the calls for curricular reform. In March of that year, shortly after his appointment to the Board, Archbishop Walsh proposed that steps be taken to revise the national school curriculum. In July, the Board sent a memorandum to the lord lieutenant asking him to set up a commission of inquiry into the system of national education. The following month, a deputation from the Board met the lord lieutenant and presented the case in favour of revising the national school programme. Dr. Walsh argued in favour of introducing manual instruction into national schools and made the point that the aim was not to teach particular arts or trades, but to give a training

**which should cultivate observation, accuracy and neatness, the love of honest, well-finished work, in fact, to develop those faculties and habits which are essential to good work in life.....**<sup>8</sup>

The deputation to the lord lieutenant resulted in the setting

up in January 1897 of a commission, under the chairmanship of Lord Belmore

**to inquire and report with a view to determining how far, and in what form, manual and practical instruction should be included in the educational system of primary schools under the board of national education in Ireland.<sup>9</sup>**

There were 14 members of this commission, 10 of whom were members of the National Board. Among these ten were Dr. Walsh and Professor Fitzgerald of Trinity College, who appear to have been the most influential members of the commission.<sup>10</sup> The four who were not members of the National Board were Lord Belmore himself; Monsignor Molloy (who was also a member of the Intermediate Board); Capt. T.B. Shaw who was an inspector in the Science and Art Department in England and J. Struthers who was an inspector under the Scottish Education Department.

In February 1897, only a month after its appointment, the commission published its first report. This report and the second report published in July, contained transcripts of evidence from educationalists in Ireland, England and Scotland. The third report, also published in July, included a special report on a visit to Sweden by three of the commissioners where they had visited a training school for educational handwork (Sloyd). The final report of the commission was published in June 1898. This report was signed by 12 of the original members of the commission. The two who did not sign were the chairman of the commission, Lord Belmore, who was ill and Lord Plunkett who had died in 1897. The first signatory to the document was Dr. Walsh who had played a significant role in the questioning of witnesses and in the collection of evidence. There is no doubt that he also played an important part in the writing of the report and the framing of the recommendations.

The Belmore commission was unambiguous in its conclusion. It recommended the introduction, not only of Hardwork but also of Drawing, Elementary Science, Singing and Drill into the curriculum of national schools. In the final report it was stated:

**We may at once express our strong conviction that Manual and Practical Instruction ought to be introduced, as far as possible, into all schools where it does not at present exist, and that, in those schools where it does exist, it ought to be**

**largely developed and extended. We are satisfied that such a change will not involve any detriment to the literary education of the pupils, while it will contribute largely to develop their faculties, to quicken their intelligence, and to fit them better for their work in life.<sup>11</sup>**

The report went on to indicate the considerations which had led to this conclusion. Reference was made firstly to educational principles. The commission felt that:

**The present system, which consists largely in the study of books, is one-sided in character. We think it important that children should be taught not merely to take in knowledge books, but to observe with intelligence the material world around them; that they should be trained in habits of correct reasoning on the facts observed; and that they should, even in schools, acquire some skills in the use of hand and eye to executive the conceptions of the brain.<sup>12</sup>**

Throughout the report, the commission emphasised the educational aspects of manual training and de-emphasised the training aspects. In this regard reference was made to the failure of the Schools of Industry in the 18th century in Germany. These schools, which were primary schools, had attempted to give a form of technical instruction adapted to the requirements of particular trades. The Belmore commission emphasised that such training was "quite out of place in a primary school, where such specialised instruction was given prematurely and to the disadvantage both of primary education and of technical secondary education."<sup>13</sup> The commission also referred to the failure of a two-year course called "Handicraft" which had been introduced as an extra subject into the National School programme in Ireland in 1885.

**"This course comprises instruction in a number of the ordinary operations of carpentry with the addition of miscellaneous other matters such as the soldering of pieces of tin, the hacking out of broken panes of glass. It does not appear to have been constructed with any very definite educational aim, and it seems to have been a failure from the beginning."<sup>14</sup>**

The commission was insistent that a clear distinction should be made between courses which had a utilitarian purpose and the type of course which they recommended, whose purpose would be educational:

**“It is of the utmost importance that the teachers should be fully informed of the essential distinction between a course... which is purely utilitarian in its aims, and a course of school Woodwork, constructed on sound educational lines, and made part of the work of the school in view solely of its general educational advantages.”<sup>15</sup>**

Attention was drawn to the beneficial effects of practical subjects in the general education of children when the educational aspects of these subjects were emphasised. The experience of England, Scotland and European countries in which practical education had been introduced and tested in the second half of the nineteenth century was referred to. In those countries, where the educational aspect of practical subjects had been emphasised, the effect on the children had been very positive:

**The evidence we have received on this point is absolutely unanimous and, as we think, entirely conclusive. We have been told, over and over again, that the introduction of manual and practical training has contributed greatly to stimulate the intelligence of the pupils, to increase their interest in schoolwork, and to make school life generally brighter and more pleasant. As a consequence, the school attendance is improved; the children remain at school to a more advanced age; and much time is gained for the purpose of education.<sup>16</sup>**

The commission referred in a subsidiary way to the relationship between manual and practical instruction in primary schools and the development of an effective system of Technical Education. In this regard it was pointed out that:

**A strong desire exists throughout this country, and it is growing stronger every day, for the introduction of a general system of Technical Education. It is thought that a good system of Technical Education would contribute largely towards the development of arts and industries in Ireland; and in this opinion we entirely concur. But the present system of primary education is so one-sided in its character that it leaves the pupils quite unprepared for Technical Education. The clever boys trained in the National Schools, if they are disposed to seek for a higher education, may pass with advantage into Intermediate Schools of the kind now**



**general in Ireland: but they are not fit to enter a Technical Schol, even if they had such a school at their doors. Now it seems to us that the changes we recommend would go far to remedy this defect. The system of National Education, modified as we propose, would give an all-round training to the faculties of the children, and would thus lay a solid foundation for any..... afterwards be found suitable to their talents and their circumstances.**<sup>17</sup>

The report emphasised that it was important that teachers understand the educational value of manual and practical subjects. It was pointed out that those countries in which the movement had been most successful were those which had "a number of earnest workers, profoundly impressed with a sense of the high educational value of a well-organised system of manual training in a primary school." The commission went on to state:

**"We are impressed with the danger likely to result from such a branch of school-work as this being taken up by incompetent teachers, especially by teachers who do not appreciate, or even comprehend, its educational aims."**<sup>18</sup>

The Commission went as far as to say that teachers who did not believe in the value of manual instruction in schools should not be permitted to teach it:

**"We fully concur in the view.... that no one ought to be allowed to teach this or any other subject who does not believe in the value of the subject which he is to teach."**<sup>19</sup>

Even before the final report of the commission was published, it had influenced the educational policies of the National Board. In September 1898, "kindergarten occupations" became compulsory for pupils in organized infants' schools or infants' departments. At the same time, the programme of the training colleges was amended; kindergarten was introduced as a compulsory subject for women and a course of manual training was included as an optional extra for men.<sup>20</sup>

In 1898, a sub-committee of the Board was set up to consider how the recommendations of the Belmore Commission might be more fully implemented in national schools.<sup>21</sup> This committee reported to the Board in November 1898 and again in February 1899. However, the unexpected death of the Resident Commissioner, T. Redington, in early February called a temporary halt to the activities of the sub-committee.

Before the end of February, a new Resident Commissioner was appointed. He was W.J.M. Starkie, a Greek scholar, who had lectured in Trinity College, Dublin for a number of years before his appointment in September 1898 as President of Queen's College, Galway. He had no experience of national education; he knew little or nothing about manual and practical instruction. He admitted that he had never even heard of the Belmore Commission:

**I had never heard of the Manual Instruction Commission.....  
I had been living in Trinity College and it is quite possible  
in that quiet atmosphere not to know what is going on in the  
world.<sup>22</sup>**

Within weeks of his appointment, Starkie started to work on the development of a new programme for national schools. He was assisted in this work by Professor Fitzgerald, who had been an active member of the Belmore Commission. In July 1899, less than six months after his appointment, Starkie submitted a report to the National Board on the question of "introducing Manual and Practical Instruction in National Schools generally."<sup>23</sup> In this report, the different problems which would arise in the introduction of new subjects was discussed. It was recognised that it would be unwise to attempt to introduce the new subjects on a compulsory or nationwide basis. The intention at this stage was to provide instruction in only a comparatively small number of centres, because "for the first year or so it will be necessary to proceed tentatively". In this regard, reference was made to the experience in France where a rigidly formulated system of Manual Instruction had been introduced into primary schools some years earlier. This innovation had failed and the report saw it as an example of "the un wisdom of trying to impose any uniform scheme upon all the National schools of the country." The Board agreed to proceed on the basis of Starkie's report. The sanction of the government and of the Teasury was sought and obtained for the scheme outlined and Starkie was asked to produce detailed plans for its implementation.<sup>24</sup>

However, during the subsequent months, events took an unexpected turn. Instead of confining himself to developing the outline plan agreed by the National Board in July, Starkie went much further and in November 1899 produced significantly expanded proposals which referred, not only to the school programme, but to the system of payment and promotion of

teachers, to the method and organisation of inspection and to the system of administration in the central office in Marlborough St. Instead of merely adding some practical subjects to the existing national school programme, a radical revision of the entire programme was proposed. Payment by results would be abolished and the results programme would be replaced by a revised programme of instruction.<sup>25</sup>

The Revised Programme (as it was called) was based on the premise that there were three matters that should always be provided for in a primary school. First, and most essential, every child should be equipped for the work of life by giving him a knowledge of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Second, the senses and the intelligence should be cultivated by Hand, Eye and Ear Training, Elementary Science, Object Lessons etc. Third, a sound mind and a healthy body should be preserved by physical drill and exercise.<sup>26</sup> Starkie believed that the programme should be flexible and that within certain limits, managers and teachers should be allowed to adapt the programme to the needs of the locality and the capacity of the pupils. He also believed that the teacher should be "absolutely unfettered" in the choice of methods of instruction.

**Freedom and elasticity are vital to good teaching and it is worth while sacrificing a great deal of the accuracy exacted by an examination test in exchange for the alertness of intellect, the spirit of initiative and independence, the slow but continuous development which a less rigid training fosters.... It will be our aim to make provision for the introduction in some measure of Manual Training into all Irish schools and we entertain a sanguine hope that at no distant epoch the new and less bookish methods of instruction will remove the existing obstacles to the spread of industrial enterprise....<sup>27</sup>**

The Revised Programme not only incorporated all of the practical subjects recommended by the Belmore Commission, it also introduced changes which had not been suggested by the Commission. The syllabuses of the traditional subjects, such as Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and Geography were revised and the emphasis was changed from the accumulation of quantity of knowledge to the comprehension of the underlying concepts. The Revised Programme encouraged learning based on observation, activity and experience.

The difference between the new and the old programmes was described by a senior inspector as follows:

**Under the Results system, the children were driven, not led. It was all hard work, forced upon them by their teachers and the course pursued in the schools appeared to be based on the ground principle that you can be educated whether you please or do not please..... The teacher really taught the children what to think and say, and not how to think and find suitable expression for the thought..... Under the new code, the teacher adopting the so-called heuristic method - a very old method revived under a new name - endeavours first of all to awaken and excite the interest of his pupils; but he does not proceed, as under the Results system, to allay and satisfy the interest thus aroused, but he rather supplies them with the means of doing so for themselves. The children thus have to begin to think and reason, and thus really educate themselves, the teacher contributing as his share forms, time and guidance.28**

Conceptually, the Revised programme was impressive. It was based on sound educational and philosophic principles. It was coherent in its planning and presentation. But from the start, it encountered difficulties in regard to implementation. Lack of resources, financial and material, contributed to the difficulties but there were other factors which militated against its success. Starkie was accused of failing to consult inspectors and teachers who alleged that the expectations of the Revised programme were unrealistic. The I.N.T.O. had from the start expressed its opposition to some aspects of the programme. They were opposed to "the provisional and tentative" nature of the programme as initially promulgated.

**We must candidly say that we have little faith in a universally tentative and provisional programme. We consider it would much better to perfect it in as far as the experience of managers, teachers and inspectors could make it perfect.29**

Many teachers failed to understand the underlying principles of the programme. Practical subjects such as Handwork suffered particularly. By 1904 the Board admitted that most of the teachers "failed to gain any connected grasp or knowledge of the subject."30 A senior inspector reported that:

had its spirit and aim been fully realised by the teachers it would have helped in a material way to forward the progress of the schools..... [but] the instruction rarely rose above a mechanical routine that was wearisome and uninspiring to the last degree.<sup>31</sup>

Many teachers, as well as some managers and parents, did not understand the educational significance of manual instruction and felt that it was irrelevant in Irish schools. T.J. O'Connell, one-time General Secretary of the I.N.T.O. referring to this in his book, *100 Years of Progress*, stated:

**Generally speaking, managers, teachers, some inspectors and at least one Commissioner, the Protestant Bishop of Killaloe, did not consider the time spent on this form of training as worthwhile. It had been tried in London and abandoned as a costly failure. It was suitable perhaps in industrial centres where openings might be available in the future for boys and girls now in school. But in Ireland, such openings were few and far between and the book learning and the three R's fitted them better for the jobs in the local shops or the post-offices which they might chance eventually to secure, or in Britain or the U.S. which would be the likely destination of so many of them.<sup>32</sup>**

And so it was not surprising to find that in 1905, when the national school programme was modified in the light of the experience of the previous five years, Handwork was dropped as an obligatory subject. It was ironic that one of the main reasons for its failure was its identification with technical education. Teachers were adamant that technical training had no place in the national school. Insofar as primary education had a utilitarian purpose, it was, as T.J. O'Connell had pointed out, to help its better pupils to obtain white collar jobs, either in the urban areas of Ireland or in Britain or the U.S.A. The educational purposes of manual instruction were not understood nor achieved, in spite of the emphasis which had been placed on this aspect in the report of the Belmore Commission.

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# HORACE PLUNKETT: EDUCATIONALIST

Trevor West

**'Whenever I set out on a mental excursion into Irish political, sociological or economic questions, no matter where I start, I always come back to education as the condition precedent of all progress in Ireland.'**<sup>1</sup>

Thus ran Plunkett's verdict after a decade as a social reformer in the dying years of the last century. A practical social philosopher as well as a great co-operator; together with a small band of dedicated supporters, he designed and put into effect a comprehensive scheme for the regeneration of Irish rural life based on co-operation and education. His aims were three-pronged: to re-organise rural commerce along co-operative lines, to introduce the scientific method into Irish farming, and to restore a sense of dignity, a spirit of self-reliance and an air of cheerfulness to the Irish countryside. They were encapsulated in his famous slogan: "Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living", but too exclusive a concentration on the commercial aspects of his movement has led to the neglect of his well thought out philosophy for the development of rural life.

Son of a large landowning Anglo-Irish family but imbued with a strong desire to serve his fellow men, Plunkett reflected on the problems facing the Irish farmer during a ten year spell ranching in Wyoming from 1879. Threatened with tuberculosis after an Eton and Oxford education he had left his native county of Meath for the high dry climate of the American Middle West. Cheap, efficient transport and new processes of preservation had opened the British market to foreign competition so, although land legislation had given the Irish farmer security of tenure, he was put to the pin of his collar to compete with better organised and educated rivals in Europe and further afield. Added to this was the depressing drabness of life in rural Ireland which led the vast hordes of Irish immigrants to flock to cities overseas.

Having given up his career as a cowboy, Plunkett attempted to introduce a form of distributive co-operation, based on the English (Rochdale) version, to the Irish country town. Its failure made him realise that the English model was not the one to follow and, inspired by Denmark's example, he set out to co-operativise the Irish dairy industry. From Denmark he learnt of the impact which Bishop Grundtvig's folk schools were having upon rural life, whose success, he believed lay in their national basis and in their foundation upon the history, literature and traditions of their country:

**'There is in the Irish mind today a yearning for a national life and dignity which the Irish believe existed long ago, and which they know has not existed, at any rate for centuries. It is remarkable that in all my work, having a purely agricultural aim, my friends and I succeeded by appealing to these old national instincts.'**<sup>2</sup>

After an uphill struggle, commencing in 1889, he managed to persuade Irish farmers that co-operation held the key to controlling the means of production in the dairy industry. In 1894 the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) was formed to co-ordinate the rapidly expanding co-operative movement. His political masterstroke in the following year was to link the lack of technical education in Ireland with the demand for an Irish department of agriculture. There was, then, no single administrative body dealing with the myriad problems of Irish farmers nor was there any proper provision for technical education essential to the progress of Irish industry.

These were not, at first sight, cognate problems, the connection between the two being primarily political. Demands for a department of agriculture from the farmers (mainly nationalist) were then reaching a crescendo, while the lack of technical education impinged most critically upon the unionists in charge of northern industry. Agricultural education (which fell somewhere in between) was, at the time, almost non-existent in Ireland. The model farm at Glasnevin had been founded in 1838 and there was also the Munster Institute in Cork, but other attempts to establish model farms or agricultural training colleges, advocated by the Devon Commission of 1844, had come to nought in face of opposition from English free-traders with the ear of the government. Scientific education in Irish schools was in a similar



plight; in 1901 only 6 secondary schools possessed laboratories (this had increased to 150 after two years of the Department's operation).

The drive for scientific and technical education came from Ulster and from the liberal unionists (remnants of the Liberal Party who had broken with Gladstone over home rule) representing Belfast's mercantile class as well as the northern tenant farmers. In 1893 Sir James Musgrave, chairman of the council of the Belfast Technical School, petitioned the Duke of Devonshire, on behalf of the liberal unionists, for the establishment of a state department for the promotion of the interests of agriculture in Ireland, with an Irish minister at its head, adding that this department should have an educative role vis-a-vis agriculture and other industries.<sup>3</sup>

The Technical Education Act of 1890 enabling local authorities to raise a rate for the specific purpose of providing technical education, had, by and large, been ignored in Ireland. (The Belfast Technical School, in 1893, was still a private institution receiving only a derisory grant from city funds). An Irish Technical Education Association was founded at a meeting (attended by Plunkett and by both Archbishops of Dublin) held in the Antient Concert Rooms in that year to press for the provision of proper facilities throughout the country. Further impetus came from George Francis Fitzgerald, professor of experimental philosophy in Trinity College and famous for his work in relativity theory, in a lecture to the Irish Industrial League in 1896 demanding technical education in the schools and castigating his own university for its failure to promote the pure and applied sciences.<sup>4</sup>

Skilfully persuading the majority of Irish parliamentarians to set aside their party differences for the common good, Plunkett established the Recess Committee of 1895/6 comprising of politicians both nationalist and unionist but dominated by forward looking businessmen. The Committee, described by Standish O'Grady as

**'a body of volunteers who, without authority or sanction from the higher powers, undertook to discharge the functions of a royal or parliamentary commission and discharged them more brilliantly or effectively than has ever been done by any any commission'**<sup>5</sup>

produced a report which had an immediate impact. Its principal recommendations were the establishment of an Irish department of agriculture and the improvement of scientific and technical education besides the incorporation of these subjects in primary, secondary and tertiary curricula. Highly critical of Irish administration under the Union the report did not produce immediate legislative results, and, supported by a wide variety of unionists and nationalists Plunkett launched a campaign for governmental action. He received splendid backing from the liberal unionists; their leader Thomas Sinclair, a mathematical graduate of Queen's College, Belfast complaining on behalf of northern industrialists, that 'everyday lost means that the splendid equipment of our foreign rivals are increasing the balance against us at a rate that can only be measured by geometrical progression'<sup>6</sup>. In 1899 a bill prepared by chief secretary Gerald Balfour passed through parliament and the Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) became a reality with Plunkett as vice-president (its executive head).

Apart from agricultural education which fell naturally within its purview, the Department administered the grants for science and art which gave it control of several national institutions, including the Museums, the Royal College of Science and the Metropolitan School of Art all located in Dublin. On account of the primitive nature of Irish educational administration Plunkett found himself in charge of scientific education everywhere but in the universities; it was not an opportunity he would have turned down for scientific innovation and educational reform were two of his principal aims and, in his mind, they were inextricably linked.

The lead given by the liberal unionists of Ulster was instrumental in ensuring that the new system of technical or vocational education should be non-denominational. During the preparation of the Recess Committee's report, the northern members put forward an amendment to the effect that the 'practical schools' should not be associated with denominational schools such as those run by either the Christian Brothers or the 'protestant committee',<sup>7</sup> while Sinclair urged that the various denominations should not be mentioned in the report.<sup>8</sup> Dr. Walsh, catholic archbishop of Dublin, persuaded his hierarchy to accept this new scheme of a lay controlled and state-supported branch of education. Thus it was that DATI-administered technical

education, unlike its primary and secondary counterparts remained secular. (When proposals for the establishment of the N.U.I. were mooted in February 1907, Sinclair urged Plunkett that the DATI should retain control of the College of Science. Plunkett regarded the College as 'the apex of our whole system of technical instruction, both agricultural and industrial'<sup>9</sup> but the links were severed and the College became part of the N.U.I. in 1908).

In his controversial book 'Ireland in the New Century' published in 1904 Plunkett castigated administrators under the Union for failing to understand Ireland thereby constructing an educational system 'based on English models and thought out by Englishmen largely out of touch and sympathy with the peculiar needs of Ireland'.<sup>10</sup> To prove his point he listed several Irish educational initiatives such as that of the Kildare Street Society, the comprehensive educational scheme devised by Thomas Wyse and the system of itinerant instruction in agriculture developed by the National Board which were either ignored or distorted by the government.

No careful observer of the Irish educational system, he wrote could fail to see that

**'the schools were practically bribed to fall in with a stereotyped course of studies which left scant room for elasticity and adaptation to local needs; that the teacher was..... deprived of healthy initiative; and that the Irish parents must have been in the dark as to the bearing of their children's studies on their probable careers in life.'**<sup>11</sup>

Irish education needed to be reconsidered from the standpoint of its relation to the practical affairs and everyday life of the people of Ireland. 'The needs and opportunities of the industrial struggle must... mould into shape our educational policy and programmes.'<sup>12</sup> But political pressure required to bring about changes in the system was not easy to generate, for, as he sagely observed,

**'all educational reform is confronted with this adverse condition that the supply has to precede the demand. A full understanding of the value of education and consequently a desire for it, is only given to those who have enjoyed its advantages.'**<sup>13</sup>

Plunkett regarded the university as the base upon which

primary and secondary education stood. But Trinity College, Ireland's oldest university had failed the test of actively influencing the majority of the people and of moulding their thought and directing their action towards the up-building of the nation's life:

**'I am bound to say that Trinity College, so far as I have seen, has had but little influence upon the minds or the lives of the people. Nor can I find that at any period of the extraordinarily interesting economic and social revolution which has been in progress in Ireland since the great catastrophe of the famine period, Dublin University has departed from its academic isolation and aloofness from the great national problems which were being worked out'** 14

The failure on the part of Trinity strengthened the case for the establishment of a university acceptable to Catholics which, he remarked, was 'not a concession of privilege, but of simple justice.' He had taken great pains to establish good relations with the Catholic hierarchy and in December 1900 was invited to meet the bishops to discuss the university question. Plunkett had to tread cautiously for, although he, personally, favoured the establishment of a Catholic university, his liberal Unionist supporters in Ulster were directly opposed to it. The result of these discussions was a suggestion of Plunkett's to the Prime Minister early in 1901 for the summoning of a Royal Commission. The Commission on University Education was established later that year, and before the commissioners, argued in favour of a complete system of Irish education open to all, thus eliminating what Catholics regarded as 'the alternative between ignorance and Trinity.'

In his evidence to the commission he elaborated on his view of the vexed question of denominational education.

**'As far ahead as we need look, all attempts to divorce religion and education in Ireland, will be, as they have been in the past - mere paper restrictions, ineffectual because the Irish mind goes the other way; harmful because what cannot be done openly and directly will continue to be accomplished by sham and subterfuge. Besides, in my advocacy of the Catholic claim I have learned that the real objection is, not to be element of religion in education but to clerical control over secular education.'** 15

During his period as vice-president of the DATI from 1900

until 1907 (when he was removed from office by nationalist opposition) Plunkett had the opportunity of constructing a system of agricultural education virtually from scratch. The Department's primary task, as he saw it, was to put the benefits of modern science at the disposal of the Irish farmer thus the educational services which he provided had a strong practical bias. Rather than set up a whole chain of agricultural colleges as he was pressed to do he sent out a team of instructors to meet the farmers in the field and concentrated on building up institutions already in existence. Parnell's estate of Avondale was purchased for the training of foresters as well as a vessel to survey Irish fishing grounds. He at once set up a statistics and information branch in his Department and for the first time a complete picture began to emerge of the country's agricultural resources.

His educational programme was rounded off by the establishment of a Co-operative Reference Library in IAOS headquarters in Dublin. The idea behind this project originated in the state of Wisconsin where Charles McCarthy, an Irish-American collaborator and friend, had established a Legislative Reference Library to assist the state's legislators in their labours. Plunkett donated a magnificent collection of co-operative books, the Carnegie Foundation provided financial support and IAOS headquarters became a co-operative university for Ireland's farmers and for the rest of the world.

As the spirit of compromise, which had so distinguished Irish affairs in the final decade of the nineteenth, withered in face of increasing feeling over the constitutional issue, Plunkett's importance as a centrist seeking a *modus vivendi* between unionist and nationalist, between protestant and catholic, declined. He is now forgotten as a politician, of more consequence to his native land is the fact that his ideals and philosophy have been equally neglected. His vice-presidential injunction to his new Department to provide:

'practical instruction to young and old, in schools, upon the farms, and at meetings, lectures, experiments and demonstrations' was conveniently forgotten. The failure of subsequent administrations whether British or Irish, to implement his scheme for a proper system of agricultural education is, perhaps, the principal reason for Irish farmers' failure to maximise their opportunities since then. Recent innovations have, ironically, been

prompted by the extension system in American universities, whose work was influenced by Plunkett and where a gospel is propounded similar to that which he preached in Ireland more than three quarters of a century ago.

Happily, the recent past has witnessed a change and a reassessment. The co-operative system, after years of neglect, is now an of study by economists, sociologists and historians. Plunkett's achievements and ideals are subject to a critical re-evaluation. The importance of his attempt to develop a comprehensive philosophy of Irish rural life is steadily gaining reecognition; his ideas have made considerable impact in other parts of the world. His complex personality was a compound of paradoxes: a combination of the man of business with the idealist; a man of strong family affections who never married; an aristocrat of great charm who could be ruthless in pursuit of his objectives; a landowner, originally a unionist, concerned with the welfare of the poorest of Irish farmers who eventually became a leading advocate of dominion home rule. Someone who was such a strange mixture with so diverse a range of interests working in one of the most interesting and traumatic periods of Irish history has proved difficult to interpret. The patient researches of scholars such as Michael Clune have given a fresh impetus to this important task.

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# **THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION AND THE CITY OF DUBLIN TECHNICAL INSTRUCTION COMMITTEE, 1901 - 1912**

**Jim Cooke**

With the passing of the Agriculture and Technical Instruction (Ireland) Act in 1899,<sup>1</sup> the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (D.A.T.I.) was formally established in Dublin in April of the following year. By that time, however, the city of Dublin technical schools at Kevin Street were in existence for over twelve years, and plans were well advanced for another large technical school on the north side of the city. The advent of the newly constituted department, with national responsibility for technical education called, therefore, for a new relationship between local government and central authority. It is the purpose of this essay to trace and analyse the matter in which the Dublin Corporation and its Technical Instruction Committee (T.I.C.) sought to resist the demand of the department for total control of all schemes of technical instruction under its auspices. The tussle for supremacy lasted for almost twelve years. During that period the advancement of technical instruction in Dublin city was impeded while the department and auditors of the Local Government Board withheld approval and funds, implicitly demonstrating to the local technical instruction committee the futility of its opposition. It was not until 1912 that the dispute was finally resolved when the department's insistence on complete control was eventually conceded.

The dispute between the T.I.C. of Dublin Corporation and the D.A.T.I. was not the only notable case in Ireland but was the earliest test case of the relationship which was to be forged between the local and the central body. Dublin Corporation stood on its independent commitment to the ratepayers while the D.A.T.I. reiterated its right under the 1899 act to withhold approval for a technical instruction scheme which did not meet its requirements in detail. The Dublin T.I.C. felt that the department certainly had the right to monitor the principles on which a scheme was based, but insisted that the administration of the scheme should lie with the local authority. The dispute, which began in 1901, arose out of the appointment of a director of the technical instruction scheme and following this every other important issue became a matter of



contention: whether the proposed northside schools should be a polytechnic (favoured by the T.I.C.) or a series of separate monotecnics (favoured by the D.A.T.I.) and the question of the site or sites for these schools which was finally agreed to be at Bolton Street.

The city of Dublin technical schools at Kevin Street arose directly from an artizans' exhibition held in 1885. The exhibition was organised principally by Arnold Graves, (uncle of Robert Graves the poet and novelist), a rising social thinker and educational. The Kevin Street school was opened in October 1887 with Arnold Graves as honorary secretary to the management committee. He was a chief executive officer who arranged every detail of the school's establishment and programme but did not teach in the school. Mr. W. Vickers Dixon was appointed in 1887 as 'principal of the school and assistant secretary to the management committee'.<sup>2</sup> By 1900 when the D.A.T.I. was established Graves was still honorary secretary to the T.I.C. maintaining his place first as an elected representative of the subscribers. The T.I.C. was constituted under the 1889 Technical Instruction Act which allowed a 1d rate to be struck for technical education which for Dublin realised £2,900 in the first year in which the act was adopted, 1893.

When in 1901 Vickers Dixon was appointed an inspector for technical instruction at the D.A.T.I. the T.I.C. appointed Louis Ely O'Carroll in his place. It was this appointment, contrary to the wishes of the department which gave rise to the dispute, which lasted until 1912 and if Dublin Corporation finally capitulated it did so while holding much of its own ground. Louis Ely O'Carroll's appointment survived the dispute and O'Carroll remained as joint head with the department's appointee throughout, and in 1930, he was appointed the city of Dublin's first chief executive officer under the 1930 Vocational Education Act, a position he retained until his retirement in 1942.

The department was firm in the view that a highly qualified person in the technological area should head up each technical instruction scheme and the appointee was also required to teach as part of that position. W. Vickers Dixon, B.A., was a senior moderator and gold medallist, Trinity College Dublin, and a registered teacher of the City and Guilds of London Technical Institute. He taught sound, light and heat, electricity and

magnetism, and electric lighting in the school and was therefore a technical expert in science and technological subjects.<sup>3</sup> A similar pattern emerged elsewhere. In 1900 Belfast had submitted a technical education scheme after consultation with the department which it approved. Mr. F.C. Forth was appointed director of technical instruction. Forth had been vice-principal, school of technology, Manchester. Likewise in 1901 when the Cork scheme was being established and approved a Mr. E.A. O'Keeffe who was highly qualified in physics and electrical engineering, and who was a technological teacher of 15 years' experience at the City and Guilds Finsbury Technical College in London, was appointed organising secretary of the scheme.<sup>4</sup> Louis Ely O'Carroll, on the other hand, was a B.A. graduate of Trinity College Dublin; he was also a barrister and had been a science teacher for the university examinations.<sup>5</sup> He did not have the technological expertise which the department clearly thought necessary for the principalship.

The new D.A.T.I. had an annual income of £166,000 of which £55,000 was to be devoted to technical instruction. Under section 16 of the act the department were to distribute the first portion of this sum among the county boroughs in proportion to their population and the county boroughs should apply this money - which was set at £25,000 by the Board of Technical Instruction - in aid of schemes approved by the department. The remaining £30,000 was to be applied by the department to the county and urban schemes which were to be drawn up in close consultation with the department. In these cases the department had full discretion in allocating funds which were not tied to any fixed ratio regarding population or local contribution. This distinction between the manner of allocating funds between the county boroughs and the other schemes seemed unimportant as the department had to approve all schemes, and merely seemed to constitute a gesture of confidence and privilege to the six county boroughs. While in the cases of Belfast, Cork, Limeick, Galway and Waterford, no controversy arose, it was this section which Dublin stubbornly quoted in its dispute with the department, maintaining that the department was obliged to pay over the money to the county boroughs, which amounted to an average of £9,000 per annum in the case of Dublin, who would then apply the money for a scheme, the principles of which were required to be approved by the department. As the department still had a veto on the application of the money, the dispute was really about what

degree of autonomy the Department would allow the boroughs. In the event the department in approving these schemes did so in very close detail.

In 1900 the T.I.C. had drawn up an outline scheme which had been forwarded to the department and a subsequent deputation had sought the 'opinion' of the department on various points.<sup>6</sup> It was obvious that the T.I.C. felt a strong prerogative in framing its own scheme. While the T.I.C. awaited answers to its queries the department withheld any payments under the act. Meanwhile an accumulation of requests for assistance began to grow.<sup>7</sup>

The first joint action of the T.I.C. and representatives of the department took place in March 1902, at two meetings held to draw up a scheme for Dublin, by which time W. Vickers Dixon had joined the department as an inspector and Louis Ely O'Carroll had become secretary to the T.I.C. The joint meeting agreed a scheme of assistance to secondary schools to carry out the department's science programme which had been adopted by the Board of Intermediate Education, subject to the applications being approved by the T.I.C. and being further approved by the department.<sup>8</sup>

The dispute began to centre on specific matters during 1903 with the placing of three reports before the Corporation, two from its own committees and the third from the department.<sup>9</sup> The first was a report by L.E. O'Carroll on the various trades and the number of apprentices in the city on which basis he outlined a scheme of technical education. Secondly, George Fletcher, senior inspector of the department, sent in a memorandum embodying a scheme and recommendations drawn up by himself. A sub-committee of the Corporation considered these two conflicting reports and issued a compromise report, recommending that there be a north side polytechnic mainly for the building and printing trades and that Kevin Street should mainly develop the mechanical engineering and electrical engineering subjects with a sizeable number of subjects taught in both. The points at issue were that the T.I.C. favoured a polytechnic to cater for the building and printing trades especially, whereas the department through George Fletcher was insisting that a series of monotchnics be established. Secondly, George Fletcher stated that a technical expert should be appointed director of the scheme, a person who would act as principal of either Kevin Street or the building trades school, but who 'would be primarily responsible for the general working of all

the schools.... A Secretary, whose duties would extend over the whole area of the scheme, would be a necessity. The Committee, however, already possess a Secretary, hence further reference to the question is unnecessary.' In addition, each school should be directed by a principal who should take an important part in the teaching programme within the school. This, however, meant that Louis Ely O'Carroll, who was secretary to the T.I.C. and superintendent and principal of the Kevin Street School was being declared unacceptable to direct the whole scheme and was being relegated to a position of correspondence secretary, presumably at the service of the director.

A copy of the T.I.C.'s scheme was forwarded to the department on 26 October with a letter stating that it has been unanimously adopted by the corporation at a council meeting on 5 October 1903. On 5 December when no reply was received the T.I.C. wrote again applying for a grant from central funds accruing to the city of Dublin. The department replied on 14 December indicating that in view of the fact that the scheme 'has been unanimously accepted by the Municipal Council, the Department are prepared, in order to avoid further delay, to approve of the Scheme as outlined in the specific recommendations referred to, subject to the following suggestions and remarks.'<sup>10</sup> This seemed a satisfactory reply except that the letter then proceeded to reiterate its own suggestions for a scheme. It did, however, contain a degree of compromise in some areas. It acknowledged that the question of a site on the northside would very likely determine how the building and allied trades, and the printing and allied trades were to be accommodated, expressing confidence that the committee would 'endeavour to secure, for each group of subjects, the full advantages of a properly co-ordinated set of classes with definite aims and regarded as a separate and self-contained educational unit'. This had resolved the question of polytechnic versus monotechnic into organisational rather than physical separateness.

The letter also stated that it was 'indispensable' that a director 'with special scientific or technological qualifications and with adequate educational experience' should be appointed. The method of appointment should be, as already followed in Belfast, Cork and other important urban districts, namely, from a shortlist supplied by the department. As this clearly meant that approval for

the scheme was conditional on the appointment of a new director, exclusive of L.E. O'Carroll, it became a major issue of the dispute.

The response to this letter conveyed the unanimous resolution of the committee declining 'to appoint an additional director at present, the matter being premature'. A further letter of the department in January 1904 repeated its requirement regarding the appointment of a director but gave the committee the option of submitting alternative proposals to which the committee sent its unanimous resolution that the work of the schools 'has heretofore been efficiently and well carried out by the T.I.C., its director and staff; and that as soon as it is necessary to increase the staff the committee are prepared to do so', but they respectfully declined to do so at the moment. Much additional correspondence ensued but with no appreciable change of attitude on the part of either the committee or the department.<sup>11</sup>

At this time the matter was raised at the Board of Technical Instruction by the corporation representatives but it was ruled by the vice president of the D.A.T.I., Horace Plunkett, to be out of order, as the borough schemes were not to be discussed by the board. He did offer, however, 'to confer after the meeting with any members of the Board who were particularly interested in the Dublin scheme'. This led to several unsuccessful meetings between John Mulligan, the chairman of the T.I.C., and Sir Horace Plunkett.<sup>12</sup>

During 1904 a motion before the corporation condemned the D.A.T.I. for frustrating its work 'by attaching an insulting condition to their acceptance of the scheme which has been unanimously approved of by the Technical Education Committee and by this Council'.<sup>13</sup> This motion was subsequently amended to replace the word 'insulting' with 'unnecessary' which was agreed to by the proposer, and the motion as amended was carried. Shortly afterwards the T.I.C. agreed by way of compromise to appoint for a limited period an expert adviser to assist in the planning and equipping of the new northside school.<sup>14</sup>

By early March 1905 the corporation had got legal opinion on the withholding of the funds as they felt 'the money should be paid over to it every year and should remain in the custody of the Corporation, where the interest would be accruing to the rate-payers....instead of being confiscated by the Department or the Treasury', but the law agent advised that 'I fear no legal

proceedings will lie to recover it' as the department was in effect a government department.<sup>15</sup> Though the dispute continued for quite a number of years more no legal proceedings were ever initiated against the department. It was clear though that if there had been a likelihood of success that the corporation would have taken a case against the department.

In April 1905 Mr. John Ryan, M.A., D.Sc., principal of the Paddington Technical Institute, was appointed as the expert adviser to the committee. He was one of four candidates selected by the department, but he was taken on only a three years' engagement.<sup>16</sup> This, of course, was not what the department had asked of the T.I.C. which was to be brought into line with Belfast, Cork and all the other major schemes were the selected expert adviser became the director of the whole scheme. During 1905 a long process of selecting a site for the new northside school took place when finally the old European Hotel site in Bolton street was chosen. In March 1906 the department wrote to the city treasurer that now that the site had been acquired 'no reasonable material difficulty need prevent the T.I.C. from proceeding at once with the work of organising a comprehensive scheme and co-ordinating its various elements with each other and with the general educational work in the City under the direction of the educational expert who is now in their service.'<sup>17</sup>

The committee, however, could afford to sit out the year 1906 as it was to be an eventful year for the department. The new Liberal government had been persuaded by Irish nationalist M.P.s to establish a departmental committee of inquiry to investigate the D.A.T.I. which they saw as part of the Conservative government's work. The leadership of the D.A.T.I. was generally upheld although the dispute between the department and the Dublin T.I.C. was rehearsed and accusations of the department's uniform and rigid approach were sympathetically evoked by one member of the committee of inquiry, Mr. Micks, who duly reported against the department in a minority report.

The dispute, which had been 'one of the chief public grievances which led to the Committee of Inquiry into the working of the Department',<sup>18</sup> was brought before the committee of inquiry in some detail by John Mulligan who had been chairman of the T.I.C. for a number of years. Mulligan outlined the dispute and was sympathetically questioned by Micks although other members

of the committee emphasised that the right to withhold approval for the scheme was 'the one hold' which the department had over the proper conduct of technical instruction.<sup>19</sup> In the reports of the committee of inquiry only Micks in a minority report alluded to the dispute noting that 'It is not a light responsibility to impose a handicap of seven years against the technical education of the capital city....' Though the main report had upheld the record of the department Horace Plunkett's position had become untenable by 1907 under the Liberal government and he was replaced by the South Tyrone Unionist M.P. T.W. Russell. Speaking to the dispute in the Mansion House shortly after his appointment to the vice presidency of the department, Russell said: 'A plague on both your houses; I will be no party to withholding the funds.'<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding this commitment, however, the funds were withheld.

The year 1906 began with an important event. The Rev. Thomas Finlay, S.J., was appointed a member of the T.I.C. Finlay (1848-1940) was a political economist and was an ardent supporter of Sir Horace Plunkett and the co-operative movement. He was an elected member of the Board of Technical Instruction and a nominated member (by the department) of the Board of Agriculture. Now as a member of the T.I.C. of the city of Dublin he was well placed to act as a conciliator, having been elected chairman of the incoming T.I.C. in 1907. He was soon to take the initiative.

In March 1908 the committee's chairman, Fr. T.A. Finlay, S.J., suggested that the duties of supervision of the work of the schools should be rearranged 'so that the supervision of the general administrative work be assigned to the secretary and manager, Mr. L.E. O'Carroll, and the supervision of the strictly educational work of the schools be allotted to our expert adviser, Dr. Ryan.' The details of this re-arrangement were drafted by Finlay, approved by a sub-committee and adopted at a meeting on 20 May 1908. This was recorded in a special report to the city council re-engaging Dr. Ryan for another three years under the new title of educational adviser.<sup>21</sup> The department, however, were not satisfied as their concept of a director was of one holding above all the title of chief executive officers which O'Carroll had been assigned.

Meanwhile, the department had begun to make regular

payments on account towards the cost of the erection of the Bolton Street school which had been begun for a tender of £34,000. The department, however, only paid when a sum became due so that each payment was scrutinised and sanctioned and the T.I.C. never had a disposable fund from this source, except the estimated and national sum from which the department made individual payments. Now the dispute was delaying but not preventing the expansion of the Dublin scheme.

During 1909 the Bolton Street building went ahead and the breviate report of the T.I.C. to the corporation for the quarter ending 30 September stated that the new school would be close to completion before August 1910 'and the Department are on this account asked to provide a sum of £32,000.'<sup>22</sup> It was now inevitable that the department would want to settle the question of director or principal before this money was paid. Another incident occurred in November which was exploited by the department in settling the dispute in its own favour. On 16 November 1909 one of the clerks at the Kevin Street school had left the office in the morning and failed to return. On examining the record of cash lodgement made by that clerk in the city accountant's office there appeared to be a considerable deficiency. A warrant was put out for the arrest of the defaulting clerk who surrendered the following day and pleaded guilty to falsification of accounts and embezzlement and was sentenced to fourteen months' imprisonment.<sup>23</sup>

On 30 March 1910 the department wrote to the chairman of the T.I.C. in terms which led to an increased bitterness in the dispute. Two issues were outlined which T.P. Gill, secretary of the department stated, would have to be resolved before the scheme for 1910-11 would be sanctioned. Firstly, no scheme for the conduct of the new Bolton Street school had been sent to the department as yet, although a large 'new departure' would need careful advance planning. It would be essential that the school would be placed 'effectively under the administration of an expert director.' The committee had not 'fully availed themselves' of the assistance of Dr. Ryan while permitting the secretary of the committee to assume duties for which the department had declared him not to be qualified. Secondly, the auditor of the Local Government Board's report to the corporation revealed 'a state of negligence and irregularity in the Secretary's department which is of the utmost



gravity.' Mr. O'Carroll should cease assuming, nominally or otherwise, the functions of principal or director and to regard the tenure of his office for the time being as probationary.<sup>24</sup> The letter showed T.P. Gill's absolute determination to limit O'Carroll's role, if not to remove him altogether.

The evidence produced against O'Carroll was very tendential and the department assumed an authority in censuring him which was not shared by the T.I.C. or the corporation whose appointee he primarily was. O'Carroll sent a reply to the charges in May addressed to the T.I.C. who, he said, along with himself, had been subjected to 'an elaborate attack' by the department.<sup>25</sup> O'Carroll finished his letter cynically 'If I have never gone behindhand to make sure of the Department's wishes before presenting them to you as tabloids, I cannot even now feel regret.'

A copy of this letter was sent to the department and a deputation from the committee met with the department. At this meeting the department stated that they would insist on the appointment of a director with authority over every section of the scheme and that O'Carroll would not be recognised as eligible for that position, but would be approved as secretary.<sup>26</sup> The committee in turn sought the opinion of the corporation's law agent who reported in June that the department had no power whatever to interfere with any corporation officer or control him in any way, and that the department must pay over the money each year to the boroughs, but the borough councils can be restrained from applying a penny of it unless the scheme is approved by the department.

**To my mind the Department is now seeking to take up the same position towards a representative elected public body as the Board of National Education is empowered to assume towards the manager of a National school, altogether ignoring the fact that the codes relating to the respective subject matters are quite dissimilar, and that the National school manager is an individual and does not hold his position by virtue of an annual election.<sup>27</sup>**

O'Carroll then wrote to the committee outlining the administrative successes of the Dublin scheme before 1901-2 and 1904-5 when he was in complete charge and showed the relative decline between 1905-6 and 19-8-9 since Dr. Ryan was appointed. O'Carroll's illustration of a decline since 1905-6 was however

somewhat simplistic because in that year the department had introduced new regulations to encourage graduated and interrelated courses of study, as opposed to the study of isolated subjects. The twenty third annual report of the T.I.C. for the year 1908-9 noted that 'the number of students (1,899) was below that of the preceding year, but on the other hand the number of class entries (5,396) was larger than in any previous year.'<sup>28</sup>

It was also inevitable that the delay in the building of Bolton street school due to the regular failure of the quarries to deliver the Mouncharles stone, and the disputes over the use of Irish materials and labour, and the question of direct labour, were causing continuous problems for Dr. Ryan who was mainly concerned with the new school. It was also inevitable that the division of duties between the two men who were running the scheme left Dr. Ryan in an unenviable position of being the department's man in the corporation's den. That the scheme held together so well and made such steady progress may be attributed in the final analysis to the professionalism of both men.

The department wrote again in August 1910 stating that they rejected the law agent's report to the T.I.C. and would adhere to the requirements contained in their letter of 30 March. 'They will not be prepared to give their sanction to a scheme for the forthcoming session unless the terms of the letter are observed.'<sup>29</sup> A scheme for 1910-11 should be sent in forthwith. The law agent immediately advised the committee that they should submit the whole matter to the city council. A special report on the dispute was ordered. It was obvious, however, that on the council there were some members who were impatient with the dispute and felt that capitulation to the department was the only practicable course.<sup>30</sup>

On 28 September 1910 the Department carried out its threat to refuse sanction for all classes in the Dublin scheme and sent back to O'Carroll all application forms for a recognition of these classes.<sup>31</sup> When in January 1911 the committee of the whole house considered the report on the dispute they recommended that Dr. Ryan be appointed director of the Bolton Street school 'to carry out the work efficiently.' This recommendation was made notwithstanding a memorandum by the law agent outlining the 'ultra vires' requirements of the department.<sup>32</sup>

Fr. T.A. Finlay, S.J., had been appointed chairman again of the T.I.C. for the year 1911-12. He had stood down during 1910

while the dispute was being resolved, for Cllr. Mahon, an elected representative. Following the corporation decision to appoint a director, he had arranged a conference with the department who asked that a scheme for 1910-11 should be now drawn up and submitted for approval to include the appointment of a director and that Dr. Ryan would be approved in that capacity, and that no objection would be taken to Mr. O'Carroll as secretary at his present salary. The department undertook to make the scheme for 1910-11 retrospective to 31 July 1910.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, Dr. Ryan was appointed director of the scheme. The Corporation adopted this report. The department had at last secured a director. However, apart from a redefinition of titles and a more specific delineation of duties the arrangement was not greatly different from that of March 1908. The two men still remained in complete control of their own individual areas.

Dr. Ryan, however, felt that he was in general charge and wrote to Fr. Finlay outlining the elements of a scheme for the borough which the committee should use in putting forward a scheme. Fr. Finlay, as chairman of the committee, drew up a scheme based exactly on Dr. Ryan's letter, which then went forward to the corporation for ratification in August 1911, with the request that it be urgently considered to be ready for the opening of the new session in September.<sup>34</sup> The corporation, however, felt that Dr. Ryan had gone too far in practically dictating a scheme to the T.I.C. and corporation. They did not want such a complete capitulation as Fr. Finlay had embodied in his report to occur within months of their agreeing to the department's main demand.

The law agent attended the subsequent meeting of the T.I.C. and a modified scheme was drawn up. This differed from the earlier one in firstly stating that the scheme was being conducted under 1889 and 1899 acts. It also emphasised the authority of the corporation, and in place of the detailed description of plans and proposals which Fr. Finlay had taken almost directly from Dr. Ryan's letter, a brief statement of the general guidelines to be followed were set forth. This corresponded with the corporation's stance of submitting the principles only of a scheme to the department.

The department, however, having received the scheme, wrote on 13 October outlining the conditions under which they would sanction the scheme. These were accepted by the T.I.C. who

informed the corporation. The corporation noted this in the minutes early in 1912 and this finally ended the dispute.<sup>35</sup> The conditions in the department's letter were a further restatement of the department's position, that the director was to have control of the entire staff, administrative and educational. The duties of the secretary were outlined in detail, all being 'subject to the authority of the Educational Director'.<sup>36</sup> The Bolton street school had been opened in October 1911 under the direction of Dr. Ryan. The department had finally won.

Fr. Finlay had tried to conduct the compromise with the department. The department would not accept compromise, however, and T.P. Gill insisted on a uniform administration of the technical instruction schemes. Though clearly competent and expansionist he saw the department's inspectors providing the stimulus for expansion and did not wish to allow committees that role. F.S.L. Lyons states that the department did not fulfil its potential and that T.P. Gill, though 'honest and hardworking was excessively cautious and sadly lacking in imagination.'<sup>37</sup> Gill, however, in an itself experimental new department had to steer a difficult course to avoid local arbitrariness, and maintain proven efficiency.

In evidence before the 1926-27 Commission on Technical Instruction, Commissioner P.J. Hennon, representing the T.I.C. stated that 'the present combined local and governmental control has worked satisfactorily and should be continued.' He added, however, 'local initiative should be encouraged and local responsibility developed.'<sup>38</sup> The 1930 Vocational Education Act, which arose from that commission, continued the system of local committees for continuation and technical education under the authority of the Department of Education but the act was careful to reserve the final powers in all matters to the Minister for Education. Specifically in regard to the preparation of the annual scheme the Minister held the right to approve of any scheme 'with such modifications as he shall think fit to make therein or refuse to approve such scheme.'<sup>39</sup>

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