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Caroline Benn: Champion of Democratic Education

History of Education Lecture Series

Goldsmiths, University of London

21 June 2016

Jane Martin,

Professor of Social History of Education



**All of us who have
spent a teaching life
within comprehensive
schools and those who
have received a
comprehensive
education should
remember Caroline
Benn**

Chris Searle, 2001

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A Cincinnati Girl in the 1930s



Ohio River Flood, 1937



Educated in the USA and Britain



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Archive Stories: Norman Rockwell, 'The Prom Dress' March 1949



Socialist soulmate



“The thought of stagnating in Ohio had dragged me down to the bottom of the well. I couldn’t face forever after in some split-level house, just an open-ended coffin with a New England lantern out at the end of the driveway...”

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“Imagine what it must have been like being married to someone like Tony Benn. I mean it’s ‘cause you normally just marry a bloke, not a sort of whirlwind, you know? And yet she managed to just stay normal.”



A woman's life/ a political life





Family values: Mrs Benn with her husband and children in 1961

“She did all the things that a conventional politician’s wife did while also being a politician in her own right...”

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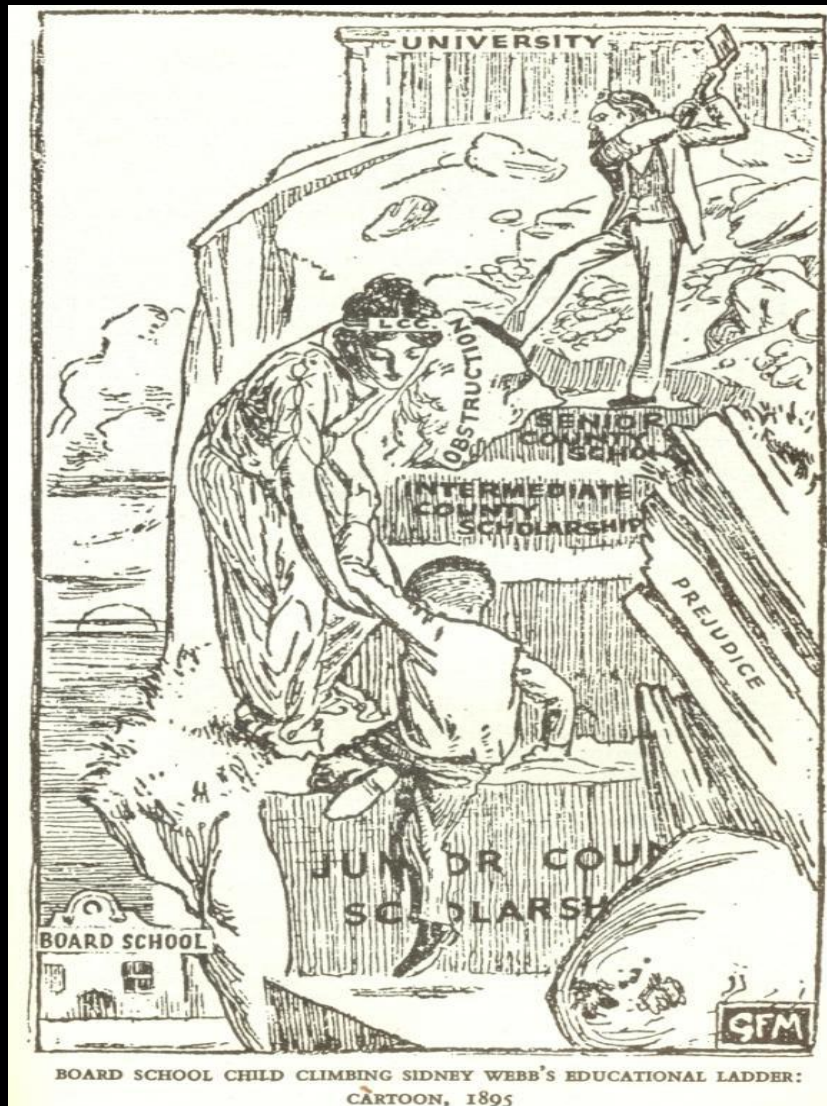
12 Holland Park Avenue, 1952-2000



“My home really became a centre of campaigning on comprehensive education.”

**Tony Benn 19
December 2013**

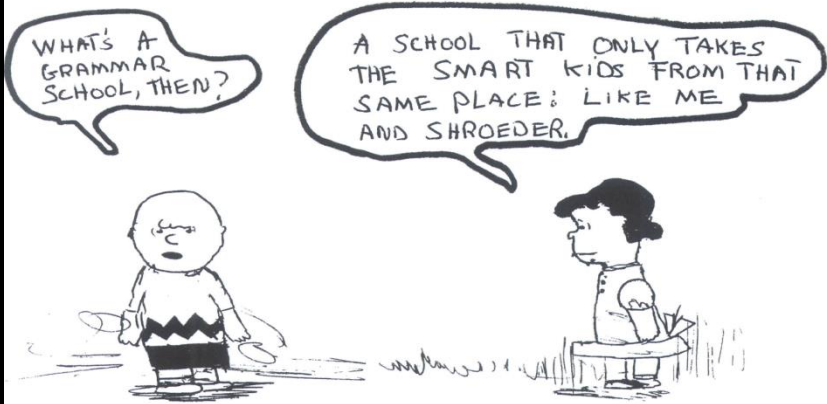
‘Opportunity’ in a Meritocracy



Sidney Webb's
“capacity catching”
scholarship system

This view of the world
encouraged a
competitive outlook,
using the divided
education system to sift
out the leaders of
tomorrow.

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COMPREHENSIVE

ISSUE NUMBER 20

EDUCATION

SPRING 1972 50p

‘Equality’ in a Democracy

“I think she saw the nature of a system which she thought was unfair. Thought how can we change it? Worked out in conjunction with others the best way of doing it and then campaigned for it and argued for it on the basis of her own experience of it ... and she became very controversial and that’s how the term radical got applied to her.”

Tony Benn to Jane Martin 19 December 2013

COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION

**SECONDARY
REORGANIZATION
IN ENGLAND AND WALES**

SURVEY NO.1 1966/7

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS COMMITTEE

“Nobody else was doing that, you know, actually chronicling – well more than chronicling, she was analysing the spread of comprehensive institutions and practices across the country”

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**“I was Alice...
everything was
Wonderland and this
was how I had all my
experience at Holland
Park School...”**

**A jewel in the crown of the new
world of the schools?**

Demo-school deputy claims 'Pupils were bribed'

Express Staff Reporter

A NEW row broke out last night over London's demo school, Holland Park — this time after many of the "power pupils" had gone to bed.

Mrs. Dorothy Coleman, acting head at the comprehensive school, issued a statement through the Inner London Education Authority, slamming the Press and television.

'QUIET UNTIL...'

She said that yesterday—the day after the big pupil demo—she had "precise evidence" that reporters and cameramen had bribed children with money, offered them cigarettes, abused teachers and stood at sixth formers, provoked children to run at cameras, given them objects to throw, including tomatoes, and tried to provoke them to smash windows.

The school, she added, had been quiet and absolutely normal except for intrusions at the school gates by Press and television crews. Mr. J. H. Bramall, leader of the Inner London Education Authority, said he entirely supported Mrs. Coleman and was considering the issue of complaints in the Press Council and the radio and television authorities.

During the day there had been reports—in evening newspapers and on television—of a further demonstration by about 50 pupils protesting over the dismissal of popular teacher Mr. Rousseau, 26-year-old teacher of social studies. The trouble started the day before—*it said*—when the pupils had smashed windows and overturned desks and chairs.

INQUIRY

Yesterday Mrs. Caroline Wedgwood Benn—wife of the Labour Secretary of State and Minister—who is chairman of the school governors, denied that the pupils had caused any damage.

An I.L.E.A. spokesman said six windows had been smashed. Later this was officially changed to 22. And the spokesman said: "There will have to be an inquiry."

Last night 400 pupils and a number of teachers attended talks at the school to "clear the air."

Afterwards Mr. George Frost, deputy head master, said it had been like a family discussion between a father and his children.

● Mrs. Rousseau—a temporary teacher given notice because the school is over-crowded—was on B.B.C. TV. As far as the demonstration were concerned, the situation was very dangerous indeed. I regret the anxiety caused.

This whole incident has disillusioned me considerably.



Mrs. Caroline Wedgwood Benn leaving Holland Park school

Addicts threatened me, says doctor

By LIN EDGSON

AN East London doctor yesterday admitted over-prescribing drugs to teenagers after intimidation outside his flat and in his surgery.

At the surgery in Hackney next door but one to a police station the doctor protested that it would need a permanent drugs squad watch in his waiting room to control the young addicts.

Undaunted and without a tie the doctor hobbled from his surgery in Lower Clapton Road, where he has prescribed drugs to some teenagers today but this in the last line—threats or no threats," he said.

Nightmare

The doctor, 53-year-old John O'Grady, explained he was hobbling because he sprained his foot when he fell downstairs at his flat in nearby Clarence Road, while trying to answer the door to a young addict wanting a script.

"They make a convenience

of me by waiting for me to come out of the flat instead of queuing at the surgery."

Dr. O'Grady said the short walk from his flat to his surgery had become a nightmare.

"This practice has about 2,000 patients, hundreds of them being youngsters. If a youngster comes in and says his name's Jones and he's one of my registered patients I have to believe him. I can't fit all the names to all the faces."

Dr. O'Grady added: "While I admit that I have over-prescribed drugs to these youngsters in the past I certainly have never done it for money. It has always been on the National Health."

The doctor was once struck off the register—and later reinstated in 1962 by conviction with an illegal abortion.

A spokesman for the British Medical Council said last night that the policies had been instructed to investigate the allegations of Dr. O'Grady's activities in dispensing drugs.

AIRPORT HOMES WILL GET 'HUSH' AID

Express Staff Reporter

A SOUND PROOFING scheme for people living near Gatwick Airport is to be introduced next year, the Government announced yesterday.

the present Heathrow Airport scheme. Further details are to be announced later, Mr. Michael Noble, Minister for Trade, said in a Commons written reply.

At the same time he announced that there would be no increase in summer night let

“The media took naturally to exaggerating problems, relaying odd incidents as if they were universal practice, and linking the equality drive to violence, vandalism, bullying, drugs, arson and indiscipline in comprehensives...”

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SCHOOL
HOLLAND PARK



**AIRLIE GARDENS
CAMPDEN HILL ROAD
LONDON W8 7AF
TELEPHONE 01 727 5631**

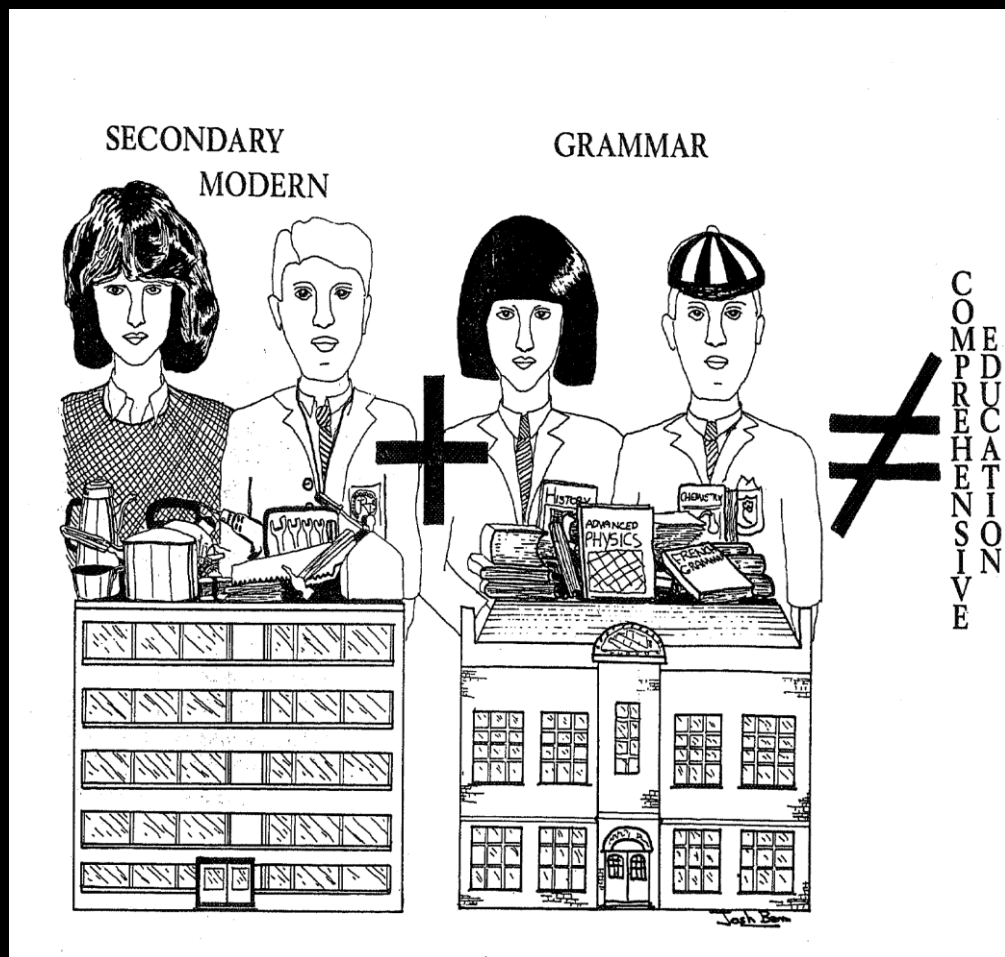


**“They had a Chair of
Governors who was
actually completely
involved in the
comprehensive
movement in a way
that other schools
didn’t...”**

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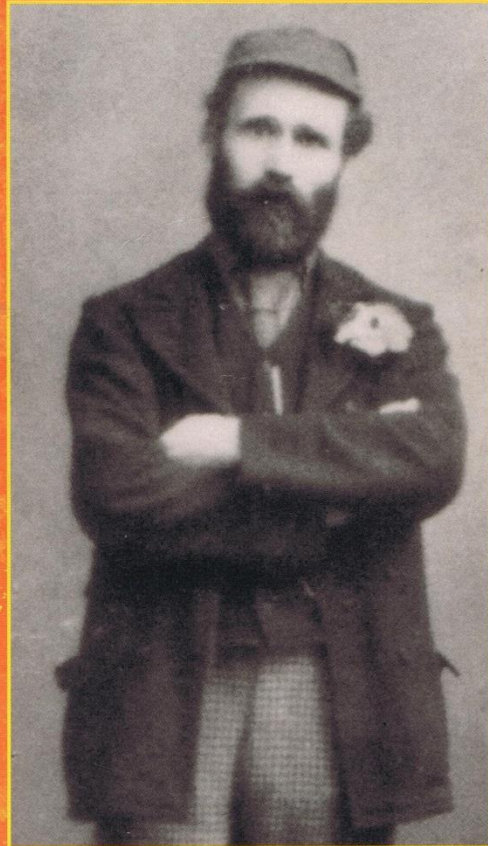
Thirty Years On
Is Comprehensive
Education Alive and
Well or Struggling
to Survive?

Caroline Benn and
Clyde Chitty



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Keir Hardie



CAROLINE BENN

“Personal events often get elbowed out of male political biography, which tends to centre on the pursuit of power. ...”

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“She obviously had a massive influence on him so he, in fact, represented a certain amount of power for her...”

Learning the Lessons

One thing I've learned in this business [of politics] just because something is a) right and b) true and c) inevitable, it does not mean you do not have to keep saying it over and over and over. Using every chance there is."

Caroline Benn to Brian Simon, 20 June 1977

**“The thing about
Caroline was that she
kept her own principles.
She had principles and
she was her own woman.
She kept her own life and
just worked incredibly
hard...”**

