

Local Government Institutions and Education in Ceylon 1870-1930

SYSTEMS of educational administration differ from country to country in the degree of centralization favoured by policy makers. In countries like the U.K. where a fair measure of decentralization is favoured, the central government has evolved a partnership with other agencies, and in particular with local government organisations. The development of the modern education system of Ceylon was largely the work of a succession of British colonial administrators who were more often conditioned by the educational practices of the metropolitan country than by the local circumstances in which their policies operated. It is, however, interesting to note that the sphere of educational administration was one of the few areas in which the educational system of Ceylon bore little resemblance to that of its prototype.

The state in England entered into a partnership with religious organisations and local government units for purposes of educational provision and management. But whereas the dual system of educational control or the denominational system was entrenched in the educational structure of Ceylon in a very short period notwithstanding differences in the religious environments in the two countries, the colonial administrators were never successful in utilizing the machinery of local government in the execution of their educational plans. The healthy relationship achieved by the British local authorities and the central Ministry in the educational field had nothing in common with the nebulous concepts and unrealistic schemes which fill the official documents of over half a century in Ceylon. The conditions which prevented the growth of this relationship in Ceylon were inherent in the colonial situation, and the long story of the failure of local government agencies to play a positive role in education is a good illustration of the interaction of political, economic and educational policies in any situation.

Local government institutions in their present form in Ceylon date mainly from the second half of the 19th century. Traditional local self-governing units such as Village Councils and District Councils are said to have lingered on in different parts of the country even in the early 19th

century but they had been denuded of both power and status by the new administrative structure. Factors such as the 1848 rebellion, the increase of local litigation and the decrepit state of village irrigation works brought home to the colonial government the need for reviving some form of local administration. The problem was viewed from the administrative angle and the need to relieve the central government of a part of the burden of ministering to the wants of local communities rather than the desire to provide a training in self government dominated official thinking and planning. Different types of local organisations were set up in the next few decades. In 1856 Village Councils were revived with the limited function of restoring village irrigation and their powers were considerably extended in 1871. In 1861 Provincial and Road committees were created as "local road authorities" in view of the rapidly expanding system of communications. Municipal administrations were organised in Colombo and Kandy in 1866 and in Galle in 1867 as the increasing size of these towns demanded some measure of administrative decentralization. Local Boards (1866) and Sanitary Boards (1892) were organised to cater to the needs of smaller towns. The elective principle was partially conceded and the Municipal Councils, Local Boards and Village Committees were empowered to create their own sources of income which would be supplemented by government grants.

This miscellaneous assortment of local organisations had not only no coherence but these institutions also provided little scope for local individuality. Central government officials presided over their activities and their financial dependence on the central administration further reduced their initiative. The real authority in the provinces was not these organisations but the provincial administration of the central government, the Kachcheri system, with its hierarchy of bureaucrats from the Government Agents as petty kings down to the local headmen. Although these local organisations did provide an opportunity for the emergence of local leadership and some preparation for national politics the centralization that was an integral part of the colonial administration militated against the development of virile self governing local bodies such as those which existed in 19th century England.

Education was not at the outset included among the limited functions of most of these newly created local bodies. In England the state entered the field of education as late as the 1830s, but by the end of the 19th century it had evolved a successful relationship with local organisations for educa-

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tional development. The local community was involved in education by the creation of School Boards where necessary by the Forster Elementary Education Act of 1870. By the 1902 Balfour Education Act the County Councils and the County Boroughs created by the Local Government Act of 1882 were made responsible for the provision and management of education under the supervision of the central government. The decentralization achieved by these measures was both financial and administrative and the local authorities have remained the pivot of educational organisation ever since.

Colonial practice everywhere ensured that education as an important agency in the transfer of values was one of the areas in which decentralization was minimal, while the colonial economic structure made financial decentralization also impracticable. But British practice as well as the growing complexity of colonial administration and the ever increasing educational expenditure led to efforts at securing local participation in education in most parts of her empire in the last decades of the 19th century. Developments in India were of particular interest to Ceylon. Between 1861 and 1871 local rates for education were introduced in most provinces in India. On the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission of 1882 primary education was declared the obligatory duty of local bodies, though secondary and higher education were not excluded from their purview, and specific local funds were credited in some provinces for educational purposes. The Indian experiment was not a complete success and the limited resources of the local bodies precluded any significant expansion of primary education. But such developments abroad had their repercussions in Ceylon.

I. 1870—1900.

Strangely enough at first the only legislation in Ceylon that took cognizance of the educational needs of local communities was the Village Communities' Ordinance of 1871 which empowered Village Councils to make rules "for constructing and repairing school rooms for the education of boys and girls and for securing their attendance at school".¹ Neither the Municipalities nor Local Boards (urban areas) were encouraged or permitted at the beginning to concern themselves with education. It is difficult to assess the extent to which this provision in the Village Council Ordinance was availed of but it is possible that the old tradition of village self government still persisted in some of the rural areas. Mr. Sendall, the Director

1. Ordinance No. 26 of 1871, Village Committees Ordinance.

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of Public Instruction at the time, certainly had very definite ideas as to the role these village organisations should play in educational matters. In a letter to the Colonial Secretary in 1871² he explained how the community should be encouraged to take a permanent and living interest in the progress of the village school by creating school committees in every village council which would be responsible for selecting sites for schools for erecting buildings and maintaining them from contributions from each family and for ensuring attendance through a system of fines. The D.P.I. was obviously influenced by the School Boards created in England in 1870 but the actual implementation of the Ordinance fell far short of these goals.

There is evidence in numerous reports³ that villagers through their *gansabhawas* or councils, particularly in remote areas, did build and repair schools, while the government paid for the teachers and equipment. It is also clear that the success of this legislation depended largely on the efficiency and enthusiasm of individual headmen, some of whom were even assiduous in ensuring regularity in school attendance through the imposition of fines by the Village Tribunals. Nevertheless there were many areas in the country where this section of the Ordinance was inoperative.

No effort was made to involve the urban local units in education until the financial crisis of the eighteen eighties drove the government to seek ways and means of reducing expenditure. Colonial economic policy in the 19th century followed laissez-faire traditions but provided every encouragement to private entrepreneurs to satisfy the basic needs of the imperial economy—essential raw materials, goods for home consumption in the U.K., markets for English industries and investments for surplus British capital.

In Ceylon economic development took the form of the growth of a plantation economy which for a large part of the 19th century revolved around the coffee industry. This export economy was naturally subject to trade fluctuations which had their repercussions on government expenditure. In 1880 the coffee industry collapsed and the government was in straitened financial circumstances until tea and rubber replaced it as revenue earning commodities.

2. Department of Public Instruction Correspondence, Letter from the Director of Public Instruction to the Colonial Secretary, 14/7/1871.

3. Sessional Paper XXVIII of 1905, Report of the Com. on Elem. Ed. in Ceylon.

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Retrenchment was the keynote of the eighties. The social services were the first to be affected and the education vote was frozen to Rs. 500,000 a year in 1882. The educational administration was compelled to consider various devices to cope with the problem of meeting expanding educational needs on a limited budget. At the very beginning of the crisis in 1881 the D.P.I. considered the possibility of introducing a local cess of the type imposed in India. He was however uncertain as to whether such a measure would yield any tangible financial return. Another complication was that the expansion of the system of grants-in-aid to denominational schools had reached such proportions that nine-tenths of government expenditure on education was allocated for such grants. The D.P.I. as well as the colonial Governor and the Colonial Office in London felt that a local tax which was likely to benefit Christian missionary bodies to this extent was hardly likely to be a popular measure. The idea of the local cess was thus abandoned but the Colonial Office suggested instead an extension to urban local units of the principle introduced by the Village Communities' Ordinance which required that Village Councils should erect and maintain buildings for government schools.⁵ In 1882 the Secretary of State approved the recommendation of the Ceylon government that the Municipal Ordinance 17 of 1865 and the Local Board Ordinance 7 of 1866 should be amended to enable these bodies to appropriate funds for the erection and repair of school buildings.⁶

The D.P.I., however, was in favour of a more limited scheme of local participation. Following the policy laid down by the Wood's Despatch in India in 1854, the Morgan Education Committee of 1869 had reversed the earlier British policy of promoting English education and had placed emphasis on the expansion of vernacular mass education. The D.P.I., who does not seem to have been very optimistic about the possibilities of local participation, felt that throwing the onus of building vernacular schools on local government units was tantamount to checking the expansion of vernacular education. He pointed out that more than half the education vote was spent on the Western Province while more than a quarter was allocated to the Municipal towns of Colombo, Kandy and Galle. A redistribution of educational expenditure was necessary and his suggestion was to leave English education, which was mainly limited to these urban areas, to other agencies so that government could concentrate on vernacular

4. Despatches, Governor to Secretary of State 19/8/81, Colonial Office. 54 Series, London.

5. Despatches, Secretary of State to Governor, 4/11/81. Colonial Office. 54

6. Despatches, Governor to Secretary of State, 4/5/82. Secretary of State to Governor, 24/6/82. Colonial Office.

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education. The Municipal Ordinance and the Local Board Ordinance should be so amended as to permit these urban local bodies to appropriate funds for English education. The central government should close its English schools and the Municipalities and the Local Boards could take them over if they wanted these schools to continue and run them as grant schools on the same pattern as the denominational grant-aided schools. The Royal College, the Normal School and the Agricultural School which served the whole island could continue to be maintained exclusively by the central government. The money thus saved could be appropriated for vernacular schools as well as for agricultural and technical education for which the government had no funds at its disposal.⁷

This scheme was warmly endorsed by the Select Committee of the Legislative Council which was appointed to consider the question of reducing public expenditure in view of the financial crisis. The Committee's approval was based on two reasons—economy, as well as the value of the principle of local participation in education. "The principle involved is however of more importance than the mere saving alone it indicates for it aims at enlisting in the cause of education, local interest and responsibility, and is capable of further extension in a manner which would greatly relieve the general revenue."⁸ Governor Longden went even further to suggest that the principle of local management should be extended to all the vernacular schools situated in towns,⁹ but the final decision was to confine the urban local bodies to English education, which was in any event limited to a small proportion of the population.

Even amidst the general official enthusiasm for the scheme there could be heard two important voices of dissent. Mr. P. Ramanathan opposed it in the Legislative Council on the grounds that no local body was at that time solvent enough to maintain schools without fresh taxation which would impose hardship on the population.¹⁰ He even unsuccessfully moved a resolution in the Legislative Council that it was undesirable to transfer these schools to Municipalities and Local Boards." While Mr. Ramanathan represented the voice of the intelligent Ceylonese who were acutely aware of the difficulty of ensuring local financial participation in view of the general poverty of the population, opposition also came from

7. D.P.I. Correspondence, D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary, 13/12/82.

8. Enclosure of Despatch, Governor to Secretary of State, 14/4/83. C.O. 54

9. Despatches, Governor to Secretary of State, 10/4/83. C.O. 54

10. Enclosure of Despatch, Governor to Secretary of State, 10/4/83. Dissent by P. Ramanathan, 13/2/83. C.O.

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Mr. Blair who acted as D.P.I. after Mr. Bruce vacated office in 1883.¹¹ Mr. Blair was forthright in his views that the local bodies were not yet ready and willing to undertake financial responsibility for education. He was opposed to "divided responsibility" and did not think that the meagre saving that would ensue from the closure of the government English schools was sufficient compensation for the loss of good schools.¹² He made unsuccessful efforts to retain the Galle Central School, which had a very high reputation at this time, as a government institution, and made several attempts to alter the decision to abandon these schools by drawing the attention of the government to the lethargic attitude of the local units to the question of accepting responsibility for these schools.¹³

The government, however, was engrossed in its financial problem and the welfare of a few English schools did not cause it much concern as it was well aware that the missionaries were active in the sphere of English education. A draft Ordinance was prepared empowering the three Municipalities and seven Local Boards (Negombo, Kalutara, Matara, Badulla, Gampola, Kurunegala and Puttalam) to take over the government English schools and levy an educational rate for their maintenance. The question of a local education rate created a furore among missionary circles, particularly in the Roman Catholic organisation. Bishop Bonjean wrote to the Governor protesting very strongly against a local rate which would tax the supporters of denominational schools who were already paying for the educational facilities provided in their schools and which would finance a non-Christian education to which his co-religionists had "conscientious objections".¹⁴

Missionary influence on government education policy was so strong at this period that the sub Committee of the Legislative Council appointed to discuss the provisions of the Bill completely changed the scope of the Ordinance. It was provided that the powers to be given to Municipal Councils and Local Boards should be limited to existing schools which should be financed by Municipal and Local Board funds and government grants with no provision for levying an educational rate.¹⁵ The

11. Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Ceylon, 1883-1884, p. 24.

12. D.P.I. Correspondence, Acting D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary, 25/4/83.

13. D.P.I. Correspondence, D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary, 1/4/84.

14. Sessional Paper IX of 1884, Legislative Council, Ceylon. Papers on the subject of Public Instruction in Ceylon. Enclosure No. 3, Letter from the Rt. Rev. Bishop Bonjean to His Excellency the Governor, 24/10/84.

15. Sessional Paper XVI of 1884, Report of Sub-Committee of Legislative Council appointed to report on Bill to transfer schools to Municipalities, 24/11/84.

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Ordinance became law in this revised form in 1884.¹⁶ A Municipal Education Code was introduced to regulate the working of these schools.¹⁷

The prospects of local participation in a country where local organisations were still in their infancy had not been promising from the beginning, but the refusal to grant them the power of raising adequate finances for the task of educational development deprived the measure of any chance of success. Twenty one schools were involved in this transfer and 19 were finally left to be handed over to the local authorities: Colombo (7), Kalutara (1), Galle (3), Matara (2), Gampola (1), Badulla (2), Puttalam (2), N' Eliya (1).¹⁸ Only two local organisations had from the very beginning evinced any interest in taking over these English schools, but their enthusiasm did not last long. The Galle Municipal Council passed a resolution in November 1884 for taking over all government English schools in that town.¹⁹ In December of the same year the Municipal Council regretfully announced that as the transfer of schools was offered on the condition that the Council would have at its disposal funds raised by a special rate, and as the government had now abandoned this proposed rate, the Council was unable to accept the schools because its resources were hardly sufficient to meet its existing liabilities.²⁰

In November 1884 the Puttalam Local Board also passed a resolution to take over the two English schools in the town,²¹ and its decision was not affected by the refusal to permit a rate. Neither of the other two Municipal Councils or any of the other Local Boards had expressed a desire to accept responsibility for these schools. The government closed its English schools (other than Royal College, the Agricultural School and the Railway Night School) on 31st December 1884, and the Puttalam schools alone were opened by the Local Board in January 1885. Financial difficulties prevented this Local Board from running these two schools efficiently as the Roman Catholics opened a school near these schools and thus drew away a number of their pupils, thereby reducing the grants earned from them.²²

16. Ordinance No. 33 of 1884.

17. D.P.I. Correspondence, D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 6/8/84.

18. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 1/2/84.

19. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 21/11/84.

20. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 10/12/84.

21. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 22/11/84.

22. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 14/1/85.

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Ultimately after 1884 neither the central government nor the local government bodies retained any connection with these provincial English schools. The missionaries were quick to seize the opportunity and many of these schools were finally handed over to these agencies. The Galle Central School was taken over by the Bishop of Colombo and run as All Saints English School; the Galle girls' school was reopened by the Wesleys. Both the Badulla and Gampola schools were taken over by the C.M.S. and the Kalutara English school by Rev. A. B. Duffs.²³ The Colombo Female Seminary, the leading government girls' institution was closed down as the government was satisfied that there were an adequate number of girls' schools in Colombo run by missionary organisations. The building and furniture of some of these schools were also given to the missionaries at a nominal rent, particularly in important towns like Galle and Badulla where the government felt that English schools were necessary.²⁴

The administration had been much concerned by the multiplicity of small English schools which ran counter to the accepted policy of vernacular education for the masses and English education for a small elite. The debacle of the transfer of the government English schools to local agencies therefore caused no misgivings or regrets in the minds of the administrators. The D.P.I. himself wrote in 1885, "I did not regret the inaction of the Local Boards in towns like Matara, Kalutara and Gampola; but I confess that for a short time I was in great anxiety concerning Galle and Badulla and concerning female education in Colombo..... On the whole I am inclined to think that events have shaped themselves on to a better course than if the Municipalities and the Local Boards had taken over all the schools they were expected to do..... We have now the elements of a strong centralised system of English training in the capital towns of every province which should work in the right direction."²⁵

The experiment in achieving some type of partnership with local authorities in education came to an end in 1885. No further interest was taken in this matter for the rest of the century. Some of the Village Councils alone continued to make desultory efforts to provide school buildings in rural areas.

23. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 18/12/84, 31/12/84, 13/1/85.

24. Ibid. D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary 7/1/85, 15/1/85.

25. Administration Report, Director of Public Instruction 1884, p. 29.

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The reasons for the failure to achieve any concrete cooperation between the central and local government authorities during this phase are apparent. Although the Retrenchment Committee of 1882 commended the principle of creating local interest in education it is clear that the administration never evinced any great interest in this project. Financial difficulties drove it to seek some means of reducing the burden on the central government and as long as government English schools were closed down, the government was not seriously concerned as to whether it was the local agencies or the missionaries that filled the gap.

Other aspects of government policy impinged on the educational question. Effective decentralization was impossible when local government institutions themselves were mere appendages of the bureaucracy. The economic development of the country had enriched both the central government and the planting interests but the resources of the local bodies were hardly adequate to provide minimum facilities in areas such as even health. The revenue of the Colombo Municipal Council declined after 1877 and the Galle Municipal Council had to be subsidised by loans from the central government. Educational provision therefore could only be a desirable but remote goal.

Educational policy had given so much power to the missionary organisations in Ceylon that the state was unable to implement a policy which the missionaries thought was detrimental to their interests. It is obvious that the missionaries did not welcome the prospect of rival schools flourishing on local rates. The decision to hand over the English schools was also a development of the policy of restricting English education to a social elite which could pay for this privilege, and as the extract from the D.P.I.'s report indicates, it was unlikely that the administration would expend its energies in fostering the interest of the local authorities in English education.

II. 1900—1930.

The beginning of the 20th century saw renewed efforts made to involve the local authorities in education and a new policy was initiated in this respect. The impetus for such a move was however once again provided by the familiar and ever-recurrent problem of educational expenditure.

The Ceylon Census Report of 1901 had focussed public attention both in Ceylon and in the U.K. on the inadequacy of educational provision in the island, and the colonial government which had in the 19th century

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pursued a more or less laissez-faire policy with regard to education, now began to display a more positive attitude towards the problem of extending educational facilities among the masses. The main difficulty which it anticipated in promoting any new educational schemes was the lack of financial resources, for the colony had to provide for its social services out of its income, and the cautious Governor and his officials shuddered at the prospect of a substantial increase in the education budget. Some new source of income had to be sought and the government decided to invite the co-operation of the local authorities, for financial reasons as in 1884, to relieve the central government of a part of the burden of educational expenditure.

The Colonial Office had already queried the increasing cost of education which had risen in the past decade from Rs. 474,387 in 1890 to Rs. 869,837 in 1900;²⁶ and from 1900 Governor Sir West Ridgeway and his officials were obsessed with this problem of finance. The Governor gave the first official hint of a new policy in opening the sessions of the Legislative Council in October 1900:

“The Secretary of State during the last year has more than once drawn my attention to the increasing expenditure and the question is one which must sooner or later be taken with earnest. To check, or even not to encourage the growth of education would indeed be a shortsighted policy unworthy of a civilised government. On the other hand we cannot continue indefinitely to increase an expenditure which in less prosperous days we may be unable to continue. The solution of the problem is to be found in inducing localities to contribute to the cause of education within their limits, and I propose that in this session you should empower Municipalities, Local Boards and even Village Committees to levy a rate or cess for education, medicine and other local requirements.”²⁷

No action was taken immediately but the new policy contemplated by the colonial government was warmly endorsed by the Secretary of State, and the Colonial Office continued to urge the Governor to evolve a scheme in which local bodies should defray a part of the expenditure.²⁸ The Director of Public Instruction was obviously thinking on the same lines as the Governor, for in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, the head of the

26. Governors' Addresses, Legislative Council of Ceylon 1890-1903, Government Press 1905. Opening of Session 1900, 18/10/1900.

27. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 18/10/1900.

28. Despatches, Secretary of State to Governor, 18/12/1900, C.O. 54

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Public Services in Ceylon, he made the following comment on the Secretary of State's warning with regard to the increase in educational expenditure:

“A considerable part of the population is still unprovided with schools and yearly increase of expenditure under this head must be regarded as inevitable, unless a new system is introduced which will throw a portion of the burden on the localities concerned.”²⁹

While it was financial expediency that drove the administrators to consider involving the local authorities in education, they were also undoubtedly influenced both by the English Education Act of 1902 which made the local authorities mainly responsible for the provision of education, and by the observations of Inspector Van Cuylenberg who had been sent to Madras to study the educational system in that province in India. The latter's official report,³⁰ drew attention to the important role played by the Municipalities and Local Boards in Madras in providing educational facilities, and the Governor did not fail to draw the attention of the Legislative Council to this fact.³¹

As the legislation which in 1884 had empowered urban local authorities to accept responsibility for English education had never been enforced, the Village Committees were still the only organisations which had the machinery to enforce compulsory education and maintain government school buildings. While the contribution of these Village Committees to educational development in the 19th century had been haphazard, an interesting experiment begun in 1899 to organise Gansabhawa or Village Committee schools in educationally backward and geographically inaccessible rural areas neglected by both government and missionaries had received the acclamation of not only the colonial administration in Colombo but also the Colonial Office in London.³² The Revenue Officer of the Tamankaduwa District of the North Central Province had established twenty schools by 1901 with the help of contributions from the villagers and from Village Committee funds, and had applied for and received an annual government grant in 1901.³³ Similar schools were begun in the next few years in two other neglected areas, the North Western and Uva Provinces.³⁴

29. D.P.I. Correspondence, D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary, 24/2/03.

30. Sessional Paper IV of 1902, Report on the System of Education in Madras.

31. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 18/10/01.

32. Despatches, Secretary of State to Governor, 1901. C.O. 54

33. Administration Reports, Director of Public Instruction, 1900 and 1901.

34. *Ibid.* 1903.

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These developments further confirmed the official view that mass education was best undertaken through the agency of the local authorities, for as the Governor pointed out, the Gansabhawa scheme was the most economical system for large areas where there had been no missionary effort.³⁵ In 1901 the Governor appointed a Committee of three high ranking Civil Servants to report on the problem of relieving the general revenue of the island of part of the cost of education. This Committee proposed that compulsory vernacular education should be enforced in the island and that half the expense should be met from the general revenue while the rest should be provided by a local education rate based on personal taxation as a property assessment would not be practicable. It also drew up a scheme of local educational units through which this proposal could be implemented.³⁶ In 1903 the Sub-Committee of the Incidence of Taxation Commission appointed to report further on the proposed education and medical cess recommended that the above scheme should be given a trial in a limited area.³⁷

Neither the colonial government nor the Colonial Office was satisfied at the progress achieved so far in devising an effective scheme for the reduction of expenditure by the central government,³⁸ and in 1904 the Governor appointed a further Commission consisting of a Government Agent (Mr. H. Wace), the Director of Public Instruction, two Managers of Assisted Schools (a Wesleyan and a Buddhist) and a planter, to report on the recommendations of the 1901 Committee, on any other ways of meeting the cost of education, and on the problem of estate education which had aroused such interest in London.³⁹

In the meanwhile the Director of Public Instruction had been attempting to interest the Colombo Municipality in the appalling lack of educational facilities in the capital city, and the Colombo Municipal Council appointed a Committee to confer with the Director on this matter. This Committee reported in favour of establishing one Municipal school experimentally, but as the 1884 Ordinance had empowered Municipalities to finance only English education, the Municipality applied to the govern-

35. Administration of the Affairs of Ceylon, Sir West Ridgeway, 1896-1903. Government Press, Colombo, p. 62.

36. Sessional Paper XXVIII of 1905, Report of the Commission on Elementary Education in Ceylon.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Despatches, Governor to Secretary of State, 15/9/04 and Secretary of State to Governor, 11/11/04. C.O. 54

39. Despatches, Governor to Secretary of State, 17/12/04. C.O. 54

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ment for power to provide for vernacular education which was now the vital problem as far as the government was concerned.⁴⁰ The Ordinance that was drafted to meet this need was extended to other Municipalities, all Local Board towns⁴¹ and to Sanitary Board towns,⁴² that is, to all urban authorities. The Governor's suggestion that similar legislation should be provided for the Village Committees⁴³ was endorsed by the Wace Commission whose report was the basis of the Rural Schools Ordinance of 1907.

The Wace Report recommended compulsory vernacular education with a conscience clause to safeguard the interests of the majority of the population, and as there was no large self governing local unit in rural areas, suggested a scheme of District School Committees which would correspond more or less to Village Committees in areas where they existed. It disagreed with the 1901 Committee on the question of a special education rate in view of the general poverty of the rural population and the recent large expansion of government revenue, some of which it felt could be utilised for education. But if local funds were necessary it suggested that two-thirds of the road tax which was a local tax should be diverted to educational purposes in these areas.⁴⁴ The Governor and the Colonial Office accepted these proposals,⁴⁵ and after all this long process of deliberation and further debate in the Legislative Council, the new policy of sharing the burden of educational expenditure with the local authorities became law as the Town Schools Ordinance of 1906 and the Rural Schools Ordinance of 1907.

Ordinance No. 5 of 1906 intended to provide for compulsory vernacular education in Municipalities and Local Board and Sanitary Board towns and authorized these local bodies to meet the costs of sites, buildings, equipment, books and salaries of teachers and attendance officers, and even to prescribe courses of instruction on the recommendations of the Director, as well as to make bye-laws to enforce compulsory attendance. But the Ordinance did not make it obligatory for local authorities to accept these responsibilities. It merely stated that "it shall be lawful for any local authority, if they shall consider it expedient to do so, to make provision from the funds

40. Administration Report, Director of Public Instruction, 1903.

41. Ordinance No. 5 of 1906.

42. Sessional Paper XXX of 1906, Town Schools Ordinance.

43. Governor's Minute, 28/3/05 on Despatch of Secretary of State to Governor, 26/1/05. C.O. 54

44. Sessional Paper XXVIII of 1905, op. cit.

45. Despatches, Governor to Secretary of State, 5/1/06, and Secretary of State to Governor, 1/3/06. C.O. 54

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vested in them for the establishment and maintenance of one or more schools within the limits of their jurisdiction for the instruction of children in the vernacular languages". Ordinance No. 6 of 1910 amended the Municipalities Ordinance to enable them to provide funds for education.

Ordinance No. 8 of 1907 "to make provision in rural and planting districts for the education of children in the vernacular languages" was a more positive piece of legislation. It divided every revenue district and every province which was not a revenue district into school districts which were to have governing bodies known as District School Committees consisting of the Government Agent or Assistant Government Agent as Chairman, the Director of Public Instruction or his representative, one of the chief headmen of the area, and one or more school managers or other persons interested in education in the district, nominated by the Governor. These school districts were to be sub-divided into school divisions under Village Schools Committees which whenever possible were to be the Village Committees themselves. The District School Committees were to be provided with one-third of the road tax and with the Village Committee funds or labour available for the construction and repair of school buildings under the Village Communities Ordinance of 1889. They were to make returns of the government and aided schools in the area, prepare schemes for the provision of adequate educational facilities, and establish new schools according to local needs. The local funds at the disposal of the Committees were to be used for the establishment and maintenance of school buildings and for the payment of clerks, while the Director of Public Instruction would appoint teachers and pay their salaries. As far as the estates were concerned the superintendents were made responsible for the provision of educational facilities.

The urban authorities were thus given a greater degree of responsibility which implied local control and management but the acceptance of this responsibility was made optional. In the rural areas the central government retained the control of education but the District School Committees were to administer funds and make provision for education. As the Lieutenant Governor explained to the Legislative Council during the course of the debate, the Ordinances were meant to provide for educational expansion on the principle that those who benefit should make some contribution to the cost of education.⁴⁶

46. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 29/8/06.

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The implementation of the policies embodied in these two Ordinances gave rise to numerous problems which revealed only too clearly the disparity between the aims of these policies and the actual results achieved. The Town Schools Ordinance as we have seen merely gave the urban authorities in Ceylon the option of making provision for education in their areas, and many of these local bodies fulfilled the forebodings of the Colonial Office which had already warned the Colonial government of the futility of such legislation,⁴⁷ by choosing to exercise the option of not involving themselves in educational activities.

The case of the Galle Municipality is a clear example of the inevitable failure of permissive legislation in countries where local bodies had hitherto had little connection with education. The Secretary of the Municipal Council, Galle, hastened to forward a resolution of the Council to the effect that it was not necessary to proclaim the Ordinance in the Municipality as there was already sufficient provision for vernacular education.⁴⁸ Investigation by the Director revealed that this was not so in reality and the latter suggested to the Colonial Secretary that the Galle Municipality should be asked to reconsider its decision.⁴⁹ The Council submitted another resolution adhering to the opinion expressed earlier, and the Colonial Secretary had no alternative but to inform the Director that the Municipal Council was legally entitled to refuse to enforce the Ordinance and that no further action could be taken on the matter.⁵⁰

Although the other two Municipalities and the Local Board towns did not challenge the efficacy of the Ordinance in this direct manner, the attempt by the administration to secure the cooperation of these urban authorities was nevertheless a dismal failure. The Kandy Municipality was the most co-operative of the local authorities. Sites were selected for two schools in 1908,⁵¹ bye-laws for compulsory attendance were enforced by 1910,⁵² and in 1911 the first Municipal Free School in Ceylon was opened at Katukelle, Kandy.⁵³ Although the Municipality was willing to consider undertaking further educational work such as industrial education, its financial resources proved a limiting factor, and this extract from

47. Despatches, Secretary of State to Governor, 1/3/06. C.O. 54

48. D.P.I. Correspondence, Colonial Secretary to D.P.I., 26/7/06.

49. *Ibid.* D.P.I. to Colonial Secretary, 6/3/07.

50. *Ibid.* Secretary, Galle Municipal Council to Colonial Secretary, 26/5/07.

51. Sessional Paper LV of 1908, Administration Report of Kandy Municipal Council.

52. Sessional Paper II of 1912, Administration Report, Kandy Municipal Council, 1910

53. Sessional Paper XXVII of 1912, Administration Report, Kandy Municipal Council, 1911.

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the administration report of the Kandy Municipal Council of 1915 describes the situation of the Municipality: "It is a question as to whether the small revenue of this Municipality would admit, for at least some years to come, of further expenditure on free education of the poor."⁵⁴ The whole Municipal area was brought under the Ordinance only in 1916, and another school was opened and handed over to be run by the Salvation Army,⁵⁵ but this was the maximum achievement by any local authority in Ceylon.

The Colombo Municipal Council at whose request the Ordinance was originally introduced, decided to start a school and got as far as purchasing a site in 1907⁵⁶ when it was overtaken by a series of financial calamities. The government was compelled to appoint a Commission in 1914 to inquire into its affairs, and this Commission recommended that in view of the "confessed insolvency" of the Municipality, "the duty of providing for elementary education be definitely transferred from the Municipality to the government."⁵⁷ The Towns Schools Ordinance was therefore amended in 1916 to enable the Director of Education to take over the function of the local education authority in the city of Colombo.⁵⁸ The Municipality had only to provide the sites and the Department began to erect a few vernacular schools, but the Ordinance was never actually enforced in all parts of the city.⁵⁹

Ordinance 30 of 1909 amending the Small Towns Sanitary Ordinance of 1892 brought the Sanitary Board towns under the Rural Schools Ordinance, but the operation of the Towns Schools Ordinance in the Local Board towns was again a slow and reluctant process. Only one town, Kegalle, had enforced the Ordinance by 1909, and seven towns out of a total of twenty one were attempting, mainly unsuccessfully for financial reasons, to provide educational facilities by 1913. A motion in the Legislative Council in 1916 to the effect that "steps be taken to bring all Municipal and Local Board towns within the operation of the Town Schools Ordinance of 1906,"⁶⁰ revealed the failure of this legislation to achieve the

54. Sessional Paper XVII of 1916, Administration Report, Kandy Municipal Council, 1915.

55. Sessional Paper X of 1924, Administration Report, Kandy Municipal Council, 1922.

56. Sessional Paper LXVIII of 1908, Administration Report, Colombo Municipal Council, 1907.

57. Sessional Paper IX of 1914, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the affairs of the Colombo Municipality, p. 18.

58. Ordinance No. 34 of 1916.

59. Department of Education Correspondence, Director of Education to Colonial Secretary, 17/10/21 and 22/2/22.

60. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 10/7/16, 12/7/16.

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aims of those who had originally proposed it. In answering the criticism of the Unofficial members of the Council, the Colonial Secretary stated that many local authorities had claimed that there was sufficient educational provision in their areas. "The reason for their thinking so, I fear, was ... that they have no particular anxiety to pay rates." He further stated that the Legislative Council had no power to take steps to enforce the Ordinance in view of its permissive nature and expressed the hopes "that the result of the Honourable members' motion will be to bring home to them a sense of their responsibility in this matter."⁶¹

Five other Local Board towns were brought under the Ordinance, but though the Director stated several times that the Ordinance should be amended to make it obligatory for local authorities to provide for education, no change was made as the administrators themselves had by this time probably realised the impracticability of enforcing the Ordinance in view of the sad state of the finances of the majority of the local authorities.

The Rural Schools Ordinance fared better as it provided definite machinery for implementing it, and had a specific sum allocated to the District School Committees in the form of one-third of the road tax, while the communal labour and funds provided by the Village Committees at least helped to keep in repair the simple village school houses built by the Committees. By 1908 the Ordinance was enforced in 16 of the 20 Revenue Districts in the island and two more came under it in 1910. The Director claimed that the Ordinance was working satisfactorily and that "a creditable amount of work has been done by most of the Committees."⁶²

But financial difficulties precluded any substantial progress in educational expansion in these school districts. The proportion of the road tax allocated for education came to Rs. 115,000 approximately and this was totally inadequate for the work of so many Committees. An annual supplementary grant had to be given by the central government to the District School Committees from 1917 amounting to Rs. 50,000 in 1917-18, Rs. 75,000 in 1918-19, Rs. 200,000 in 1919-20 and an equal amount in 1921. When this grant was drastically reduced in 1922 to Rs. 15,000 as a result of the financial crisis, the District School Committees were unable to keep even the existing schools in repair.⁶³

61. *Ibid.*

62. Administration Report, Director of Public Instruction, 1908.

63. Administration Report, Director of Education, 1923.

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Meanwhile the whole question of the relationship between the central and local authorities with respect to education was re-examined by the government in view of the failure of the two Ordinances to solve either the education or the financial problem. The Attorney General informed the Legislative Council in 1917 that a Commission had been appointed to report on the question of placing the control of education, roads, sanitation and general local government in one body.⁶⁴ The Commissioners in their Report⁶⁵ attributed the failure of the Ordinances to the lack of financial resources and to the inadequate role given to the local authorities which had limited the development of local interest in education among the bulk of the people. Their recommendations suggested a partnership between the central and local authorities which was analogous to the situation in countries such as the U.K. and went far beyond the financial arrangements which had so far been the aim of government policy. The activities of local organisations had been restricted to providing school buildings, but the Commission recommended that "with the object of fostering local interest in education, it is desirable that each local body should be encouraged to provide itself with a system of education." In brief local authorities were to be encouraged to establish and manage their own schools.

The government, however, had little faith in local participation of this kind and disillusionment regarding the financial resources of local authorities and the increase of general revenue over the last two decades due to the expansion of exports led to a complete reversal of policy in the next few years. In introducing in 1919, the Local Government Ordinance which created Urban District Committees and a Local Government Board, the Attorney General told the Legislative Council that, contrary to its earlier intentions, government had decided to exclude education from the bill and not make it a function of local government:

"The leading principle of local government and one which is embodied in this Bill is that matters of local government—the finance of local government—should be largely provided for by the locality which enjoys the benefits of these measures. The Education Bill, which is also on the Order of the day, proposes a departure with regard to education, and that is, that the expense of education, having regard to the general benefit that accrues to a community from a good system of education, should be met out of general revenue."⁶⁶

64. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 13/8/17.

65. Sessional Paper VII of 1917, Report of the Local Government Commission.

66. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 19/11/19.

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This complete change of policy from that embodied in the Ordinances of 1906 and 1907 which left vernacular education to local resources, received official sanction as the Education Ordinance of 1920 (Ordinance No. 1 of 1920). In his statement of objects and reasons the Attorney General pointed out in the Legislative Council, that the previous Ordinances had failed to achieve educational expansion due to the inability of the local authorities to finance educational activities. A new approach was called for:

"It is considered that the time has come when the cost of education should be wholly paid out of general revenue. There is much to be said for the principle that the money spent on education should be provided out of local taxation, supplemented by a contribution from general revenue; but its operation here in practice would be that in the poorest part of the colony, where progress in education is most largely called for, the amount available for expenditure in education would be the least... The education of the people is a matter of general public concern, and the government has therefore decided to ask the Legislative Council to supply the necessary funds to provide and maintain a satisfactory system from public revenue."⁶⁷

Financial centralization was thus resorted to in the interest of a more equitable distribution of available resources. The degree of centralization was even greater than that which obtained at the beginning of the century for the new Ordinance required that funds for education should be voted by the Legislative Council and allocated by the Director, and this would naturally exclude the contribution in money and labour that the Village Committees had made since the latter years of the 19th century.

Control and finance were to be the function of the central government but some administrative decentralization was provided for by the creation of a new local educational organisation. The Attorney General claimed that "the government is fully alive to the advisability and propriety of enlisting local assistance to a considerable extent to deal with educational matters"⁶⁸. Under the Ordinance every Municipal and Local Board town and every local authority created in the future and every district was to be an educational district. In every educational district there was to be an Education District Committee of six to nine members, two of whom were to be nominated by the Municipal Council, Local Board or other local authority, and the Committees could delegate their powers to the Village

67. *Ibid.* 26/11/19.

68. *Ibid.*

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Committees. The Education District Committees had to enforce compulsory attendance and to use the funds allocated to them by the Director for new buildings, repairs, furniture and equipment, and salaries of clerks while the Director paid the salaries of teachers. Funds could be utilised for assisting grant-aided schools at the discretion of the Education District Committees.⁶⁹

Unlike the Town Schools Ordinance which had endeavoured to make the local authorities the educational authorities for the area the 1920 Ordinance created a new educational organisation whose only connection with the local authority was the fact that two of its members were nominated by the local authority. Municipalities and other Urban Councils had no longer to accept responsibility for education.

The Ordinance had conferred for the first time statutory recognition of the Director of Education and his Department and strengthened the position of the Board of Education which had been an advisory body since its inception in 1896. The managers of the denominational schools were strongly represented on the Board and its prestige had lent it a power to which the administration had always shown deference. Governor Sir West Ridgeway himself had admitted that no important step regarding general educational policy had been taken during his administration without consulting it.⁷⁰ It still remained an advisory body in theory under the new Ordinance but its power to make regulations through the Code gave it an authority which further impeded any progress towards local decentralization.

By 1920, therefore, the relationship between the central and local authorities in Ceylon had been altered to give greater weight than ever to the central government and to minimise the role played by local authorities. The attempt to make local authorities participate in educational work and contribute towards its financing had failed for economic reasons. The new policy was warmly endorsed by the Legislative Council⁷¹ whose Unofficial members were keen to expand educational opportunities but were at the same time aware of the financial resources of the local bodies and felt that the state should bear the burden of educational expenditure.

The increase of general revenue had been partly responsible for the willingness of the central government to accept the main responsibility for

69. Ordinance No. 1 of 1920.

70. Administration of the Affairs of Ceylon, op. cit., p. 60.

71. Hansard, Legislative Council, Ceylon, 10/12/19.

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the cost of education. In 1922, however, trade declined, and as the income of the country was largely dependent on the export trade, the difficult financial situation that ensued led to a policy of retrenchment. Educational administrators found that the large grants expected from the central government were not forthcoming and were driven to despair over the problem of extending educational facilities on the meagre funds available to them. Till the end of the period under review, that is, to the early thirties, we find officials attempting to reverse the trend once again and to endeavour to throw at least part of the burden of educational expenditure on local authorities.

The 1920 Ordinance was enforced in Ceylon in 1924 and in the meanwhile three Municipal Education District Committees and eight Urban Education District Committees corresponding to the eight Urban District Councils created under the Local Government Ordinance of 1920 were set up. The personnel of many of these Committees did not differ very much from the old Committees for the tendency was still to elect the Government Agent as Chairman, but they now included the elected member of the Legislative Council of the area and two members nominated by the local authority. The only additional power the Committees had was the payment of grants to aided schools and some of the Urban Education District Committees which had very few government schools in their areas preferred to expend their funds on grants to aided schools rather than establish new government schools until such assistance to aided schools by these Committees was stopped in 1927.⁷²

The most significant change was in the question of finance. The Municipalities ceased to contribute from their funds. The Colombo Municipal Council stated very clearly that "the Municipal Education District Committees appointed under Ordinance I of 1920 have no connection with the Municipal Council except that the Council nominates two of the nine members."⁷³ The Charity Commissioner's Department of the Municipality created in 1929, took over the supervision of free meals and books given to some of the needy children in Colombo schools.

The communal labour and funds provided by the Village Committees had been of immense use in constructing and repairing schools in remote rural areas, and the cessation of this contribution under the Ordinance

72. Administration Report, Director of Education, 1927, p. 7.

73. Sessional Paper XXXII of 1929, Administration Report, Colombo Municipal Council, 1928.

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drew protests from both the Director of Education and the Government Agents who were in charge of the Village Committees and who felt that the majority of schools in the already neglected areas in the North-Central, North-Western and Uva provinces would have to close down unless some arrangements could be made for their maintenance.⁷⁴ This problem was finally settled by the Village Committee Ordinance of 1924 which permitted the use of the labour tax for education, and by the Attorney General's ruling that the Education District Committees could pass bye-laws which made possible the use of Village Committee funds.⁷⁵

Except for this small contribution from the Village Committees the sole source of income of the Education District Committees was the grant of Rs. 500,000 for new schools and Rs. 100,000 for repairs allocated by the Director among the 30 Committees. At first the allocation was made on the basis of Re. 1/- for every school going child and cents 55 for every non school going child but as this system favoured the better provided areas grants were subsequently distributed on estimates prepared by the Committees.⁷⁶ This grant proved to be totally inadequate and although it was increased to Rs. 750,000 in 1928 and Rs. 1,000,000 in 1929 it did not keep pace with the demand for government schools. The general complaint of the Education District Committees was that they had no funds to open new schools and that the grant was usually sufficient only for repairs to existing buildings.⁷⁷

The Director of Education who had to face the practical difficulty of opening schools with inadequate funds seemed to have had his reservations about the government's new financial policy even before the Ordinance was enforced and in the next few years he made strenuous efforts to get both the Education and the Local Government Ordinances amended to enable local authorities to shoulder some of the responsibility for educational expenditure. In 1923 the Colonial Secretary, the Chairman of the Local Government Board and the Director of Education met to discuss a memorandum prepared by the Director on this subject. They arrived at the conclusion that the Local Government and Education Ordinances should be amended as suggested by the Director so that funds for education could be raised locally in addition to the annual grant by the legislature. The Governor agreed tentatively but decided that the Executive Council should

74. D.E. Correspondence, Acting Government Agent, North Western Province to Colonial Secretary. 18/11/25.

75. *Ibid.* Director of Education to Solicitor General for Attorney General, 22/1/25.

76. Administration Report, Director of Education, 1926, p. 18.

77. *Ibid.* 1929, p. 17.

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discuss this proposal after a decision had been made by the government on the recommendations of another Commission already appointed to examine anew the question of financial relations between the central and local authorities.⁷⁸

This Commission had been asked to report on whether the police, education, communications and public health should be public or local services. The recommendations⁷⁹ of this Commission published in 1924 were a compromise between the suggestions of the Local Government Commission of 1917 and the policy incorporated in the 1920 Education Ordinance. It endorsed the view of the Local Government Commission that local bodies should become local authorities and establish and maintain schools, appoint and dismiss teachers and be responsible for attendance and the curriculum. But it also felt that the smaller local authorities had inadequate resources for this task and were in no position to undertake local management of schools:

“We are reluctantly compelled to admit that in the present backward state of the development of local government in this country it is impossible to apply fully the principle that education should be treated as a semi-national service.”

Education should therefore be a national service for the present but as the general revenue could not bear the whole burden of educational expenditure local funds must help to increase resources for education. The Commission therefore proposed an education rate in areas where rating machinery was available. This rate was to be one percent of the annual value of lands and buildings liable to assessment and the rate was to be fixed according to the government expenditure on elementary education in the area and the ability of the area to bear the tax. Local authorities should be permitted to control the expenditure of these funds if and when they were willing to assume complete responsibility for educational services in their areas.

The Urban District Councils and Local Board towns were invited by the government to express their views on the Report and on the proposed education rate. All eight Urban District Councils rejected the proposals and insisted that education should be a national service.⁸⁰ At a conference

78. D.E. Correspondence, D.E. to Colonial Secretary, 9/8/23.

79. Sessional Paper VI of 1924, Report of the Financial Relations Commission.

80. Sessional Paper XXXIII of 1905, Comments of the Urban District Councils and Local Boards of the Financial Relations Com.

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of the Urban District Councils it was decided that these Councils were yet in their infancy and in need of government assistance for a number of years, and a resolution was passed "that education should be considered a national service and that no education rate be levied in the case of local bodies".⁸¹ The Unofficial members of the Local Government Board too agreed that education should be a national service for many years to come and that the central government was the only authority which in the present situation could efficiently distribute education. No local rate should be levied until the development of local government justified it.

The Governor, Sir Hugh Clifford, also opposed the recommendations of the Commission. His view was that the government could not now go back on the "public pronouncement of policy" made at the time of the introduction of the 1920 Ordinance, the object of which had been to meet the cost of education from general revenue because local taxation would lead to inequalities. He was also opposed to the idea of a local rate which had not in the past proved an efficient way of raising revenue:

"I have already drawn attention to the doubtful policy of attempting to make local authorities raise an education rate if it cannot be imposed all over the colony and particularly if they are not to have immediate and direct control over the funds so raised."⁸²

In a subsequent minute he added that the Colombo and Kandy Municipal Councils were probably the only local authorities which were in a position to impose a rate.⁸³ No doubt the Government was also aware of the difficulties involved in securing the passage of such legislation through a Legislative Council in which the unofficals now formed a highly vocal majority.

The President of the Local Government Board also opposed the rate and said that the policy incorporated in the 1920 Ordinance should be adhered to.⁸⁴ The Governor put the recommendations of the Financial Relations Commission before the Executive Council which rejected them,⁸⁵ and the government made known its decision that "it cannot accept the recommendation that an education rate should be levied in the case of local bodies possessing rating machinery."⁸⁶

81. *Ibid.*

82. D.E. Correspondence, Governor's Minute 17/2/26.

83. *Ibid.* Governor's Minute, 16/5/26.

84. *Ibid.* D.E. to Colonial Secretary, 22/4/26.

85. Minutes of Executive Council, 7/3/26.

86. Sessional Paper XXXVIII of 1926, op. cit.

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But the Director of Education did not accept this decision as final and continued to agitate for a new policy. In 1926 he wrote to the Colonial Secretary: "I think it very desirable that all local bodies should be permitted to apply their funds to educational purposes." He could see no reason why the Municipalities and urban Councils should not be permitted to participate in educational activities when the Village Committees were allowed to do so. His new scheme was that the education authority in a Municipal area should be a Municipal Committee with one or two Inspectors coopted from the Department. In other areas the education authorities should correspond to the nine Provinces with the Government Agent as an ex-officio member, so that there would be in all, three Municipal and nine Provincial Committees.

The Colonial Secretary consulted the Municipal Councils and Government Agents about this proposal.⁸⁷ The Government Agents reported against this proposal and were unanimously of opinion that the local bodies had enough to do and had no funds for education. The Galle Municipality did not wish to be an education authority nor use its funds for education as its resources were inadequate.⁸⁸ The Colombo Municipal Council resolved "that government should be informed that the Council's view is that it should not be created an education authority and that it should not be given power to apply its funds if it so desired for educational purposes."⁸⁹ Only the Kandy Municipal Council agreed to allocate 1% rate on the annual value of properties assessed for rate for education but it wanted an Education Committee responsible to the Council to be the Education Authority as in England.⁹⁰ The Director of Education therefore agreed that it would be inadvisable to impose an education rate in view of the fact that the consensus of opinion was against the proposal, but he still felt that local authorities should be empowered to devote funds at their discretion.⁹¹

The situation remained thus till 1930 when the economic depression not only depleted government's resources but also imposed on it the additional burden of taking over a large number of assisted schools whose managers found themselves unable to continue financing their schools. The Education District Committees needed a large increase of funds and the Director once again pointed out to the Colonial Secretary that either

87. D.E. Correspondence, Colonial Secretary to Government Agents, 5/5/26.

88. *Ibid.* Chairman, Municipal Council Galle to Colonial Secretary, 28/7/26.

89. *Ibid.* Chairman, Colombo Municipal Council to Colonial Secretary, 9/6/27.

90. *Ibid.* Chairman, Kandy Municipal Council to Colonial Secretary, 30/6/26.

91. *Ibid.* D.E. to Colonial Secretary, 15/12/26.

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the Legislative Council should increase its vote substantially or local bodies should be enabled to allocate a part of their revenue to the Education District Committees. A school site in Colombo cost a lakh of rupees and he saw no reason why the rural areas should be starved of funds to enable the Colombo Municipal Education District Committee to purchase one site.⁹² The President of the Local Government Board agreed with the Director although he anticipated considerable opposition by the Legislative Council and the local authorities, especially because government had already rejected the proposal of the Financial Relations Commission and the Urban District Councils were no more prosperous now.⁹³

The Colonial Secretary once again consulted the three Municipal Councils as to whether the present legislation should be modified to enable local bodies to provide and maintain education either from their general revenue or from the proceeds of a special education rate. The Galle Municipal Council rejected the proposal as their financial position showed no prospect of improvement. The Kandy Municipal Council referred to their earlier decision and were willing to discuss the matter with the government but opposed a special education rate as the depression made it difficult enough to raise the ordinary rates.⁹⁴ The Colombo Municipal Council wanted the option of providing funds for education but on condition that the Council should be the local authority and government continue its present grant.⁹⁵

The president of the Local Government Board consulted the Urban District Councils and informed the Colonial Secretary that with the exception of Kurunegala which had stated that a special rate should be allowed but not made compulsory, all the other Urban District Councils were either unwilling or unable to bear any share in the cost of education. Some of the views expressed by these Councils were that education should be a national service; that increased taxation was impracticable; that financial contribution should be accompanied by local control of education; and that self-governing institutions were yet insufficiently developed.⁹⁶

As the Director of Education and the President of the Local Government Board were still of the opinion that the local authorities should be

92. *Ibid.* D.E. to Colonial Secretary, 19/3/30.

93. *Ibid.* President, Local Government Board to Colonial Secretary, 7/5/30.

94. *Ibid.* Kandy Municipal Council to Colonial Secretary, 4/8/30.

95. *Ibid.* Colombo Municipal Council to Colonial Secretary, 3/7/30.

96. *Ibid.* President, Local Government Board to Colonial Secretary, 30/12/30.

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required to make some contribution to maintaining schools, the matter was referred to the Colonial Treasurer who suggested that the Director should now refer the matter to the Executive Committee for Education under the Donoughmore Constitution.⁹⁷

The period of Crown Colony administration ended in 1931 leaving the situation unchanged, and despite all the efforts of the Director, the reluctance of the local authorities and the recognition by the Governor and his chief advisors of their financial difficulties prevented the passage of new legislation requiring local contribution to education. The policy laid down by the 1920 Ordinance was adhered to and administrative and financial centralization continued to be the main feature of educational administration in Ceylon.

The pattern of central and local administration sketched in the preceding pages indicates that British administrators were primarily concerned with evolving a satisfactory financial relationship between the central government and local bodies. Local control of education was never seriously considered, not even in the Town Schools Ordinance which rather vaguely conferred the status of local authorities on urban local bodies, but some local control of educational provision was inevitable. It was obviously inherent in the colonial relationship that the control of education must lie in the hands of the colonial power and it was much easier for the government to control the machinery of education through the central government than through miscellaneous local bodies.

The financial relationship finally evolved gave no satisfaction to the educational authorities, for after 1920 the central government bore almost the entire burden of educational expenditure. The reasons for the failure of policies formulated at the beginning of the century and for the lack of response from the local authorities can be traced to general colonial political and economic policies.

The local authorities were both unable and unwilling to make any substantial contribution to the cost of education. No strong and continued tradition of local government either in their past or recent history made them alive to their responsibilities in this respect. Urban local authorities had been created only in the last three decades of the 19th century and there was no large rural self-governing unit analogous to the County

97. *Ibid.* Colonial Treasurer to C.S. 5/3/31.

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Councils of England. It is significant that the only local contribution made to education, meagre though it was, was by the Village Committees which had for centuries conducted the affairs of the small rural community.

Administrators often referred to the lack of responsibility of the local authorities and in particular were critical of the lethargic attitude of the urban authorities. But these were the very areas in which centralization had been strongest in pre-western times while the entire colonial situation and the political policy of the colonial government did nothing to promote this sense of responsibility. Centralization was the keynote of the administration and the majority of the officials serving in local areas, education included, were responsible to the colonial government in the metropolis and not to the local authority. Centralization in education, in fact, increased after 1920 for as the Director of Education commented with reference to the 1920 Ordinance "The old Ordinance was more in accordance with the principles of self-government than the new one is and more in accordance with the traditions of the country."

The main reason for the failure of the policy of the administration was the financial inability of the local authorities to make more than a limited contribution to educational expenditure. As we have seen, the financial difficulties of the local bodies caused government policy to be modified and to transfer the main financial responsibility to the central government. Although educational officials clamoured for more local expenditure the realities of the situation were different. The poverty of the local authorities was no imaginary excuse to evade responsibility.

Ceylon was known as the most prosperous Crown Colony in the 20th century, but this prosperity was dependent on the expansion of its export trade and the increase of revenue therefore accrued to the central government, while the corresponding rise in living standards affected mainly the upper and middle classes of society. The local authorities derived their income chiefly from property taxes and these increased very little in value and could not compare with the expanding resources of the central government. The socio-economic conditions of the mass of the Ceylonese, the peasants of the country, benefitted least from the economic policies of the rulers, and the gap between plantation or export agriculture and peasant agriculture was enormous.

When the education officials urged that the local authorities should contribute towards education they were demanding that the sections of

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society that could afford least should contribute more, whereas in actual fact the much vaunted prosperity had increased the resources of the central government and the classes of society which did not really patronise government schools. The increase in the share of educational expenditure by the central government through the years was therefore the logical result of the economic developments of the period. At the same time the extreme dependence of the government on its export trade made it vulnerable to economic depressions, and the expansion of educational facilities tended to fluctuate with the rise and fall of the general revenue.

Epilogue

The period of Crown Colony administration thus ended in 1931 without any tangible achievement in the field of local participation in the provision and management of education. National control of education at the centre was partially achieved in the thirties and the transfer process was completed in 1947. But the pattern of educational administration showed few structural changes in these years for though the colonial situation changed, political and economic factors continued to make it impracticable for local bodies to play an active role in education. The relationship between the central and local authorities was unchanged even after the Donoughmore Reforms till 1939, the only difference being that members of the State Council were appointed to the Education District Committees to ensure a closer relationship between the policy-making body and these educational organisations. The 1939 Ordinance attempted in theory to break away from the policy embodied in the 1920 Ordinance and to invite the cooperation of local bodies in educational work. Local Advisory Committees were to be created in Municipal, Urban District Council and other areas to advise the Executive Committee and the Director of Education on local needs. These Committees would include the Education Officer of the area, two members recommended by the local authority and other members nominated by the Governor. At the same time powers were conferred to set up Urban Education Authorities under Municipalities and Urban District Councils and Rural Education Authorities in Village Committee areas to replace the Local Advisory Committees. These Local Education Authorities were to prepare local education schemes to make provision for the educational needs of the area, and to bear the whole or specified part of the cost of education and were empowered to levy an additional rate to meet these expenses. But like the Towns Schools Ordinance of 1906 these educational functions were not obligatory, and the

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decision as to whether a particular local body could meet the cost of education and assume responsibility for educational provision was left to the Executive Committee for Local Administration of the State Council.

Needless to say the local authorities showed the same aversion to assuming these responsibilities as they had shown in the past three decades for similar economic reasons, and the Colombo Municipality even attempted to persuade the central government to take over the provision of free school meals which had been its chief contribution to education in the past.⁹⁸ The Special Committee on Education in its Report published in 1943⁹⁹ deplored the lack of cooperation on the part of local authorities and suggested that the Municipal Councils and the more well-to-do Urban Councils should at least accept responsibility for primary education in their areas. But till the end of this period no local body evinced any interest in undertaking any of the functions permitted by the 1939 Ordinance. The Local Advisory Committees continued to function, but while they did some creditable work in backward areas they were largely inactive in urban areas.¹⁰⁰

The State Council was therefore as unsuccessful as the colonial government in creating a more positive relationship between the central and local authorities partly because the same socio-economic conditions militated against any effective contribution by local authorities. On the whole the policy of centralizing educational administration was strengthened rather than modified during these years despite the vague aspirations of the 1939 Ordinance, for the new legislature was more anxious to control and nationalise policy than to effect any real devolution of authority.

The same disposition to favour centralized control is seen in the policy of the governments that have held power in the 20 years that have followed independence. Despite a progressive but slow decentralization of administrative routine after 1962, no educational scheme since 1947 has envisaged any significant changes which would involve the participation of local government agencies. The recommendations of two recent Commissions on reforms in local government and reforms in education respectively aptly illustrate the current attitude to the question. The Report of the Commission on Local Government issued in 1955 made the following reference to this subject:

98. Administration Report of Colombo Municipal Council, 1934, p. 11.

99. Sessional Paper XXIV of 1943, The Special Committee Report on Education.

100. Administration Report, Director of Education, 1943, p. 46.

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“It cannot be said that there has been any strong demand by local authorities to take over educational activities in their respective areas..... We feel that local authorities have yet much leeway to make up in the fields which have been generally accepted as those for development by local authorities in Ceylon..... and we therefore cannot recommend their participation in educational activities as yet. Moreover the whole policy of the central government in the field of education is still in an unsettled state and until that policy has been satisfactorily settled and functions smoothly throughout the Island, the time will not be ripe to consider any delegation of this function to institutions on the circumference.”¹⁰¹

Six years later the National Education Commission viewed the problem against the background of the general educational situation and while welcoming local cooperation, did not feel that the times were propitious for even partial local control of education :

“At the present time when there are wide disparities in the educational facilities available in different areas and when vigorous organisation is called for, we do not consider it feasible to give local bodies responsibility for Junior School or Senior School education.....the time may come in 10 to 15 years perhaps when the full responsibility for school education can be transferred to some of the Local Bodies, the role of the State thereafter being to enunciate general policy and to make a per capita grant to the Local Body.”¹⁰² It is unlikely that the creation of District Councils will mark any immediate change in either policy or practice.

It is obvious that the role of the local agencies in educational activities has from the beginning been determined by the demands of political and economic situations. The colonial government conceived policies which could not be implemented in an environment which did not favour their success, and the greater realism of modern policy makers has prevented the creation of a similar impasse today. The economic position of local government organisations and the policies of the central government both then and now inevitably threw the onus of responsibility on the central administration, and it is an index to the importance of education as a social force that nationalisation of policies has implied little relaxation of the centralization of control that has been an integral part of educational policy.

SWARNA JAYAWEERA.

101. Sessional Paper XXXV of 1955, The Report of the Commission on Local Government, p. 203.

102. Sessional Paper XVII of 1962, Final Report of the National Education Commission, p. 143.