

Using the view that  
from 1833 to 1846



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From 1833 to 1846, the reform of education was severely hindered by numerous factors; the efficiency argument, the economic argument and the knowledge argument (namely, that knowledge, or education is not needed by the working class). However it can be argued that any of the reasons are the most important, because they are all so different, but all crucial to the delay of the Ten-Hour Act being finally introduced.

In Source A, it tells us that more money is needed to further the growth and success of schooling for children, thus agreeing with the view that the economic argument was the strongest. It says that money must be provided by parents as a token sum, but the government is the most vital factor in this matter. They want purely government legislation, not substantial amounts of money since they believe that money, by itself, would do no good. It seems to suggest that reform was also limited by reluctance by parents to let their children go to school, therefore showing the government that there was a need for them to spend money. However, this source cannot be fully trusted, since it is aimed at the masses, it is cheap, and it will only print what they want to read. This does not prove that the government did not want to spend money, but it does show that this was the common conception; this does agree with what we already know.

This was published in 1833, when the first Factory Act was made, which did very little towards improving working conditions or implementing education for the lower classes. But it was at the time of the education grant, which, despite being a mere pittance made to the main religious societies which ran the schools, did go some way to proving that reform was something that was sought after all. Source B is by a radical MP, Hume, who strongly disliked the

idea of the government voting for an annual grant of £20,000 to be allowed. He 'objected' to it, merely because it was not that he disagreed with this idea as a whole; indeed he was a radical, and so was forward thinking and progressive; he did not want to stick to the old thinking that poor children did not deserve an education.

Instead his aim was for the grant to be increased substantially, because he thought that £20,000 was far too small an amount to be permitted for furthering education. He wanted a huge amount, a 'large sum', and other radicals of the time also agreed with him on this matter. He realised that if charitable donations alone can raise a significant total, then surely the government ought to be able to at least match, if not exceed it. However, he does not seem to recognise that those who gave considerable amounts of money charitably could easily afford to do so, and actually wanted to, whereas the government was almost being forced to do this, even though at this point in time they did not do too much for the people in general. Many schools existed purely by charitable donations, whether they were proper schools or simply Dame schools. Hume just wanted them supported, in order to further this cause of spreading education to the masses.

He stated that legislation or a commission of some sort should also be set up to distribute the money. This source is quite reputable, because the MP in question was still in power at this point, around the time of the first Factory Act, and so can show that reform had been greatly limited by the government's reluctance to spend money. However, since he has said this in a parliamentary debate, he is speaking without too much thought, and aiming to persuade others to think the same, instead of just speaking

knowing that people already will agree with him. This view must be held amongst others, otherwise Hume would not have said this, but due to the circumstances, one can presume that some of the fervidity of the statement only comes from him speaking in a debate, although he could well have prepared what he planned to say far in advance.

Source C, in contrast, is by William Cobbett, who like Hume was also a radical, but unlike Hume, thought that the grant should not be introduced in any amount. Cobbett had bizarre views for the time, and even now is seen as eccentric. He was a fervent Tory radical, who believed in keeping the old traditional ways, but at the same time encountered many problems in his life, such as being imprisoned for libel, and at this time in his life was commented upon by Macaulay as being insane. Cobbett was not so much an MP of the era, for he did not believe in self-help, and more believed that one should only need knowledge that is relevant for one's own profession, and so education was not needed. If we take this source as being the norm, you can only presume that lack of reform of education was only due to the ruling classes and the middle class not actually deeming it necessary in the first place.

He himself tried to treat the workers as equals when it came to education, by speaking as if he had the right to represent them all, but by doing so ended up basically patronising them by using demeaning phrases such as '[I do] not wish to degrade them'. He was not in the right position, as with any MP, to accurately represent the views of his constituents, especially when he tried to win various political seats, succeeding only after the 1832 Act. Cobbett did not have a typical view, and although partially reform was limited because of

people in power like him thinking that education in general was not needed, he is in a minority. He does not think that government is not giving enough money; in fact, he believed that they are giving far too much, since any money (not 'one single penny') is too much to be spent on creating a 'race of idlers'. This debate was a crucial one in which they discussed the possibility of a grant, and Cobbett used this opportunity to get his increasingly bizarre points of view across, having probably prepared a speech in advance. Reform was not needed in his mind, so he did not care whether he was the one holding it back or not.

Source D is in stark contrast with C, and very different to A and B, even though they both have similar views. The extract is taken from the 'Westminster Review', founded by Jeremy Bentham who was a keen utilitarian, philosopher and political radical, as well as being in favour of individual freedom. It was the journal of those who followed his views, read by wealthy people who would necessarily be out of every day contact with people these reforms would affect. In the Review, it writes that legislation alone is needed to create education, because the 'charitable public' would provide the rest. It is obvious to see why they are writing praising the 'public' because those who would be most charitable were the wealthy, and if they were or were not Benthamites, if they read this, they could easily be swayed by use of flattery to their viewpoint. This source criticises the government for doing even less than the little that was needed to start it up in the first place, and the dislike is obvious.

They mention in the article where the government had wasted money before, yet they were ignoring the need for only elementary education,

enough to improve efficiency so that the economy would be improved. Bentham approved of the monitorial system because it was efficient and saved money and effort on the part of the teacher. This source agrees with sources A and B that charity will be given, but only wants a one off payment large enough to start off the system, rather than continuous small maintenance payments which can achieve little alone. However, like the other sources, none of them mention other factors which also limited reform of education, such as the problem with religion, with the societies, with the physical administration, and with the simple dislike of having to send one's children to school, and missing out on an income from them. This extract cannot be taken as the truth, because it is so biased against the government that was actually reforming education slowly and surely. When it was written in April 1834, it underestimated the future reforms that were to be carried out until 1846, and which were to eventually succeed in opening up education to most children, with the aid of many other Acts and Bills.

These sources show that the government was a key factor in limiting the reform of education, but there were also many other problems with introducing it. It was not the most important, but equally as important as other factors. The government did continue to pass reforms, despite much opposition, and so by 1846, one can say that the government not longer hindered as much the progression of the spread of education.