

Educational Developmentalists Divided? Patrick Cannon, Patrick Hillery and the Economics of Education in the Early 1960s

PETER MURRAY

National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare

Abstract: The catalytic effect of the OECD-linked study that produced *Investment in Education* is a much celebrated episode of Ireland's modernisation. A remarkably broad cross-departmental consensus supported the initiative. Bureaucratic caution and ministerial self-preservation were set aside to allow a "warts and all" portrait of Irish education to be painted by the study team. Special efforts were made to focus public attention on the findings of a damning report that legitimated a quickening pace of government action to increase access to an expanded, rationalised and reoriented education system. But, as well as developmentalist triumph over conservatism in the education field, there was also significant division between state and civil society developmentalists. This is examined through an analysis of the relationship between the Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools and the Department of Education.

I INTRODUCTION

In *Preventing the Future* Tom Garvin identifies a dysfunctional education system as being a key cause of why Ireland was "so poor for so long" (Garvin, 2004, pp. 125-169). The book's discussion of Irish educational deficiencies also highlights the role of system critic and reformer played by Patrick Cannon, the headmaster and proprietor of Sandymount High School. "A bugbear of clerical educationalists because of his liberal views", Cannon is placed alongside such "pundits" as Owen Sheehy-Skeffington and Seán Ó Faoláin whose "eloquent public proddings" were partially responsible for "... the dream Ireland of Faith and Fatherland that had filled the minds of so many political leaders" being "quietly abandoned" (Garvin, 2004, p. 142 and 144). Within a context where

Email: peter.murray@nuim.ie

“the civil servants saw that the Church was in charge” (Patrick Hillery quoted in Walsh, 2008, p. 74), the Department of Education withheld recognition from the Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools (FLCSS) in which Cannon was a leading figure until Jack Lynch in 1958 reversed this policy in what Garvin terms “... a quiet act of what amounted to considerable political courage and creativity” (Garvin, 2004, p. 149).

As Lynch was the first of a series of Fianna Fáil education ministers who belatedly began to face up to the issues of expanding Irish secondary education and revising its curriculum, the development of a reasonable working relationship between the Department and FLCSS might have been expected to flow from Lynch’s initiative. But the opposite turned out to be the case. Under Lynch’s successor, Patrick Hillery, FLCSS quickly found itself operating in a very hostile environment. In 1962 the Department withdrew recognition from the Federation over its decision to adopt a new title while Hillery publicly accused it of blackening Ireland’s name overseas in a report that precociously applied the same economics of education approach that the Department itself was embracing in collaboration with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

This paper provides both a descriptive account and an analysis of the dispute between the FLCSS and the Department in the early 1960s. It focuses on how, throughout the brief period in which it enjoyed officially recognised status, the Federation was repeatedly threatened with its withdrawal. It then turns to the Federation’s 1962 report on *Investment in Education in the Republic of Ireland* and the role it played in bringing about the breakdown of relations between itself and the Department. It next situates this report within the wider context of the growing influence exerted by the economics of education perspective on educational policy development in Ireland and the roles played in this process by OECD and by the Ford Foundation. As its relationship with the Department of Education worsened, what was now styled the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools sought to directly engage Taoiseach Seán Lemass in a discussion of education’s role in wider economic development and planning. However, the response from Lemass echoed Education’s hostility, leaving the Federation as far out in the political cold in the 1960s educationally activist state context as it had been in the 1950s context of deferential state passivity. The significance of this tale of deep division among the apparently like-minded for analysis of the transformation of the Irish education system that gathered pace during the 1960s is considered in a concluding section. The discussion begins, however, with a sketch of the context in which lay Catholic secondary school proprietors like Patrick Cannon emerged as providers of education in Ireland after World War II.

II IRISH SECONDARY SCHOOLING PRIOR TO STATE ACTIVISM

The Catholic Church in Ireland possessed “a grip on education of unique strength” (Whyte, 1980, p. 16). At primary level the basis of this grip was the vesting of local level management control in parish priests (or their Protestant equivalents). In secondary schools not only was there clerical institutional control but most of the teaching was carried out by priests, brothers and nuns. The availability of a deep reservoir of person-power underpinned this situation:

In the late 1960s the Catholic Church (North and South) had at its disposal a full-time staff of well over 30,000 priests and religious, of whom over 25,000 lived and worked in Ireland. This was the Irish Church’s highest number of personnel in its history and, relative to the population it served, made it the most heavily staffed in the western world (Fahey, 1992, p. 256).

But quite extensive as the Irish Catholic clerical provision of secondary education was, there was marked geographical variation in its availability and it was characterised by restrictions peculiar to a church monopoly which bore particularly heavily on the educational opportunities of boys:

North of a line from Dublin to Galway diocesan colleges dominated boys education, religious orders being actively discouraged from founding boys’ schools in most of that part of the state. Thus in this part of the state there were 50 per cent more Catholic schools for girls than for boys, and the number of girls attending Catholic secondary schools was three-eighths higher than the number of boys. Moreover in other areas such as Cork the only schools allowed to compete with the diocesan colleges were those run by lay brothers. The purpose of all these restrictions was, apparently, to secure for the dioceses concerned a monopoly of vocations to the priesthood (FitzGerald, 2003, p. 140).

Some of the resultant gaps were filled by lay proprietors setting up secondary schools, sometimes in the teeth of strong clerical opposition:

A Mrs. Lynch opened a secretarial school for girls in Carrick-on-Shannon; then she saw there was a need for secondary schooling and opened the Rosary High School for boys and girls. The Marist Convent for girls that my mother had attended was well established but there was no secondary school for boys in the county town. A married woman in charge of a mixed school of adolescent boys and girls set off all kinds of ecclesiastical alarms. Mrs. Lynch must have been a remarkable woman. The Church tried to get her to close. She refused. They then brought in the Presentation Brothers to close her down. They didn’t succeed. Both schools prospered. The result was that this small country town

and its poor hinterland had three very good schools at a time when secondary education was open only to the rich or the academically bright (McGahern, 2005, p. 168).

In establishing his Sandymount High School against the wishes of the Archbishop of Dublin, Patrick Cannon is credited with having upended an unwritten Department of Education rule that any lay Catholic seeking to set up a new secondary school was required to submit evidence that the Catholic bishop of the diocese did not oppose the venture (O'Connor, 1986, p. 21). Like Mrs Lynch, Cannon had a rival school run by a religious congregation set up in competition with him. In his case, Marian College was literally next door to the lay-run establishment (Cooney, 1999, p. 295). Elsewhere, Sean Hamilton experienced difficulty with his local parish priest and with his bishop. The opposition he encountered "... was based on the claim that his school in Bandon, County Cork, could deprive the diocesan college at Farranferris, which was 17 miles away in Cork city, of pupils from the Bandon area" (O'Donoghue, 1999, p. 114).

The Dublin-based Cannon was an exception to the general pattern of the location of lay-owned schools in the western part of the state. Between forty and fifty of these schools came together in the FLCSS having found that, being neither Protestants nor Catholic clergy, there was no existing schools association of which they could seek membership (O'Connor, 1986, p. 74). In correspondence with the Department of Finance in May 1962 the Department of Education represented lay Catholic secondary school proprietorship as a last resort of the economically desperate – "... this Federation represents small Secondary Schools started under lay aegis throughout the country at a time when those establishing them could not secure employment in the existing secondary schools and were forced to turn to the setting up of these small schools in the smaller towns and villages as a means of securing employment".¹ A somewhat grudging acknowledgement of the business acumen of the school proprietors was, however, contained in Education's September 1961 observation to the Department of the Taoiseach – "... while there may be a certain case for an increase in grants to these secondary schools generally, the Committee of this Federation has produced no evidence to show that any of the schools of the Federation, which are private institutions run by themselves, are conducted at other than a profit".²

¹ National Archives (NA) Department of the Taoiseach (DT) S 12,891 D/1/62 Department of Education to Department of Finance 15/5/1962.

² NADT: S 12,891 D/1/61 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 9/9/1961.

III OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF FLCSS AND ITS WITHDRAWAL

The first meeting between FLCSS and a Minister for Education for which documentation is currently available took place at the end of June 1960, a little over a year after Patrick Hillery took on the portfolio. For this FLCSS prepared a lengthy memorandum dealing with a variety of financial issues, FLCSS representation on bodies set up to advise or report to the Minister and access for the FLCSS to the department's reference library.³ Shortly afterwards, on 8 July, the department wrote accusing the FLCSS of "discourteous and irresponsible actions" whose continuance would lead the Minister to reconsider his recognition of the body.⁴

Assurances that no discourtesy had been intended were proffered on this occasion, but less than a year later, on 22 June 1961, FLCSS was again informed at a discussion with senior department officials that withdrawal of its official recognition was being contemplated. In this instance, according to Hillery's Private Secretary, "... the Federation representatives excused themselves by stating that, being a recently recognised Association, as yet they had little experience of established procedure as between the Department and School Associations".⁵ Hillery's expectation "... that for the future your Federation's action would be in accordance with the established procedure followed by other School Associations" was stated in a letter of 28 July. Asked for clarification, the department replied on 4 October that "... established procedure is a line of conduct that has sprung from responsible action on all sides concerned and accordingly that a sense of responsibility is the best guide in the matter".⁶

In January 1962 the Annual General Meeting of FLCSS approved the changing of its name to the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools (FISS). On April 18 the Minister's Private Secretary informed the Federation that it could not be recognised under this "very misleading title".⁷ When the Federation asserted its right to decide for itself what its title should be,⁸ it was informed on May 17 that "... the recognition granted by the Minister to your Federation

³ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/61 Memorandum presented to the Minister for Education from the Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools on various problems arising in Secondary Education, 30 June 1960.

⁴ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Copy of Private Secretary to Minister for Education to Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools 18/4/1962.

⁵ NADT: S12891 D/1/61 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 7/7/1961.

⁶ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Copy of Private Secretary to Minister for Education to Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools 18/4/1962.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Officers of Federation of Irish Secondary Schools to Minister for Education 4/5/1962.

hereby ceases to operate".⁹ The Federation, for its part, claimed that its change of title was not the reason the department had moved against it, a point that will be discussed in more detail below. It characterised official recognition as "... an administrative device specially designed to stifle all constructive suggestions on Irish education, and all public discussion of Irish educational problems, as well as all legitimate constructive criticism of the policy of the Department of Education". It went on to refer to "... the threat of withdrawal of 'official recognition' with which we have been harassed practically since the date on which we received it".¹⁰

What, apart from changing its name, had the FLCSS done to cause offence to the Department of Education? An eleven item list compiled by FISS of the charges levelled against it in the 18 April 1962 letter from the Minister's Private Secretary provides a convenient, if partial, summary:

This letter, among other things:

1. Accused the Federation of discourteous and irresponsible actions.
2. Reminded the Committee of an oral discussion of 22nd June 1961 when our Committee was accused of making misleading statements.
3. Accused the Committee of wishing to dictate procedure to the Minister.
4. Accused our Committee of appearing to consider that our Federation was entitled to priority over other school associations.
5. Accused the Committee of 'considering that our Federation carried an educational responsibility equal to that of the Minister'.
6. Drew attention to our letter of the 24th of January to the Minister and objected to the phrase 'Our Committee must request that you will reconsider the conditions of appointment of the seven secondary inspectors'.
7. Objected also to the phrase: 'Our Committee will be glad if you will treat this matter as very urgent, and let us have your views at your earliest convenience'.
8. Made a general accusation of 'arrogance' under 6 and 7.
9. Accused the Federation of suggesting to the Taoiseach that neither the present Minister nor his predecessor was capable of handling the Department of Education.
10. Complained that the Minister was given the impression that he was in some sort of subordinate position to our Federation, and answerable to the Federation rather than to Dáil Éireann for his conduct of policy.

⁹ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Copy of Private Secretary to Minister for Education to Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools 17/5/1962.

¹⁰NADT: S 12,891 D/2/63 Memorandum for An Taoiseach, Mr Seán Lemass, regarding the relations between the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools and the Minister and Department of Education 29/4/1963: NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Officers of Federation of Irish Secondary Schools to Minister for Education 4/5/1962.

11. Stated that the Minister regarded our Federation's change of title as a culmination of our misdemeanours and would refuse to continue recognition if the new title continued to be used".¹¹

In correspondence with the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Education expanded upon the offences with which it had directly charged FLCSS/FISS and added some new ones. To be recognised and consulted by the Department a schools association was expected to adopt a self-denying ordinance regarding communication with Dáil deputies, the press and others – "... the Minister was not prepared to permit them to make him 'a scratching post on the way to the fair'". The press coverage garnered by the Federation was "... as the Minister believes, designed to give a false impression to the other recognised School Associations, all of which are of far longer standing and most of which are far more representative than this body, which is concerned with not more than 1/15th of the total secondary school population". The Minister also "objected strongly" to a "continual bombardment" of letters and to "... often daily telephone calls to the senior officials of the Department by the Federation's Honorary Secretary [Cannon], who wasted the officials' time by holding them on the telephone for long periods, sometimes of over half an hour, attempting to discuss serious educational problems". By December 1961 "... there was no option but to inform [Cannon] that the Department's officials would no longer be prepared to waste their time in telephone discussions with him".¹² Protests by the Federation in January 1962 that advertised secondary school inspector posts did not require candidates to have either secondary school teaching experience or a university qualification in Education prompted the comment that:

It has for some time been clear to the Minister that the gentleman concerned [Cannon] is suffering from not only severe *cacoethes scribendi* but, it is to be feared, from what appears to be a form of megalomania.¹³

Earlier, in July 1961 it had been stated that "... if the Federation continued its attitude of open war with the Minister, he, for his part, would find it preferable for them to have to do so as an unrecognised body" because "... in that way, the public would know where the Minister stood vis-à-vis the

¹¹ NADT: S 12,891 D/2/63 Memorandum for An Taoiseach, Mr Seán Lemass, regarding the relations between the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools and the Minister and Department of Education 29/4/1963.

¹² NADT: S 12,891 D/1/61 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 7/7/1961, 9/9/1961 and 16/12/1961.

¹³ NADT: S 17,225/62 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 1/2/1962.

Federation”.¹⁴ Less than a year later this preference had been translated into practice.

IV DISCOVERING THE ECONOMICS OF EDUCATION

As noted above, FISS did not accept that its change of name was the real reason why it was derecognised. Rather “... our Committee believes that resentment at the preparation of our study, rather than the alleged reason – change of title – was responsible for the letter sent by the Minister of Education on the 18th April”. The study referred to was entitled *Investment in Education in the Republic of Ireland with Some Comparative Statistics* and sub-titled *A Study of Policy Considerations in Post-Primary Education Related to Economic Growth and Possible Integration in the European Community*. Running to thirty pages of typescript that contained twenty statistical tables and a diagram as well as a general commentary – for a summary see Randles (1975, pp. 83-87) – the “final draft”¹⁵ was released to the press on 5 May 1962. Sections of the study were in circulation prior to this date, however, and FISS was later to point out that:

Although our change of title was notified to the Department on 14th February it was not until the 18th April that the question of change of title was raised. Our Committee considers it significant that this letter was sent to us twelve days after the complete statistics of our study had been sent to the Minister on the 6th April.¹⁶

Challenged in the Dáil – where a number of TDs speaking in the debate on the Education Estimates in June 1962 referred to the FISS document and the Minister in reply admitted that “... we need to have something done about producing statistics”¹⁷ – Hillery maintained that the change of title was indeed the reason why recognition had been withdrawn. At the same time he strongly attacked the quality of the FISS study and claimed that “... its circulation internationally can be construed only as an irresponsible attempt to harm this country”:

¹⁴ NADT: S 12891 D/1/61 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 7/7/1961.

¹⁵ This “final draft” carries the disclaimer: “This is a Provisional Working Document and is still open to amendment STATISTICS SUBJECT TO FINAL CHECKING”.

¹⁶ NADT: S 12,891 D/2/63 Memorandum for An Taoiseach, Mr Seán Lemass, regarding the relations between the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools and the Minister and Department of Education 29/4/1963.

¹⁷ *Dáil Debates* Vol. 195, 6 June 1962, Committee on Finance Vote 30, Col. 2190.

My real worry about this organisation was when they started writing – without authority and without letting anyone know – to European and American organisations showing up this country in a bad light. While I am Minister, they will know I am here.¹⁸

Reference was made in the Dáil to the Council of Europe as one of the European and American organisations written to by FISS.¹⁹ Another, not publicly referred to at the time, was the Ford Foundation whose grant for the establishment of the Economic Research Institute marked its first significant direct involvement with the Republic of Ireland and its policymakers. Before discussing the Ford Foundation, the FISS study and Irish officialdom it is useful to turn briefly to the rise of the economics of education and its emphasis on human capital formation as a key factor in promoting economic growth.

The launching of the first Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union in October 1957 prompted a concerted drive to increase the West's science and technology capacity that focused particularly on the availability of an adequate pool of qualified personnel. In the part of this drive undertaken by NATO neutral Ireland was not involved. But, alongside NATO members and other European neutral states, Ireland had been since the period of its receipt of Marshall Aid a member of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). To this body the USA offered funding, to be matched by an equivalent contribution from OEEC member states, for measures to address the scientific and technical manpower shortage in Europe. This resulted in the 1958 creation within OEEC of the Office of Scientific and Technical Personnel (OSTP). When OEEC was transformed into the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1961, with Canada and the USA becoming members, OSTP was incorporated into its Directorate of Scientific Affairs.

Between its establishment and its incorporation into OECD's new structures, OSTP established effective working relations with Irish policymakers through the Interdepartmental European Recovery Programme

¹⁸ *Dáil Debates* Vol. 198, 13 December 1962, Questions: Oral Answers, Col. 1447.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Col. 1445: see also NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 12/6/1962 "... the Minister has discovered that the Federation has gone so far as to mislead the Council of Europe into acceptance of the document concerned as a valid survey, by the entire Irish secondary school authorities, of the Irish educational situation and as suitable material for inclusion in a forthcoming Council booklet on education in the member states of the Council. The Minister has taken immediate steps to warn the Council of Europe that this Federation caters for only around one-fifteenth of the total Irish secondary school pupils, that its statistics and views generally are not accepted by the Irish government as valid and that he objects absolutely to their acceptance by the Council. Much harm to our international reputation may, however, have already been done in Council of Europe circles".

Committee – an institution created in the Marshall Aid period through which much Irish OEEC business continued to be transacted after US aid to Ireland was terminated. This resulted in Ireland's scientific education provision undergoing a review by two OSTP-nominated educational experts in 1959. Highlighting a range of general educational as well as specifically scientific educational deficiencies, the reviewers advocated the bringing of education within the scope of the economic planning machinery that the Irish state was constructing. This proposal was taken on board as preparations for the Second Programme for Economic Expansion got under way in mid-1961. The Irish review thus exemplified how, by interpreting its remit in a relatively broad way, OSTP disseminated an influential new perspective on the role of national education systems:

The concentration of the initial OSTP programme...stemmed from the conviction that the rate of growth of the economy would be increasingly determined by the provision of education in science. But it was equally accepted from the beginning that the problem of producing an adequate supply of well qualified scientists, engineers and technicians was not one which could be examined independently from the output of the educational system as a whole, since such technical personnel represented only part of the apex of the educational structure. It was only logical, therefore, that a central objective of the programme would be to stimulate policies in Member countries for increased allocations of resources to education as part of their efforts to maintain an adequate rate of economic growth. Out of this simple idea emerged the 'Economics of Education' which was to play such a prominent part in the work of the Organisation and, more generally, in providing political support for the massive expansion of education over the next ten years (Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 32).

Here the key developments were OSTP's fostering of the Study Group in the Economics of Education formed in 1960 and the conference on 'Economic Growth and Investment in Education' held in Washington in October 1961. The study group developed a theoretical rationale for educational expansion while the Washington conference was a key moment in the dissemination of these ideas to a wider audience of senior policymakers (Papadopoulos, 1994, pp. 32-34; O'Connor, 1986, pp. 62-63; White, 2001, pp. 29-31). No Irish economist was a member of the Study Group but it did include an Englishman who had significant Irish connections. John Vaizey began his career in industrial economics with a study of the British brewing industry. At Peterhouse College Cambridge in the mid-1950s he became friendly with Patrick Lynch, a former Department of Finance civil servant who had acted as economic adviser to the Taoiseach and would subsequently combine an academic career at University College Dublin with extensive external

commitments. Vaizey's involvement with the brewing industry led to his co-authoring with Lynch of one of the volumes of the history of Guinness's brewery that were to mark its Dublin bicentenary (Lynch and Vaizey, 1960). Time spent "working with uncatalogued and unsorted archives" in Dublin meant that "through the Irish book I got to know Ireland well" (Vaizey, 1986, pp. 123-124). Economic history had replaced industrial economics as Vaizey's main theoretical interest but it too was displaced when, prompted by the work of Richard Titmuss and Brian Abel-Smith on the National Health Service, he began to focus on the economics of education: "I became an Expert on that somewhat esoteric but increasingly fashionable subject...[and] was drawn increasingly to Paris to work with international organisations" (Vaizey, 1986, p. 123).

Senior civil servants were not the only Irish audience for the work of Vaizey and his fellow economics of education experts. Cannon and his FLCSS/FISS colleagues were aware of and engaged with it at a remarkably early date:

During the year 1961 our Committee established contact with OECD in Paris, and familiarised themselves with the work being done by OECD in the study of educational problems. In January-April of 1962, our Committee devoted very considerable effort to the study of the provision for post-primary education embodied in their publication 'Investment in Education in the Republic of Ireland'. In working on this document our Committee had before them the programme, the models and the ideas already applied in the study of education in its different aspects in several European countries. They were fortunate in being in possession of a copy of the study *Targets for Education in Europe* embodying the content of an OECD conference held at Washington October 1961.²⁰

The Introduction to the FISS study acknowledges that "... in particular we are much indebted to the writings of Mr John Vaizey...it would be impossible for us to overestimate our debt to this source". Vaizey, like FISS, was anxious to see economic analysis of education applied to the Irish system with which he had become acquainted in the course of visits to research Guinness's history and of which he was highly critical. In 1959 Vaizey had used his position within the personal network based on the close working links between leading US private foundations and the Paris-based OEEC (a key Atlanticist institution in Western Europe supported by the US state) to advocate Ford Foundation funding for an Economic Research Institute (ERI) in Ireland

²⁰ NADT: S 12,891 D/2/63 Memorandum for An Taoiseach, Mr Sean Lemass, regarding the relations between the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools and the Minister and Department of Education 29/4/1963.

which should prioritise research into education. After grant aid was given to the ERI and it became operational, Vaizey continued to be a source of information and comment for the Ford Foundation on how the new institute was taking shape. The absence of education projects was a recurrent complaint which Foundation officers raised with ERI Director R. C. Geary and with T. K. Whitaker, the Department of Finance Secretary who had been the prime mover in the ERI's creation and continued to exercise decisive influence over the shape it was taking (Murray, 2009, Chapter 8). In Dublin, official hopes of repeating the success of the ERI application to the Ford Foundation were high in 1962 and provided a context for Department of Education sensitivity to "... writing – without authority and without letting anyone know – to European and American organisations showing up this country in a bad light". On 4 May the day before FISS released the final draft of its document, Terry O'Raikeartaigh, the Department of Education's Secretary, in the course of a letter discussing possible candidate projects for foundation funding in the education field wrote to Whitaker:

Incidentally you may be somewhat disturbed to know that we found out recently that Mr Patrick G. Cannon, Honorary Secretary of the Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary School, has for some time been in direct touch with the Ford Foundation on behalf of that body. Recently the Federation changed its title to 'Federation of Irish Secondary Schools' and when the Minister personally informed their President that he could not recognise a body with such a misleading title, the reply was that they had changed the title in order the better to meet the wishes of the Ford Foundation!... What worries me is that Cannon could easily cross the wires with the Ford Foundation. He deals continually in all kinds of misleading statements.²¹

While the FISS may have been intending from an earlier date to send its completed report to the Ford Foundation, and may have had a shrewd suspicion that a change of title might be helpful to the report securing serious consideration within that organisation, Cannon appears to have made initial contact only in late May after the FISS document had been published.²² Matthew Cullen, a Foundation officer who had visited Dublin in April to check on the ERI's progress, wrote to R. C. Geary on 13 June after receiving the report:

I have just received a copy of a study of post-primary education in Ireland, recently undertaken by the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools, and I find

²¹ NA Department of Finance (DF) 2001/3/775 T. O'Raikeartaigh, Secretary, Department of Education to T. K. Whitaker, Secretary, Department of Finance 4/5/1962.

²² Information from Ford Foundation Archives, New York.

it a very interesting effort. It points out especially the lack of adequate data and statistics on educational enrolment, manpower needs, and the like and points also to the need for planning in the educational area. I wonder have you seen it and what you think of it. Have there been any further developments since my visit to Ireland in yours and Mr Whitaker's attempts to get someone interested in this field?²³

Enclosing a copy of this letter, Whitaker wrote to O'Raifeartaigh on 19 June that:

It is obviously important that I should write to Mr Cullen to inform him of developments regarding the proposed survey of needs and gently to correct any misapprehensions which he may have formed from reading the Federation's study...I would hope that the Interdepartmental group that is making the arrangements for the proposed survey will have sufficient progress to report to form the basis of a letter to Mr Cullen of a kind likely to preserve the interest and good-will of the Ford Foundation!²⁴

The "proposed survey" referred to here had its origins in an OECD Directorate of Scientific Affairs document entitled "Pilot Studies on Long-Term Needs for Educational Resources in Economically Developed Country" which the Irish delegates – an Assistant Secretary from Finance and another from Education – had initially discussed at the October 1961 Washington conference. During the closing months of 1961 consideration of the carrying out in Ireland of the kind of pilot study OECD envisaged got under way involving the Departments of the Taoiseach; Agriculture; Industry and Commerce and External Affairs as well as the Central Statistics Office (CSO). Support for the proposal was unanimous and planning for the study got under way in January 1962 with a meeting of Irish and OECD officials. Most discussion at subsequent planning meetings centred on the question of the expertise needed to carry out the envisaged study. Initially a necessity to source this from outside the country was perceived. The CSO Director, M. D. McCarthy told the 7 March meeting that "... the chances of finding in Ireland a suitable economist and statisticians for the study team were very slim indeed". His suggested means by which the project leader might be recruited ranged from advertisements in the *Economist* and similar publications, through his own contacts with the National Science Foundation in Washington, to recommendations from John Vaizey or the OECD. Later at the same meeting, when the creation of a Steering Committee to work in tandem

²³ NADF: 2001/3/775 copy of Matthew Cullen, Ford Foundation to R.C. Geary, Director, Economic Research Institute 13/6/1962.

²⁴ Ibid. T. K. Whitaker to T. O'Raifeartaigh 19/6/1962.

with the study team was being discussed, one of the participants remarked "... that as the members of the study team would be foreigners, it was desirable that the Steering Committee should consist of people who could give informed guidance to them".²⁵

By mid-April this perception was changing. At a meeting on 17 April with C. H. Murray, the head of the Department of Finance's Economic Development Branch, John Vaizey was unable to suggest anyone who might be available to fill the team leader position – "... economists were very scarce and economists qualified to undertake a study of educational needs and resources were doubly scarce". The "possibilities of a part-time assignment" were then turned to – "... for this to be at all workable the man in question would have to be resident in this country...he [Vaizey] suggested that we might consider the question of securing the release of a university academic from his university work". A further project-planning meeting took place on the same day at which Irish officials were briefed on developments within OECD by Kjell Eide who stated that "... the Organisation would consider it vital that the project leader be a national of the country carrying out the study".²⁶

At the next meeting of Irish officials only on 23 May "... it was agreed that, both from the national and the OECD viewpoints, it would be preferable that the team leader should be an Irishman with a suitable academic background". Patrick Lynch was identified as the preferred candidate for this role while an Irish statistician working for the United Nations in New York – W. J. Hyland – was to be sounded out on returning to join the study team by McCarthy. By 25 June Lynch's agreement had been secured, arrangements for Hyland's return were well advanced and – although a British candidate for a junior economist position within the team had been suggested by Vaizey – it was decided to seek the release of another Irish university lecturer, Martin O'Donoghue of Trinity College, to fill this role. A civil servant from Education – Pdraig O'Nuallain, "a secondary [school] inspector with a degree in mathematics" – completed the team. On 4 July T. K. Whitaker wrote to Matthew Cullen referring to his "... interest in what was being done here in the way of forward planning in the educational field" and providing "... news of a recent very satisfactory outcome of our efforts in this direction". The letter made no reference to the FISS study and Whitaker's previously expressed intention "gently to correct any misapprehensions" Cullen might have derived from it was not acted upon.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid. Report of Meeting 7/3/1962.

²⁶ Ibid. Report of Conference 17/4/1962.

²⁷ T. K. Whitaker to Matthew Cullen 4/7/1962.

Pressure on the ERI to carry out educational research ended at this point and it was not until the mid-1970s and the advent of Dale Tussing that what had by then become The Economic and Social Research Institute became active in this field. The existence of the OECD study team also provided Hillery with a defence when his attitude to FISS and its research document were raised in the Dáil by Fine Gael TDs on two occasions in December 1962 and January 1963:

In relation to what it [the FISS document] purported to do, we have a committee at the moment on which there is Mr Paddy Lynch, an economist of international repute, along with a statistician from the United Nations and other people. They are setting out to do this very thing. They are the competent people to do it and not people studying it in their spare time in order to get more money for their schools.²⁸

By February 1964, when the FISS document was again referred to in the debate on the Education Estimates by another Fine Gael Deputy, Hillery had shifted from attacking FISS to patronising them:

As regards the document which Deputy O'Donnell had, I understand the authors of that document have already been told by an expert in the field of economic investment that it cannot be a basis for anything relating to research in that field. I do not want to take anything away from the amount of energy they have expended but investment in education is a very specialised subject. We have this OECD team headed by Mr Patrick Lynch, the economist, and supported by a statistician, another highly trained man. By the time they have finished, they will have spent two years studying, with the resources and co-operation of OECD and the Department of Education. They will publish statistical information and a general plan of investment in education. I do not think any document produced, even by the most enthusiastic people, without the services of such qualified people, and without the support of an international organisation, can be regarded as useful as a specialist report. That does not stop them from publishing documents and using this name. I have no vendetta with them. When I became Minister for Education, they claimed they were a partner of the Department. They were taking more of the time of my officials than I was, under the guise of being a partner, and I had to ask them to stop. If they regard that as a vendetta, they are welcome to do so.²⁹

Further light is thrown on the question of whether or not an official “vendetta” against FLCSS/FISS could be said to have existed in the next section of the paper where the focus is switched from the interaction of

²⁸ *Dáil Debates* Vol. 198, 13 December 1962, Questions: Oral Answers, Col. 1446.

²⁹ *Dáil Debates* Vol. 207, 5 February 1964, Committee on Finance – Vote 30, Cols. 512-513.

FLCSS/FISS with the Minister for Education to its attempts to engage the attention of Taoiseach Seán Lemass.

V FLCSS/FISS AND TAOISEACH SEÁN LEMASS

In June 1960 the FLCSS sent the Taoiseach a copy of the long memorandum it had prepared for its meeting with the Department of Education. Almost a year later it informed the Taoiseach that "... practically all the matters raised at our deputation have now been turned down by the Department of Education" and made the first of several requests that Lemass receive a deputation to discuss education's role in wider economic and social development, citing in this instance "... the well recognised relationship existing between productivity in both agriculture and industry and duration of formal education". On these occasions the Department of the Taoiseach sought the Department of Education's views and was advised against receiving a deputation. The Department of the Taoiseach followed this advice and referred the FLCSS to the Minister for Education.³⁰

With Hillery away from his Department, FLCSS wrote to Lemass protesting against the lack of proper qualifications for advertised secondary school inspector posts in January 1962³¹ and on 6 April sent him the statistical tables from its soon to be completed report. An accompanying request to receive a deputation once these had been studied received the now standard reply. The request for a meeting was renewed on 22 May in relation to the deterioration of relations between the Department of Education and FISS. The refusal on this occasion was addressed to Cannon in his private capacity at Sandymount High School in order to avoid using the FISS title.³² On 4 June the Taoiseach received an invitation to open a new secondary school catering for almost 100 pupils in Dungloe. When this was referred to the Department of Education the Headmaster of Ard-Scoil Colmcille, E. P. O'Donnell, was identified as "an active member of the school association until recently known as the Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools". Rehearsing its version

³⁰ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/61 Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools to Taoiseach 10/5/1961, 8/8/1961, 28/8/1961, 30/11/1961; Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 7/7/1961, 23/8/1961, 9/9/1961 and 16/12/1961; Department of the Taoiseach to Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools 25/8/1961 and 20/12/1961.

³¹ NADT: S 17,225/62 Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools to Department of the Taoiseach 26/1/1962.

³² NADT: S 12891 D/1/62 Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools to Taoiseach 6/4/1962, and 22/5/1962; Department of the Taoiseach to Honorary Secretary, Federation of Lay Catholic Secondary Schools 11/5/1962, Department of the Taoiseach to Patrick Cannon 29/5/1962.

of the change of name story and that of the "... very misleading, fallacious and incorrect document" circulated to TDs and to the Council of Europe, the Department of Education reply concluded:

Despite, therefore, the fact that this particular secondary school, being situated in the Gaeltacht has, on the advice and with the encouragement of this Department, received capital assistance from Roinn na Gaeltachta towards the erection of its new premises, the Minister would advise the Taoiseach very strongly against attending the opening since for him to do so would appear to give countenance to what the Minister considers to be a treacherous action on the part of this Federation... It is extremely likely that, if the Taoiseach were to attend the ceremony, Mr Patrick Cannon, originally from Donegal, who is Honorary Secretary of the Federation and the moving spirit of its attitude and actions, would also attend and make use of the occasion to gain official status and prestige for his Federation in defiance of the Minister for Education. Apart from the foregoing, the Minister feels that it would not be in keeping with the dignity of the Taoiseach to participate in the opening of this small secondary school.³³

For his part, Lemass directed that no reason for declining the invitation be given when he was presented with a draft that cited the extent of his other commitments.³⁴ On 23 November Lemass took the initiative by writing to Hillery that "... even if you do not feel like blowing your own trumpet, I think you should nevertheless try a blast or two". Public statements by the Minister for Education were needed, in the Taoiseach's view, because "... the critics seem to be getting too free a field":

I do not know the explanation of the present tendency, among speakers at certain types of public functions, commentators in the press and others, towards criticism, amounting in some case to disparagement and derision, of various features of educational policy, but the publicity given to this criticism could possibly lead to erroneous notions at home and abroad, unless steps are taken to deal with it, including the suggestions of outdated methods, hide-bound administration, etc., which appear to be getting prominence recently.³⁵

Neither FISS nor any other critic was specifically referred to in this letter but when Hillery, made a speech that dwelt on the unwillingness of supporters of the education system to publicly defend it, an editorial in the *Irish Times* on 6 December commented that "... the general tenor of his complaint defies analysis" before going on to commend the suggestion contained in the FISS

³³ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach 12/6/1962.

³⁴ Ibid. note 12/6/1962.

³⁵ NADT: S 12,891 D/2/62 Seán Lemass to Patrick Hillery 23/11/1962.

document of the previous May that a permanent planning unit be established within the Department of Education.³⁶ Later that month and in January 1963 Hillery faced oral questions on the derecognition of FISS and on its research document together with a motion disapproving of changes in the Rules relating to the Secondary Teachers Registration Council that had been made to end the representation on that body that FLCSS had secured in 1959.³⁷ In April 1962 FISS renewed its efforts to secure a meeting with Lemass, sending him a memorandum detailing the breakdown of its relations with the Department of Education and defending itself against the charges made by Hillery. When this was referred to the Department of Education the response was that "... a communication should now be addressed to Mr Cannon which would bring home to him and through him to his organisation the serious results of the course they are adopting". A draft reply designed to do this was enclosed. Within the Department of the Taoiseach this came before Lemass with a note that observed:

The issue of a reply in the full terms of the draft suggested by D/Education would obviously lead to further aggravation of the controversy between the Department and the Federation – which was publicised in the Dáil on the 13th December last. It might be advisable to confine the reply to the final paragraph of the draft i.e. that you are satisfied that no useful purpose would be served by your receiving a deputation. For approval, please.

Lemass, however, directed that "... a letter as proposed by M/Education may issue". Dated 14 May, this letter stated as the Taoiseach's views that FISS "was wholly unwarranted in arrogating to itself" its present title; that "no responsible minister could recognise it under that title"; that its research document "... merely shows that such a study should be undertaken only by persons with the highest competence in the statistical and economic fields"; that one particular table in this document was misleading and selectively constructed "... as an obvious attempt to show this country in a poor light" and that the document's past or intended future circulation to international bodies "can only be regarded as acts of irresponsibility".³⁸

³⁶ Ibid. *Irish Press* clipping "Art interest is heartening sign" 5/12/1962; *Irish Times* clipping "Planning Education" editorial 6/12/1962.

³⁷ *Dáil Debates*, Vol. 198, 13 December 1962 cols. 1444-1448; *Dáil Debates* Vol. 199, 23 January 1963 cols. 279-293.

³⁸ NADT: S 12.891 D/2/63 Honorary Secretary, Federation of Irish Secondary Schools to Taoiseach 29/4/1963 enclosing Memorandum for An Taoiseach, Mr Sean Lemass, regarding the relations between the Federation of Irish Secondary Schools and the Minister and Department of Education; Department of Education to Department of the Taoiseach, Bealtaine 1963 enclosing Suggested reply to Mr P. F. G. Cannon; handwritten minute from Private Secretary to Taoiseach and his handwritten reply 13/5/1963; Taoiseach's Private Secretary to Patrick Cannon 14/5/1963.

The FISS reply to this broadside denied misleading anyone through its title or its statistical tables, although it conceded that countries other than the northern European ones with whom OECD usually grouped Ireland might also be included in comparative tables. It also asserted the good faith in which it had acted – “... true patriotism may consist of facing up to the real facts of the situation, and real irresponsibility may consist of attempting to conceal a true knowledge of the actual facts”. But it struck a conciliatory tone with regard to its title – “... our Committee and our Federation are by no means a doctrinaire body, and if the Minister for Education feels that any serious embarrassment is caused to him by our present title, the possibility of a suitable adjustment in the title is not entirely ruled out”.³⁹ Indeed enclosed with this letter of 25 June was a *Supplement to Investment in Education in the Republic of Ireland: With Some Comparative Statistics* issued in the name of the Federation of Irish Lay Secondary Schools. This olive branch was proffered to no avail. Lemass directed a “reply as proposed” by the Department of Education which stated that the “... contents of that letter do not provide any reasons which would impel the Taoiseach to alter the views expressed in the letter to you on the 14th May last”.⁴⁰

Although it continued to issue commentaries on educational policy developments, FISS had by June 1963 come to a political dead end. Cannon continued to be a pariah in official eyes. In May 1964 the National Press sent a copy of a new Irish-English dictionary for students it had published to the Taoiseach. Although the letter that accompanied it was signed by the company’s Secretary, M. A. Walsh, a sharp-eyed civil servant noted Cannon’s name on the headed paper and wrote a note to Lemass suggesting that “... as the Director named above – Mr Patrick F. G. Cannon – is the leading spirit of the ‘Federation of Irish Secondary Schools’ who have in the past engaged in much controversy with D/Education you may consider it sufficient that I should merely acknowledge with thanks on your behalf”. The Taoiseach’s response was “to reply as you suggest”.⁴¹

However, after Hillery left the Department of Education for Industry and Commerce, “... the former title, status and role of the federation as a recognised body were restored following the intervention of George Colley as

³⁹ Ibid. Honorary Secretary, Federation of Irish Secondary Schools to Taoiseach 25/6/1963 enclosing *Supplement to Investment in Education in the Republic of Ireland: With Some Comparative Statistics*.

⁴⁰ Ibid. Minister for Education’s Private Secretary to Taoiseach’s Private Secretary 2/7/1963 with handwritten note of approval by Taoiseach; Taoiseach’s Private Secretary to Patrick Cannon 4/7/1963.

⁴¹ NADT: S 12,891 E/95 M.A. Walsh, Secretary, National Press to Taoiseach 13/5/1964; handwritten note 15/5/1964; Taoiseach’s Private Secretary to M.A. Walsh, Secretary, National Press 15/5/1964.

Minister in 1966” (O Buachalla, 1988, p. 159). Cannon, for his part, remained an active critic of the Irish education system although his ideas now tended to be communicated through a different channel. The public interest in educational issues he had helped to stimulate in the early 1960s led the Dublin newspapers to appoint specialist Education Correspondents to their staffs, the first of whom was John Horgan of the *Irish Times*. He recalls that:

Anyway, it wasn't long before Pat Cannon contacted me. I went out to Sandymount and had a fascinating chat. He showed me lots of these Euro documents and persuaded me, without much difficulty that Irish education was a basket case. So I wrote an article, maybe more than one. At some stage thereafter the paper published a letter from Marlborough Street: 'The Minister's attention has been drawn to....' etc, that purported to demolish the arguments largely advanced by Pat Cannon and replicated by me. I went back to Pat and asked for help, which he supplied. Another article would then appear, evoking yet another Departmental riposte. Some years later I was chatting to Sean O'Connor, then Secretary of the Department (he had been Assistant Secretary when I joined the *Irish Times*) and the topic of Sandymount and Pat Cannon came up. He told me: 'We had four civil servants working on replies to those articles of yours', and added, ruminatively, 'I'm a bit ashamed of that, now!'⁴²

VI CONCLUSION

In discussing the role of pressure groups within the Irish political system Basil Chubb (1992, p. 115) draws a distinction between insiders and outsiders. The former are welcomed into the corridors of power: the latter "... are kept at arm's length by public officials, political and bureaucratic alike, who regard them at best as goodhearted busybodies and at worst as unreasonable and sometimes fanatical nuisances". This fate much more frequently befalls attitude groups that champion a cause (e.g. in mid-20th century Ireland, elimination of corporal punishment in schools) rather than sectional groups that promote an interest (e.g. that of school managers or teachers). Outsider status arises, Chubb suggests, "... because many attitude groups advocate reforms for which there is no great public demand". While sectional in composition, FLCSS/FISS was not typically sectional in outlook (O'Buachalla, 1988, p. 158) and could even be said to have straddled the sectional/attitude divide. But, while plainly perceived by officialdom in Chubb's "at worst" terms, the views of FLCSS/FISS were to a large extent in tune with those of a dissatisfied public – and indeed with those held by the Taoiseach, the minister

⁴² Personal communication from John Horgan 13/3/2009.

and the civil servants with whom their relations were so bad – as regards the need to expand Irish post-primary education (O’Sullivan, 1992). Indeed with regard to the requirement for curriculum reorientation in the direction of maths, science and modern languages FLCSS/FISS may have been much more at one with official thinking than were the attitudes of the general public.

FLCSS/FISS may have been outsiders because they expressed the “right” ideas in the “wrong” way. As O Buachalla (1988, p. 158) observes, FLCSS/FISS “... relied upon realistic examination of the issues and showed scant regard for those in the education establishments who did not seem to agree with Macauley’s dictum ‘that men are never so likely to settle a question rightly as when they discuss it freely’”. Highlighting some key traditions of Irish Catholicism at the beginning of his study of Irish church-state relations, John Whyte (1980) notes both the existence of a church grip on education of unique strength and “the authoritarian strain in Irish culture”. Within this cultural context frank and open criticism was, perhaps, liable to be equated with discourtesy, irresponsibility and treachery whether the governmental orientation was towards acceptance of the educational status quo or towards its reform.

The “right” ideas may also be lodged in the “wrong” institutions. FLCSS/FISS may have seen the Irish educational future, have decided that it would work and yet itself have been officially perceived to be part of the current structural problem rather than a part of its solution. In June 1961 the proposals of a Department of Finance Memorandum for the preparation of a successor to the First Programme for Economic Expansion that had now reached its mid-point were approved by the government. This memorandum stated that “Education will be covered in the new programme, special arrangements being made with the Department of Education for the preparation of material”.⁴³ When this material was circulated in January 1962 the numerically small lay catholic secondary school sector and its geographical heartland loomed strikingly large in the discussion of second level:

IX Efficient secondary schools of the future will have to provide instruction in a wide curriculum of subjects in the junior classes and will need to carry that study to a fairly advanced level in a reasonable number of subjects in the senior classes. To do so they will have to be of adequate size and so, in many cases, will have to draw their pupils from a radius of perhaps ten to fifteen miles. This Department is accordingly satisfied that that it will be necessary to examine at an early date the feasibility of providing grants-in-aid for the building of Secondary schools with a view to the provision of larger units which could cover a much wider programme (with special reference to the

⁴³ NADT: S 17,437 A/63 Department of Finance Memorandum for the Government 22 Meitheamh 1961.

teaching of Science and modern continental languages). In the rural areas which comprise much of the north-western, western and south-western parts of the country such secondary schools as do exist tend to be so small as to limit greatly the scope of the programme taught and it is clear that under existing conditions a great many children in these areas will never have access to full educational opportunity. It may be that eventual solution to the problems of these areas will be the provision of comprehensive schools with 'streaming' at 15+ or so.

X As a corollary of IX above, the provision of larger schools, of whatever type, to serve more extensive areas, raises the question of the introduction of a subsidised system of transport of pupils to secondary schools at least in outlying areas. Such an arrangement would make possible some degree of planning of the steps to be taken to bring about an adequate system of secondary education over the country as a whole. It would also allow the department more discretion in the matter of acceding to or refusing requests for the recognition of schools proposed to be established by private individuals in premises which usually fall far short of what could nowadays be reasonably regarded as suited to the requirements of a secondary school.⁴⁴

The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Problems of Small Western Farms published in April 1962 and the work of the Cabinet Committee set up to oversee the implementation of its recommendations provided a forum in which these ideas took on more concrete shape. In January 1963 the Department of Education produced for this Committee a memorandum entitled "Proposal for Comprehensive Post-Primary Education Pilot Scheme related to Small Farm areas". This began by observing that the post-primary education system has many virtues but also suffered from fundamental structural defects. First, the provision of secondary education depended entirely on private initiative. In remote areas prevailing circumstances provided insufficient incentive with the result that "... large parts of the small farm area are under the present system unlikely ever to have the benefit of a secondary school". Families with children could not be expected to be willing to remain in those areas and educational under-provision was thus a contributor to depopulation. Third, where a population just sufficient to ensure a secondary school's viability existed, "... such school is always so small as not to permit the employment of staff to cover much more than the minimum programme" with continental language and science subjects almost invariably losing out. Moreover:

Private schools under one-man management, as are most of the schools here in question, are inherently unstable. The owner of such a secondary school, who is usually also the manager and headmaster thereof, may die or have to

⁴⁴ NADT: S 12,891 D/1/62 Department of Education "Forecast of Developments in Education Services During the Five Year Period 1963-68".

retire from teaching or for one reason or another withdraw from the area. In such case the school, being fundamentally a business enterprise established primarily as a means of living or with a view to private profit, will be up for sale and, as has on several occasions already occurred, could fall into the hands of someone with little or no real interest or experience in education.

This is one of the principal reasons why there has never so far been serious question of a direct building grant for secondary schools. Under the system at present obtaining it would at the least be imprudent of the state to invest capital in secondary schools which, managed and part-owned by a private individual, might, for one reason or another, at any moment cease to be available for the purpose intended and which in any case would continue to carry the private profit motive which led to their foundation. (A result, however, of there being no direct State grant towards the building of a secondary school is that secondary schools under one-man management are very often housed in very unsuitable premises).⁴⁵

In the comprehensive school concept the memorandum fleshed out and which Hillery publicly unveiled in May 1963, good housing was to be secured through “direct provision of buildings on the part of the state” for schools catering for between 150 and 400 pupils to which subsidised transport covering a relatively wide radius was available. Management stability was to be provided by clerical or lay head teachers working under a committee comprising a nominee of the local bishop, a school inspector nominated by the Minister and the Chief Executive Officer of the local Vocational Education Committee. For the lay school proprietor the future was thus to be a repeat of past experience of exclusion at the hands of a combination of church and state. For the Minister, as he intimated to the Taoiseach on 9 January 1963, the small farms areas, now mainly if partially serviced by the lay school proprietors, were to serve as a sort of “scratching post on the way to the fair” for the newly activist state. The establishment of comprehensive schools on a pilot basis in these areas would precede a more general rolling out of the model across the country as a whole:

While the arguments for special facilities for the Western farm area are valid I would like you to regard the suggestions as the archetype of a system of Post-primary Education which should apply to the whole country. Certain ‘vested interests’ would be annoyed at the introduction of such a school on a national basis but in this particular area those interests have not provided for the children and cannot therefore object to state action. Once a beginning is made the general application of this system to the whole country would follow with time.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ NADT: S 17,405/95 “Proposal for Comprehensive Post-Primary Education Pilot Scheme related to Small Farm areas”.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Patrick Hillery to Seán Lemass 9/1/1963.

The constituency that FLCSS/FISS represented had emerged within a context of a growing demand for secondary education which the clerical church to which the state passively deferred could not or would not meet. As the state moved from deference to activism, it redefined its relations with the clerical church and occupied the space in which the lay school entrepreneurs had taken root in the course of doing so. A vocal constituency for educational planning thus found itself being planned to the margins of existence within the revamped Irish education system.

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