NOT FOR PUBLICATION

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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A CRITICAL LOOK AT HER MAJESTY'S
INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND
AND WALES

44 Canfield Gardens
London, N.W.6.
England
20th May, 1972

Mr. Richard Nolte
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10017
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Dear Mr. Nolte:

This newsletter is the first in a series of newsletters in which I examine the operation of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools in England and Wales.

The format of this series is that of one continuing essay of which each newsletter is a section. However, each individual newsletter stands, for the most part, on its own; although there may be an occasional cross reference to other newsletters from time to time.

The sections of the essay which comprise this first newsletter introduce you to the overall activities of the Inspectorate by placing it in historical and organizational perspective.

Future newsletters will examine the particular activities of the Inspectorate and offer detailed criticism.

Each future newsletter will have pagination as part of the continuing essay so that you can clearly see how the parts fit into the whole.

With this introduction, let us now turn to inspecting the Inspectorate.

Sincerely,

Irving J. Spitzberg, Jr.

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May 1972

INSPECTING THE INSPECTORATE: A CRITICAL LOOK AT HER MAJESTY'S INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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INTRODUCTION

Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools offer an interesting and perhaps unique institutional approach to a difficult problem of modern technological societies: organizing professional knowledge and judgment in the service of public decision makers. Her Majesty's Inspectorate[1] is a source of professional educational advice for the Secretary of State for Education and Science and also for the teachers in the classroom. In theory and in practice the HMI attempt to integrate professional knowledge and judgment into a political decision-making process. The success of the Inspectorate suggests many lessons for those who wish to harness professional expertise in a democratic setting; its failures provide insight into the constraints inherent in this problem.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools in England and Wales is made up of 543 men and women[2], who are engaged in an activity only obliquely implied by their name. The HMIs play at least three roles in the British educational system, which, for purposes of analysis, we can categorize as: communicator, adviser, and administrator.

In his role as communicator, the HMI acts as "eyes and ears of the Secretary," keeping her and her Department posted about what is going on in the educational system as a whole. And also, the HMI's provide a national network through which teachers in one part of the country hear about what teachers elsewhere are doing and thinking. In addition, in its function as information network, the Inspectorate serves as an important interface between the teaching profession and the latest research knowledge -- educational, psychological, and subject based.

The appellation "eyes and ears of the Secretary" is often used to describe the second role of the Inspectorate in relation to that of

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1. hereafter sometimes cited as "the HMI" or the Inspectors themselves as "HMIs".
2. p1, HMI: TODAY AND TOMORROW, HMSO, LONDON, 1971

the Secretary: that of adviser. However, this characterization is somewhat misleading for the advising role, because as adviser in regard to substantive educational matters, the Inspectorate is doing more than just selecting information for the Secretary. It is making professional educational judgments about issues of policy. More often than not the HMI is asked to collect information and provide a professional judgment about alternative policies for dealing with particular educational problems. The HMI's most important advisory role -- especially in his own view -- is in relation to the Secretary of Education and Science at Curzon Street; and the character of this relationship is assumed to be quite special. It is not seen as that of a staff officer to his superior but instead as that of an independent adviser on particular substantive issues which require professional knowledge. The independence and professional content of this role are of great pride among the Inspectorate and at the same time a matter of dispute among outside observers.

Another element in the advisory role of the Inspectorate involves the HMI's relations to the local educational authorities,[3] headmasters of schools, and some individual teachers. It is crucial that we understand the organization of the English educational system in order to appreciate the nature of this advisory relationship. As a matter of historical practice and general principle verging on constitutional significance, control over the substance of education -- the curriculum, teaching methods, and teaching appointments -- has been decentralized to the local authority and in actual fact to the local school. There are all sorts of constraints on this decentralisation -- e.g., regional and national examination groups, national labour contracts, and standards for teaching credentials -- but the principle of decentralization is an article of faith in English education.[4] And the major statutory instruments dealing with education withhold substantive educational powers from the national government. It is in this decentralized system that the HMI operates.

The individual HMI, in the course of his visits to a list of schools assigned to him, operates as an adviser to headmasters and teachers about their educational problems. Also, some HMIs also advise chief education officers about local authority problems, especially in relation to dealings with the Department of Education and Science.

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3. hereafter sometimes cited as "LEA"

4. English education, as distinct from Welsh or Scottish education, is cited here, because these statements may be less true for British education as a whole, though still relevant. The Secretary of State is responsible for education in England and Wales.

But no HMI exercises any control over any of his advisees. He makes judgments about the quality of education and their contributions to it; and he provides advice based on these judgments. But advice it is: the recipient himself decides whether to accept it or not. The HMI has no sanction to invoke.

The third role of the HMI is that of administrator. This is the least clear-cut and identifiable of the roles. And it is the one which creates the greatest difficulties in performing the other two, although it is the least important. It clearly involves two tasks. First, the oversight and approval of probationary university graduates who are not certified as qualified teachers, which lasts for a minimum of one year but longer if performance is weak. This particular task is a disappearing commitment since under a recent statutory instrument all aspiring graduate teachers who graduate from 1972 onwards must additionally take a one-year course of professional training and become certified. Second, there is the actual implementation of the occasional ad hoc national education policies -- e.g., the development and application of criteria for educational priority areas, which were poverty areas receiving additional educational resources. Also, some HMIs actually inspect and approve independent schools, and HMIs dealing with further and higher education (which includes all sectors of post-secondary education except the universities) play a decisive administrative role in deciding, in the interests of efficiency and rationalisation, which institutions can offer what courses at each level.

Although the administrative role is a very small part of the overall activities of the HMIs, it does create problems for the reputation of the HMI as an independent officer advising the Secretary and teacher alike according to his best professional judgment. The HMI as administrator is seen to be implementing established departmental policy, not because of and sometimes apparently in spite of his own best professional judgment. This state of affairs undercuts both the appearance and the fact of independence which are so important to the persuasive powers of the HMI in dealing with various constituencies in the educational system.

In all three roles -- communicator, adviser, and administrator -- the HMI functions as both a generalist and a specialist. As a generalist most HMIs (except for the most senior executive officers) have a list of schools for which they are generally responsible and to which they offer general consultancy services. And also, each inspector maintains a speciality in which he provides consultation for an area much larger than his list of schools and for the Secretary. This combination of generalist and specialist functions provides one of the greatest strengths to the HMIs as individuals and to the Inspectorate as a whole: it gives a quality to HMI advice which can often best be described as wisdom.

In the day to day life of the individual HMI, each of these roles overlaps with the others, one blurs into the others, one is actually done in the guise of the others, and so on. Nevertheless, these categories of communicator, adviser, and administrator can help the observer better understand the effect of what the Inspectorate does and how it functions to integrate professional judgments into the social process for making value judgments about educational policy.

And in regard to each descriptive role, we can establish norms by which to evaluate the success of the Inspectorate. But we must understand that any detailed standards within a descriptive category must be justified by reference to a general argument about the proper role of professional judgments in decisions which also involve value judgements. And this argument must assume an analysis of a democratic state, because this is the political context for the creation and operation of the Inspectorate.

But before we can evaluate the Inspectorate, we must first look closely at its operation. Then we can critically analyse various aspects of its operation and organization. After describing and critically analyzing the Inspectorate, I shall construct an ideal consultancy system which will systematize the lessons to be learned from this study and at the same time provide another critique of its operation. Finally I shall return to the general problem of integrating professional knowledge into general social decisions and evaluate the HMI in terms of our conclusions.

We can best begin this examination by a brief survey of the history of the Inspectorate, because the legacy of this history is still very much a fact of HMI life. So to the history books we next turn.

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

I. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: WHEN THE INSPECTORATE DID INSPECT

In 1820, by either an ingenious or dubious act, depending upon one's historical perspective, the Whig Government provided £20,000 "for the purpose of education." For a few years the Treasury turned this money over to voluntary societies for administration and allocation. But in 1839 a special Committee of the Privy Council was appointed to administer the money and to see that it was well spent. This committee was established by an "Order in Council" which meant that its officers were appointed by and directly responsible to the Queen.

The first Secretary of the Committee of the Privy Council was a remarkable man, Dr. Kay[1]. who instructed his colleagues about their duties in a spirit which is still meaningful for the modern HMI:

> It is of the utmost consequence that you should bear in mind that this inspection is not intended as a means of exercising control, but of affording assistance; that it is not to be regarded as operating for the restraint of local efforts, but for their encouragement; and that its chief objects will not be attained without the cooperation of the school committees - the Inspector having no power to interfere, and not being instructed to offer any advice, or information excepting where it is invited.[2]

Elsewhere Dr. Kay described the Inspectorate as the means "by which information respecting all remarkable improvements may be diffused wherever it is sought."[3]

In spite of the benevolent and restrained role envisaged by Dr. Kay, over the years Parliamentary dissatisfaction with the schools -- often based upon published reports of the Inspectors themselves -- resulted in the Revised Education Code of 1861, which made part of the grants paid to maintained schools dependent upon the individual examination of children (and teachers) in a particular school by the HMI. The details of the code indicate the enlarged power and authority of the Inspector:

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1. later Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth, who took the latter part of his surname from his wife's maiden name, which seems to have been a Nineteenth Century expression of sympathy with womens' lib.
2. Report of the Select Committee on Education and Science (hereafter, SC), pv,s5, HMSO, London, 1968.
3. quoted in Armytage, FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION, Cambridge, 1970.

> ...each child in the infant school earned 6s6d., and each older child 12s. for "satisfactory" performance in an examination conducted by the HMIs. Penalties for unsatisfactory attendance (4s for each older child and 2s6d for evening schools) and for unsatisfactory performance in reading, writing or arithmetic 2s8d per subject and 5s in evening schools), were imposed.[4].

Later this power of examination was changed to increase its impact: grants were awarded on the basis of the performance of the class as a whole, not the individual pupil. This change was designed to improve the overall performance of the schools.

The contribution of this system of payment by results to the improvement of educational quality in Great Britain was questioned then and is certainly open to the doubt of historical hindsight. Matthew Arnold, the most famous of all HMIs, could write in 1865: the Code is a "game of mechanical contrivance in which the teachers will and must more and more learn how to beat us."[5]. (Latter day American exponents of performance contracting should take note of this historical lesson!)

The impact of inspection and examination cannot be underestimated. Stuart Maclure put this impact succinctly in his ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF LONDON EDUCATION:

> First, success or failure in the examination meant more or less grant, and managers -- even though the School Board might resolve otherwise -- tended to use this as a measuring rod of the teacher's skill. And second, the teacher's personal dossier -- his parchment -- had to be endorsed each year by the HMI with a grading and brief testimonial. To earn full salary, a teacher had to have ten satisfactory entries on his parchment. HMI was, therefore, a figure of power in the teacher's lives, whose unannounced arrival was a matter of dread[6].

So, if the inspecting by the Inspectorate had a questionable effect on the improvement of quality in the classroom, it most certainly had a deleterious impact on the relationship between the Inspector and the teachers. Inspectors came to be seen as the enemy against whom the teachers must unite; during this period the teachers' unions prospered.[7].

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4. Armytage, p124
5. REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL FOR 1865, quoted in Armytage, p291.
6. p63
7. Chief Inspector L.J. Burrows suggests the importance of the Inspectorate's own recognition of this state of affairs: "Though it would take considerable research to establish from such records as the Reports of HMIs during the period of 'payment by results,' I understand from former colleagues who have done this that during the 20 yrs. odd in which the system operated, the Inspectorate strove steadily behind the scenes to get it changed, holding that the system was too rigid, that it damaged the relationship between the Inspectorate and the teachers, and that it inhibited experiments in curriculum and method. One moderately (cont.

Nevertheless, the Inspector as examiner continued until 1895, and in some respects until the Education Act of 1902, which created the outlines of the modern British educational system by devolving extensive powers to local education authorities. But the legacy of distrust of the HMI persisted well into the post Second World War educational world and even today still colors some teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward the Inspectorate.

Although the Inspector as ogre tended to die with the 19th Century, the HMIs continued to make yearly formal inspections of the schools until the Second World War. After that War, during which inspections were suspended, there was one more attempt to provide an inspection of every school, but this was the last. By the end of the 1960s the pretense of periodic formal inspections of all maintained schools (those supported by public funds) had been dropped.

The legislative authority for the present role of the Inspectorate comes from Subsection 2 of Section 77 of the Education Act of 1944:

> It shall be the duty of the Minister to cause inspections to be made of every educational establishment at such intervals as appear to him to be appropriate, and to cause a special inspection of any such establishment to be made whenever he considers such an inspection to be desirable.....Provided that the Minister shall not be required by virtue of this subsection to cause inspections to be made of any educational establishment during any period during which he is satisfied that suitable arrangements are in force for the inspection of that establishment otherwise than in accordance with this subsection.[8].

Although the language of this subsection seems to establish an obligation on the Minister "to cause inspections" on a regular basis, it does not offer a raison d'etre for them. And because of growing HMI and school disenchantment with the large scale inspection of schools and also because of the inadequacy of HMI personnel numbers to keep up with the expansion of the system, regular school inspections have virtually disappeared.

The most recent chapters of HMI history date from the Rosveare Report in 1956, which was an internal self-evaluation by the Inspectorate, and the Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and Science in 1968. The former report suggested that no attempt should be made to enlarge the Inspectorate beyond approximately 500 Inspectors, which was its size at the time. The Select Committee envisaged a

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Footnote 7 cont....
distinguished historian believes that the Inspectorate was principally responsible for the abandonment of the system.

8. SC, p4 S7

reduced size for the Inspectorate as well as some modifications in the Inspectorate's functions. Most recommendations of the Select Committee were never accepted by the Secretary. However, the information collected by the Select Committee will be extensively drawn upon throughout this report, because often the evidence was far more perceptive than the Committee's final recommendations.

During the late'60s and early '70s, the Inspectorate has become self-consciously and primarily a consultancy service for the Secretary and for the local authorities, as well as, in some degree, for the schools and teachers. The Inspector as guarantor of educational quality through examinations and formal inspections is no longer a participant in the life of British education. Even though he does still assess, appraise, and act as watchdog on quality - though not any longer in every school.

The first lesson to be learned from this brief survey of the history of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools is that as a body they have a tradition of great authority which has bred a strange mixture of respect and some fear. This legacy of authority has meant that the Inspectorate has been able to attract to it the very best from the British educational system. But it has also meant that the HMIs have had to overcome remaining fear and distrust.

And the second lesson, and perhaps the more important, is that the HMIs have been quite flexible in their response to changing needs of the system. Beginning as advisers, they then adapted themselves to the job of examiners, then to the assignment as inspectors, and now they have come full circle back to the primary role of adviser. The Inspector now finds himself in the position of Dr. Kay's first HMIs--"having no power to interfere, and not being instructed to offer any advice, or information excepting where it is invited."

The Inspectorate is now left with only one real power: that of persuasion. How it has organized itself to make the most of this power must next become our interest.

II. ORGANIZING FOR PERSUASION

There are 496 HMIs in England, organized into a central office at the Department of Education and Science at Curzon Street and nine territorial divisions throughout England; there are also 47 Inspectors in Wales.

The Inspectorate in England is directed by a Senior Chief Inspector jointly with six Chief Inspectors, each with responsibility by level of education or subject matter designation. Each geographical division has a Divisional Inspector who also participates in the overall policy making and who is responsible for the implementation of HMI policy in his geographical area. In addition there are Staff Inspectors with national responsibility for monitoring and coordinating HMI activity in regard to various grade levels, academic disciplines and particular educational problems: for example, there are Staff Inspectors for adult education, further education for women, art, history, etc.

All of the remaining HMIs have at least two assignments: general Inspector for a list of schools (and, for a limited number of Inspectors, a list of establishments for further and higher education); and specialist Inspector for an academic discipline, area of education or particular educational problem, in which role he acts as a consultant for his division and/or the country as a whole. Some of the more experienced Inspectors also have responsibilities as District Inspectors: that is they act as consultant to a local educational authority and as a moderator between the L.E.A. and the Department of Education and Science. Two hundred Inspectors combine all three jobs; all have the first two.

The combination of generalist and specialist functions is of great interest to the observer of the Inspectorate and a matter of some pride to the HMIs themselves. There is no percentage division of time between specialism and general assignment. And the actual division will vary according to the interests and abilities of the individual HMI. Although this is now changing somewhat: it will shortly be divided approximately one-third to specialism, one-third to general territorial work, and one-third at choice and, more team-work is a part of it.

The generalist function is served in regard to a list of schools where the HMI is General Inspector. In the "old days" -- as recent as the mid-60s--The General Inspector would expect to organize a formal and general investigation of every school on his list every few years. Today the listing of a school with a particular HMI only means that he will try to visit the school informally each year and some schools even more often. He will informally contact the headmasters of schools

on his list on a regular basis. His general list will include both primary and secondary schools and will be assigned to him on a geographical basis. His responsibility to the schools on the general list will include being a resource person for dealing with educational problems and also acting as a representative of and to Curzon Street.[1]

The observer should remember that general responsibility for institutions of further education -- technical colleges, colleges of education, and polytechnics -- rests with a separate group of HMIs who concentrate their generalist and specialist energies on this sector of education.

In his specialist responsibity, the HMI initially will continue the specialism which he brings with him to the Inspectorate. With only a very rare exception, Inspectors will have taught for many years and will have had successful careers in the classroom and often in the administrative sector of the school or teaching in a college of further education as well before joining the Inspectorate. Therefore, the speciality of the HMI may be discipline related -- social studies, English, physical sciences -- or phase related -- secondary organization, primary schools -- or problem oriented-minority education, education of the handicapped. Also, after some time in the Inspectorate, HMIs develop new specialisms in response to the changing needs of the schools and the Inspectorate itself: for example, there are specialists in computer education, educational technology, curriculum design, etc.

The specialist qualification of the HMI is maintained and enhanced through speciality panels which involve all HMIs, who offer a given speciality, and which are chaired by a Staff Inspector. These panels provide forums for the presentation and mastery of the latest knowledge in the field and act as resource centers for the speciality for the whole country.

The HMI as specialist will usually have at least divisional responsibility for his area of expertise, but quite often the allocation of specialist HMIs will require that a particular HMI be on call to other divisions for his specialism.

The combination of generalist and specialist activities manifests itself in all three roles of the HMI. Therefore, these two functions connect the sometimes conflicting roles.

The HMI, in his role as communicator among authorities, schools, and teachers, as well as between all of them and the Secretary, is usually aware first hand of the various experiences of the schools on his list in dealing with the whole range of educational problems facing schools. So he is often able to tell one school what others are doing about the general problems. And if the HMI does not know the answer to a particular question himself, he can always call on one

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1. The location of the Department of Education and Science, which is often used to identify it.

of his specialist collegues or an especially qualified teacher in another school for further information. Also, he keeps the Secretary informed about the current problems and prospects of the schools; and the schools informed about prospects if not the problems of the Secretary.

In the role of adviser in the schools, the HMI, when asked to advise on a particular problem, may be well qualified to offer advice even if the problem does not arise in his subject area of expertise. But if he does not feel qualified to advise the school in a particular instance, he can ask one of his expert colleagues to come into the school and analyze the particular problem and provide suggestions for dealing with it. In his role as specialist, the HMI will expect to be called upon by his colleagues. And the essence of his role as generalist adviser is to be well informed enough about a whole range of problems to know that he doesn't know the answer but does know where the possible answers can be found. The generalist adviser is like the general practitioner in medicine who knows which consultant to call in.

The specialist function of the HMI is most important in his role as adviser to the Secretary. The Secretary has access to the advice of 543 men and women who have a number of different expertises but each of whom also has the perspective of general experience in dealing with a wide range of educational problems.

The administrative role of the HMI usually requires the generalist qualification: the HMI soon learns the knowledge necessary to fulfill competently the limited administrative demands made upon him -- especially the evaluation of probationary teachers regardless of field. The experience of the generalist is quite valuable to the HMI who is District Inspector: he can make sound though routine administrative decisions where necessary and provide helpful advice to civil servants who must make the most important administrative decisions for the local authorities. However, specialist qualifications are sometimes invoked in particular administrative duties: the best example here being the decisions about the Educational Priority Areas, where expertise in dealing with urban educational problems was the important qualification.

In addition to the combination of generalist and specialist functions, another important component in Inspectorate effectiveness as an organization for persuasion is its perceived and actual independence in relation both to the Secretary and the schools. The limits of this independence will be explored throughout this essay; but it is important to understand that its existence is a very real part of the life of each HMI. This independence rests in small part upon the legal status of the HMI: he is appointed by and in theory is responsible to the Queen, not the government of the day. But in great measure

the independence of the Inspectorate rests upon the qualification of the HMIs as experienced professional educators whose views are respected by their various constituencies. And this professional qualification itself very much depends upon the successful combination of general and special competence.

The wisdom, and I do not think this word is too strong, of Inspectorate advice rests upon this combination of generalist experience and perspective with technical expertise based upon actual past accomplishment in the field. The respect which this combination engenders is the force which gives this organization for persuasion its power and authority.

In order to give personal reality to this account of organizing for persuasion, it will be helpful to look at the actual experiences of the HMI in his natural habitat, which shall be our interest in the next section of this Inspection of the Inspectorate.

Received in New York on May 31, 1972