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SHE FOUGHT FOR THE PEOPLE: HELEN TAYLOR'S WORK FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SOCIALISM AND FEMINISM ON THE LONDON SCHOOL BOARD, 1876-85

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Abstract

The London School Board has received considered attention with seminal works by Dyhouse, Hollis, Martin and Turnbull. These have focused on the gendered experiences of women and children, both within the administrative Board and the state schools and the methods by which women members negotiated a space for themselves. Helen Taylor's contribution has been examined within this ground-breaking literature concluding, in the main part, that she achieved little, was a political maverick, unable to form alliances or work cooperatively with men. However, in locating the work of Helen Taylor in the context of the struggle for London municipal reform, this article explores her role in furthering the interests of municipal socialism, improving democracy in the rapidly expanding city, and advancing women's rights. Much of the opposition she faced arose from opponents of her socialism, her campaigns for land nationalisation and her support for the Irish tenant in the Irish Land War. Likewise, many of the educational concerns she took up sprang from both her socialism and her feminist upbringing as the daughter of Harriet Taylor and the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill. Taylor strove to achieve sexual equality within the School Board community, both in the schools and in the School Board governing chamber itself, and this paper draws more positive conclusions about her educational work, and her constant challenging of the gendered roles and practices she experienced.

Keywords: *Helen Taylor, London School Board, Victorian education reform, feminism, gendered education, educational endowments, secular education, campaign for abolition of corporal punishment, free schooling*

INTRODUCTION

The London School Board (LSB) has received considered attention with seminal works by Jane Martin and Patricia Hollis.¹ These have focused on the gendering of the institution and the methods by which women members negotiated a space for themselves. Helen Taylor's contribution has been examined within this ground-breaking framework, concluding that she achieved little, was a political maverick and was unable to form alliances or work cooperatively with men. Hollis concentrates on Taylor's intransigence and inability to compromise, maintaining that she used her position in society mainly for her own advantage.² Hollis claims that Taylor was 'parent centred' in her School Board policies, rather than 'child centred,' citing as an example her opposition to corporal punishment as an infringement of parental rather than

¹ P. Hollis, *Ladies Elect: Women in English Local Government* (Oxford, 1989); J. Martin, 'Fighting down the idea that the only place for women was home. Gender and Policy in Elementary Education,' *History of Education*, vol 24, no 4 (1995), 277-292; J. Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London, 1999).

² Hollis, 92.



children's rights.³ Hollis concludes that Taylor achieved little in her educational work because of inability to build alliances, comparing her unfavourably with Annie Besant.⁴ Besant, however, joined the Board later in the decade, when the policies for which Taylor had fought unsuccessfully, in particular free education, had gained political credibility with the rise of 1880s socialism. Besant had more socialist allies within the LSB. Hollis ignores Taylor's politics when examining her fraught relationship with the official Liberals on the Board, concentrating solely on personality as the cause of the tensions. Martin's study of women members of the LSB offers a more positive assessment of Taylor than Hollis. Martin does recognise, in passing, that Taylor's intransigence on the LSB was a result of her socialism and that Taylor failed to get the credit she deserved because she challenged the male political establishment with her feminist and radical politics.⁵ Martin concludes, however, that Taylor's inability to compromise led to her not achieving much during her nine years on the Board for the working class whom she served.⁶ The previous literature, therefore, has acknowledged Taylor's socialism in passing but has not fully explored how it informed her work on the LSB. The focus has been on the failure of her campaigns within the methodological framework of case studies of the gendered experiences of the women members.

This article aims to give a more nuanced account of Taylor's contribution by evidencing that Taylor's motivation is revealed by locating her work on the LSB in the wider world of the demand for improved local democracy in the capital. This manifested itself, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as a growing movement for municipal socialism and collectivism which campaigned for a single local government authority, a campaign spearheaded by the London Municipal Reform League and achieved, in 1889, with the creation of the locally elected London County Council. The LSB was the first elected body which administered for the entirety of London's growing population. For socialist members, including Taylor, it was an important step in the struggle for a unitary governing authority for the whole of the capital and a vehicle to further the interests of municipal socialism, improve democracy in the rapidly expanding city and advance women's rights. Much of the opposition she faced arose from opponents of her socialism, her campaigns for land nationalisation and her support for the Irish tenant in the Irish Land War. Likewise, many of the educational concerns she took up sprang from both her socialism and her feminist upbringing as the daughter of Harriet Taylor and the step-daughter of John Stuart Mill. Taylor strove to achieve sexual equality within the LSB community, both in the schools and in the LSB governing chamber itself.

This article therefore begins with an overview of British education provision, the ground-breaking role of the LSB and Taylor's election to the Board in 1876. This is followed by an examination of some of the reforms for which Taylor campaigned: the need for local government reform to alleviate the consequences of the grinding poverty endured by the working classes; the expectations of gender roles in Victorian society and its impact on the highly gendered school curriculum; the abolition of corporal punishment and, by extension, a denormalization of the physical and emotional abuse suffered by many, especially women, in the domestic sphere. Taylor's practical and pragmatic activism is examined through her efforts to secure gender equality through childcare provision and equal pay, as well as her campaign for secular, free education for all, and her successes – and failures – are addressed within the context of the contemporary political climate and the resulting legislative reforms, whether enacted during, after, or long after the lifetime of this formidable woman. By demonstrating the ways in which she constantly challenged the gendered roles and practices she experienced, a more positive conclusion is reached on Taylor's educational work.

HELEN TAYLOR

British activist Helen Taylor was born in 1831, the daughter of the women's rights campaigner, Harriet Taylor and John Taylor, a wholesale druggist. Her mother was a member of William Fox's Unitarian reforming circle, where she met the economic philosopher John Stuart Mill in 1830. Mill and Harriet shared an interest in feminism and reform politics and Harriet left her husband for Mill though the relationship remained discreet. They married following the death of John Taylor. After her mother's death in 1858 Taylor worked with her step-father to promote women's suffrage. Mill died in 1873 and Taylor sought out a public role for herself. She was a leading women's suffragist, a founder member, in 1881, of the Democratic Federation (which was renamed the Social Democratic Federation in 1884 after embracing Marxist

³ *Ibid.*, 97

⁴ *Idem.*

⁵ Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling*, 44.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.



socialism) and a supporter of Home Rule for Ireland. Taylor was also a leading campaigner for land nationalisation in Great Britain and supported the Irish in their struggle for improved tenant rights during the Land War, 1878-1882. Taylor died in 1907 and her grave in Torquay, Devon bears the simple epitaph: 'She fought for the people.' She served three terms (1879-1885) as an elected LSB Member.

Taylor's motivation came from her socialism and collectivism. She was a founder member of the Social Democratic Federation and on the executive of the London Municipal Reform League. When Taylor unsuccessfully tried to stand for Parliament in 1885 her manifesto was essentially that of the Marxist Social Democratic Party and in it can be seen her campaigns within the School Board.

- A fair day's wages for a fair day's work
- 6-hour working day which will give work to men where now there is none
- Local government cooperation and workshops under elected managers
- Restoration of the land
- Direct taxation and graduated income tax none under 300 and rising by degrees to 19 shillings in the pound
- No wars that are not voted for by the people
- Free justice
- Restoration of the endowments for free clothing food and education
- Free education
- Home Rule and legislative independence for Ireland
- Universal suffrage, annual parliaments and payment of members⁷

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Taylor had moved away from the liberal reforming world of her childhood. In 1885 Andrew Reid edited a book in which leading Liberals, both MPs and campaigners expressed why they supported the Liberal party and what it meant to be a Liberal.⁸ Time and time again the contributors mention the utilitarian philosophy of it being a means to secure the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.⁹ This philosophy, founded by Jeremy Bentham earlier in the century, had been the creed of a number of public figures, includes John Stuart Mill, and his father James. Liberalism also meant, to the Victorian mind, equality and progress in society through greater democracy and an increase in voting and social rights for the working-class.¹⁰ Despite growing support for women's suffrage, not all Liberals supported the demand for sexual equality. In addition, a central tenet of Victorian liberalism lay in the importance attached to the freedom of the individual. The greatest happiness for the greatest number of people should, however, safeguard individual rights.¹¹ It also meant an adherence to the concept of free trade which had been fiercely fought for by the campaigners against the Corn Laws during Taylor's teenage years in 1846.¹² Therefore, within the School Board chamber both the Tories (socially conservative and supporters of the Voluntary Church schools and the Church of England) and the Liberal School Board Members would be at loggerheads with Taylor's socialist agenda which took Taylor away from the Liberal platform she was first elected on in 1876.. It is within the framework of her political ideology that Taylor's work on the LSB will be examined here, and it will be argued that she was no maverick, but always had a political motivation, however unsuccessful that might be.

⁷ Taylor's 1885 Election Hand Bill, Mill Taylor Collection (hereafter M.T.C.), London School of Economics, Box 7. For Taylor's attempt to stand for Parliament, see J. Smith, 'Helen Taylor: The First Woman Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, 1885' in E Rackley & R Auchmuty (eds.) *Women's Legal Landmarks* (Oxford, 1918), chapter 9.

⁸ A. Reid (ed.), *Why I am a Liberal* (London, 1985).

⁹ *Ibid*, Arthur Arnold, MP, 17, Thomas Catling, 38, Rt. Hon Lord Hurlow, 97.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Joseph Arch, 16, Henry Broadhurst, MP, 35, Millicent Garret Fawcett, 43, Alice Westlake, 107.

¹¹ *Ibid*. Amongst those to mention individual liberty as their reason for being a Liberal are Professor J S Blackie, 31, Rev John Hopps, 59 and the Rt Hon James Stansford, MP, 93.

¹² George W E Russell MP declared his adherence to the concept of free trade to be at the heart of his liberal radicalism, p. 81. For a detailed account of the Anti-Corn Law League see Asa Briggs, *The Age of Improvement* (London, 1959), pp. 312-25.



THE LONDON SCHOOL BOARD

A rapid increase in population in Victorian Britain led to a growing public demand that the state should legislate to provide the extra necessary school places which the voluntary sector could not provide for the working people. The upper classes attended private boys or girls' schools (called Public Schools) or were taught at home by governesses. Existing schools for the working-classes consisted of Dame Schools (run in a private individuals' home), Ragged Schools (charity schools run for working-class children) and Church of England schools. In 1869 the National Education League was set up by reforming Liberals and Radicals to lobby for free, compulsory secular state education for all children. Factory owners and industrialists also called for more schools to be established which would provide the literate working-class workforce they needed. However, Tory industrialists supported an expansion of the Church of England schools, funded by the state, rather than state-run schools. Britain was the workshop of the world, leading the Industrial Revolution, and a basic education for the working-class was deemed necessary to maintain this world economic dominance. This political pressure on the British Parliament, from both liberal reformers seeking to improve working-class involvement in democracy through mass basic education, and the manufacturers, needing a literate workforce to maintain their industrial success, led to the 1870 Education Act.¹³

The LSB had been created under this Act, which set up a state system of elementary education for children between the ages of five and twelve. A further Act in 1880 made education compulsory up to the age of ten.¹⁴ Forster's intention had been to put education in London under the control of the City Corporation, the Boards of Guardians, the Vestries and the District Board of Works; but a successful amendment by the MP for Finsbury, W.M. Torrens, led to the setting up of an elected School Board for London.¹⁵ Women were eligible both to sit on the Board and to elect its members under the terms of the Municipal Franchise Act of 1869, which gave the local vote to unmarried or widowed women who were ratepayers. The Education Act itself was a compromise between those who wanted a secular state-run elementary school system (most members of the middle classes, the Trades Union Congress and forty Liberal MPs) and the National Education Union (comprising the Anglican Church and the Tory Party), who were defenders of the church school voluntary system. The compromise resulted in an educational system where the voluntary sector was supported financially by the government and existed alongside state-run Board Schools paid for by a levy on local ratepayers and controlled by a locally elected School Board.¹⁶

Men and women needed no property or residential qualifications in the division in which they stood as candidates and each ratepayer had as many votes as there were seats on the Board for that district. Minority interests were upheld by a system of 'plumping,' whereby a voter could place all his or her votes on one candidate. Voting was by secret ballot (except in the City of London ward).¹⁷ The School Boards have been recognised as the first mass elected public bodies and, thus, advancing English democracy.¹⁸ It was an important step in the state having control and influence over ordinary people's lives through collective ownership and control, in this case of schools and schooling.

Taylor was first elected to the LSB in 1876, as one of four members for the Southwark Division. It was the suffragist, Eliza Cairns who had suggested to Taylor that she stand for election. Cairns, who had been happy to hear that Taylor had recovered from a period of ill-health, wrote to Taylor indicating that the matter had been discussed amongst leading suffragists.

...it encourages me to hope that you will listen favourably to a proposal I have to make – which is that you will stand for the School Board. I saw Mrs Anderson yesterday and she was talking to me on the subject and wondering if you were properly asked you would consent to stand...Mrs Orme too is of the same opinion and is very anxious that you should become a member of the School Board. She wrote to me about it some time ago.¹⁹

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2014/aug/28/elitism-in-britain-breakdown-by-profession>.

¹⁴ <http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/livinglearning/school/overview/1870educationact/>.

¹⁵ T. Gautrey, *Lux Mihi Laus. School Board Memories* (London, 1936), 19.

¹⁶ Martin, 'Fighting down the idea that the only place for women was in the home,' 278.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ J. S. Hurt, *Elementary Schooling and the Working-classes 1860 – 1918* (London, 1979), 75.

¹⁹ E. Cairnes to H. Taylor, October 1876, vol. 19, no. 226, M.T.C.



This was not Taylor's first contact with the London School Board. Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, having just been elected on to the first London School Board, had written to her in 1870 asking if John Stuart Mill would consider standing for election and accept the Chairmanship but he had declined.²⁰ The women's suffrage movement had recognised the importance of the creation of the School Boards in extending opportunities for women in the public sphere. *The English Women's Review* had closely followed the first elections in 1870, quoting John Stuart Mill's support for women coming forward to sit on them and the publication had celebrated the election of the first three women to the new authorities, Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (London), Emily Davies (London) and Lydia Becker (Manchester).²¹ The paper gave much coverage to the triennial elections and pressed the case for more women to come forward and seek election.²²

TAYLOR'S ELECTION TO THE LONDON SCHOOL BOARD IN 1876

Taylor, herself, did not expect to be successful in the 1876 LSB election because of her 'advocacy of gratuitous, compulsory and secular education.'²³ Southwark, her constituency, had a large Roman Catholic Irish population who, in later years, due to her support of Home Rule and the Irish Land War, fully supported Taylor. In 1876, however, her fellow Liberal, and election running partner, the Reverend Sinclair had feared that her avowal that her 'chief object in becoming a candidate was to promote secular views' would lead to them both being defeated in the poll. He appealed for her to be more moderate on platforms with him.²⁴ Taylor refused to compromise and she was elected despite her strident pronouncements supporting secular education. Sinclair, too, was successful though he bought charges of election misconduct against her and she had to defend herself at an official hearing. She had not, he claimed, referred to the fact that he was her official Liberal running partner at an election meeting.²⁵ Further, it was alleged that she had paid into the Southwark election committee £200 despite Sinclair being on supposedly equal terms as a running partner, that she had issued a handbill in support of her candidature only, that she had arranged a meeting at the Bridge House without official consent and that she had not made clear the official policy on the religious question in schools to reporters.²⁶ An inquiry found her innocent of the charges. Taylor, however, faced opposition from the Liberal party in each of the subsequent elections in which she stood as an Independent Radical Democrat. Sinclair refused to stand as a candidate in the same borough in 1879, choosing to contest a seat elsewhere.

TAYLOR'S SOUTHWARK CONSTITUENCY AND THE NECESSITY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

The Southwark to which Taylor was elected was one of the poorest boroughs in London according to Charles Booth's survey, *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London*. The survey identified 67% of Southwark's population as poor. This was in contrast to Camden (17.8%), South Bermondsey (30.7%), Lambeth (36.5%) and Vauxhall (39.6%).²⁷ Booth concluded that in Southwark poverty was worst round the banks of the Thames and ameliorated the further you travelled south, away from the river.²⁸ Between Jamaica Road and the Thames was particularly socially deprived: 'The inhabitants are mostly water-side labourers, many of them Irish and very ignorant.'²⁹

The survey made good use of the LSB visitors to collect the information. The visitors' usual duties were visiting the homes of school truants. They took the survey into individual homes and into the Board Schools of Southwark which had some of the worst social problems and poverty in the metropolis. Booth's study identified that '...the Board School in Westcott Street contains some of the poorest children in London.'³⁰ Booth recorded that, despite school fees being low, non-payment was common as a result of inability to pay.³¹ It was concluded that poverty was the main cause of high rates of absence from school and that ten percent of children in London at the Board Schools went to school

²⁰ E Garrett Anderson to H. Taylor, 9 December 1870, vol.15, no. 145, M.T.C.

²¹ *The English Woman's Review*, January 1871.

²² *Ibid.*, December 1876.

²³ Draft letter, H. Taylor to A. Westlake, 26 September 1876, vol. 16, no.181, M.T.C.

²⁴ J. Sinclair to H. Taylor, 17 October 1876, vol. 16, no.147, M.T.C.

²⁵ *Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Advertiser*, 30 December 1876.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 December 1876.

²⁷ C. Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, vol. 2 (London, 1891), 29.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 393.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 396.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 488.



hungry.³² Taylors first-hand knowledge of the grinding poverty of her constituency and the need for free education, need to be borne in mind when examining Taylor's educational work.

An 1883 pamphlet detailed the findings of a survey, conducted by a Methodist minister in the South London area of Southwark. This exposed the desperate living conditions of the poor.

Every room in these rotten and reeking tenements houses a family, often two. In one cellar a sanitary inspector reports finding a father, mother and three children... Another apartment contains father, mother and six children, two of whom are ill with scarlet fever.³³

A survey, conducted by the London Congregational Union in 1885 went out to talk to the homeless in Southwark and found fifty destitute people without even the shelter of a tenement slum. They slept under railway arches. The Union published a pamphlet describing their individual experiences of existing, unseen, on the margins of society within walking distance of wealthier areas of middle-class Victorian suburban villas. This pamphlet also catalogued the hunger of many children attending the state schools of the borough.³⁴ These were the children Taylor was trying to help.

ACTIVISM THROUGH POLITICS

It was recognised by local Christians that the problem of London's poor was too big for the churches in Southwark to alleviate and that government intervention was needed.³⁵ Taylor was part of the political debate on what this intervention should be and she wanted the working class to be enabled, through education, to take their full part in building a new society which would eliminate this dire poverty. She was part of the movement which saw the solution to the poverty found in Southwark, and throughout London, as laying in socialism. She was a founder executive member, in 1881, of the Democratic Federation: this new political organisation was an attempt, by Henry Hyndman, to unite the London trade societies, radical clubs, working-class organisations and other campaigning groups, including the Land Nationalisation Society, within one reforming organisation. The provisional executive advocated that the manifesto of the party should include a demand for manhood suffrage, triennial parliaments, equal electoral districts and the payment of M.P.s salaries and election expenses by the rate payer. To these long-standing radical chartist demands were added adult suffrage, nationalisation of the land, abolition of the House of Lords, election bribery to be declared a felonious act and legal independence for Ireland.³⁶ The Democratic Federation did not, at first, demand that the state should own the means of production. This was added in 1884 when it became the first Marxist organisation and renamed itself the Social Democratic Federation; shortly after this, Taylor and many other leading members left the organisation, finding Hyndman's control over it too autocratic.³⁷ Members of the Social Democratic Federation recognised the importance of local democratic bodies, like the School Boards, for disseminating their socialist ideas. Elected members of the London School Board, who were also Democratic/Social Democratic Federation included Taylor, Edward Aveling and Annie Besant. They brought their socialism into the LSB and tried to achieve the Social Democratic Federation manifesto through influencing educational policy.

Taylor was also a member of The London Municipal Reform League, which was formed in March 1881 and resolved to campaign for one central municipal authority for the whole of London, a London County Council.³⁸ Sydney Buxton (President of the Municipal Reform League), and League members,³⁹ Benjamin Lucraft⁴⁰ and Florence Fenwick Miller⁴¹,

³² *Ibid.*, 489.

³³ A Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (London 1883), 7.

³⁴ *Light and Shade, Pictures of London Life*, (A sequel to the *Bitter Cry of Outcast London*) published by the London Congregational Union (London 1885), 18.

³⁵ Rev. F. Crozier, *Methodism and the Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (London 1885), 5.

³⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 May 1881.

³⁷ For a history of the Social Democratic Federation see M. Crick, *The History of the Democratic Federation*, (Keele, 1994).

³⁸ J. Lloyd, *London Municipal Government History of a Great Reform 1880-1888* (London 1910) 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Lucraft (1809-1897) was the only working-man elected to the LSB during the 1870s. He was a chair maker by trade. Lucraft had been involved in radical politics since his youth. as a supporter of Chartism which campaigned for universal suffrage and parliamentary reform. He was a founder member of the General Council of the First International of the International Workingmen's Association. See George H Dyer *Benjamin Lucraft: a biography* (London 1879), in the British Library.

⁴¹ Florence Fenwick Miller was an English journalist, writer and social reformer. She was elected to the LSB in 1876 at the age of 22



were also members of the London School Board. As political reformers they saw election to the Board as essential to their political aims; they were political activists not educationalists. Taylor and Fenwick Miller were both on the General Council of the League.⁴² The rapid growth of London, both in area and population, required a less chaotic control of infrastructure.

The administration of London was, during the time of Taylor's LSB tenure, in the hands of a multitude of autonomous authorities. The Metropolitan Board of Works controlled main drainage, buildings, open spaces, bridges, the Fire Brigade and street improvements, over which there was no public control. There were twenty-three London vestries and fifteen District Boards, composed of two or more vestries. These thirty-eight bodies controlled all street paving, lighting, cleansing, water and drainage. Although elected, very few people voted for them. The members of the Vestries and District Boards elected the Metropolitan Board of Works, resulting in that organisation being distanced from direct democracy by one remove. Added to this water and gas were in the hands of private companies.⁴³

The Local Government Bill of 1884 enlarged the City Corporation to include the whole metropolitan area. It legislated for an elected council of 240 members, 45 to be elected by the City Corporation, 45 to be former members of the Metropolitan Board of Works, and 150 from London Divisions. They were elected for a three-year term after which the Board of Work members would become elected. An awareness of all these piecemeal administrative bodies is necessary to understand the importance of the fully elected LSB as an important first step in the democratisation of the capital and state influence over Londoners' daily lives.

Taylor endeavoured to increase the influence of working-class Londoners within these new state-controlled institutions. Later she would attempt to stand for parliament on a manifesto of payment for M.P.s and she brought her political belief, that public office should not be denied to the less well-off, into her School Board work by proposing an unsuccessful motion that the Board should petition Parliament for the power to pay members an annual amount not exceeding £200 each.

It was impossible that those most interested in the Board's work – the working-classes – should be represented upon it unless they were paid...This Board should be a popular Board and should really represent the working-classes and the parents of the children should have a chance of coming upon it.⁴⁴

Furthermore, she attempted, again unsuccessfully, to have Board meetings moved from 3pm to 7pm to allow working parents to attend them.⁴⁵ Her fellow board member and close friend, Elizabeth Surr, praised the tenacity of Taylor. '(She)...did not work for success, she was generally found upon the losing side, fighting like a brave soldier in the cause which she conceived to be true and just.'⁴⁶

CHALLENGING GENDER EXPECTATIONS ON THE LONDON SCHOOL BOARD

Separate spheres, recognised by historians as 'one of the fundamental organising characteristics of middle-class society in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century England',⁴⁷ was undermined by the election of women onto the new School Boards. Separate spheres attempted to confine women's influence to the private world of home and family.⁴⁸ Amanda Vickery has challenged the premise that these separate spheres represented 'the overarching constraint for Victorian women.'⁴⁹ Vickery asserts that women led more diverse lives than this would allow.⁵⁰ It was only a middle-

and served until 1885. She edited the feminist journal *The Women's Signal* during the 1890s and was one of the founders of the Women's Franchise League in 1889. See R. T. Van Arsdel, *Florence Fenwick Miller. Victorian Feminist, Journalist and Educator* (Aldershot, 2001).

⁴² The London Municipal Reform League, *Annual Report 26 January 1882*.

⁴³ Lloyd, 24.

⁴⁴ *School Board Chronicle*, 7 March 1885.

⁴⁵ *London School Board Minutes*, 5 March 1885.

⁴⁶ *Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Advertiser*, 11 March 1882.

⁴⁷ C. Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cambridge, 1992), 106.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴⁹ L. Davidoff & C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London, 2002), 76.

⁵⁰ A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A review of the categories and chronology of English women's history', p. 75, in Sue Morgan (ed.), *The Feminist History Reader* (Abingdon, 2006), chapter 3.



class ideal which a number of privileged women were able to circumnavigate, resist and negotiate, and in general, these women shared a number of social factors which enabled them to do so.⁵¹

Taylor addressed practically the challenges faced by working class women. For instance, she understood that working-class girls were often hampered in their education because they had to look after younger siblings while their mothers worked, so she attempted to have babies' rooms included in schools to enable girls to attend regularly.⁵² Taylor further believed that boys and girls should be taught together in mixed schools under the control of female head teachers. The negative view of Taylor's unpopularity with teachers recorded in the historiography ignores the support she gave to female teaching staff.⁵³ She passed up no opportunity to improve employment rights for women teachers. She sought equality of pay and conditions for women teachers, and was a staunch defender of their rights; this was before Clementina Black,⁵⁴ Secretary of the Women's Trade Union League, successfully secured an equal pay resolution at the Trades Union Congress in 1888,⁵⁵ and nearly a hundred years before the successful passing of the Equal Pay Act in 1970. Taylor did have victories in regard to women's rights, in the School Board chamber. Taylor, Surr and Fenwick Miller successfully opposed a recommendation by an internal committee of the LSB not to appoint any woman with young children to the post of headmistress.⁵⁶ Taylor regularly attempted to have men and women teachers paid at the same rate, putting forward a heavily defeated motion in 1879, during a debate on the new salary scales, which was seconded by Fenwick Miller and supported by two men, the Revd. Coxhead and Mr Firth.⁵⁷ Progressive women members were often supported in their campaigns by the more feminist-minded men.

In 1883 Taylor succeeded in having the joint assessment of married teachers' income referred to the Board's Solicitor on the grounds of possible unlawfulness under the Married Women's Property Act in 1882.⁵⁸ Later that year she unsuccessfully attempted to amend a motion on uncertified teachers' salary scales which would have given women pay parity, attracting only ten supporters but showing again that there were male Board members who supported equality for women.⁵⁹ Taylor was supported by Miss Hastings, but Miss Davenport Hill, Miss Richardson and Mrs Westlake all voted with the majority against equal pay and continued to do so on future salary motions. For them, politics overrode gender solidarity.

The new salary scales were a long-drawn-out affair, taking over five years. They took up eighteen hours of debate in three sittings in the final month before adoption.⁶⁰ When they were finally passed, at the end of December 1883, they gave all teachers a fixed salary, not dependent on results. Head teachers were to be paid according to the number of pupils in the school rather than the success of the pupils in government tests. However, the equal pay for equal work Taylor had tirelessly campaigned for remained an unrealised dream. Historical study shows how social and political change in society is achieved slowly, whether it is the abolition of slavery, the campaign for the universal suffrage or the dismantling of apartheid, change rarely comes without a long struggle and is the result of much work by many over decades.

Taylor also fought against the gendered nature of the School Board administration. In 1877, after Taylor and Fenwick Miller were first elected, the 'lady members' had to insist on going to the Lord Mayor's dinner at the Mansion House to which all School Board members were invited. The women were told that they were invited on the presumption that

⁵¹ Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling in Victorian and Edwardian England*, 53.

Martin's study of the women members of the London School Board uses Stacey and Price's sociological model charting success in politics. This evidences that nearly all shared similar privileged backgrounds. They came from politically active families, were middle- or upper-class, financial independent or supported by their families and few family commitments.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 14 April 1877.

⁵³ Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling*, 129.

⁵⁴ <http://www.unionhistory.info/> A collaboration between the TUC and London Metropolitan University celebrated Clementina's work to secure equal pay but nowhere in the resources is Taylor's work for equal pay recorded.

⁵⁵ *The Women's Time Line*, <http://www.mmu.ac.uk/humanresources/equalities/doc/gender-equality-timeline.pdf>

⁵⁶ *School Board Chronicle*, 2 Feb 1878.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 30 April 1879.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2 July 1883. The Married Women's Property Act of 1870 allowed married women to legally own the money they earned and to inherit property. Previous to the Act, the earnings and inheritance of married women legally belonged to their husbands.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13 December 1883.

⁶⁰ Gautrey, 139 – 41.



they would decline and plead a prior engagement, as women members had in the past. Taylor and Fenwick Miller refused to pretend they were otherwise engaged and attended the banquet.⁶¹ In doing so they had indicated that they would not accept the gendered roles assigned to them as women by patriarchal male members.

The conduct of meetings privileged the male members. Fenwick Miller later recalled the disadvantaged position of the women members in meetings which favoured masculine attributes, such as forwardness in debate. She wrote of how Taylor secretly made a note, for three months, of how long each member spoke and proved that the men were much more talkative. Taylor drew attention to how men controlled the meetings, declaring that Mr Stanley had spoken forty times as long as all the women put together, and describing him as having 'forty women speaking power.' There was a serious point to her observations, as meetings were lengthy affairs. The Board was often accused in the press as wasting London rate payers' money throughout the whole of its thirty-three-year history.⁶² Mr Buxton, the Chairman, in his Annual Report in October 1883, revealed that, on average, the weekly Board meetings in the previous twelve months had lasted 4 hours 37 minutes in comparison to 3 hours 15 minutes in 1879–80.⁶³ Taylor's motivation was always political, in this case a desire to save the taxpayer money. F. W. Soutter, a political colleague recalled that she would tow no party line to win favour within an official caucus, 'for the opinion of "society" as that term is generally understood she cared not a rap.'⁶⁴

TAYLOR'S CURRICULUM CAMPAIGNS ON THE LONDON SCHOOL BOARD

The school curriculum was gendered: boys and girls were prepared for different lives, boys for the world of work and girls for the private domestic realm.⁶⁵ Taylor endeavoured to make changes to the school curriculum, which would give girls equal status. Not only had girls been physically separated from boys by the architecture of the new Board schools with their separate entrances, play grounds and departments, but girls also had a separate curriculum.⁶⁶ A Needlework Sub Committee report of 1873 found that girls were spending between five and seven hours a week on sewing, during which time the boys were engaged in extra arithmetic. In 1870 the theory of Domestic Economy had been added to the curriculum code for girls and became compulsory in 1878 and in 1882 cookery in schools became eligible for a government grant. Florence Fenwick Miller and Taylor put forward a number of motions to the Board to reduce the needlework requirement and they were finally successful in achieving a reduction in 1884.⁶⁷ They failed, however, to stop the increasing encroachment of domestic subjects for girls within the school curriculum.

As a socialist, Taylor saw the curriculum as a means of social advancement for working-class boys and girls. While Hollis assessed Taylor as parent- rather than child-centred, it is more correct to say she was politically motivated rather than child-centred.⁶⁸ By the 1880s a growing movement was calling for a more holistic approach to children's education – a child-centred education. Supporters of the educational theories of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) argued that children needed to be listened to and would learn best from play in kindergartens staffed by teachers trained in Froebel methods.⁶⁹ Froebel's educational theory insisted that children should be respected as people and that neither discipline nor punishment were needed if the child's intellect was engaged in learning through play. The LSB adapted Froebel educational theory in the 'Babies' class' from 1877 although financial constraints restricted a full adoption.⁷⁰ *The School Master*, commenting in a leader on the 1885 LSB election, lamented that very few candidates were educationalists, noting that 'for some it was a stepping stone for Parliament, and that many others 'were advocates of women's rights

⁶¹ Florence Fenwick Miller, *An Uncommon Girlhood*, unpublished manuscript, Wellcome Library, 950.

⁶² Gautrey, 31.

⁶³ *School Board Chronicle*, 6 October 1883.

⁶⁴ F. W. Soutter, *Recollections of a Labour Pioneer* (London, 1925), 84.

⁶⁵ For a comprehensive account of the gendering of the Victorian school curriculum see C. Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (London 1981).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* Also A.M. Turnbull, 'Learning her Womanly Work: The Elementary School Curriculum 1870–1914' in F. Hunt (ed.), *Lessons for Life, The schooling of girls and women 1850-1950* (Oxford, 1987).

⁶⁷ *School Board Chronicle*, 26 January 1884.

⁶⁸ Hollis, 97.

⁶⁹ J. Liebschner, *Foundations of Progressive Education: The History of the National Froebel Society*, (Cambridge, 1991).

⁷⁰ J. Read, 'Free Play with Froebel: Use and Abuse of Progressive Pedagogy at London's Infants' Schools 1870–1904' in *Paedagogica Historica International Journal of the History of Education*, vol. XLII, June 2006, 299–324, 309.



and other popular fads of the day⁷¹ Taylor fell into both these 'fad' categories through her feminism and socialism. Her curriculum campaigning for girls to receive the same education as boys came from her feminism and a desire to not have their future curtailed through a narrow domestic subject based curriculum.

CAMPAIGN AGAINST CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

In her campaign against corporal punishment in LSB elementary schools Taylor was continuing the work of her mother and step-father, who campaigned against physical and emotional abuse. Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill had written a series of articles for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1850 exposing the physical and emotional abuse of women within marriage, perpetrated by husbands and sanctioned by the law and on physical abuse of children by their parents.⁷² They had also anonymously published a pamphlet critiquing Henry Fitzroy's Bill of 1853, *The Bill for the Better Prevention and Punishment of Assaults on Women and Children*, in which they highlighted the importance of education in reducing physical brutality.⁷³

Organizations had been established to oppose the use of the birch in schools. Shortly after winning her first election Taylor was in correspondence with the educationalist W.F. Collier, the author of a pamphlet opposing corporal punishment in schools.⁷⁴ In 1879 J.W. Bradley wrote to her, requesting that he be allowed to add her name to the list of members of the Council of the Association for the Abolition of Corporal Punishment.⁷⁵ Martin asserts that much of the opposition to Taylor, during the 1879 School Board election, came from teachers who most likely paid for the leaflets published opposing her re-election.⁷⁶ It should be noted, however, that Taylor also received letters from teachers expressing their gratitude to her for supporting the schools out of her own purse. After leaving the Board she continued to provide such support, negating the idea that she was routinely disliked by teachers.⁷⁷ Saxon Street Board School wrote to her in 1889, thanking her for allowing the school's pupils to use her private library⁷⁸ and an infant school in Bermondsey wrote expressing thanks 'for your kind help which has never been solicited in vain for the benefit of the children.'⁷⁹ Again much of the opposition Taylor faced was political. The official liberals opposed her membership of the Democratic Federation They opposed her support for the Irish Land League during the Land War of 1879-1882 and her stance against the Coercion Acts of Gladstone which saw imprisonment without trial in Ireland. Her campaigns for land nationalisation also made her political enemies. Taylor wrote to her fellow land campaigner Henry George after the 1882 School Board election, relating how bitter the contest had been in Southwark. Pamphlets and bills (included ones printed by leading landowners the Duke of Westminster and Lord Abedare) had been distributed, attacking her politics although not her personality, in an attempt to turn the voters against her. 'The Liberal Association of the Borough distinctly declared that my conduct in regard to Ireland and Gladstone made it impossible for "liberals" to allow me to be re-elected.'⁸⁰

Taylor was not alone in opposing corporal punishment, and indeed the prevailing myth, that corporal punishment in schools was viewed as a necessity during the nineteenth century, has been recently challenged.⁸¹ There was growing unease about its use in schools following the trial of Thomas Hopley in 1860 for the manslaughter of a pupil at his school. Hopley's trial has been described as a watershed in attitudes to corporal punishment in schools.⁸² In 1871 School Board member Professor Huxley had succeeded in setting firm boundaries for the administering of corporal punishment

⁷¹ *The School Master*, 19 September 1885.

⁷² H. Taylor & J.S. Mill, 'The Suicide of Sarah Brown,' 'The Case of Anne Bird,' and 'Wife Murder' in A. Robson and J.E. Robson (eds), *Sexual Equality, Writings by John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill and Helen Taylor* (Toronto 1994), 53-56, 66-70 and 87-91.

⁷³ H. Taylor and J.S. Mill, 'Remarks on Mr Fitzroy's Bill for the More Effectual Prevention of Assaults on Women and Children' in Robson & Robson (eds.), 91-8.

⁷⁴ W.F. Collier to Helen Taylor, 16 September 1877, vol.15, no.39, M.T.C.

⁷⁵ J.W. Bradley to Helen Taylor, 12 August 1879, vol. 15, no. 21, M.T.C.

⁷⁶ Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling*, 129

⁷⁷ Hollis, 97.

⁷⁸ R.W. Postage to Helen Taylor, 19 January 1889, vol.16, no.124, M.T.C.

⁷⁹ S.A. Long to Helen Taylor, 28 February, 1889, vol.15, no.108, M.T.C.

⁸⁰ Helen Taylor to Henry George, 4 January 1883, Henry George Collection (H.G.C.), New York Public Library.

⁸¹ J. Middleton, 'Spare the Rod,' *History Today*, 62, 11 (2012), 5-6.

⁸² J. Middleton, 'Thomas Hopley and mid-Victorian attitudes to corporal punishment', in *History of Education*, 34, 6 (2005), 599-615.



in the capital's schools.⁸³ The LSB had accepted the decision of the First Report of the Scheme of Education Committee's recommendations, headed by Huxley, that it should only be administered by the Head Teacher and recorded in a punishment book.⁸⁴ Taylor, therefore, took her seat on a Board which had already set legal boundaries as regards physical punishment in its elementary schools. In 1879 Taylor put forward a motion calling for the abolition of corporal punishment in all London state schools.⁸⁵ In 1882 she tabled a second motion for abolition, seconded by Benjamin Lucraft, in which she cited France, Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden as countries ahead of Britain in this matter. She claimed to know of three cases in which a child had lost a finger after being caned.

Industrial schools, relying on private philanthropy and voluntary organizations, had been set up following the Youthful Offenders Act (1854) and received public money for the upkeep of offenders admitted to them by the Magistrates Courts. Further Acts of Parliament in 1857 and 1866 saw the Home Office taking over the supervision of the schools.⁸⁶ In 1870 the LSB assumed this responsibility for the industrial schools of the metropolis and the children whom they sent to them. Taylor, Surr and Fenwick Miller campaigned endlessly to expose the mistreatment and abuse of boys at two industrial schools in London, Upton House and St Paul's.⁸⁷ Surr first drew the Board's attention to the regime at Upton House after she visited and found the institution to have no fires lit, just plain wooden boards and boys wearing no shoes.⁸⁸ Taylor believed that many decent children were in the industrial schools. They were often the children of working widows whose unsupervised children were picked up roaming the streets and sent to reform schools.⁸⁹ She argued that ordinary elementary schools should accommodate these children.⁹⁰ Surr uncovered such a catalogue of abuse at St Paul's Industrial School that Taylor, Fenwick Miller and herself became determined to do something about it. Surr and Taylor became school visitors for St Paul's in 1879 and Taylor also visited twice in 1882 because children from her constituency, Southwark, had been sent there. Surr resolved to bring abuse at the school to public attention after two boys set fire to it. These boys claimed they had lit the fire in protest at the harsh conditions at the school,⁹¹ and when the case came to court Taylor paid for the successful defence of the boys.⁹² Surr gave evidence, collected from boy witnesses, on the appalling conditions at St Paul's. The school was a Church of England school to which the LSB sent remanded boys, in return for which the school received public money. Thomas Scrutton, the Chairman of the London School Board's Industrial Schools Committee, was also manager of this school. That today would be regarded as an unacceptable conflict of interest and many felt uncomfortable about it at the time.⁹³

Surr alleged that the children were malnourished and that they were punished by having both hands and feet handcuffed and locked in cold rooms for days at a time. They were forced to carry beds on their heads and endured cold weather without shoes, jackets or bedding.⁹⁴ In March 1881 Taylor seconded Surr's unsuccessful motion to remove all the Board's children from St Paul's Industrial School. and the Chairman's 1881 report to the Board stated that, as a result of the two women's campaigning, a committee was to be set up to enquire into the allegations. This committee heard a catalogue of mistreatment and excessive punishment from boy witnesses.⁹⁵

Taylor informed the Board of her intention to put a motion that the Board's Solicitor should begin proceedings against Scrutton for fraud in relation to his having charged the Board for boys who were not at the school on the days the

⁸³ *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 25 June 1871.

⁸⁴ *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 27 June 1871.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 February 1879.

⁸⁶ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/DisplayCatalogueDetails.asp?CATID=7904&CATLN=3&FullDetails=True>.

⁸⁷ For an in-depth account see J. Martin, "'Hard-headed and Large-hearted:' Women and the Industrial Schools, 1870-1885' *History of Education*, 20, 3 (1991), 187-203.

⁸⁸ *School Board Chronicle*, 5 April 1879.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 26 February 1881.

⁹⁰ *The School Master*, 30 June 1883, M.T.C., box 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1 July 1882.

⁹² Surr wrote to the *London Standard*, on 16 November 1881, revealing that Taylor, 'warmly interested in all helpless children,' had paid the legal expenses.

⁹³ *School Board Chronicle*, 22 October 1881.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 November 1881.

⁹⁵ *The Minutes of evidence taken before a Special Committee re Upton House Industrial School*, 21 May 1879.



charges pertained to.⁹⁶ Taylor had visited the Finance Department of the LSB to check the vouchers for payment of pupils against attendance.⁹⁷ Surr called on Scrutton to resign after the Home Office withdrew its certificate from St Paul's, following the School Board enquiry, which resulted in its closure rather than the reform which had been initially intended by the Board. The Home Office concluded that there was not enough evidence for a criminal prosecution. Fenwick Miller wrote to the Home Secretary that the Committee had not heard all the evidence available but to no avail, though a Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into conditions in industrial schools.⁹⁸ Scrutton resigned from the Board in May 1882 and his resignation was celebrated by many members who held him totally responsible, as the School Manager, for the mistreatment of the boys.⁹⁹ When the Board's Chairman moved to send Scrutton a letter of regret at accepting his resignation Mr Bonnewell called it hypocrisy 'when the majority of the board were glad he had gone.'¹⁰⁰

Scrutton sued Taylor who had publicly accused him of manslaughter due to the death of a boy following contaminated food being served at St Paul's under his management. In June 1882 Taylor's libel case came to court. Scrutton was claiming damages of £10,000 while Taylor refused to back down and declared privilege. She maintained that the letter which contained her allegation had been official School Board business. She had sent it to a Mr Upton, the promoter of a public meeting in November 1881, held to discuss the industrial school scandal in Tower Hamlets. Taylor had been unable to attend, being in Ireland working for the Ladies' Land League in their campaign against the Irish landlords. She had written the letter from Dublin, an extract from which had been read out to those assembled and the whole text published later in the press. In it she had declared that Scrutton was guilty of the manslaughter of boys in his care at the school, for he had 'supplied some of the miserable adulterated food himself to the school and there can be little doubt in my mind that the children were kept there only to make money by their work.' Scrutton had asked Taylor to publicly withdraw these allegations but she had refused and had repeated them at a Board meeting on 19 January 1882 and on 7 March at a divisional meeting in Bermondsey, where she had accused him of the manslaughter of thirteen boys. During the trial, she continued to maintain that Scrutton had also charged for boys not at the school.¹⁰¹ She declared in court that, 'every kind of wanton cruelty was carried on year after year in that school by the authority of a man who calls himself a Christian and a philanthropist.'¹⁰²

The trial finished in anti-climax as Taylor's barrister advised her she could not win the case and should settle, which she did, paying Scrutton £1,000, though she would not retract her allegations.¹⁰³ On leaving the court, to applause from her supporters in the public gallery, she declared that, 'she had done her public duty to her own electors, to London and to the children of England. She had stated outside the Board that Scrutton was morally guilty of the crime of manslaughter.'¹⁰⁴ Debates about the morality and effectiveness of corporal in British state schools would go on for nearly a century before being finally banned by an Act of Parliament in 1987.

CAMPAIGNS FOR SECULAR AND FREE EDUCATION

Secular and free education would also appear on Taylor's socialist parliamentary manifesto of 1885 and she worked relentlessly for 9 years on the LSB to achieve both. During the 1880s the LSB split into progressive (Liberal) and moderate members, the latter strongly opposed to rate increases to pay for London's education and fierce defenders of the church schools.¹⁰⁵ Secular state education, free from any denominational bias, had been a long-time Radical goal and was a Social Democratic Federation election pledge for its candidates. Taylor fought constantly against any watering down of

⁹⁶ *School Board Minutes*, 27 October 1881.

⁹⁷ Helen Taylor to Elizabeth Surr, 24 October 1881, M.T.C, vol. 23, no.681, M.T.C.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 November 1881 and 21 January 1882.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 May 1882.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 May 1882.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1 July 1882.

¹⁰² *The Times*, 28 June 1882.

¹⁰³ *School Board Chronicle*, 1 July 1882.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 January 1882.

¹⁰⁵ Gautrey, 100



the compromise reached in the 1870 Education Act which had forbidden denominational teaching in London elementary schools whilst insisting on a daily reading of the Bible.¹⁰⁶

When the LSB issued a circular on Religious Education in 1878, which called on teachers to teach the children 'the truths upon which their future lives depended',¹⁰⁷ Taylor protested vehemently. She insisted the circular went against the religious compromise of 1871 and opened up the possibility of teachers imposing their own individual belief systems on the children. The following year, Taylor objected to a LSB report, *The Religious Examination of Pupil Teachers*, on the grounds that it threatened the religious liberty of the apprenticed teachers. She argued it would lead to head teachers putting pressure on pupil teachers to sit the Scripture examination because schools that did not put candidates forward would lose grants. She was heavily defeated in her attempt to stop the report being issued to head teachers; but she had made a moral stand against what she regarded as a serious violation of the principle of secular education.

In 1883 a candidate for a teaching post at Jessop Road School, Brixton wrote to the press, complaining that he had been asked inappropriate questions during his interview in an attempt to discover his religious views. He had allegedly been asked by his interviewer: 'Do you love to read the bible as you would a novel? Do you follow teaching for the love of God? Are you a churchman?'¹⁰⁸ Taylor and Edward Aveling, a fellow socialist member of the Democratic Federation, tabled a successful motion to have the matter examined by the Committee of Inquiry of the London School Board. The inquiry cleared the interviewer of misconduct but Taylor and Aveling attempted to get the Board to alter a letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the subject and have the word 'completely' removed from before the word 'exonerated' in relation to the accused interviewer. They also requested that the words 'of denominational bias' should be inserted after the words 'the charges,' thus indicating that the Board had only partially cleared the interviewer.¹⁰⁹ This is a further example of men and women working together on the board to promote socialism. Martin maintained that Taylor believed men and women should work separately on the board citing as evidence Taylor's wish to exclude men from suffrage committees in the 1860s.¹¹⁰ Referencing Taylor's campaigning outside the School Board reveals that she was not the separatist it has been claimed. Taylor's feminism had evolved by the 1880s when she opposed the setting up a separate women's committee in the Democratic Federation:

The time is gone by for Ladies' Committees separate for public work. That is one thing at least we learn on the School Board where men and women work together on public official business and I doubt whether you will find it more easy to induce women to work on a Committee of their own.¹¹¹

In her *Claim of Women to the Suffrage* of 1867, she declared that women only formed a separate class because they were excluded from society's concerns and pursuits. She believed that once the barriers were lifted on their participation in the workplace and social and political institutions women's interests would be incorporated into the class interests of men.¹¹² The experience of working with women members of the LSB converted some male members to the women's suffrage cause, notably Lord Sandon and William McCullagh Torrens, both in 1871. This has been noted, not as a result of these men being converted to feminism but rather their belief that the opening up of a public role on the board for women had not upset the social order. They felt confident that giving the local vote to women would not result in social change as *local* government was an extension of women's domestic sphere.¹¹³

There was continuity also in Taylor's support of free education. It was both a contemporary Social Democratic Federation manifesto pledge and a long-term radical goal. John Stuart Mill had moved towards supporting free elementary education towards the end of his life in 1870. He had earlier written to Henry Fawcett in 1869 undecided on the issue and giving it as his reason for not joining the newly established National Education League which was campaigning for

¹⁰⁶ The 1871 Conscience Clause had allowed parents to withdraw their children from even this reading of the Bible.

¹⁰⁷ *School Board Chronicle*, 8 June 1878.

¹⁰⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 January 1883.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 24 February 1883.

¹¹⁰ Martin, *Women and the Politics of Schooling*, 19.

¹¹¹ Draft letter from Helen Taylor to Henry Hyndman, undated, vol.18, no.33, M.T.C.

¹¹² See B. Griffin, *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain, Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge 2012), 216.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 242.



free secular elementary schooling for all children, unfettered by denominational control.¹¹⁴ The issue of whether schooling should be free continued to divide Liberals, many feeling that it would remove parental responsibility, but Taylor campaigned tirelessly for it throughout her nine years on the London School Board. The campaign gained ground and free elementary education was finally achieved in 1891. Taylor regularly supported her Southwark constituents in their applications for relief from fees due to their inability to pay.¹¹⁵ She always opposed motions to raise the fees at various schools, though usually hers was a minority voice.¹¹⁶

In 1882 Taylor put forward an unsuccessful motion that 'the Board petition parliament to be allowed to open all its elementary schools free.'¹¹⁷ During the debate Taylor appealed for free schools on the grounds of economy. She emphasised the work involved in collecting the fees and enforcing payment. Time was wasted sending home children to collect the money and she claimed that teachers were paying out of their own salaries in order to keep the children in school and thereby earn the government grant. Opposition to her proposal came from the supporters of the voluntary church schools. The Rev. Morse claimed that: 'Free education was a favourite theory with radical politicians and socialist philosophers but that in his mind was simply Communism.'¹¹⁸ This is evidence of board members opposing her politics not her personality.

Taylor came close to securing free education for London's children in 1885. Her motion was only defeated on the casting vote of the Chairman, thus consigning Taylor's campaign to historical obscurity.¹¹⁹ The London teacher, Thomas Gautrey, recalled this narrow defeat in his memoirs. He identified Taylor's 'impassioned speech' as a watershed in the fight for free elementary education. 'Free schools became from this time an election cry at both Board and Parliamentary Elections.'¹²⁰

CONCLUSION

This article, whilst acknowledging the debt owed to previous studies of the women of the London School Board, has illustrated that, rather than being an eccentric maverick, Taylor's socialism and feminist beliefs were at the core of her work as an elected member of the London School Board. It has argued that by putting Taylor in her historical context, rather than as a sociological case study of gender politics, her political motivation is revealed. She was both continuing the educational concerns of her mother, Harriet Taylor and her step-father John Stuart Mill, to which she added the new Marxist socialism of the 1880s. In placing the School Board in the context of her other political campaigning for land nationalisation, Home Rule for Ireland and her membership of the Democratic Federation she is rescued from being merely idiosyncratic. She was blunt and opinionated, traits that are often admired in male politicians. Nevertheless, Taylor had a high moral sense of what was right and wrong and she 'fought for the people,' the poor of London, so that their lives might be improved through educational opportunity.¹²¹

Taylor had successes on the Board, if success is seen as moving debates along for those who follow to win the battle. She almost succeeded in securing free education in London's board schools and paved the way for its achievement in 1891. She was ahead of her time, but by the late 1880s there were many more socialists, including Annie Besant, elected to the LSB who would have supported her motions. She helped to expose and end cruelty and corruption within the London school system and was a staunch defender of secular education. Taylor's feminism saw her campaigning for better opportunities for women teachers and girl pupils, and she believed that no limits should be set on the advancement of working-class boys and girls. Finally, in becoming the first woman to chair a committee of the London School Board, she broke down a barrier which other women could cross in future, and this was acknowledged in the press as a watershed moment.¹²²

¹¹⁴ J.S. Mill to Henry Fawcett, 24 October 1869, vol. 1, no.159 M.T.C.

¹¹⁵ *School Board Chronicle*, 17 May 1879.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29 November 1879. Taylor unsuccessfully opposed the raising of fees at Blackheath Road School.

¹¹⁷ *School Board Minutes*, 20 April 1882.

¹¹⁸ *School Board Chronicle*, 2 April 1881.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 July 1885.

¹²⁰ Gautrey, 86.

¹²¹ Soutter, *Recollections of a Labour Pioneer*, 85.

¹²² *School Board Chronicle*, 10 October 1885.



The historiography has depicted Taylor as merely an imposing personality who was difficult to engage with on a personal level. This, it has been claimed, made her less successful because she failed to make the necessary political alliances through an inability to compromise.¹²³ This one-dimensional view of Helen has been challenged in this article and Helen's achievements on the School Board evaluated and acknowledged for the first time. The emphasis in the historiography has not been on what she did, but on portraying her as an unlikable personality with whom it was impossible to have a warm relationship. For instance, M.S. Packe, a biographer of John Stuart Mill, felt able to say of Helen:

After Mill's death, she became the jealous guardian of all his thoughts and relics. She grew priggish and overpowering: eventually mean, suspicious truculent and sometimes half beside herself with passion. She became a great light in her various causes, women's suffrage and the London School Board. For the rest she clung on grimly at Avignon.¹²⁴

Taylor has been depicted in the historiography as a woman who attracted controversy by her refusal to compromise. Packe ignores her movement to socialism and her final long illness when she suffered years of dementia and confusion, reducing her illness to 'hanging on.' Yes, she could be uncompromising when compromise might have been the easy way. For example, she refused to withdraw libellous comments against a fellow School Board member and preferred to pay the considerable sum of £1,000 as an out-of-court settlement rather than withdraw one word of her allegations because she believed she was right in her allegations. This article has illustrated, however, that she did work collaboratively to put an end to child cruelty, and campaigned for greater opportunities for working-class children and girls in particular.¹²⁵

Helen had both positive aspects and negative defects in her character, as do all human beings, one weakness of hers being that she saw everything in black and white with no shades in between, which led to conflict with those who *may* have compromised on the School Board or in the women's suffrage groups, though that is not certain due to the socialist agenda behind her campaigns. She was indeed an exacting person to work with, and this must have tried the patience of colleagues many times, but she had a sense of morality based on social justice for ordinary people, men and women. Her friend in the Moral Reform Union, Emily Hill, wrote a candid, honest obituary of her for the *English Women's Review*.

A rare and striking personality. Mentally and morally she was on grand lines...Her love of truth and justice and hatred of oppression amounted to a passion. Compromise she could neither tolerate nor understand. She used to say of herself that she had no tact. What she seemed to fail to recognise was that life could not be lived on principles of pure logic. Everything Miss Taylor, did, said or wrote had an air of distinction and individuality. She was a formidable antagonist.¹²⁶

It is a fitting tribute, revealing the strengths and weaknesses of a remarkable woman. However, although she could drive people to distraction through her rigidity, she can be lauded for a devotion to principle which led her to be truly independent on the School Board rather than blindly party political. Her friend F.W. Soutter assessed her educational career and concluded that it "was marked by earnest attention to the exacting duties of the office, an exceeding plainness of speech and a resolute obliteration of the ordinary party-political bonds".¹²⁷

For her devotion to working ceaselessly for class and gender equality, Taylor deserves to be reassessed in the historiography of Victorian education, both for herself as a woman of political agency but also as a positive example of how the creation of the LSB allowed women to negotiate a political role for themselves. Taylor strove to advance both the feminist and socialist cause as a member of this influential local government organisation on which men and women worked politically together for the first time in an elected British Assembly.

¹²³ Patricia Hollis, *Ladies Elect* p 166. Hollis compared Helen unfavourably with Annie Besant.

¹²⁴ M.S. Packe, *The Life of John Stuart Mill*, p. 413.

¹²⁵ She worked closely with Elizabeth Surr on this and the two remained friends after their school board careers were over.

¹²⁶ Press cutting of Emily Hill's obituary of Helen Taylor taken from *Women and Progress*, 8 February 1907, MTC, box 7.

¹²⁷ Soutter, *Recollections of a Labour Pioneer*, p.86.



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