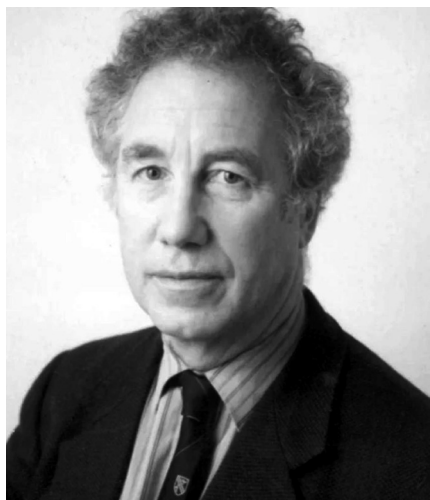


# Remembering Richard Pring

*Sally Tomlinson*

*Professor Sally Tomlinson remembers her friend and colleague Richard Pring, distinguished educationalist and stalwart advocate for comprehensive education. Her tribute was first published on the Socialist Educational Association website in October 2024.*

Much loved and admired, Professor Richard Pring, Director of the Education Department at the University of Oxford (1989-2003) and President of the Socialist Educational Association from 2008 until 2016, died peacefully at home on 6 October 2024. He was a passionate supporter of state-maintained education and regarded the competitive market-oriented system developed over the past 30 years with great sadness. The idea that certain groups or classes of people were 'less educable' or should be denied the full education available to a select minority was incomprehensible to him.



Professor Richard Pring (1938-2024)  
*(photo with thanks to the SEA website)*

The shift over the last two centuries towards a more democratic society through an extension of the franchise and, eventually, acceptance of the notion of a common 'comprehensive' education system was to Richard the only acceptable direction for human flourishing and a common humanity. In his many books and articles, and in his teaching characterised by gentleness and slightly sardonic humour, he engaged with philosophical and moral debates on education and what makes for human flourishing. He was fond of quoting the advice given in 1944 by the permanent secretary to younger civil servants (he was one of these himself in the 1960s) to 'Be prepared to die in the first ditch as soon as politicians get their hands on education'.

Alas, the politicians gradually did so, and '[w]hen the 2010 Act was passed with its radical changes to institutional arrangements for schools under the Academies programme ... [e]ducation had been handed over to the politicians', as Richard wrote in *Education, Social Reform and Philosophical Development*, published by Routledge in 2022. With many others concerned about education at all levels, he believed that schools should be brought back under local democratic control, and be part of a reformed system committed to ending inequalities, poverty and all forms of discrimination. He also consistently wrote about, and supported, developments in further and

vocational education and youth work, and deplored the increase in school exclusions and denigration of young people who would not or could not fit into the current test-oriented schooling with its narrowed curriculum.

Richard was born on 20 April 1938 and at 17 went off to Rome to the English College and Gregorian university with the intention of training for the priesthood. After seven years he abandoned this, although awarded the Bene Merati medal by Pope Pius XII, and returned to train as a teacher at the College of St Mark and St John, and attend the Institute of Education (now UCL) for his PhD.

In the 1960s he was an assistant principal in what was then the Department for Education and Science, learning the ways of government. After this he lectured at Goldsmiths London University and at the Institute of Education. There followed a professorial post at Exeter University (1978-1989) and then at Oxford University, where Richard was the first chair in education. He was a fellow of Green Templeton College, professor emeritus from 2003, and was given honorary degrees from UCL and Kent University. He managed his writing and campaigning for comprehensive education in between running 27 marathons, and had loving care over the years from his wife Faye and three daughters.

He was my friend and colleague for over 30 years and, with others, I will miss him greatly. Richard was working on a book in his last years, 'Religion in a secular society', and we both agreed that God in all forms had created a heavenly comprehensive school (sponsored by St Peter and old SEA members) which awaited a visit.

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