

UK dominated by the privately educated and Oxbridge graduates

Thomas Scripps
29 June 2019

“Power rests with a narrow section of the population—the 7% who attend private schools and the 1% who graduate from Oxford and Cambridge.” These are the findings of a report by the Sutton Trust and Social Mobility Commission.

Elitist Britain, based on a survey of 5,000 individuals, details the stranglehold on the commanding heights of British society maintained by a tiny ruling elite. According to the study, these “influential people” are overall five times more likely to be privately educated than the average population.

When those educated in selective state grammar schools—overwhelmingly dominated by the upper classes—are included, the disparity grows even wider. The elite are also eight times more likely to have attended a top Russell Group University and twenty-four times more likely to have gone to Oxbridge (Oxford or Cambridge) Universities.

Just 7 percent of the population as a whole attend private schools, while only 5 percent attend grammar schools. Only 19 percent of the current working population has attended any university, 6 percent have gone to a Russell Group University and less than one percent to either Oxford or Cambridge.

By contrast, in politics and the judiciary, the private and grammar school educated account for 46 percent of Members of Parliament, 79 percent of the House of Lords, 73 percent of civil service Permanent Secretaries, 73 percent of public body chairs, 43 percent of select committee chairs and a massive 85 percent of senior judges.

Twenty-four percent of MPs went to Oxbridge, as did 38 percent of Lords, 56 percent of Permanent Secretaries, 40 percent of public body chairs, 33 percent of select committee chairs and 71 percent of senior judges. Well over half of all these groups went to

Russell Group universities.

It is the same story in the army and the police, where 64 percent of senior members of the armed forces and 45 percent of police chiefs are from private or grammar schools. Sixteen percent of senior armed forces officers and 13 percent of police chiefs went to Oxbridge.

And if anyone wishes to know why this system of grotesque, all-encompassing class privilege is so rarely criticized by the media, 68 percent of newspaper columnists went to a private or grammar school, 63 percent of the most influential news media figures and 49 percent of BBC executives. Forty-four percent of newspaper columnists have Oxbridge backgrounds, as do 36 percent of the most influential media figures and 31 percent of BBC executives. Over 70 percent of all these groups attended at least a Russell Group University.

To complete the cultural picture of privilege, 25 percent of pop stars and 56 percent of the richest figures in TV, Film and Music went to a private or grammar school. In sport, 43 percent of men and 35 percent of women playing international cricket for England went to private school, as well as 37 percent of male British rugby union internationals and an extraordinary one in three Olympic medallists.

In business, 41 percent of the CEOs of FTSE 350 companies were educated in private or grammar schools and 15 percent went to Oxbridge.

These figures do not take account those educated in the top Comprehensive schools in the country, monopolised by families rich enough to afford the premium for houses in their catchment areas.

The report’s findings are hardly surprising. They confirm what workers and youth across Britain come to understand through their daily experiences: that positions of influence in society are a closed shop

dominated by a rarefied elite. But *Elitist Britain* does highlight the incredible personal closeness of this narrow layer. The elite are not simply of the same socio-economic class; many of them likely attended the same classes at school and all mix together at dinner parties, resorts and the like.

As the study's authors explain, "The most common pathway into the elite is attending independent school followed by Oxford or Cambridge, making up 17 percent of the whole group, and forming a strong 'pipeline' into the highest status jobs. Those who attended independent school and any Russell Group university comprise over one in four of the elite as a whole (27 percent)."

In some cases, these individuals are members of aristocratic families that have ruled Britain for generations.

The two contenders to replace Theresa May as Prime Minister, Boris Johnson and Jeremy Hunt, are not only both privately and Oxbridge educated, they are both related to the Queen. In Johnson's case, this is thanks to his descending from the German Prince Paul Von Wurttemberg, a descendant of King George II. Hunt, meanwhile, is the Queen's 5th cousin. The former Prime Minister, David Cameron, another Oxbridge graduate, is a fourth cousin to the Queen.

The *Daily Express* also reports that Hunt is "related to Sir Oswald Mosley, who became leader of the British Union of Fascists and whose father was as a third cousin to the 14th Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, father of Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, who served alongside King George VI as Queen."

Other studies have found that almost one in five MPs are landlords, including 28 percent of Tory MPs and 11 percent of Labour MPs. This compares to less than 3 percent of the overall population. The proportion of MPs with backgrounds in manual occupations fell from 37 percent in 1964 to 3 percent in 2015—almost all of this decline taking place within the overwhelmingly privileged middle class leadership of the Labour Party. One quarter of MPs had an occupational background in politics, 22 percent in corporate business, 15 percent in finance, 14 percent in law and 10 percent in media.

These facts tear to pieces the farce of "representative democracy" in Britain. They confirm Karl Marx's observation in the *Communist Manifesto*: "The executive of the modern state is nothing but a

committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

The government, the judiciary, the security services and the media are all manned by the same ruling elite to ensure their continued control of society.

The shock at the "scandalous" figures of *Elitist Britain* registered in the liberal media is feigned. The hopeful references to "equal opportunities" and "diversity" legislation are a cynical fraud. The fact that a privileged few dominate positions of influence is not a flaw in an otherwise fair system to be tinkered with and fixed. This is the natural development of a society based on capitalist relations of production and the resulting extreme levels of inequality. Far from an "engine of social mobility," the education system is a tried and tested mechanism for excluding the majority of the population from the running of society.

Appeals for gender balances or greater representation of ethnic groups in top positions, as championed by the purveyors of identity politics, obscure this fundamental class reality and serve as vehicles for the advancement of competing layers within the upper middle class. Schemes to promote a token contingent of working-class individuals into top universities and professions do nothing to challenge the dominance of the upper classes—who look down on their poorer fellows as, in the words of Oxford graduate Toby Young, "small, vaguely deformed" interlopers.

The sole progressive way forward is a socialist transformation of society, which brings an end to social inequality, makes high quality education available to all and establishes a genuine participatory democracy among working people.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact