

Independent Working-Class Education: which way forward?

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Like so many other things during the long New Labour years, trade union studies has become wrapped in an incomprehensible coating of jargon and bureaucratese. The structure and content of Stage One Reps' courses and others is now dictated almost entirely by something called 'accreditation', ie criteria for awarding the qualification, which itself sits meanly in the midst of the 'NVQ' (National Vocational Qualification) nightmare that New Labour has bequeathed to the nation. This system ensures almost no concern for real learning, though its book-length course guides are rife with 'Learning Outcomes'.

Basically, if a steward attends the majority of classes and can produce 'proof' of her learning in the form of contributions to flipcharts, notes, completed questionnaires and other miscellanea, she is duly awarded the appropriate 'Key Stage' recognition. Although discussions within Stage One cover crucial issues such as the reasons for union decline and membership 'apathy', these are dealt with in a superficial 'reasons for joining a union, reasons against', rather than involving any political and historical discussion of what has happened to the trade union movement and how that movement might be renewed.

This dismal state of affairs has been fuelled by three main developments:

The overwhelming trend towards individual case-work fuelled by anaemic 'rights'-based legislation from both the EU and New Labour. Workplace reps will testify that, although this has made for a huge increase in workload, it has done nothing to strengthen basic trade union organisation (1). The development of new forms of workplace representation such as 'equality reps' and, of course, 'learning reps' (see below). This, of course, might be seen as a progressive development, but what it actually does is to dilute the class role of the shop steward.

'Partnership' and general trade union weakness in the workplace. While partnership approaches have by now long lost credibility, they and the earlier 'Social Contract'-based legislation of the mid 1970s bestowing 'rights' on shop stewards have created a bureaucratic emphasis on 'training' which again means courses are preoccupied with correct procedures, legalese, and endless 'information and consultation' flannel which again adds nothing to the class strength of workplace representatives. (The shop stewards of the 1960s, with their 'frontier of control' mentality, certainly didn't get 'trained' in anything other than the workplace-based school of class warfare). At the same time, the comparative strength of employers means they can prevent time off for stewards who might be interested in some of the more analytical courses still offered by the TUC, such as Contemporary Trade Unionism.

In addition to all of these factors, and overwhelmingly influential, is the mushroom-like growth of 'Unionlearn'. The value of this programme to employers is evidenced by the fact that the ConDem government has made no moves at all to threaten it. As *Labour Research* reported just before the election, the Conservative Party's 'trade union envoy' (huh?) - former Labour MEP Richard Balfe - has confirmed that the Conservatives would retain this programme, which, significantly, is amply government-funded. Balfe's assurance 'echo[ed] the views of skills secretary David Willetts, who told the House of Commons, 'One thing we like about Unionlearn is that it is very cost-effective . . . The amount of encouragement and training that one receives for relatively modest sums is very attractive indeed' (2). Very attractive indeed to employers and neo-liberal politicians, certainly, as demonstrated by the widespread endorsement of Unionlearn by luminaries such as Peter Mandelson and the boss of First Bus. This is because, of course, the objectives and content of Unionlearn

courses are to provide a cheap alternative to adequate early-years schooling in providing workers with 'basic skills' like literacy and numeracy - a process which has nothing to do with trade union education.

Potential

The potential for shop stewards classes and other basic forms of working-class education to raise basic class questions is still evident. Almost any group of reps can produce a lively discussion on issues of organisation and resistance against both employer and trade union bureaucrat - though many stewards have become somewhat stolid and institutionalised under Unison-style 'partnership' approaches. Any serious debate, however, becomes difficult when required to spend a whole day discussing, for example, how you would conduct the defence for a member disciplined for talking too long on the phone.

It is in this current context that the need for truly *independent* forms of working-class education has become pressing. The above analysis has referred mainly to TUC education, but, as many tutors in these areas will attest, the same stifling tendencies are also evident in other forms of working-class education from Ruskin to the WEA. However, the difficulties of offering an alternative are considerably more formidable than those of providing a critique. The environment of explosive rank and file resistance within which the Plebs' League flourished is today, at least so far, notably absent. Attempts to set up class-wide rank and file links at workplace level have suffered from sectarian rivalries and 'party-building', and any initiative to build Independent Working-Class Education (IWCE) from the base would of course encounter parallel difficulties - though this does not make the attempt any less worthwhile.

In this unpromising situation, however, we do have some allies. The conclusion that the class content of trade union education has been, if not neutralised, then fundamentally threatened, has already been arrived at by a large number of trade union tutors interested in discussing independent working-class theory and labour history rather than in teaching the correct way to conduct a 'disciplinary'.

The disillusionment of many of these tutors - and no doubt their students - with the increasingly 'skills'- and procedures-based agenda in trade union education provides one set of reasons for attempting to provide some alternative in terms of a form of trade union education rooted in the con-

cerns of workers rather than employers. This would include labour and trade union history as a basic component. It would encourage an understanding of political and economic issues based in a critical - ie Marxist - analysis of the capitalist system. It would avoid what the Plebs' League students so vividly described as the 'sandpapering' of their class instincts. It would be rooted in and develop from working-class students' everyday working-class experience. Most of all, it would bring theory and practice together to shed light on the everyday concerns faced by workplace trade union activists, including crucial questions like internal trade union democracy and class independence from the employer.

Active

As emphasised above, this will not be an easy project. A small group of trade union tutors and activists was set up last year to develop IWCE, but its future is uncertain. Although we could seek support from some of the more active trade union education institutions, like Northern College and Ruskin, such institutional support contains dangers, as it threatens the political independence crucial to this project. How to square the circle? The experience of the US project Labor Notes suggests one answer - a 'building out' from the original grass-roots network of workplace-based activists established by its monthly newsletter and biennial conference to a programme of day or weekend schools which the same activists have found invaluable in building their own organisation and strength in the workplace. Probably as a result of these 'Troublemakers' Schools', the 2010 Labor Notes conference was the biggest yet. My own view is that it is only through building up a similar network of contacts who can be more or less relied on to take an interest in this project that we can move forward. These contacts would include both trade union tutors and workplace activists. Without such a network we would be wise to recognise the very real practical problems surrounding the setting up of a programme for IWCE - highly desirable though such a project would be. If we can build up a reasonably reliable base of this kind, however, we may be able to move forward to some form of IWCE-building event within the next year. The support of socialists committed to rank and file organisation and class-based education will be crucial to this exercise.

1. See S. Cohen (ed.), *The Truth About Work . . . & The Myth of 'Work-Life Balance'* (TU Publications, 2008)
2. 'The Tories and the Unions', *Labour Research* May 2010

News update: June - August 2010

Week beginning 28/6/10

[Previous week] The new head of the HE Academy (HEA) tells a *Times Higher Education (THE)* interviewer that he plans to have everybody who teaches in HE hold a teaching qualification. He says that: 'My observation when I first became qualified 30-odd years ago was that people who taught without an academic qualification that schooled them with the psychology, the philosophy, the sociology of learning and teaching were not as good teachers as those who had it'.

The Army's department of education and training receives £27m a year from the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), although this sum now faces a 25 per cent cut over the next three years.

HEFCE informs universities of a surprise £20.8m cut in teaching funds for this academic year, resulting from £82m of immediate government spending cuts.

Over the last year the proportion of new students enrolling with the Open University (OU) who are

aged between 17 and 25 has increased by 36 per cent, such that these students now constitute 25 per cent of all new enrolments.

Following last week's government announcement that £50m is to be made available to colleges caught up in the LSC's Building Colleges for the Future fiasco, it emerges that this money has been diverted from the Train to Gain scheme, and that the SFA refuses to publish a list of the colleges deemed eligible. (£30m of the £50m has been earmarked for bids from amongst 150 or so colleges affected, which can apply for a 'renewal grant' of up to £225,000 each if they can show they can raise two thirds of the cost of their project themselves from other sources.) Colleges able to show they can provide twice the cost of their projects can bid for money from the other £20m.

The HE Careers Service Unit (HECSU) claims that government cuts to the public sector could lead to a situation where 20 per cent of graduates are unem-

ployed, the highest percentage so far having been 13.5 per cent in 1983. (The HECSU predicts that up to 240,000 graduate jobs could be lost.)

David Cameron and George Osborne include university finance directors in the list of those invited by letter to suggest how 'waste' could be cut.

The Association of Colleges (AOC) and the Association of [private] Learning Providers (ALP) publish the results of a joint survey conducted in late May, to which 136 organisations responded, suggesting that many think local authorities will discriminate in favour of schools when planning 14-19 provision.

The Employers Pensions Forum, a group of vice-chancellors and senior managers in universities, holds a press briefing (in London) on the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS). Organised by a PR company, the event is titled 'Does the USS have a future?' Speakers claim that unless the final salaries scheme for HE staff is scrapped, the

Government could withhold part of the £7.3bn overall HE funding distributed via the HE Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and equivalent bodies elsewhere.

In a speech to the London-based Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, justice minister Ken Clarke maintains that FE should be at the heart of the new system of 'intelligent sentencing' which he advocates.

Jack Dromey is one of nine new Labour and Tory MPs elected by their parties to serve on the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee.

UCU members at The Manchester College, which has derecognised the union, take strike action against attempts by management to impose a contract which puts those teaching adults on worse conditions than those teaching young people.

Birmingham Metropolitan College is sponsoring Harborne Academy, an 11-18 institution due to open in new buildings in 2013.

Michael Gove announces that universities will be invited to design 'linear' (ie non-modular) A-levels, to be introduced over the next three to five years in competition with existing AS/A2 models.

Labour Party member Kathleen Tattersall resigns as chairperson of the school exams regulator, Ofqual. Immediately prior to this, she announces an Ofqual study in which the difficulty of A-levels will be compared with that of equivalent qualifications in China, India, Canada, Singapore, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and one or more EU countries.

The decision by the Government to publish salary details for

everyone in the public sector who is paid more than David Cameron (ie £150,000) reveals that HEFCE CEO Sir Alan Langlands is the 12th highest paid public 'servant', on £230,000-£234,000 a year. Through the same route it emerges that, up to his resignation in May 2010, Student Loans Company CEO Ralph Seymour-Jackson was receiving between £165,000 and £169,000 a year.

UCAS announces a review of the methodologies used to generate the HE entry 'tariff'.

Week beginning 5/7/10

Points in a *THE* article on the situation with HE funding include: universities and science minister David Willetts has announced that the first running of the research excellence framework (REF) - the procedure for determining how a large part of public funding for research is allocated to universities, due to replace the existing research assessment exercise (RAE) in 2013 - is to be postponed for one year, while HEFCE tries to find an acceptable way of measuring the 'impact' (ie the direct usefulness) of research; however, Willetts has also said that a decision on impact could be taken this autumn after the Comprehensive Spending Review and Lord Browne's review of HE fees; the UCU has published figures suggesting that a 25 per cent cut to HE funding (ie as projected in Osborne's emergency June budget) would lead to the loss of 22,600 posts, including 10,200 academic ones; Labour leadership front runner David Milliband has declared his support for a graduate tax.

A review of FE fees, led by the former LSC chairperson Chris Banks, recommends that, outside

of specific areas such as the supposed universal entitlement to a level 2 qualification, public funding for FE courses should be made available to colleges and private training providers on a matched funding basis only (ie be made proportional to the amount raised by the provider in fees, paid either by students or employers).

It emerges that the campaign conducted by the Employers Pensions Forum against UCU's defence of final salary pensions in the HE sector has been paid for directly with public funding from HEFCE. £627,000 of HEFCE funding has been spent on this over the last two years, including one PR project that cost £334,000, within which a single actuary received £60,000, with £45,000 spent on legal advice, £16,000 on 'communications', £10,000 on room hire and catering, and £15,000 on building a website.

Responding to Michael Gove's announcement about A-levels last week, both Harrow School head Barnaby Lenon and Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference secretary Geoff Lucas say that they think existing modular A-levels are likely to continue.

Papers released from HEFCE's May board meeting reveal that it has backtracked on a move to alter the wording of its 'funding memorandum' (ie its funding agreement with each university) by which HEFCE would assume the power to replace a vice-chancellor. (This move followed the dispute between HEFCE and London Metropolitan University about student completion data which culminated in the resignation of vice-chancellor Brian Roper and all the institution's lay governors.) (85 per cent of universities responded to consul-

tation on the proposed change, and 78 per cent of those responding opposed it.)

Treasury officials have earmarked educational maintenance allowances (EMAs) for possible abolition in the October spending review.

Figures for 2008-09 released by the HE Statistics Agency (HESA) reveal that 10 per cent of graduates from UK universities were assumed to be unemployed six months after graduation, up from 8 per cent the year before. (59 per cent were in employment, 18 per cent were involved in further study, and 8 per cent were combining the two.)

Sir Andrew Cubie, 'independent' chairperson of the Universities Superannuation Scheme's decisionmaking panel, uses his casting vote to support the scheme proposed by the Employers Pension Forum, which would replace the existing final salary scheme, as applicable to about 130,000 senior administrators and lecturers in pre-1992 universities, with a career average scheme, and raise their age of possible retirement from 60 to 65, thereby ruling out consultation on a UCU proposal centred on higher contributions. (Lecturers in post-1992 institutions remain eligible to participate in the Teachers Pension Agency final salary scheme.)

A survey by the Association of Graduate Recruiters of over 200 large firms reveals that: the average number of applications per graduate vacancy has risen to a record 68.8; last year, 60 per cent of the employers surveyed automatically screened out all applicants with degrees below 2.1.

Week beginning 12/7/10

NUT head of education John Bangs is to retire in September at the age of 61. A successor has not yet been announced.

Following publication last week of the independent review, led by Sir Alan Russell, of the 'climategate' affair at the University of East Anglia (UEA), management announces an intention to restructure support services there with the result that 150 out of 300 staff in the academic division of this are likely to lose their jobs.

Commenting on the decision by management at the National Extension College (NEC) to face down opposition by trustees and merge with the Learning and Skills Network (LSN), apparently in the hopes of turning the NEC into a vocational feeder for the OU, former NEC executive director says: 'I think that had the NEC not owned a site in Cambridge, then the LSN would not have been so interested'. (The NEC building in Cambridge is said to be worth at least £6.5m. LSN CEO John Stone was formerly principal of Long Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge.)

HE minister David Willetts is to press ahead with the previous government's scheme for financing extra HE places through efficiency savings (the so-called University Modernisation Fund - UMF), a measure described by him before the election as 'fiscal magic'. This involves putting in abeyance his own scheme for financing these places by offering discounts to people who repay their student loans earlier than they otherwise would, thereby releasing cash.

A Review of Governance and Strategic Leadership in English

Further Education, written by consultant Allan Schofield for the Association of Colleges (AOC) and Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) reportedly reserves judgement on whether moves should be made to allow governors to be paid.

Commenting on *The Higher Education Knowledge Exchange System in the United States*, a report compiled for HEFCE by Alan Hughes, director of Cambridge University's Centre for Business research, HEFCE research, innovation and skills director David Sweeney claims that: 'We [ie UK HE] are just as good at research commercialisation as US higher education, and indeed our academics may have gone further . . . in embracing the importance of engagement with the economy and society in their core practices'.

The consultant KPMG now says that the estimate it made in May, based on a sample of 100 institutions, that 34 per cent of FE colleges are considering merger was probably too low.

UCU releases figures suggesting that 33,800 jobs in FE are at risk from the Government's plan for a 25 per cent cut to public services, of which 18,800 would be lecturers. (The actual number of lecturers being sacked is higher than this, because of the numbers working part time.)

The General Social Care Council (GSSC) releases previously undisclosed reports on 77 institutions providing social work training which were inspected in 2008-09. 14 met GSSC requirements in full, 61 were asked to make improvements, and two (Thames Valley University and Havering College of FHE) were judged to be at risk of failing. A report on Brunel University,

inspected in the same period, has not yet been released.

FE minister John Hayes tells the ALP annual conference that he needs to 'continue to consult with the sector on the best way forward' as regards the replacement of Key Skills by Functional Skills, and he has therefore decided to extend till March 2011 the use of Key Skills in apprenticeship frameworks. (This follows ALP lobbying against Functional Skills as being too 'classroom-based'.)

At the unionlearn conference, held in London, FE minister John Hayes presents Quality Awards (thereby becoming the first Tory minister to address a TUC conference since the mid 1990s, while business secretary Vince Cable tells unionlearn providers that: 'I want you to build on what you have already achieved'.

In a speech on HE given at London South Bank University, business secretary Vince Cable says that 'no one should be under any illusion that there will be anything other than deep cuts', and advocates more two-year degree-level programmes. Commenting on this, former Oxford University Learning Institute Director Graham Gibbs says that: 'The average English full-time student puts in so few hours a week that they would need to study for nine years to reach the Bologna [ie EU] definition of a bachelor's programme. Cutting the English degree to two years would reduce its reputation to rubble'. Cable also suggests that HE in general might be funded by a system of contributions from graduates linked to the premium (ie higher lifetime earnings) they supposedly receive as compared with non-graduates (ie rather than by fees), with higher earners paying more.

Week beginning 19/7/10

In a letter sent to Michael Gove and other ministers, including David Willetts, in response to Gove's plan to revive 'the art of deep thought' by using the Cambridge-backed Pre-U qualification to undermine modular A-levels, Cambridge University admissions director Geoff Parks says: 'We are worried . . . that if AS-level disappears, we will lose many of the gains in terms of fair admissions and widening participation that we have made in the last decade'.

Points in *THE* coverage of HE grant allocations for 2010-11 as confirmed by HEFCE include: the total 'fine' to be paid to HEFCE by universities which have recruited beyond their quota is £15.7m, corresponding to £3,700 for each of the 4,235 'excess' students enrolled; about 60 institutions are being 'fined'; the largest repayment is by De Montfort University (in Leicester) which must lose £3.4m for over-recruiting by 913; the overall teaching budget disbursed by HEFCE is £4.7bn; about 90 institutions will benefit from a share in the University Modernisation Fund, worth £21m or 10,000 extra students; the remaining 163 institutions (ie including FE colleges that do some HEFCE-funded work) will see a cut; the overall reduction arising from the Government's demand for 'efficiency savings' is £82m; further cuts are likely to follow the Comprehensive Spending Review in the autumn.

Michael Gove announces that: John Hayes, as well as being minister for FE, skills and lifelong learning within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), is also to become minister of state for 16-18 apprenticeships and careers advice in the Department for Education (DFE); and

from August the funding of education and training of 16-18 year olds in FE and 6th form colleges (ie but not school 6th forms) will be handled directly by the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA), rather than by local authorities under YPLA supervision as instigated by the Brown government via the April 2010 Apprentices, Skills, Children and Learning Act. (The position of the 1,000 or so LSC staff transferred to local authorities after April is unclear.)

HEFCE figures for the percentage of students who started PhDs in 2002-03 and completed them within seven years vary between 90 (Imperial College) and 35 (Bedfordshire University).

UCAS releases figures for the period to 30/6/10 which show an 11.6 per cent rise in applications (reaching just under 660,953, up from 592,312 at the same point in 2009). Combined with the cap on admissions this is thought likely to result in a rise to about 170,000 this year (from 130,000 last) in the numbers not securing places.

Features of the situation at London South Bank University's London Language and Literacy Unit (LLU+) include: the unit was established in 1975 and currently employs 41 people; LSBU made a net loss of £98,000 in 2008-09; LSBU management is cutting 100 jobs altogether this summer and reviewing all fixed-term contracts which are due to end before 31/12/10; management has also proposed the 'phased closure' of LLU+ and redundancy or redeployment for its staff; LSBU UCU maintains that compulsory redundancies will not be necessary.

In a ballot of the 3,500 members of the Association for College Management (ACM), 88 per cent

of the 910 people voting have supported merger with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), within which the former ACM will from November 2011 constitute a section called the Association of Managers in Education (AMIE).

The USS has decided that the ballot, which it is required by law to hold, on the axing of its final salary scheme will be conducted between September and December amongst the relevant staff by management in each university involved in the scheme, rather than by a national ballot of the 130,000 or so active members of the scheme, as advocated by the union side. If this vote results in support for employers' proposals, these will then be implemented from 1/4/11.

HESA figures showing the proportion, broken down by university, of those obtaining first degrees via full-time study in 2008-09 who were either in employment or further study six months later, range between 95.2 per cent at Cambridge and 74.5 per cent at London Met.

Week beginning 26/7/10

In a speech given at the College of Enfield, Haringey and NE London (CHENEL), John Hayes: maintains that the Government still aims to implement the Tories' pre-election scheme to revive the FE Funding Council (ie a single body funding all aspects of FE, involving the merger of the YPLA and SFA); launches consultation on FE funding, including proposals to scrap Labour's entitlement to a free Level 2 or Level 3 qualification for all, and do away with adult safeguarded learning; and launches a separate consultation on the future of 'skills' (ie apprenticeships).

Figures on UK university fees for 2010-11 gathered by former LSE academic Mike Reddin reveal that: the average fee for a UK student doing a one-year taught Master's degree has risen by 16 per cent over 2009-10, reaching £5,214; in 2010-11 the average to be charged per year to non-EU undergraduates will be £10,463 in classroom-based subjects, and £11,435 in lab-based subjects; these figures represent an increase of 6.1 per cent over the previous year; the average to be charged such students for a one-year taught Master's is £10,398 (classroom-based) and £12,487 (lab-based), representing 5.2 and 6.1 per cent rises respectively; the highest fees charged to overseas undergraduates in England are at Imperial College - at £26,250 in lab-based subjects; this compares with £22,500 charged at Harvard or £25,000 at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and also with £250 at the Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon and nothing at the Free University of Berlin. (UK inflation as measured by the consumer price index stood at 3.2 per cent in June 2010.)

Advisory Committee on Mathematics Education (ACME) chairperson Dame Julia Higgins writes to Michael Gove criticising his attempts to undermine modular A-levels, on the grounds that this would lead to a further decline in students choosing to do maths. Commenting on this, National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) vice-chairperson Simon Gibbons says that: 'The whole discourse that A-level is too easy, and that we need a return to rigour, is rubbish'.

Some spokespersons for HE management claim that the changes made by HEFCE to the wording of its financial memorandum, ostensibly to allay fears that

it was arrogating to itself the power in effect to dismiss vice chancellors, are only cosmetic. (The new wording applies from 1/8/10.)

Commenting on publication by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) of its annual report, UKCES research and policy director Mike Campbell claims that: 'The supply of highly skilled people in the UK is growing seven times faster than the demand for them - that's unsustainable'.

Former LSE director of development and alumni relations, Mary Blair (a US citizen) attacks Vince Cable's scheme for financing HE by a system of graduate contributions, on the grounds that it would undermine the drive (including by George Osborne and culture secretary Jeremy Hunt) to foster 'American-style philanthropy' (ie including alumni giving) here.

During a visit to Wandsworth Prison, for which the FE contractor is Kensington and Chelsea College and where Timpson Shoes is part-funding an academy, John Hayes announces that a Justice Green Paper, to be published in the autumn, will include a review of prison education.

Management at Reading University is consulting on a plan to axe up to 27 jobs, mainly in the Schools of Biological Sciences and Systems Engineering, in an attempt to 'save' £10.6m by 2012.

UCU announces that meetings will be held during September to consider strike action in HE over pay and pensions.

The Government has decided to keep for this year the 'September guarantee' of a place in educa-

tion or training for school leavers, but not to extend it to 18 year-olds.

The USS board of trustees rubber-stamps the decision of the USS joint negotiating committee to consult on scrapping the final salary scheme for staff in pre-1992 universities.

HE unions meet the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) for the fifth round of the 2010 pay talks. UCEA refuses to increase its 0.4 per cent offer, and all the unions except UCU agree to consult their members on this. UCEA also says this offer will be 'subject to review' (ie withdrawn) 'in late October should there be no settlement'. On top of this, UCEA refuses to make any concessions on job security.

Week beginning 2/8/10

Publication of the LSC's final annual report reveals that when CEO Mark Haysom resigned over the Building Colleges for the Future fiasco, he received not only a £120,000 payoff, but also a £36,000 bonus.

A Passing Storm, or Permanent Climate Change? Vice-Chancellors' Views on the Outlook for Universities, report of an online survey conducted in June and July 2010 by Paul Woodgates and Mike Boxall for PA Consulting, in which the views of 155 institution heads were sought and those of 55 received, quotes one as saying: 'Our major challenge is taking the whole academic body on to the next phase of the journey, where the skill set, skill mix and working requirements will be very different from those in the past. Some won't be able to make the journey'.

Interviewed by the journalist Warwick Mansell for a *TES* feature on 14-19 diplomas, Sir Mike Tomlinson, one of the architects of this qualification, says: 'One thing is for certain: it will not replace A-levels'.

Interviewed by the *THES* following his one-week trip to India, David Willetts reports that Indian ministers speak of expanding the HE sector there so that by 2020 there will be 1,000 extra universities and 40 million extra student places.

In a letter to the *TES*, Malcolm Cooper, described as 'Managing Director of MCA Cooper Associates, raises a series of questions directed at LSN CEO John Stone. These questions focus on the amount of public money which the LSN, nominally a charity, has received, including via the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS), since the former became, as Stone expressed it, 'separated from the Government' in 2006, and on its subsequent commercial interventions in the training and consultancy market.

Interviewed for the *THE*, OU vice-chancellor Martyn Bean calls on the Government to use the outcome of the Browne review of HE fees to reverse the previous government's cuts to funding for equivalent or lower qualifications (ELQs), said to have deprived 35,000 OU students of financial support.

In a submission aimed at influencing the Government's comprehensive spending review, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) claims that employers are receiving about £3.7bn in tax breaks intended to cover the costs of training, and says this needs to be subject to stricter scrutiny.

Following the PricewaterhouseCoopers report which found that less than half of the staff in universities in Wales were involved in teaching and/or research, and the reaction to this by Welsh Assembly education minister Leighton Andrews, it emerges that Department for Children, Education and Lifelong Learning director general has been given a two-year secondment to the civil service in London.

Evidence gathered jointly by Unison and the Institute for Careers Guidance (ICG) reveals that nationwide cuts to the Connexions service by local authorities, due to take effect in September 2010, are much greater than anticipated, with Norwich, for example, cutting 50 per cent of the £5.6m Connexions budget there, resulting in 65 job losses, and Bolton making cuts equivalent to 30 per cent.

Points in figures on the amount spent by each university in 2008-09 (the third year of top-up fees) on bursaries, scholarships and outreach, released by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), reveal that: a total of £304m was spent on bursaries and scholarships to students from low-income backgrounds; institutions were asked to report on such provision only for those with household incomes under £49,305; however, 79 per cent of the total went on those with household incomes under £25,000; across HE as a whole, 25.8 per cent of the extra £344m received from tuition fees was spent on access measures; in terms of individual institutions, the largest proportion (41 per cent) of such income was spent by Thames Valley University (TVU); altogether, 346,000 low-income students received some support.

UCU members employed by The Manchester College at 70 prisons and young offender institutions take strike action over attempts by management to impose a sharply deteriorated contract.

Responding to *The Impact of Spending Cuts on Science and Scientific Research*, a report by the previous parliament's Science and Technology select committee, the Government supports the further concentration of HE research funding on elite institutions.

Following TVU's pullout from its Reading site, formerly Reading College (of FE), the latter is relaunched, under LSN management, with the support of Oxford and Cherwell Valley College.

Ofqual reveals that awarding bodies are in some cases reducing to ordinary A grades the A* grades achieved by candidates in some A-levels, in order to create an appearance of consistency across all three awarding bodies.

Office for Fair Access (OFFA) director Sir Martin Harris says that the A* A-level grade does 'increase the risk that the brightest disadvantaged young people may be squeezed out of the applicant pool for the most selective universities'.

Week beginning 9/8/10

A Guardian 'poll' of 38 (mainly posh) universities suggests that, over a week before the clearing process starts, several of these are already declaring themselves full.

Following the Government's decision to open twelve 'university technical colleges' (UTCs - ie 14-19 technical schools as advocated by former Tory educa-

tion minister Kenneth, now Lord, Baker and the late Lord Dearing, to be set up as academies) during its first term of office, AOC spokesperson Joy Mercer comes out in favour of this idea so long as colleges are involved in planning. Opponents include Sally Hunt for UCU, on the grounds that funds will be diverted from proper colleges, and a spokesperson for Universities UK (UUK, = the vice-chancellors) on the grounds that the term 'university' is being mis-used.

Cabinet secretary Sir Gus O'Donnell has over the past few weeks told meetings of vice-chancellors that it would be prudent for them to plan for 35 per cent cuts over 2011-15 (ie rather than only the 25 per cent expected to follow the Comprehensive Spending Review this autumn). The *THE* claims this could result in the average research/teaching spending per HE student falling from £5,441 now to £3,357, down from £9,553 in 1989 (the earliest year for which HEFCE can provide such data).

The National Employer Skills Survey, carried out with 80,000 businesses on behalf of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES), reveals that between 2007 and 2009, the number of workers receiving some training in their jobs fell by 1.2 million (to 12.8 million).

Labour and Tory members of the Scottish parliament have joined forces to press the SNP administration to abandon its policy of resisting HE tuition fees. Scottish Labour HE spokesperson Claire Baker accuses the SNP of 'sticking its head in the sand' over this issue.

The Sixth Form Colleges' Forum has told the unions organising

teachers in that sector (ATL, NASUWT and NUT) that until the comprehensive spending review it cannot make a pay offer. (There are about 8,500 full time equivalent teaching positions in these colleges. For the past 20 years their pay rises have been automatically pegged to those for school teachers, who are to receive a 2.3 per cent rise in September, in contrast to the 0.2 per cent offered by the AOC to FE lecturers.)

Interviewed by the *TES*, Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) CEO David Collins claims that in the year since his appointment he has cut £18m off LSIS's costs, mainly by cutting staff numbers from 180 to 116 and placing with colleges and training providers contracts that would previously have been given to consultancy firms such as KPMG and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Collins says some individual consultants had been receiving £150,000 a year from LSIS for working less than half time. LSIS continues to use the Tribal Group as a contractor.

Week beginning 16/8/10

In a *TES* article, HMMC secretary Geoff Lucas reveals that, following accusations that it has been manipulating the marks required for an A* star grade at A-level in order to maintain the appearance of consistency, Ofqual reveals that in 21 out of the 214 A2 specifications, the proportion of candidates awarded an A* has fallen outside the agreed (2 per cent) tolerance range, thereby triggering a process of manipulation aimed at ensuring consistency across boards. (Exam boards had been instructed to manipulate marking in such a way as to ensure that the proportion of candidates achieving an A* did not fall more than 2 per

cent above or below projections worked out on the basis of past results. The announcement does not specify which subjects or awarding bodies have been involved in this.) Commenting on this, Lucas says: '... the awarding process in a largely modular examinations system is now so complex that one has some sympathy with calls for the reintroduction of linear exams and even a return to some form of norm-referencing, with single awarding bodies responsible for different subjects'.

Publication of the A-level results reveals that 69,302 A* grades were awarded, constituting 8.1 per cent of all A-levels achieved and surpassing by over 1 per cent the percentage and by 10,000 the numbers predicted.

Carl Lygo, CEO of BPP University College, which in July was given the right to award its own degrees, thereby becoming the first such for-profit institution to be licensed in the UK, and which belongs to the US-based Apollo Group, tells the *THE* that several public sector HE institutions have since then, apparently on HEFCE advice, approached him seeking partnerships, and says: 'It seems to me to be a great shame that some departments that are excellent are being forced to close - I would be interested if anyone wants to talk to me, whether it's history, English, philosophy or politics.' (BPPUC currently offers accounting and business degrees.)

Points in a *Guardian* article on the likely increase in people trying this year to do degrees in FE colleges include: New College Durham principal John Widdowson has drawn attention to the fact that UCAS applications from people over 40 are up 23 per cent; at Ealing, Hammersmith and West London

College, where extra staff have been taken on for a 'clearing hotline', principal Paula Whittle maintains that 'smaller classes and a more hands-on approach from tutors who don't have to juggle the competing demands of teaching and research' (*Guardian*) are a bonus for those doing degrees in FE. (In her previous job as principal of Barnsley College, Whittle initiated a 'zero tolerance' policy for staff, which culminated in the sacking of a UCU branch officer.)

The *THE* claims that the Government is looking into ways of making it easier for HE institutions to become public limited companies.

Following an invitation by the Cabinet Office to become one of the 'pathfinder projects' through which the Government hopes to encourage the creation of 'employee-led mutuals' (ie similar to the John Lewis Partnership), the 157 Group, which now has 28 FE colleges in membership, has issued its own invitation to awarding bodies to join a partnership with the Group, such that the latter would offer its own qualifications, the last date for responses being 9/9/10.

The UK A-level pass rate rises by 0.1 per cent, reaching 97.5 per cent. The same statistics reveal that the numbers taking maths rose by 6 per cent, reaching just under 89,000. The biggest percentage fall in entries was for critical thinking, down 16.5 per cent.

It emerges that, as predicted, Pearson, the publishing group which owns the Edexcel exam board, has set up a 'school improvement' business which will offer schools and colleges 'strategic planning and administration' based on data about students' exam performance

supplied via Edexcel. The manager of this new business, Anders Hultin, was previously CEO of the private school provider GEMS, in which former Ofsted chief inspector Sir Mike Tomlinson has been involved.

Pearson announces that applications to university by people taking BTEC programmes have risen this year by 21 per cent, reaching 85,000.

The AOC calls on the Government to increase the proportion of FE colleges offering HE work which are directly funded by HEFCE (as opposed to being franchised by universities).

BT reveals that it has received 24,000 applications for the 221 apprenticeship places which it has available.

Week beginning 23/8/10

According to the *TES*, the following FE colleges are now sponsors of at least one academy school each: Barnfield College (in Luton); Bradford College; Furness College (with Barrow in Furness Sixth Form College); Dearne Valley College; West Herts College; West Kent College; Hull College; City College Norwich; SE Essex College; City of Wolverhampton College; Tameside College; The Manchester College.

UCAS reveals that at the start of clearing this year there were 18,000 courses with vacancies, as against 32,000 last year. The number seeking such places this year is 187,488, up from 141,130 at the same stage in 2009.

Commenting on the above figures for UCU, FE policy officer Dan Taubman argues that between 150,000 and 200,000 people with level 3 qualifications

look set to miss out on a university place, and many of these will now look for apprenticeships or courses in FE, displacing some of those who would normally enter these on the basis of level 2 qualifications.

Over 100,000 year 10 and 11 school students now spend part of their week in FE colleges, and about 4,000 14-16 year olds study full time in colleges.

Oxford University director of undergraduate admissions Mike Nicholson tells the *TES* that: 'It doesn't really matter if you haven't got any friends or hobbies or if you don't do any charitable work. [Acceptance] is a purely academic judgement'.

Ofqual publishes details of cases where A-level grades have this year been manipulated to ensure that the proportion of candidates achieving A* approximates to predictions. Out of 214 relevant A-levels, 33 were manipulated, of which 23 involved a reduction in the numbers getting A*. 14 of these 23 were exams administered by English boards. Ten of these 14 were administered by OCR, the subjects and total number of candidates sitting the exam in each case being: Classical Greek (275); Religious Studies (9,146); ICT (3,136); Business Studies (4,531); Physical Education (9,997); Sociology (4,171); Chemistry A (14,931); Government and Politics (796); Law (5,782); Economics (6,539). Two were administered by AQA: History (12,662) and History of Art (908). Two were administered by Edexcel: Economics (5,495) and Art and Design (4,709).

Across the UK, 8.1 per cent of A-level entries were awarded an A*. 17.9 per cent of entries from private schools received this grade, as compared with 5.8 per

cent of entries from state schools and colleges.

46,770 candidates this year sat A-level General Studies, making it the sixth most popular subject, but also representing a 6.5 per cent drop over 2009, the fifth successive annual reduction and a 20 per cent fall since 2005. In the second year of the AS-level extended project qualification, there were 15,958 completions, a 200 per cent increase over 2009.

It emerges that, in the year to March 2010, 71 staff employed by the USS to invest its funds received a total of £2.9m in bonuses, representing an average of about £40,000 each. USS claims its assets appreciated by over £4bn in that period.

Following campaigns by the media and by Anastasia De Waal, director of the rightwing Civitas thinktank (in the latter case aimed at promoting her book *Unqualified Success: Investigating the State of Vocational Learning in the UK*), Ofqual will in the autumn start two investigations, one comparing A-level English Literature and Physics with equivalent subjects in the Cambridge Pre-U qualification, and another comparing GCSE, IGCSE, BTEC and OCR National science qualifications.

3,069 candidates have this summer been awarded full Higher 14-19 Diplomas.

Clarification:

In issue 58, under 'News update', (p8), we referred to 'leftwing education sociologist Michael Young' as a founder of the National Extension College. This refers to the late Lord Young of Dartington, and not to the editor of the book *Knowledge and Control*.

Where we stand:

Post-16 Educator seeks to defend and extend good practice in post compulsory education and training. Good practice includes teachers working with students to increase their power to look critically at the world around them and act effectively within it. This entails challenging racism, sexism, heterosexism, inequality based on disability and other discriminatory beliefs and practices.

For the mass of people, access to valid post compulsory education and training is more necessary now than ever. It should be theirs by right! All provision should be organised and taught by staff who are trained for and committed to it. Publicly funded provision of valid post compulsory education and training for all who require it should be a fundamental demand of the trade union movement.

Post-16 Educator seeks to persuade the labour movement as a whole of the importance of this demand. In mobilising to do so it bases itself first and foremost upon practitioners - those who are in direct, daily contact with students. It seeks the support of every practitioner, in any area of post-16 education and training, and in particular that of women, of part timers and of people outside London and the Southeast.

Post-16 Educator works to organise readers/contributors into a national network that is democratic, that is politically and financially independent of all other organisations, that develops their practice and their thinking, and that equips them to take action over issues rather than always having to react to changes imposed from above.

Education and the reserve army of labour

Patrick Ainley

Introduction

Andrew Gamble's 2009 book *The Spectre at the Feast* follows Marx in seeing 'One of the key functions of economic crisis' as 'to reconstitute the reserve army of labour' (p47). As Gamble argues, this previously occurred at the time of the last recession which ended 'the long boom' of more or less full employment, for men at least, from 1945-73. Monetarist economics then relied on maintaining millions in poverty as a drag on the wages and a threat to the conditions of those working longer hours in full-time employment.

The reconstitution of the reserve army of labour involved in the state's resolution of the latest capitalist crisis goes further than in the 1970s, and involves education to an extent it has not done before. There was, though, a precedent for what Martin Allen and I have called 'education without jobs' (Ainley and Allen 2010, p13) in the 'training without jobs' described by Finn in 1987. Then, with the return of permanent and structural unemployment, education and training were implicated, through the provision of worthless vocational certification, in reconstituting a 'rough', 'semi-' or 'unskilled' section of the formerly manually working industrial proletariat into an irregularly employed, peripheral so-called 'underclass'.

Education to all levels was also complicit in 'upgrading' occupations in the expanded services, sales, middle-management and administration of a post-industrial economy in which much manual work that was not automated and deskilled was exported, especially to China. Expanded higher education in particular provided supposedly higher level courses certifying the 'skills' required for many of the new and often graduatised jobs in the new 'knowledge economy'.

Implications for education

Increasingly flexible working across sectors to contract in a competitive race to the bottom, not only with national and international companies seeking to deliver services for less than in-house but also - where possible - to outsource contracts abroad, has been the pattern in much of the private sector in recent years, contributing to the 'credit crunch' (Turner 2008).

For previously secure welfare-state professionals, such outsourcing, along with the latest applications of new technology and the growth in services, produces the same effects that the automation and outsourcing of skilled manual work had upon apprenticed crafts in the 1970s. The introduction of 'new public management' has also transfigured many salaried 'professions' like teaching so that they are reduced towards the conditions of waged labour. The 'modernisation of the public sector', as Blair presented it, disorganises dissent, pitting individuals in competition against one another.

Insofar as institutionalised education and training have any remaining direct economic function, therefore, it is not to construct some 'new correspondence' with a reconstructed economy but to inculcate such competitive attitudes into its pupils/students and trainees. For, rather than 'employer demand for skills', it is the absence of work - particularly the disappearance of specific 'youth jobs' - that has been the reason for young people staying in full-time education for longer, and experiencing a more prolonged transition to adulthood - if they are able to make a transition at all.

In the absence of work, education has little economic rationality. It functions rather as the main means of social control over youth, by enhancing divisions amongst young people. Students are

divided from non-students, but also amongst each other in a competing hierarchy of post-16 institutions.

Only some of those from elite universities are likely to be guaranteed 'graduate jobs'. Others - possibly up to one in three graduates - are likely to be 'underemployed' in jobs previously done by non-graduates, that is, assuming they are able to find a job at all. As many of those in their late teens remain dependent upon their parents for much longer, with nearly £25,000 of student debt (according to the latest *Push Student* survey), they are faced with a housing market which, despite moving from boom to bust, remains difficult to enter.

'Personalisation'

Collective appreciation of this increasingly common situation has been undermined by on-going class reformation, mediated by the differentiating role of education to all levels referred to above. The 'standards agenda' in schools and 'widening participation' to HE have also contributed to 'individualising' social class. So it is not surprising that surveys show students, even though they are aware that different types of courses and institutions attract people with different social characteristics, consider class differences as being unimportant in the determination of destinies, and see their college or university as treating everybody 'the same'.

Though becoming increasingly high stakes and competitive, 'learning' has also been reinvented as a personalised affair. The implication of being asked to take responsibility for their own learning is that students are also expected to regard their own failure as the consequence of individual inadequacies - 'You have only yourself to blame' if you do not achieve, as their F&HE teachers tell them.

While we need to recognise the role of business and media corporations in the promotion of a new identity culture, claims that the disappearance of the 'old certainties' of class from the consciousness of young people will result in new entrepreneurial strategies to survive the transition from youth to adulthood can be rejected. Neither is it the case that intergenerational inequalities are now the main dividing lines within society, as Willetts alleged (2009).

Even though young people may not be 'class conscious' in the traditional sense, class differences run through the process of transition from youth to adulthood. In particular, differences in economic power continue to determine access to the 'good schools' that ensure class advantages are maintained. For example, the 7 per cent of the popula-

tion (12 per cent in London; 20 per cent in Bristol) still able to afford private schooling can continue to be assured that not only are 50 per cent of A grades at A-level achieved by this sector, but that one third of those being privately educated will achieve three grade As. A place at a Russell Group university, while not certain, is therefore much more likely.

As graduates on average earn more than non-graduates, and Russell Group graduates more still, it is quite understandable that young people continue to queue in large numbers for higher education despite speculation about just how much of a lifetime salary premium graduates may enjoy. However, while the relative advantages of being a graduate might hold up in a 'labour queue' for employment, the ratio between graduate earnings and graduate costs will fall as the balance between well-paid permanent employment and casualised 'Mcjobs' continues to tilt. The 'graduatisation' of a further tranche of jobs, mainly in retailing, is predictable.

Education's credibility crunch

These developments threaten to burst the whole educational bubble of recent years. Students are mortgaging their increasingly uncertain futures for fees, while many universities could be said to have speculated in sub-prime student markets. With qualification and grade inflation from GCSEs to degree classifications apparent to all save vice-chancellors and exam boards, concern persists about quality - including the basic literacy and numeracy of those deemed university 'graduates'.

Not only in primary schools, teaching to the test has made subject knowledge and understanding a thing of the past, as students prepare for a succession of competitive exams that start earlier and end later. Even where formal study allows genuine intellectual development, educational participation starts from the largely instrumental motive of gaining labour market credentials. This is recognised as 'overschooling' when school, college and university graduates fail to find employment comparable to the level of qualification they have acquired as the value of this level of qualification declines.

Consequently, a crisis of legitimacy is endemic for overschooled but undereducated pupils/students and their teachers/lecturers at all levels of learning from primary to postgraduate schools.

The heightened competition between the 'free schools' intended by Michael Gove's 'post-bureaucratic education' is competition only in cramming for more 'academic excellence' exemplified by the independence of the private schools, and is only for

the few who can demonstrate more or less expensively acquired cultural capital in tests of levels of literacy. For the rest, vocational qualifications become even 'more practical', increasing the very inequalities that the 'new' Tory Party now officially abhors.

In any case, what was ignored by all the calls during the general election campaign for vocational relevance and a return to apprenticeships (the Conservative manifesto promised 400,000 but the Coalition has announced only 50,000) was the fundamental fact that most employers no longer require apprentices. Any employers who do need them run in-house apprenticeship schemes, but precious few remain. 'The demands of employers', like recently retired Tesco boss Sir Terry Leahy, amount to 'paperwork kept to a minimum and instructions simple' (quoted in *The Daily Mail* 14/10/2009).

Raising the school leaving age to warehouse young people in schools and colleges is perhaps preferable to preparation for such employment as at least it can keep dreams alive. Certainly, cutting back on post-compulsory education relegates more people to the corrosive consequences of unemployment that are much more costly in the long term.

'Part-time Britain'

In 'part-time Britain', most students and trainees are amongst the 27 per cent of all workers now in part-time jobs, while 39 per cent of all further, higher and adult students and trainees are also on part-time courses.

Today's 'education without jobs' lasts much longer and is more far-reaching than Finn's 1987 'training without jobs'. The end of post-war full employment (for men at least) and the recreation of the reserve army of labour from the 1970s on was, Gamble suggests, a permanent outcome of the Thatcherite resolution of the economic crisis of the welfare state. The new and expanded reserve army of labour, under the reconfigured and reconstituted new market and post-welfare state will - unless it is opposed and resisted - be equally permanent.

The new normality is prefigured in new patterns of part-time and temporary contractual employment that are reaching up the generations. Rather than condemning a stigmatised section of the formerly manually working class to long-term structural unemployment, as happened from the 1970s on, in the latest economic crisis the reserve army of labour is reconstituted so that part-time work and study/training are intermitted throughout the life course of many more people. Institutionalised learning then

plays a larger part in everyone's life than previously, although including the 'learningfare' already familiar in FE, where receipt of benefits has long been conditional on attendance on some courses.

If these developments are viewed as a form of work sharing, it can be argued that at least work is being shared more evenly amongst larger numbers of people. However, none of them are working to capacity, while those who are full-time employed continue to work the longest hours in Europe, whilst others remain full-time unemployed despite the benefit cuts and workfare regimes visited upon them.

Conclusion

Whether this part-time work with breaks between temporary contracts will afford opportunities, possibly using ubiquitous social networking, to organise and change the situation remains to be seen. Certainly, a full employment green economy presents the only sustainable alternative to the resumption of growth under the dominance of finance capital to which the current government is dedicated.

As education and training becomes even more involved in social control through learningfare and warehousing for youth (perhaps extending the National Citizens' Service and other forms of 'volunteering' and 'work experience'), those teachers and others fighting to return education to its true purposes of critically transmitting culture from the past in order to develop it in a sustainable future, whilst simultaneously struggling to maintain their positions against government attempts to outsource education at all levels, can use the critical space remaining to them to enable their students to understand their situation so that together with them they can overcome it.

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Trevor Griffiths on General Studies

As part of an occasional series on the history of the struggle for valid education within FHE, we print here extracts from an interview conducted in 1982 by Ken Swallow, then editor of the journal Liberal Education, with the playwright Trevor Griffiths, who had earlier on worked as a General Studies lecturer at Stockport College.

K.S.: It was in the Sixties that you moved into Liberal Studies in Further Education?

T.G.: When I left the school (1), I was going to write an external MA for one year, about culture and society and my wife was working as a child-care officer in Manchester. After a term of that I couldn't stand it and started applying for jobs, and jobs were sprouting in Further Education. I felt that I had to get back into the fray in some way. I always relished teaching a hell of a lot. I loved the spark of it and I loved the drama of teaching. I don't mean that it was an ego trip. Very exciting things happen in face-to-face situations which people who have not been there don't really understand, or people who've only been there as a pupil.

First of all I got a job as a part-time Liberal Studies tutor and when a vacancy occurred, I was doing well enough for them to take me on. Now, hair was getting longer, CND badges were being worn - ties weren't - you know the period. When I joined the Stockport staff there were three of us and we were beginning to build a department, so there was a pioneer quality to it. It was very exciting because Liberal Studies was like everything - the history of the world - whatever you made it - whatever the students need. We had a good old time for a couple of years, but then the backlash inevitably set in. Were we really responsible enough to handle several thousand pounds of spending or whatever?

K.S.: Should you be there at all?

T.G.: That's the point, and roundabout the time that we decided we would not jump the queue for tea and leave the students standing, it became apparent that we were not wanted and I didn't get the job - thank God I didn't get the job - of head of that department. They brought somebody else in from

outside and I was then able to look for another job knowing I couldn't work under the guy they brought in, decent enough guy but light years away from anything I wanted to do as a Liberal Studies tutor. But during that three years, I learned exponentially . . . about problems of teaching, problems of learning and developed an enormous respect for most of the students that I encountered.

K..S.: Did you do one-hundred-percent General Studies (2) across a range of technical college work?

T.G.: I did pre-Craft, Craft, Gs (3), Ts (4), ONC, HNC, HNDs, Nursing Cadets, Gas Fitters, Bricklayers, B.Sc external degree students, Art students, Art pre-diploma students . . . a fantastic and very exciting range of work - quite impossible to organise your thoughts across the whole spectrum or so it seemed at the time - but endlessly stimulating and vital work.

It was tough as well. It wasn't easy. I think this is the case even now. Students were resistant to this 'wank-off' as they called it.

K.S.: There also exists in General Studies a tension between the view of it as giving students supportive skills and the deeper aspirations to politicise, socialise and sensitise to cultural traditions and experiences.

T.G.: Oh yes, it racked the whole enterprise in what I call the 'first wave' of General Studies. There were all kinds of ways in which it presented itself. For us, at Stockport, the problem was, did we devise, in consultation with the classes and other departmental heads and tutors or was it going to be devised for us? Heads of technical departments knew what their courses were and suggested what you might call supportive skills; increasing literacy, certain oral

skills to do with interviews and what have you. While none of us thought that was unimportant, few of us saw it as the only way, or all that Liberal Studies was about, and we were involved in devising courses about citizenship, about politics, about history, about cultural affairs, events, processes.

That's where, I think, we ran into conflict with the traditions of the technical college. By and large, technical colleges had not been hitherto, up to then, contentious places, places where ideas were speculatively discussed.

The first wave crashed onto its bows with a lot of noise, if not a lot of force. We were known, rather wryly, as the From Russia With Love Brigade by the Building Department, and I'm quite sure that the Science Department considered us as even more dangerous and evil, and obviously we provoked a lot of that. From Russia With Sex not From Russia With Love, because we did also feel that some open discussion of sexual matters for the 17-18-year-old kid was important. I remember getting almost sacked for teaching Lady Chatterley's Lover to a group of second year nursing cadets, one of whom, it turned out, was a Jehovah's Witness, and that was very tricky.

They were really great times - an arch in my life and a terrific coiled spring for further work and further thought, once I'd left. I'd been there some three years and added to the five years at the school, that was eight years in teaching. I was wacked - flat on my back! I'd drained out what juices I'd got. . .

K.S.: Is there anything that you'd like to say in summary, or in conclusion, to the general educationalists who read Liberal Education?

T.G.: It's worth saying that moving from education face-to-face to education officer with the BBC (5) and then from that to writing does not feel like major departures, new directions. It all seems part of a piece. Writing is part of the educational process, writing plays anyway, but it happens to be educative rather than educational. I don't feel different now writing plays than when I was preparing tutorials for craft students. It's all part of the same job and part of that job is demystifying the world in which we live, actually enabling perception to occur rather than promoting the various deceptions and mystifications that surround reality for all of us. The one great thing about Liberal Studies, more than anything else for me, was just how important the student was. Teaching that isn't student oriented - well you might just as well throw it straight in the basket because it's ultimately not going to trigger or stimulate anything important in the student's life or mental process.

Notes:

1. After National Service and before becoming an FE lecturer, Griffiths worked for five years from the age of 24 as a teacher in a private school.
2. 'General Studies' refers not to the A-level examined subject, but to the version of liberal studies, in most cases not externally assessed, that was done with industrial release students in FE from the late 1950s through to the 1980s.
3. 'Gs' probably refers to engineering students on a full-time course.
4. 'Ts' probably refers to students on technician (as opposed to craft-level) courses.
5. After three years as an FE lecturer, Griffiths became an Education Officer at the BBC.

CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

- ◆ campaigns against the decline in standards
- ◆ defends individuals against victimisation
- ◆ gives moral support and legal advice
- ◆ investigates malpractice and publishes findings
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Organising for critical pedagogy: FE then and HE now

Colin Waugh

In this article I will discuss the publication *Why Critical Pedagogy and Popular Education Matter Today*. This 55-page booklet was published in January 2010 by the Higher Education Academy Subject Network for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics (CSAP) and is obtainable via <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=2711140>. It has been put together by the CSAP Critical Pedagogy / Popular Education Group, which comprises five lecturers in universities in the West and East Midlands, and consists of short articles by members of that group plus articles by other people who did workshops at conferences organised by the group in 2007, 2008 and 2009. (A further conference took place at Nottingham University this year.)

The aims of the Critical Pedagogy and Popular Education Group are shown below on p23. It can be seen from this that, although the Group view critical pedagogy and popular education as mutually complementary, they distinguish between them, in that critical pedagogy is more focused on the attempt to apply ideas and approaches pioneered by Paulo Freire to mainstream higher education, while popular education is about the use of these and similar approaches in the context of community groups, social movements and the like.

The articles written by the five members of the group reflect the fact that they are accustomed to exchange and share ideas amongst themselves. They comprise: an introduction to the whole booklet (by Joyce Canaan); a collective piece by the whole group (Canaan plus Sarah Amsler, Stephen Cowden, Sara Motta and Gurnam Singh), which is in effect a sort of manifesto; 'Education as a critical practice' (Sarah Amsler); 'The moment of critical

pedagogy' (Stephen Cowden); and 'From 'anti-racist' to 'post-racist' education' problems and possibilities' (Gurnam Singh and Stephen Cowden). All these articles reflect the common standpoint which looks to Paulo Freire as a key theorist. The best thing *Post-16 Educator (PSE)* readers can do with regard to all of them is to get hold of the publication and read them carefully, discussing the issues raised with other likeminded practitioners. This is because all five authors, consistently with their Freirean orientation, seek rather to pose and reflect on problems and issues and encourage others to do likewise, than to assert predetermined positions.

This approach is well illustrated by the 'manifesto' chapter, which closes by raising such questions as: What do we mean by 'practice'?; What do we mean when we use the word 'community' . . . ? What are the possible relationships between 'academe' and 'activism' . . . ? Why do we find ourselves wanting to talk about building 'bridges' between academics and activists . . . ? How do we understand the meanings of 'subversion' and 'transformation' . . . ? What do we mean by radical education . . . ? (There is also a section noting that some group members have found the concept of 'ideology' helpful whereas others have not, and going on to pose the question as to how people who want to work together should handle disagreements of this kind.) In each of these areas the initial problem is used to generate further questions, giving readers the sense of joining a continuing and deepening discussion.

The quality of much of the group's argumentation is such that, were FE and HE practitioners in any

numbers to use it in the way suggested above, this at first glance unassuming booklet could spark a serious movement of collective self-organisation amongst them.

One of the other articles - 'In the age of stupid: a call for popular education and critical pedagogy both inside and outside the university', by Alice Cutler, a teacher close to the Trapeze Collective (Take Radical Action through Popular Education and Sustainable Everything!) - shares the Freirean perspective. The remaining articles, on the other hand, focus more on 'popular education' - in the sense that their authors tend to be more concerned with putting ideas into practice in specific situations than about thereby also reflecting on them in the manner seen by Freire as crucial.

The first of these articles is Jim Crowder's: 'Why critical pedagogy and popular education matter', which expresses approaches developed by a group at Edinburgh University who in 1997 set up the Popular Education Network. Crowder describes this organisation as having 'about 160 members in 57 institutions of higher education in 24 countries'. On its behalf he then defines 'popular education' as 'rooted in the real interests and struggles of ordinary people; overtly political and critical of the status quo; committed to progressive social and political change'. He adds that it has the following general characteristics: 'its curriculum comes out of the concrete experience and material interests of people in communities of resistance and struggle; its pedagogy is collective, focused primarily on group as distinct from individual learning and development; it attempts, wherever possible, to forge a direct link between education and social action'.

The other articles are: 'A location of possibility?': critical pedagogies in the university classroom' by Cath Lambert (basically a write-up of a workshop delivered at a conference in 2009); 'The French movement against neoliberalism in universities' by Emilie Souyri; 'Why popular education matters' by Maureen Russell, a WEA organiser in Birmingham; and 'Popular education in the university' by Eurig Scandrett (also based in Edinburgh).

The rest of this article will explore possible areas of common ground between the Critical Pedagogy Group and readers of *PSE*, drawing on experience within predecessor publications and organisations.

PSE began life in 1988 as a section (titled *General Educator*) within another publication, *Liberal Education*, which in turn was the journal of an organisation, the Association for Liberal Education. *General Educator* itself was also the journal of an organisation, namely the General Studies Section of the then union for FE and polytechnic lecturers.

In 1976 there was a merger between two unions, the Association of Teachers in Technical Institutions (ATTI, the union organising lecturers in FE institutions, many of which were then called technical colleges or colleges of technology), and the Association of Teachers in Colleges and Departments of Education (ATCDE, a union which organised lecturers in teacher training colleges, most of which have since become universities or parts of universities). The merged union was called the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education - NATFHE.

The ATCDE had an arrangement by which subject associations of the type which allowed school teachers and (school) teacher training college lecturers to keep up to date with and sometimes influence curricular changes, could also have a presence within the union. When ATCDE and ATTI merged, these 'subject sections' became a (somewhat tokenistic) part of NATFHE's constitutional structure. In 1980, four years after the merger, the present writer, along with a group of other FE lecturers, utilised this facility in NATFHE's constitution to form the first such section to be set up since the merger, and the only one then focused on a curricular area that existed in FE colleges and polytechnics, but not in schools. This area was General Studies.

Liberal education

General Studies in this sense had nothing to do with General Studies as an examinable subject in school sixth forms, but was, rather, the form taken by 'liberal education' within the day- or block-release further education provided for industrial apprentices and some other categories of young worker (for example, Nursery Nurses) as regularised in the 1964 Industrial Training Act.

Briefly, 'liberal education' was a concept and practice that seems to have been developed mainly by two offshoots of the Workers' Education Association (WEA) - that is, by the organisation set up in 1903 by Albert Mansbridge with the support of the Oxford University Extension Delegacy as a way of drawing working-class and union activists away from Marxist self education and into forms of adult education provision under ruling-class control where they could be 'sandpapered' and emerge as tractable bureaucrats, MPs, councillors and the like. These two WEA offshoots were, respectively the Workers Education Trade Union Committee (WETUC), set up around 1920 as a counter to the Marxist National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), and the Army Bureau of Current Affairs (ABCA), set up early in World War II at the instiga-

tion of the prominent WEA figure and Penguin Books director W.E. Williams, as a programme of adult education discussion groups for conscripts.

In the 1950s, and especially from the second half of that decade onwards, there was a growth in technical and technological education directed at engineering craftspersons and parallel workers in some other industries such as mining, steelmaking, shipbuilding and construction. Provided both via evening classes but increasingly also through release within work time, this aimed both to extend and deepen these workers' knowledge of production processes and to equip some of them for supervisory roles. (The line dividing further education, of which the dominant form in that period was technical colleges, and higher education, in the form of polytechnics, colleges of advanced technology and the like, was not so sharp then as it became later.) An element of liberal education, modelled at least partly on practices developed within trade union education by WETUC and partly on the approach devised by Williams for ABCA, was incorporated in this industrially-related provision.

In the meantime, and especially from the early 1960s, a tightening labour market pushed industrial employers into expanding the apprenticeship system so as to draw into it a section of young people who would previously have been restricted to unskilled jobs. (There may also have been an intention to erode by dilution the power over production exercised by existing groups of skilled craftspersons.) The 1964 Industrial Training Act regularised this drive to expand apprenticeship, and formalised arrangements for the expanded group of apprentices to be released part time into technical colleges.

In line with a practice that had already grown up in technical education, a liberal education element was extended into these courses, in the form of a timetable slot, usually about one hour per day of release. Under the influence of the then Department of Education and Science (DES), and with the support of the biggest examining body, City and Guilds, the work done in this slot was usually called 'General Studies'.

Within a few years, this seemingly innocuous arrangement became tangled up with class struggle. First, from the second half of the 1950s there began a sustained surge of cultural self-assertion amongst working-class young people, linked but not reducible both to an increase in their spending power which resulted from the tightened labour market, and to the state policy of increasing the access of one section of this group to higher education. Secondly, as the end of the post-war boom came into sight, at least in the UK, the

government began to introduce measures aimed at checking - in the first instance by the Wilson government's *In Place of Strife* proposals - the gains made by unions during the period when the labour market was tight. This in turn triggered an upsurge in rank and file organisation of which the highest point was the defeat of the Heath government by the action of mineworkers in 1974, and which continued through to the 1979 'winter of discontent'.

Militancy

At the level of the day- or block-release further education of apprentices, the combination of these developments manifested itself, starting in the late 1960s, in a situation where hundreds of thousands of industrial workers, who spent the rest of their time in unionised workplaces where there was often a high level of rank and file militancy and grassroots self-organisation, were brought into contact as students with lecturers whose backgrounds, cultural predilections and age, in contrast to those of the earlier liberal studies lecturers, were close to their own, who differed from them mainly in the fact that they had been to university rather than into industrial employment, who had in many cases been radicalised - superficially or otherwise - while in higher education, and who were in a position, because of the open brief given them by liberal education, to try to teach them virtually anything that both parties could in practice agree on.

Although this situation could be extremely difficult, no one who was a General Studies teacher then could have been unaware of the extent to which some students at least actively embraced this situation and the open and experimental modes of teaching and learning, especially discussion-centred teaching and learning, the raising of challenging social questions etc, that went with it. (There is no space here to explain in detail how the potential of General Studies was dissipated, partly under pressure from forces outside itself and partly through internal weaknesses.)

One similarity between the situation of General Studies in FE then and the situation in much of HE now, is that, just as FE then was explicitly shaped by the requirements of industrial production, and just as colleges then were geared to producing industrial workers who possessed a specific set of capacities, so a large and growing part of HE now is geared much more explicitly than hitherto to producing people who are able and willing to do the jobs that the employing class wants done. It is true that most of HE and the preparation for it, for

example A-levels in schools, was, in 1970 and long before, primarily about picking out and preparing layers of young people for positions in the workforce. But now, especially since the expansion of universities that began with Major and was accelerated under Blair, a much greater proportion of what goes on in HE is focused on this, with the full knowledge of all those involved, than was the case before. In short, HE has become to a large extent FE.

On top of this, HE is likely, under the impending regime of deep cuts, to undergo an internal differentiation in which a big section of it will be pushed still more strongly in a vocational - or, more correctly, perhaps, a para-professional - direction. Despite the cutbacks that now seem certain to reverse much of the expansion engineered by the Blairites, this trend towards para-professionalisation is going to continue. In fact we can expect it to accelerate because, despite the increasing evidence that having a degree does not guarantee a decent job or even a job at all, unemployment will make people more and more desperate to find routes into work. Government moves aimed at pushing universities into closer relations with employers, produce more part time courses for existing employees and so on, are likely to reinforce this effect.

Clearly there are big differences between this set of developments and those which occurred in FE in the period discussed earlier on. For example, the labour market then was tight (ie it was not just a matter of 'skill shortages' in a few employment areas) and important sections of workers were much more militant, better organised, and more in a position to exercise power within production than is the case now. So although HE is becoming more like FE, the FE which it is becoming like is the FE that has existed from the mid 1980s through to now - that is, a broad preparation for entry to semi-skilled occupations, rather than the relatively narrow preparation, partly under TU control, for progression within skilled ones that FE provided in the 1960s and 1970s.

Nevertheless, it seems likely that the trend within HE must quite soon produce a situation in which, just as General Studies teachers perceived themselves to be fighting instrumental, employment-derived restraints on what could be taught and learnt, talked about in class etc, so a section of HE lecturers now will perceive themselves as under an obligation to resist anti-educational pressures impinging on their work from the employment sectors for which students are being prepared. It is reasonable to think that those involved in the Critical Pedagogy movement are pioneers of this resistance.

Further, within HE there is already developing, and must inevitably continue to develop, a layer of teachers whose situation will become increasingly close to that of many students, just as the situation of General Studies lecturers was, during that earlier phase, closer than that of traditional liberal studies lecturers to that of the apprentices they taught. This is because more and more of the teaching in HE is being done by people on temporary contracts, and especially by PhD and post-doctoral students. Because of the casual nature of their employment, the life situation of at least some of these teachers is much more precarious and hence much closer to that of broad sections of undergraduate students than was that of HE lecturers, say, twenty years ago.

Now again, the situation of these casualised lecturers is in one sense the exact opposite of that of the General Studies teachers in FE around 1970. Members of this latter group were able to be openly radical because all of them were employed in institutions where there was some degree of democratic control - ie because colleges then came under local education authorities - and union strength, and because a large proportion of them were tenured staff. On top of this, the work that they did was an established part of what students had to do - that is, the college had to assure the students' examining body that General Studies had been done.

However, against this must be set the fact that certain forms of general education have become a necessity for the survival of universities in a way which did not apply to General Studies in relation to FE colleges in that earlier period. For virtually all universities which are not 'research-intensive', which means the majority, the drive towards expelling human labour from the teaching and learning process, both through technological innovation and through, for example the expansion of class sizes, when combined with funding geared to student completions and degrees awarded, must make learning support increasingly crucial to their ability to hold on to students, and hence to survive as institutions. In the end such support depends on personal contact. Therefore this set of imperatives must generate a layer of staff who, like the General Studies teachers in FE a generation ago, are pushed by the very nature of their work to side with the students, who in turn are for much of the time subjected to an increasingly alienated teaching and learning process.

However different learning support may be from the wide open brief of liberal education, the experience of General Studies suggests that the strength of any movement that might develop under these circumstances depends at least partly on whether

the teachers in question are or are not in a position to think through to a certain threshold level their own ideas about their work. This depends in turn upon two other things. First, that they have access to a body of existing thought which can provide a model for this. And secondly, that they have access to a high enough level of knowledge about the historical roots of their work situation to avoid repeating mistakes made by other practitioners in the past.

Postman

On the first of these stipulations, we as General Studies teachers drew mainly on the work of US writers published in the then Penguin Education series - for example on Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's *Teaching As a Subversive Activity*. If we had had access to a deeper and wider body of thought about our kind of work we would have made more headway and would have been much harder to defeat. And on the second stipulation, if we had known that our struggle was in part a recapitulation of earlier ones going back through the Plebs League and beyond, we would have avoided many mistakes.

The potential importance of the Critical Pedagogy Group's work seems to me to lie mainly in this: that they have a more highly developed acquaintance with the ideas of Paulo Freire (ie of a vastly more serious thinker than Postman) than we had, and hence may become a channel through which those ideas, which are already beginning to spread amongst ESOL lecturers in FE, can gain a purchase both amongst learning support lecturers, and hopefully also amongst staff who devise mainstream courses, in universities. (The fact that their approach is the opposite of narrowly academic, and features strongly a willingness to connect with community campaigns and mobilisations makes this significantly more likely.)

In order for this to happen, it will be necessary that those ideas are not treated as sacrosanct but subjected, rather, to a rigorous reworking, by practitioners, from the standpoint of socialism from below, including in the historical perspective mentioned above. The booklet reviewed here is evidence that, in line with the reflective approach that Freire himself advocated, the Critical Pedagogy Group can play a central role in this reworking.


Aims of Critical Pedagogy Group:

- Develop and advocate pedagogies of engagement, life and hope, aiming to break down the barriers between informal and formal education, contributing, in a different way than governments often propose, to a reconnection of these domains to enable progressive, collective change.
- Rethink the university as a radically democratic, social and political institution, since the university is a site where some of us happen to be located;
- Rethink spaces of informal education where others of us work - community work, cultural work, campaigning work - so that these spaces can be organised in more radically democratic ways;
- Challenge the individualised atomisation and instrumental and fatalist thinking that neoliberalism encourages in part through its assumption that 'There is No Alternative' (TINA). We, in contrast, seek to create learning and teaching environments in formal and informal educational spaces that facilitate dialogue, reflexivity and connection to real life needs that enable the creation of methodologies encouraging and realising more democratic practices;
- Link activism outside and inside the academy, utilising the insights stemming from both practical engagement with the world and engagement with theory that seeks to understand the world. That then would work to produce new knowledge that can bring together academic research with insights gained from grassroots action and everyday practices to produce new knowledge that serves to help improve the world;
- Build on past and present experiences in social, cultural and political action (eg Latin American social movements, WEA, Institute of Race Relations, TRAPESE);
- Use such experiences to develop social research projects that can build theory further for future critique and action;
- Develop an independent, cross-sector, organised community of progressive cultural workers in informal and formal educational contexts working together for a more social just and sustainable future.

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