Great confusion hides great reversal

Patrick Ainley *and* **Martin Allen** ***argue that few are facing up to the enormity of the changes the Coalition is inflicting upon English education***

Over the past term 'the academic community' in particular has reacted with characteristic confusion to trebled undergraduate fees. Confusion is worse confounded by uncertainties over recruitment, which overall was down about 10 per cent in 2012, a decline likely to be compounded if the latest application trends are confirmed in 2013. All but four universities were forced into clearing, leaving others in the expanded 'top' Russell Group to compete with each other to attract AAB (last year) and ABB (this year) A-level grade students. The 'Real Russells', by contrast, characteristically reduce their undergraduate intake to increase demand and leave them more room for research.

The chief executive of UCAS, Mary Curnock Cook, confirmed that, although those institutions with higher tariff entry points have suffered less from the drop in applications, they still experienced an overall drop of 7 per cent compared to 14 per cent at institutions with lower entry requirements. Consequently, nearly all universities have raised their entry thresholds as well as their fees and withdrawn commitments to widen participation as they revert to traditional type and drop modular forms of assessment. At the same time they are desperately seeking links with employers, furiously franchising and piloting two-year, four-term degrees with learning-on-demand and on-line.

Despite - or partly as a consequence of - these moves, already only about one in three 18+ women are now applying for degrees compared with a quarter of 18+ men. This is way down on New Labour's target of half the age range to be in some sort of HE by 2010 that was nearly achieved, for women at least, in despite of raising fees. It appears that many men now have other options, as perhaps have the most highly qualified sixth-formers who are prepared to go abroad, wait things out or enter employment without the necessity of going to HE in hopes of a 'graduate premium' that for most graduates promises only about 15 per cent of their prospective lifetime earnings over non-graduates.

Yet, while most graduate salaries are well below the recent Association of Graduate Recruiters' survey figure of £26,500 average for leading graduate employers, having a degree at least improves an individual's *relative* position in the jobs queue. That students will not be required to make any loan repayments until they earn £21,000 - a figure close to the median wage - is also a key contributory factor. Given the lack of alternatives, therefore, it is no wonder so many school and college leavers still apply to universities, although there has been a significant fall, especially in older applicants.

However, the majority who do not aspire to the Russells have not applied to local universities to save money by living at home. Instead, 'oven-ready' sixth-formers go for the 'full-student package' at campus and other universities between the Fab Four and the Million+ group of former polys. Perhaps this explains why many Million+ institutions are most badly down - especially the hardest hit everywhere humanities, social sciences and modern languages but also business studies.

Not many applicants have so far been attracted by the FE colleges where the number of HE in FE students has also fallen by at least 10 per cent. The latest new universities that have been encouraged to enter the market for degrees and sub-degrees have also been no more successful and nor have private providers, save in some specialist subjects.

Vice-chancellors are desperately reorganising their deckchairs to anticipate these contradictory responses as UCU declares its determination to fight each closure and all redundancies case by case. Few academics any longer rely upon students to sustain an escalating Resistance, as Bailey and

Freedman did in 2011. Others, for example John Holmwood leading a Campaign for the Public University, reason eloquently for a higher education integral to democracy and civil society, lately joined by a more august but similar Council for the Defence of British Universities. However, most academics still defer to Stefan Collini's influential answer to his own question *What Are Universities For?* (2012) by relying upon special pleading for an autonomous academic profession maintaining its privileges to research and teach 'for its own sake'.

Students are equally confused, with NUS looking to Scotland for an example of integrated F&HE (Burns 2012) but simultaneously visiting the dark side by drawing upon consumer power to influence the National Student Survey in league with *Which University?* Many students indeed have little interest in what they study beyond the prospects it offers for employment. So they remove themselves from any meaningful involvement in learning: 'Let's make like I give a shit!' as a student T-shirt proclaims. At worst staff join the charade of quality they supposedly maintain.

Education is thus losing its validity as a way forward for the younger generations. Unconnected to possibilities for practice, displaying knowledge for assessment has replaced learning. This simulacrum of study disguises the decline in attainment - if not the increase in effort - all teachers recognise but testingtestingtesting has long since replaced educationeducationeducation.

All this confusion misses the enormity of what Martin Allen and I have called *The Great Reversal* in the state's education policy. Having rolled out a widening participation which presented itself as professionalising the proletariat, while disguising an actual proletarianisation of the professions - including the academic profession, the Coalition of Gove and Willetts are rolling it in again. (The one exception to this trend is this year's stipulation that all nurses should complete degree courses.)

Although habitually genuflecting to the so-called 'knowledge economy', Willetts and Gove - unlike Labour - no longer seek to educate their way out of recession. They therefore don't equate more qualifications with more 'skills' - unlike the teacher unions, who thus seek to establish their usefulness to the national economy. Instead, Gove and Willetts recognise that the main purpose of education for moribund capitalism is social control over youth. They therefore seek to tighten the selection of a minority through cramming for more academic exams whilst also peddling illusions that the reintroduction of grammar schools will restart upward social mobility.

However, rather than helping young people 'move up', inflated educational qualifications are now required to avoid downward social mobility. 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; not because most employment has become more demanding - in fact, the opposite is generally the case. So today, an expanded 'middle-working' / 'working-middle' class of non-manual, lower managerial, professional-reduced-to-paraprofessional service workers is no longer insulated from downward social mobility.

In a class structure going pear-shaped, the academic failure of the large majority is a recipe for more riots. Hence the desperate efforts to cobble together 'apprenticeships' that employers do not need but which Willetts and Gove think will accommodate all the wrong sort of people who have gone to the wrong sorts of university. A reduction in the number of students is factored into Willetts's supposed miscalculation of student debt, Andrew Mc Gettigan has long alleged.

Such an abandonment of mass tertiary education and reversion to the previous mass secondary era is unprecedented. So too is the privatisation that the Coalition are building on New Labour's previous marketisation of institutions. Gove has made clear his intention that 'free schools' and academies independent of the soon to be residual local authorities will be opened to private investment for profit should Cameron win a second term. He also reportedly favours vouchers as a way of making parents pay for more than basic schooling; while for Willetts adult, further and higher fees already function as paperless vouchers.

This is another first at which this deadly duo are aiming - for England to be the first country to go beyond its habitual kowtowing to the private schools and abandon state for private education altogether.

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Reclaiming our professionalism after the IFL

Rob Peutrell ***reflects on the humiliation of the Institute for Learning***

The piece below (see box pp6-7) was written for a UCU newsletter at South Nottingham College. The aim was to draw attention to the wider debate on teacher professionalism that emerged following the boycott of the IFL and the subsequent Lingfield review.

I drafted the piece aware of the limited effect of occasional newsletter articles. In fact, do busy teachers still read union newsletters, especially those sent out as email attachments? Moreover, when I suggested including something on teacher professionalism, I was reminded that not all members would be interested. True but perplexing: how can educators not be interested in this question?

Of course, the boycott itself was hugely popular. Partly, it was a matter of principle. Few teachers agreed with mandatory membership of the IFL, and most were not going to pay for the privilege.

Yet, it was unclear how far teachers went beyond opposing mandatory membership and fees to engage with the wider questions of teacher professionalism that were raised in the wake of the campaign. These included professional regulation; the need or otherwise for qualified status; the relationship between a professional body and the union; the gap between the IFL's 'aspirational' rhetoric and the everyday realities of teaching work; and the competing 'managerialist' and 'democratic' models of professionalism. My local impression was that discussion of these issues was limited.

This is a real challenge to activist-educators because the issue of professionalism touches on every aspect of our teaching lives. As many commentators have noted, the changes set in motion by college incorporation in the early 1990s have contributed to the construction of a particular ideal of the educational professional - corporate, compliant and decidedly acritical - which disempowers ordinary teachers. These changes include less collegial and more top-down decision making; increasing regulation and admin-related workloads; the drift towards overt and hidden forms of privatisation; and the prevalence of a language rooted in new-age management-speak.

In this context, the IFL was never the real issue. It was a convenient target for teachers' frustration, but was symptomatic and symbolic. The IFL boycott allowed teachers to express their unhappiness without the risk of confrontation with college management or of strike action. But the stress on fees and personalities (particularly that of the IFL's Deputy Chief Executive, Lee Davies) distracted from the bigger questions - who we are, what we do, and why and how we do it; as well as who benefits, who makes the decisions and what kind of institutions we want to work in.

At stake now is: whether and how we can initiate a wider debate on these issues? I am aware that not debating teacher professionalism *explicitly* does not necessarily mean a lack of *tacit* interest. This is always frustrating for activists keen to get a dialogue going, particularly when 'managerialist' practices and the ideologies and values that sustain them are fast becoming entrenched.

Yet, if we are to develop an argument that can challenge the 'managerialist' model, we urgently need to build our own collective, grassroots capacity for a different way of thinking.

It is not that we lack resources in this endeavour, including the different traditions of community, liberal, and radical education, as well as the history of independent working-class education discussed in *Post-16 Educator*.

Perhaps we need reminding that, for all the attempts to humanise or democratise public education, at its core it reflects and recreates the ideologies and practices of the society of which it is a part, and has always done so. The stories we told ourselves (*second chance education*, *widening participation*, *critical pedagogies*) have little resonance in the new, and essentially privatised, FE. We can all list examples to illustrate the new culture, but the widening pay disparity between college chief execs and main grade staff, and the insidious notions of *employability* and *functional* (as opposed to critical) skills must figure amongst the most common.

Following Judyth Sachs and Kerry Kennedy, the notions of 'activist' and 'civic professionalism' are also important resources. Both refuse the idea of a professionalism based on the private aspirations of

particular institutions. Rather, they recognise that teachers have wider civic and political responsibilities, an idea that was central to the recent *ESOL Manifesto*.

A good starting point might be Frank Coffield and Bill Williamson's critique of current orthodoxy, *From Exam Factories to Communities of Discovery* (Institute of Education 2011). In their view, a basic lack of democracy undermines the educational claims of the

South Notts College UCU Branch Newsletter November 2012 (extract)

Up for debate: after the IFL?

Following the Lingfield enquiry, there is no longer a statutory requirement for *I£L* membership. Most FE teachers have welcomed this change.

When state-funded, the *I£L* was largely ignored - except for the ritual of a yearly declaration of CPD; when state funding ended, more UCU members voted to boycott the *I£L* than for action to defend the pension.

Whilst teachers objected to paying for membership of an organisation most had not volunteered to join, the *I£L* seemed to represent everything teachers had come to resent - excessive salaries for its Chief Executive and her Deputy, glossy production values, and a rhetoric that praised 'brilliant teaching' yet took no account of the everyday lives of practising teachers.

We won't pay I£L

Animosity was widespread. On the *TES* blog and the facebook page *We Won't Pay IFL*, criticism of its leading officers, especially of its publicity-seeking Deputy Chief Exec, was often deeply personal.

But what was missing was any real debate over teacher professionalism, what it meant or ought to mean, and whether there were alternative visions of professionalism to that of the *I£L*.

This is a crucial issue, because whilst Lingfield is being applauded for its position on the *I£*L, its underlying agenda benefits neither FE teachers nor the students and communities that depend on further education colleges.

Initially, Lingfield proposed a free-for-all on teacher qualifications and professional development. In its view, CPD and teacher qualifications were best decided locally, subject to negotiations between college managers and the trade unions.

Rightly, UCU opposed this. This was partly for the same reason UCU was an early sponsor of the *I£L* - the appalling record of professional development in some colleges.

Deep and cheap

UCU argued that leaving responsibility to individual colleges would inevitably result in a neglect of professional development, and further encourage a culture of *pile-'em-deep 'n teach-'em'-cheap* with unqualified teachers recruited on lower salaries. This would be to the detriment of both educational quality and teachers' conditions.

Lingfield backed off on teacher qualifications, although its ideological trajectory remains clear: deregulation and wasteful competition between 'private' colleges.

FE Guild

Lingfield recommended that an *FE Guild* be set up as the sector's professional body, an idea much in tune with former FE minister John Hayes's weirdly medieval worldview.

As yet, the exact form the Guild will take is unclear, except that, unlike the *I£L*, there will be no obligatory membership. Discussions are on-going, although the view amongst the UCU people involved in the consultation is that some kind of national oversight of CPD and teacher qualifications is better than none at all.

Professionalism?

However, whatever happens to the Guild, the real question for UCU members is what *we as teachers ourselves mean by teacher professionalism*.

Democratic and Managerial Professionalism

A recent UCU paper highlights two very different visions of teacher professionalism: the 'managerialist' and the 'democratic'. It draws on the work of academic-educators, such as Stephen Ball and Judyth Sachs.

current system, despite the rhetoric of standards and world-class skills. In order to address the big social, cultural and environmental issues we face together, they argue, education requires the genuinely democratic participation of teachers and students, and needs a heavy dose of critical citizenship. In place of the top-down, outcome obsessed approach we see today, Coffield and Williamson argue for '*communities of discovery*', and envisage education as a deliberative, collaborative and open-ended process.

Without doubt, the idea of a '*community of discovery*' could be very easily given a managerialist twist, like so many other concepts and so much other language (*reflective practice*, *peer observation*, *passion*). However, the essential point, it seems to me, is this: if democracy is a practice, and we are seeking to democratise education, we need to start practising.

This brings me back to the question: how do we get fellow-teachers involved in the debate? And to do that how do we start pulling together the different strands (activist, civic and democratic professionalism; the critiques of privatisation and the emphasis on data audit, over other forms of accountability; the erosion of collegiality and so on)?

In the first instance, we need a network that enables teachers and researchers interested in democratic teacher professionalism to start talking to each other. Here, I am thinking of the electronic ESOL Research Network as well as the facebook group, *We Won't Pay IFL*.

To get that going a working conference, again of teachers and researchers, needs convening. This should be a participatory '*community of discovery*' rather than an opportunity for set-piece speeches, and clearly focused on exploring ways of promoting democratic professionalism. I have in mind here the participatory way in which the *ESOL Manifesto* was written.

Finally, following the conference and network, activists might be encouraged to start small-scale, self-managed '*communities of discovery*' involving teachers in particular colleges or localities. These would be supportive affinity groups, their focus ranging from specific issues of classroom practice to educational policy and theory. Such groups would help bring educational debate back to practising teachers. Their very existence would challenge management's right to determine the rhythm and content of professional development. They could feed into local UCU branch debates, and, through a wider network, participate in national discussions.

In the last issue of *Post-16 Educator*, Dan Taubman outlined the need for 'a UCU concept of professionalism' (issue 69, October - December 2012). We need to tease out what this means in practice. Creating local and national forums, albeit on a small scale, could be an important part of the process. The debacle of the IFL is an opportunity we should not miss.

In the 'managerialist' model, colleges are businesses, education a commodity, students customers, and other colleges competitors. Decision-making is essentially top-down and teachers are subject to micro-monitoring. As in any other business, quantitative judgements predominate, with activity driven by calculations of input against output.

By contrast, in the 'democratic' model, education is valued as an end in itself, as an entitlement not a consumable. In this model, emphasis is put on dialogue, participatory decision making and local democratic accountability. Whilst formal qualifications inevitably remain central to education, measurable outcomes are not exclusively valued. Importantly, the college is seen as a 'community of practice' involving teachers and students, and not as a mechanism for generating quantitative outcomes and competitive advantage.

Four Horsemen

The next few years promise to be even rockier for FE. *Cuts* in funding, *Attacks* on pay and conditions, the *Erosion* of provision, and *Privatisation* are our own (potentially) apocalyptic Four Horsemen.

As educators, we will want to defend not only our terms and conditions, but also the wider system of publicly funded, publicly accountable and publicly available FE.

Re-imagining

The demise of the *I£L* is an opportunity for us to get stuck into some collective re-imagining - *what kind of FE do **WE** want to see?*

The struggles around ESOL provision

We print here an article adapted by* Alice Robson *from the talk given by her at a meeting of the Independent Working-Class Education Network in London on 6 October 2012

'ESOL' or 'English for Speakers of Other Languages' provision is an area of adult education unique in its close relationship with migration. For much of its history, there have been struggles around the very existence of such classes for migrants and minimal state funding has been provided. While this changed after the bringing of ESOL into the Skills for Life strategy in 2001, this was paralleled by increasing compulsion for migrants to learn English. Today there are struggles again over the existence of ESOL, with changes recently proposed to access to free classes, against a backdrop of cuts to further and adult education generally. In fighting these attacks, it is also important to think about the kind of ESOL provision we want. How can ESOL teaching be class-conscious and anti-racist? In a field which has historically seen so much volunteer involvement rather than adequate state funding, what does it mean for ESOL to be 'independent'? How does looking at the past help ESOL teachers grappling with the challenges we face today? And can ESOL classrooms be spaces for organising?

What is ESOL?

ESOL refers to English classes for migrant and refugee adults who are settling in the UK. This is distinguished from 'EFL', English as a Foreign Language, which refers to English classes for people learning English in their home country, or coming to the UK to study for a short time before returning. The distinction has never been a completely clear one, and the increase in migration from southern Europe countries with high levels of unemployment is a contemporary example of how people may not neatly fit into one category or another. ESOL classes take place in further education colleges, in adult learning centres, in schools, children's centres, community centres, workplaces (less so now funding has been cut for this), in private training providers (sometimes on contracts from Job Centre Plus) and by volunteers in a range of community settings.

ESOL is an area of education unique in its close relationship with migration, and of government and societal views of migrants – and, over the past decade, increasingly bound up with immigration policy and controls. The racism experienced by ESOL learners, in their interactions with public services, on the streets through racist abuse and discriminatory policing and through the pernicious effects of immigration controls (such as waiting for asylum or leave to remain decisions, the threat or reality of detention, doubts over whether family reunion will be permitted) are issues learners bring with them into the classroom. In 2002 the Nationality, Immigration, and Asylum Act was passed, requiring those seeking citizenship to show 'a sufficient knowledge of English, Welsh or Scottish Gaelic and about life in the UK'. This was then extended to indefinite leave to remain applicants, and is now at a much higher level than what was previously demanded due to further immigration rule changes. The link between English and the very right to stay in the UK makes English, and ESOL, an increasingly important part of the Government's agenda of ever-tightening immigration controls.

ESOL in the UK: historical context

For most of its long history, however, the actual teaching of ESOL in the UK has been largely ignored in policy circles. Whilst this allowed considerable scope for what has been taught – such as examples of innovative radical anti-racist education in ESOL classes in the 1980s – it has been chronically under-funded, frequently poor quality and often taught by untrained and unpaid teachers. In more recent years, where state attention has been given to ESOL, the funding this has brought has come alongside sustained attempts to use ESOL as a tool to promote both a certain view of migrants – as a placid and willing source of cheap labour – and of whatever version of 'Britishness' is currently dominant in official circles. Struggles and debates around teaching English to migrants are not limited to the 21st century. Can the history of ESOL provide us with any perspectives on the problems we face today, and of how we might make our classrooms spaces where critical, class-conscious, anti-racist education can take place? Looking at a few examples from ESOL's history suggests some possibilities, as well as highlighting some challenges.

The history of Jewish migration to Britain was cited by Ed Miliband in his December 2012 immigration speech. He described the arrival of 'penniless shopkeepers' from eastern Europe in London's East End in the early 20th century, before going on to talk about his parents' arrival in the UK as refugees escaping Nazism, with his father's study of English at Acton Technical College and subsequent career as a professor of sociology presented as a positive example of migrant achievement (he carefully left out any reference to his politics). One of the many deeply problematic parts of Miliband's speech is the implication that 'integration' is almost synonymous with migrants' English-language competence. The limitations of this view were something that was recognised in one of the periods Miliband cites: the arrival of Jewish migrants from eastern and central Europe in the early 20th century. The press, then as now, denigrated the new arrivals, one publication exclaiming that 'many of them do not speak English and they mix very little with Englishmen'. Certainly the migrants' common use of Yiddish and their concentration in Whitechapel, often working in Jewish-owned and staffed workshops, meant that Yiddish remained for many the primary language of communication. However, as well as some Jewish migrants attending English classes, during this period of expanding municipal adult education provision, English classes were offered alongside classes in the language spoken by migrant communities including Yiddish, German and Irish. The emphasis was thus not just on new migrants learning English but also on mother tongue provision, and on others having the opportunity to learn the language of the new migrant communities.

After the Second World War, migration from the New Commonwealth prompted government concerns about the language needs of new migrants, but largely focused on children. Of the Section 11 funding for New Commonwealth migrants used for education (both English and mother tongue provision), it was estimated that only 1 per cent was spent on adults. The government approach in this period of restricting immigration through a series of immigration acts whilst claiming to improve the condition of those already here, in part through the measures in the 1968 Race Relations Act, was the context for the setting up of the Community Relations Commission to promote 'harmonious community relations'. Part of this strategy involved establishing adult community language schemes, an approach which presages the central role of learning English to New Labour's more recent 'community cohesion' strategy. Much of the ESOL provision from the 1960s was voluntary-run, with classes taught by volunteer teachers who were usually untrained. Such teachers often worked alone, as 'home tutors' teaching in students' homes. The role of volunteers in ESOL provision is a very timely issue, with David Cameron's 'Big Society' bringing with it a vision of adult education including volunteer-run classes and 'self organised learning groups'.

The Industrial Language Training Programmes which ran from the late 1970s to the late 1980s provided work-based ESOL for migrant workers, but saw communication as something people needed to share responsibility for and thus also provided training in cross-cultural and language awareness for employers and other employees. These programmes did not shy away from the acknowledgement of racism in the workplace. This is in sharp contrast to New Labour policy which, particularly following the 2001 Bradford and Burnley riots, is premised on laying blame for a lack of 'community cohesion' on migrant communities (particularly migrant women), without an acknowledgement of shortages in provision or on the racism and class inequality that persists in British society. After the programmes were terminated, funding from the Industrial Training Units was transferred to the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (as the Basic Skills Agency, now part-run by the private, multi-million pound profit-making consultancy firm Tribal, was then called) – thus also serving as an example of the increasing privatisation of further and adult education.

The history of ESOL in the last decade has been characterised by the bringing of ESOL into the Skills for Life strategy alongside literacy and numeracy in 2001, the rhetoric of responsibility (read: compulsion) for migrants to learn English in politicians' speeches

since the Bradford and Burnley riots, the introduction of fees for ESOL learners (but not literacy and numeracy learners, a discrimination strongly felt by ESOL learners) in 2007, and the ever-tighter links between ESOL and immigration policy. The ESOL materials produced by the then DfES in 2001 are an insight into government views of what migrants should be. The twin focuses are 'community cohesion' and 'employability'. Workers are taught through all the stages of getting a low-paid job (helpfully assisted in this by their local Job Centre), and how to communicate in deferential fashion when they get one (being shown politely asking for time off to go to an appointment). All interaction with service providers and those in positions of authority is problem-free, ignoring dynamics of class and race which so often structure these exchanges; the underlying message that if you don't get what you need it is your fault not that of the authority figure. However, many teachers reject this, do not use the materials (there is no requirement to do so as long as the curriculum is covered) and some ESOL classrooms are spaces where genuinely participatory, learner-centred, class-conscious education takes place.

Recent struggles for ESOL

Labour introduced fees for ESOL learners not in receipt of benefits in 2007. In 2011, the Conservative government sought to further restrict access to free ESOL, proposing to increase the group of people made ineligible for free classes. The Tory plans were to limit access to free (fully-funded) classes to those in receipt of so-called 'active' benefits, ie Job Seekers Allowance and the Work-Related Activity Group of Employment and Support Allowance. This move would have meant that huge numbers of ESOL learners would have been prohibited from accessing provision, as they would have been expected to pay unaffordable fees. The percentage of students who would have been affected by this varied from area to area, but in several London boroughs this figure was a high as 80 per cent. Women with young children, commonly recipients of Income Support rather than Job Seekers Allowance, would have been disproportionately affected.

The 'Action for ESOL' campaign was launched early in 2011, following a London meeting attended by ESOL teachers, union activists and migrants' right organisations from across the country. Form the start, there was consensus that whilst an immediate goal was to stop the funding changes being implemented and thus maintain current access to free ESOL classes, the campaign needed to go beyond this. Not only was the very premiss of fees contested, but so were many things that had become part and parcel of teaching ESOL. These included relentless attempts to measure learner progress, such as through exams (and in some cases the removal of learners who do not progress quickly enough from courses), attempts to use ESOL teaching as a tool for the state's drive towards 'integration' and the unstable working conditions of hourly-paid ESOL lecturers. So whilst the immediate goal of the campaign was clear, an important part of it was that it went beyond simply defending the status quo.

Alongside the vibrant demonstrations and marches and the huge student letter-writing campaign was a conscious attempt by people involved in ESOL to think critically about the current state of the profession. In September 2011, a day-long meeting of Action for ESOL saw the beginning of the collective writing of Action for ESOL's 'ESOL Manifesto', a document containing the collective demands, beliefs and values of its authors. Crucially, the manifesto also showed engagement with pedagogical questions – often notably absent from campaigns to defend education. These included the rejection of a narrow approach to language learning which prioritises the mastery of discrete items of language over meaning and the understanding of how language is used in real-world contexts, the importance of a participatory ethos in the ESOL classroom, and emphasising the potential of education for developing critical thought and effecting individual and collective change.

How can we contribute to today's class struggle? ESOL as a space for organising

Recognising the potential for the classroom as space for critical reflection on people's lives – the material conditions that underpin them, the values that shape them and the contradictions and struggles that abound in them – shows the influence of the ideas of the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire in some parts of the ESOL teaching community. There has been a long interest in Freirean pedagogy in adult education, particularly adult literacy, in many areas of the world outside Brazil. Recently in the UK, Freirean ideas have been fused with the techniques of participatory rural appraisal in the 'Reflect ESOL' approach developed by Action Aid. Reflect ESOL lessons start from learners' existing knowledge and experience, aiming to intertwine critical reflection on this lived experience with language development. An important stage in the Freirean process, following this reflection, is action.

I was one of a number of ESOL teachers who used a Freirean approach in lessons about ESOL cuts. With other colleagues, I shared the conviction that for students to play a key role in the struggle against the cuts, time in the classroom needed to be set aside.

Students worked in groups to create different ‘codes’, a visual or textual representation of the issue, and these were used as the basis for discussion and further work. There was space for learners to articulate their opinions on and to debate the reasons behind the cuts. Discussion on action was the logical next step, and we shared ideas on what we could do against the cuts, with petitions, letters to MPs, protests and marches all being raised by the students. In the classroom, students worked on letters to local MPs, a process which involved developing personal testimonies of the importance of ESOL. Without a doubt, the lessons on ESOL cuts were very engaging for the learners, and at times during the process the classroom was really an exciting place to be – a space for action to take place and be planned. However, despite the learners’ active involvement in letter writing, organising petitions and taking part in protests, there was distance between the learners’ action and the Action for ESOL campaign. Or rather, the learners’ actions fitted neatly into the teacher-led campaign: the students had been involved in ‘action’, but this was piecemeal rather than strategic. This raises important questions about how the classroom can genuinely be a space for learner-led action, and the conditions necessary for this.

Trade unions have also recognised ESOL as a potential space for organising migrant workers, or to go alongside this organisation. This too has a historical antecedence: after the passing of the Polish Resettlement Act in 1947, a Polish settlement of the TGWU was established. For the first three years of its existence, it ran classes in English. There are many contemporary examples of trade union-organised ESOL classes today, often in conjunction with local colleges. For example, Unite in Ipswich ran a class for workers in food-processing, and GMB in Southampton set up a Migrant Workers’ branch which runs ESOL classes, both provided by the local college. Running classes with a college may limit who can attend, as this funding brings with it restrictions on access according to benefits and immigration status. Alternative examples include the collaboration between the more explicitly political, voluntary-sector ESOL provider English for Action and London Met Unison, who ran ESOL classes for the university’s catering and cleaning staff at London Met last year.

ESOL classes have also been used as spaces for organising outside the trade union movement. One example of this is the X-talk collective: a sex worker-led co-operative which approaches language teaching as knowledge sharing between equals and regards the ability to communicate as a fundamental tool for sex workers to work in safer conditions, to organise and to socialise with each other. X-talk provides ESOL classes alongside political campaigning for sex workers’ rights, and involvement in feminist and anti-racist struggles. All the teachers are qualified ESOL teachers (paid by the collective, which is grant-funded) who are or have been sex workers. The project is explicit about the potential for language as a tool to communicate and empower as well as oppress. There is a lot of emphasis put on the importance of a pedagogy reactive to the needs of the people in the group which takes into account and respects the diversity of experience within it.

Class-conscious education in a changing context

There are, therefore, examples from both the past and present of ESOL which show it as a potential space for explicitly class-conscious, feminist, anti-racist, participatory education. The success of the recent Action for ESOL campaign went beyond maintaining current access to classes, but made some important first steps to teachers thinking about the kind of provision we want. Student involvement in this process warrants attention. And there is much thinking to do, particularly given the contemporary context, which brings further challenges. As further cuts are planned to further education, how will this affect ESOL as a sector? Working in a field so tightly bound up with migration, as teachers we see events and situations abroad affect who is in our classes. In recent months, the fiscal crisis in Europe has brought with it an increase in students migrating from Spain and other countries, many of whom are working in low-paid jobs or seeking work. And what of the increase in the language requirement for those from outside Europe seeking to settle in the UK? The Tory plans for the ‘Big Society’ are a particular threat to ESOL teachers (and learners) as English is seen as something that anyone can teach. ‘Self-organised learning groups’ were proposed in a recent government document. With self-organisation now being touted by the right, questions about what ‘independent’ working-class education means, and the kind of education we want, are particularly pertinent ones for adult education workers to grapple with.

Further reading / websites

Sheila Rosenberg, *A Critical History of ESOL in the UK, 1870-2006* (2007)
Elsa Auerbach, *Making Meaning, Making Change* (1992)
Rebecca Galbraith, ‘Act now for ESOL!’ *Post-16 Educator* 62 (March-April 2011)
Action for ESOL: actionforesol.org
Reflect ESOL: www.reflect-action.org/reflectesol
X-talk project: www.xtalkproject.net
English for Action: www.efalondon.org

National narrative under scholarly analysis

Cliff Jones

Nurit Peled-Elhanan, *Palestine in Israeli School Books. Ideology and Propaganda in Education*, published by I. B. Tauris (www.ibtauris.com), 2012 ISBN 978-1-78076-505-1

'Hey, guess what, young Israeli soldiers are wearing cameras on their helmets as they search Arab houses looking for terrorists.' 'Really?' 'Yeah, it's great, you should see the pictures.' 'Wow, that's cool'.

I paraphrase an overheard conversation between American visitors in a restaurant in Jaffa. It came to mind as I began to read this book. Remember that old American saying derived from General Sheridan as he suppressed the indigenous people in favour of settlers, 'The only good Indian is a dead Indian'? Once it is believed that Indians are savage, inferior, uncivilised and a hindrance to the fulfilment of those with God (and a specially designed historical narrative) on their side it becomes much easier to pull the trigger when you have them in your sights.

The proficiency in linguistics of Nurit Peled-Elhanan enables her to make points of historical, political, national, cultural and personal significance: points that engage our emotions: points that disturbingly, for some, challenge the many myths sustaining a system that dehumanises even the believers of those myths. To pull those triggers is dehumanising. To read, learn and inwardly digest this book just might rehumanise some of the people with fingers on triggers.

I wonder: to how many Israeli university undergraduate booklists will this book be added? Will it be studied by trainee teachers? Knowing and having worked with some Israeli teacher trainers I have hopes that it will. The power to approve school textbooks does not, however, lie with them and despite attempts by a valiant number of Israeli academics and journalists to draw attention to the role of ideology and propaganda in education the official narrative continues to be deeply internalised.

Some of the labels that we use in order to classify 'others' and to signpost the histories that keep us comfortable with ourselves can be misleading, even wrong, but also very sticky. Like the UK Israel has many sustaining myths that come with some very sticky labels. I doubt if there remains a serious historian who believes that the Romans expelled the Jews from Palestine after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem or the later Bar Kokhkba Revolt and yet the notion of 'returning' after expulsion is an embedded belief - a sticky label - that helps legitimise the establishment of the state in a form that raises one group above another. And this is a state that, while reducing the status of the people it found there, has managed to promote the idea that it is 'The only democracy in the Middle East'. Can you be a democracy and yet raise one group of citizens above another? And, you might ask, how can a country claim for itself the power to charge its critics with being anti-Semitic when it pursues policies that humiliate and demonise 'others' who are at least as Semitic?

You know that you have been labelled as inferior when you are forced to accept being re-named and re-classified by a more powerful invading group: when your capacity to self-define is lost to others. For example, to be labelled Welsh is to accept being called 'foreigner' in the Germanic language of the invaders of Britain. It is insulting but eventually you accept it because you lack the power to resist the new narrative. 'Israeli Arabs', however, whenever they cross over the border, refer to themselves as Palestinians. They have not accepted their re-classification. Nurit's analysis of the discourse within Israeli (Jewish) schoolbooks makes clear that

not only do two contradictory realities exist but that the internalisation of the official Israeli narrative is so crucial for self legitimacy that it must squeeze out, suppress and subdue historical narratives that contradict it.

Nurit's book reveals how Palestinians are represented negatively within the Israeli national narrative, specifically in school textbooks. The high quality of her scholarship, including the amount of carefully detailed evidence she provides, will make it difficult for propagators of the official narrative to attack and contradict her. So, we should ask, what might be the effect of this book?

The Israeli historian Shlomo Sand's book *The Invention of the Jewish People* (2009) generated very strong pro and con reactions and, incidentally, huge sales in Israel. His intention to normalise or to de-exceptionalise being Jewish in Israel was probably weakened because in straying from his area of expertise he enabled those he had upset to pick holes in part of his thesis. Nurit does not stray from her area of expertise. She uses it on a specific topic: a topic that might be thought to be small and narrow but that actually unlocks matters of huge significance. In discussing Israel as a democracy she introduces us to the word 'ethnocracy'. School textbooks reinforce the idea that Israel is an ethnically based state: a state for Jews: a racially ring-fenced democracy. I have often wondered how schoolteachers taking classes around the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv deal with the display just inside the entrance that makes the contrary point that Jews are racially disparate. There is plenty to argue and become upset about.

What she has to say about the rationalising, even the justifying, of massacres carried out by Israeli forces reminds me of yet another conversation, this one between me and a strong supporter of the official narrative. We were arguing about the Dier Yassin massacre in 1948 when most of the inhabitants of a Palestinian village were killed. My interlocutor: *'It is emerging now that they were warned to get out so why did they stay to be killed?'* This was presented to me as a debate-winning argument. It was, in other words, their own fault that they were killed. As Nurit explains in her book, it is not a case of hiding history but, rather, a case of setting examples of such massacres within a discourse of what had to happen in order to establish a state for exceptionalised people.

Visiting Yad Veshem, the holocaust museum, I found to be a deeply emotional experience. American money has since paid for its expansion. Foreign dignitaries are taken there. Its impact upon them must be very powerful. I bet that Tony Blair has been. He is, after all, charged with bringing peace to the area, though he has never visited Gaza. During these visits does anyone have pointed out to them by their guides that this museum, which remembers an appalling crime against humanity, which humbles us, which reduces visitors to tongue-tied silence, which commits us to dedicate our lives to never, ever, ever allowing anything like that to happen again, is built on a pleasant shallow hillside overlooking what was once Dier Yassin?

Why should any of this matter to us? Is it not merely 'a quarrel in a far away country between people about whom we know nothing' as Chamberlain said about the German invasion of Czecholslovakia? It matters because 'education, education, education' is really about 'society, society, society'. Let us not fall into the trap of assuming that Israel is exceptional in its portrayal of and teaching about 'others'. 'British' history is mostly 'English' history. The histories of, for example, the USA, Argentina, Brazil, Tibet or Australia are not taught to children from the perspectives of indigenous, invaded peoples. To do that would be discomforting. We are suckers for reassuring narratives. They absolve us from sin. Remember the profound words of that arch-enemy of the working classes, Winston Churchill: 'History shall be kind to me, for I shall write it'.

The book also matters to us because we collaborate with the distorters of history in an area that we have chosen to make special. The 'Holy Land' is not merely a tourist destination. We imbue it with so much meaning that the shape, nature, focus and intent of its discourse have the power to control how we make sense of humanity.

Do buy, read, disseminate and argue about this book: a book to which I have done scant justice. I have used the word 'exceptional' a number of times. I wish I could say that Nurit Peled-Elhanan is not exceptional. Unfortunately, she is. I met her briefly when she did some work on a programme that I directed in Israel working with teachers across cultural, religious, ethnic and political boundaries. She is a co-recipient of the 2001 Sakharov Prize for Human Rights and the Freedom of Thought awarded by the European Parliament. I knew before I met her that her daughter had recently been killed by a suicide bomber. What I did not then know was the huge extent of her intellectual capacity to focus upon and reveal the power of official discourse and narrative to create the conditions for killing. After reading this book no one should think that discourse analysis is only for ivory tower academics. It has the potential to relax a few trigger fingers.

Changing technology

Philip Sainty ***continues the debate begun by David King in PSE 68***

When referring to a writer who has sole responsibility for the death of three people and for injuring 23 others by mailing out nail bombs over a period of 17 years, the charge of being an 'apologist' for that person will always be a concern. Many will know Ted Kaczynski by his *nom de guerre*: the Unabomber. the goal of his terrorist activities, which targeted companies and individuals he decided were responsible for increasing humanity's reliance on technology was to attempt to counter the loss of freedom incurred by technological advancement. After 17 years, realising that this aim may be unachievable, he modified his demands. If a major media outlet would publish his essay verbatim then his bombing campaign would stop. Kaczynski thought that people would realise the error of their ways of they could only hear, or read, the truth.

Following recent articles in *PSE* concerning the Luddites (*PSE* 68) and the encouragement of blogs as pertains to Bentham's concept of the Panopticon (*PSE* 69), it's relevant to address the thoughts of Kaczynski in respect of his position as a 20th century Neo-Luddite. Yet, as David Skrbina writes in *Technological Slavery*, Kaczynski is not a Neo-Luddite. David King illustrated in *PSE* 68 that the Luddites were committed to smashing machinery that took jobs from people. Kaczynski's opposition to technology is more all-encompassing than that.

Why Kaczynski rather than, say, Kirkpatrick Sale? The first reason is that the (relatively) short *Industrial Society and its Future* (*ISAIF*) is an approachable text. While it's clear in conveying his conviction, *ISAIF* is not burdened by the exclusive language and terminology of the overly academic. It can be readily accessed on the internet, and, as per its original publication in the *Washington Post*, the paragraphs are numbered, allowing for easy duplication and for referencing of, or referral to. There is what we might call the 'meta' reasons: the concerns surrounding the author of the text and his activities. Engaging with Kaczynski provokes questions such as: is recourse to violence ever justified? How do we define terrorism? Is state violence always legitimate? Can we separate the actions of the author from the work? Is this an attempt by someone to justify their committing of multiple murders?

The latter two questions also engage with other problematic areas, such as whether or not we should ban, or restrict the publication of, certain books, like *Mein Kampf*, as many countries have done. Or to look at how the resulting actions of a political thought or ideology have often led to events that are antithetical to the original idea, such as the *Communist Manifesto* arguably leading to the creation of gulags in Stalinist Russia. Moreover, it brings about that most pertinent of philosophical questions for the politically engaged: does the end ever justify the means?

Other reasons involve the complex nature of Kaczynski's criticism and at, or to, whom it is levelled. While it could be claimed that Neo-Luddites, such as Sale, align their anti-technological politics with anarchism / socialism, it is to those who consider themselves politically 'on the left' that Kaczynski addresses many of his most fervent criticisms, through, for example, his concept of oversocialisation and the effect this has on post-industrial / capitalist society, which he terms the industrial-technological system.

Kaczynski defines two types of political leftist. The first is a rebellious type who writes letters, attends protests and generally makes a nuisance of themselves. The second are true revolutionaries, willing to engage in violence to challenge the pervasive technological system. For those who think of themselves as activists, Kaczynski's critique can be unsettling. Far from being 'radical' or out to change society for the better by making it more equal, he says, most activists are simply rebellious and their actions serve only to make society more efficient. By ensuring equal rights for women and minority groups, or saving the planet and its

resources, for example, these people actually do the system good by making it more efficient: producing a larger workforce who have less to complain about, therefore being more compliant, ensuring that the earth's resources are not depleted, respectively, all help to ensure the longevity of technological-industrial society. From Kaczynski's point of view, then, feminism achieved nothing more than creating a system whereby women are expected to work the same hours and jobs as men, which led to increased estrangement from the family as more children are cared for by others. Thus increasing economic throughput and shoring up the system.

This transgresses traditional criticisms of globalised capitalism. We are all subject to the demands of technological throughput. Even those at the top of the scale are unaware of a coherent plan as regards society's future. The industrial age has given way to the technological age and, with it, all people are at the mercy of technological processes that get ever larger, demanding more sophisticated infrastructure far removed from the needs of most people.

Instead we are all engaged in what Kaczynski terms 'surrogate activities'. As a former mathematician (he was a maths prodigy), his example of such activities comes from the world of science. Most scientists, he says, are not engaging in useful research for the common good, but the research dictated by funding streams. They are the demands of the system, not people. Like the scientists, most people's activities are not of their own creation, volition or decision: earning a wage necessitates them and that wage is dependent on the demands of the system. That being the case, most people know not that which they are contributing to.

Similar to the Luddites, Kaczynski considers that jobs are not just a means of gaining income with which to feed families, but, in a society driven by capital, a form of participation. They incur privileges that extend beyond simple means of production, allowing those with work to have a say in how society functions. This is familiar territory as regards the 'undeserving poor': benefit claimants are not just scroungers, but invalid 'people': their entitlement to participate in society is marginalised, if not altogether invalidated.

The views expressed in *ISAIF* go far beyond the debates surrounding technological determinism. It brings into question the entire purpose and processes of society. It can be a useful dialectical tool for teachers of history, sociology and, at a stretch, information technology: if the curriculum allows for it. In *ISAIF*, technology is the governing factor, such that even the powerful are powerless against the momentum of change demanded by technological-industrial society as we pursue more efficient, sophisticated and grander methods of production and interaction. People are robbed of their dignity, giving more of themselves over to the demands of industrial-technological processes. Similar to Cheryl Reynolds' (*PSE* 69) convincing analysis of the blog as Panopticon, the demands of technology and 'new' ways of learning make us ever more estranged from functioning in the world as people. Our Facebook page, and our other presences on the World Wide Web, are both 'us' and 'not us'. Like Laing's *Divided Self*, each new process forced on us by the system causes us to lose something of our self.

For Kaczynski, the ultimate loss is of our dignity: his central concern. Though the term is used a number of times in the *ISAIF*, there is little in the way of satisfactory explanation of what he considers 'dignity' to be. The closest is three paragraphs (42-44) on 'Autonomy'. Reading between the lines, one gets the sense that it is about having control over our lives and being able to occupy ourselves with our own provision, and the provision of those for whom we are responsible. It is somewhat reductive. And yet, when one considers the process we are subjected to when, for example, applying for a job, it's plain to see that a lot of modern processes put us in very undignified positions. Similarly, there is little dignity in many of our current approaches to education: the recent exam rigging scandal was a wholly undignified affair for all concerned.

What is perhaps the most original concept in *ISAIF* is Kaczynski's extension of the concept of socialisation: 'oversocialisation'. As far as Kaczynski is concerned, those on the left who act rebelliously, and not revolutionarily, are oversocialised. So diverse and wide-ranging are the moral demands of contemporary society, he says, that it is nearly impossible to act morally: the demands are too great. This engenders such internal conflicts that we manifest psychological problems as we seek constant redress, or self-censorship of our behaviour, attitudes and opinions in order to comply with the demands of society.

Like Thoreau, Kaczynski sought out solitude in the wilderness and it was when one of his favourite areas of wilderness had a road built through it that he decided things were getting out of control and began his bombing campaign. Like the characters in Abbey's *Monkey Wrench Gang*, it's easy to sympathise with a recourse to violence based on this experience. *ISAIF* is a nihilistic text: it offers no succour for the future, save by dismantling the existing system. Taken wholesale, this would indeed cause one to seek violent means to address the destructive nature of modern society. But it is his general reluctance, if not blind rejection, of any good

in modern society that leads to the rejection of this conclusion. If our activities, rebellious or revolutionary, do create a system where all are genuinely equal and that uses our finite resources effectively and sustainably, then what would there by to revolt against? That, perhaps, is the most threatening thought for one so determined to dismantle the apparatus of the state.

References

Abbey, E. (2004) *The Monkey Wrench Gang* London: Penguin Classics
Kaczynski, T. J. (2010) *Technological Slavery* Washington: Feral House
Kaczynski, T. J. (1995) *Industrial Society and its future* http://editions-hache.com/essais/pdf/kaczynski2.pdf, accessed 11/12/12
Laing, R. D. (1990) *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* London: Penguin Books
Thoreau, H. D. (1995) *Walden: Or, Life in the Woods* New York: Dover Publications Inc.

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**
- **seeks to develop a support network with unions and other organisations.**

For further information, contact the Secretary:
Dr John Hewitt, 33 Hillyfields, DUNSTABLE, Beds LU6 3NS; john.hewitt22@virgin.net

CAFAS website: www.cafas.org.uk

S.E.A.

The Socialist Education Association (SEA) is affiliated to the Labour Party and seeks to inform and influence party policy on education. SEA members include parents, governors, teachers and other education professionals from all sectors and people with a general interest in education.

The SEA is seeking to engage positively with the Party and to support the development of popular policies which will help Labour win. We believe that Labour's policies on education should be based on our core values of equality, democracy and solidarity. SEA is committed to developing policy which is based on research and evidence of what works in the UK and abroad, and we offer the following key proposals:
To develop democratic and comprehensive alternatives to marketisation and privatisation which divide communities and increase inequality. Like the NHS, the locally accountable community comprehensive school is a successful and popular expression of our values – we should champion it.
To develop a single, broad and inclusive framework for the curriculum from early years to adult education. We need an alternative to the bewildering choice of qualifications, which can limit opportunities and lead to segregation by social class. This should include choice, depth, breadth, stretch and progression, and value what learners know and can do so that all learners can be proud of their achievements.
To develop ways of targeting educational investment to reduce inequalities and promote achievement as an alternative to regressive spending cuts which hit the poorest hardest. This means keeping educational routes open for all learners throughout life.
To develop, with others, an education charter based on the principles of equality, inclusivity, democracy and solidarity.
To promote the development of locally elected bodies which would be responsible for scrutinising education provision in their area.

The SEA wishes to promote the widest possible debate about the future of education and welcomes any suggestions or responses to these proposals from all those with an interest in education.

If you are interested in joining, contact Martin Dore, General Secretary of SEA, at: socialisteducation@virginmedia.com

Highlander celebrates 80 years

Steve Bond

I recently had the good fortune to revisit the Highlander Research and Education Centre in Tennessee. Highlander has just celebrated its eightieth birthday – a remarkable achievement for an independent radical education project. It describes itself as '. . . nurturing, supporting and connecting the work of people organising for change . . .' (see mission statement below). I wanted to go back to see what had changed since I was last there, and find out what Highlander was doing now.

The Centre started in the 1930s and was one of the first educational institutions in the South of the USA where people of different races could come together, (Under Tennessee school laws at that time it was illegal for black and white people to attend classes or eat together or stay overnight under the same roof. Lynchings and attacks on black people were common.) Highlander was a base for labour organising, and later for the civil rights movement. (The important role of the Centre, especially in helping to organise citizenship schools, is recorded at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis.) In the 1970s and 1980s Highlander became involved in the environmental justice movement, helping groups fighting black lung disease, toxic waste dumping, strip mining and plant closures. More recently it has embraced cultural organising, language justice (working with immigrant groups), concerns about threats from 'extreme energy' sources (and attempts to set opponents of different sources against each other), and solidarity economics.

We arrived in the rain with the edge of super storm Sandy coming in from the East. But it was great to be back. We stayed in what used to be Myles Horton's house – on top of a hill with great views of the Smokey Mountains in the distance. Horton was one of the founders of Highlander and an influential adult educator for over fifty years (see obituary in *General Educator* 8, July-October 1990).

One of the first things I noticed was that Highlander had expanded. The Centre had taken over about 100 acres of land including a 400 tree apple orchard and farm buildings. They are developing the orchard as an organic plot, and the main farm house will be used for workshops and longer term residencies. The latter project is part of an ambitious capital campaign called 'The Generations to Come'.

The plan is to renew the whole centre, including: turning the current workshop centre into fully accessible and energy efficient lodgings for workshop participants and guests; moving the library and resource centre into a new Learning Centre named after Septima Clark, Highlander's Director of Education in the 1950s; creating and renovating other properties for lodging space and meeting places; land based programmes eg to develop the orchard and create new walking trails; setting up a maintenance endowment. The campaign is seeking to raise $3.2m. The first work was due to start just as we were leaving at the end of October. Staff were optimistic about raising the money.

The ambition of this initiative, and the support it has generated at a time of recession and economic uncertainty, is an extraordinary testament to the importance and appeal of Highlander's work.

Workshops and events at the Centre (or which Highlander was involved with) over the last couple of years, illustrate the range of people and groups the Centre works with, and the themes and issues they are concerned about. These include:

- Seeds of Fire camps for young people (last year's camp focused on the education system and the criminalisation of youth of colour)
- Cultural Workers weekend, looking at issues like Gulf Coast regeneration, immigration, the economy and environment. (Highlander administers the 'We Shall Overcome' Fund which supports cultural organising in the South.)

- Greensboro Justice Fund fellows workshop – the fund supports 300 community-based organisations working to end all forms of discrimination and exploitation
- Local and national work on immigration and globalisation – raising awareness of the need for fair and just immigration policies, campaigning to stop repressive legislation in the South, and helping to organise for immigrant and refugee rights
- Being part of the Green Jobs team in the Central Appalachia Regional Network – also connecting to mountaintop removal and energy issues, and helping young people organise
- Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) – organising with white people to act as part of a multi-racial majority for justice
- Racial Healing and Equity project – to support anti-racist social change
- Social Change workshops
- Wacky workshop weekends
- Children's camps
- Language Justice work – building the capacity of people to organise across language and culture (eg by providing training on interpreting and translating – with the emphasis on language as a tool of empowerment)
- International visitors, including a group from Haiti and artists from Africa
- Various groups book to stay at Highlander to run their own workshops eg a group which did training on direct action techniques.

Highlander staff are also engaged in outreach work eg cultural organising. This continues a long tradition stretching back to the union organising in the 1930s, and the citizenship schools in South Carolina which helped black people get the vote.

Whilst Highlander remains a beacon of hope and 'alternative' education in the USA, it's not easy to 'draw lessons' from the Highlander experience for England. (Colleagues in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland may have a different story to tell. The establishment of the Ulster People's College in Belfast in 1982 was inspired by Highlander). Circumstances are very different. The squeeze on public funding for adult education, and the tighter requirements around targets and outcomes, have made it harder for state funded bodies (whether residential colleges, university extension departments, local authority services or the WEA and voluntary sector) to sustain, let alone develop, the kind of radical work which was possible in the past. And we don't have the same tradition here of raising large sums from charitable sources, trusts and individuals for radical educational work as they do in the USA.

Highlander has survived partly because it performs an important role in the region. There is a distinct identity and a whole series of networks associated with 'Appalachia' – the Southern states around the Appalachian mountains. Highlander has developed links with organisations, institutions and campaigns in the South, and has become known as a centre where people can meet and learn from each other, and as a resource to support and inform ongoing work.

Highlander has also been very good at responding to new and emerging social 'movements' (though some staff weren't so happy with the use of this term). Its ability to offer something valuable eg to the environmental movement, to immigrant groups and those campaigning against racism, and to the newer politics of the occupy movement and direct action, have helped it sustain its relevance and make its approach and resources known to a wider audience.

Perhaps the most important thing to take from Highlander is not the value of the buildings and the centre (wonderful and important though they are), but the educational ideas and approach. When the State of Tennessee tried to close Highlander down in 1961, the Centre's main building was padlocked. Myles Horton told news reporters: 'You can padlock a building. But you can't padlock an idea. Highlander is an idea . . . This workshop is part of the idea. It will grow wherever people take it.' The Centre re-opened in 1971 on the current site near New Market, and the idea is still very much alive. Central to this idea is the notion that poor and working-class people have the knowledge and potential to find collective solutions to their problems. Staff are there to work with people, facilitate discussion and then support people and groups (eg by bringing in relevant expertise) in tackling issues in the way the groups they are supporting think is best. The emphasis is on working with people and groups who, in Myles Horton's words, are '. . . moving in a radical direction' and who have the potential to multiply leadership for radical change.

The challenge for us is how to create opportunities in the current climate, both within and outside the state supported sector, where once again, we can foster adult education in the service of the poor and those organising for social justice and radical change.

Further reading:

Frank Adams (with Myles Horton), *Unearthing Seeds of Fire* (John F. Blair, 1975)

Tom Lovett (ed), *Radical Approaches to Adult Education* (Routledge, 1988)

Highlander Research and Education Center *Annual Report 2011*

Judith and Herbert Kohl with Myles Horton, *The Long Haul: An Autobiography* (Teachers College Press, 1997)

Dale Jacobs (ed), *The Myles Horton Reader* (University of Tennessee Press, 2003)

DVD: 'You Got to Move' – stories of change in the South – film by Lucy Massie Phenix (new edition 2011, available from the Highlander Centre).

'Highlander serves as a catalyst for grassroots organising and movement building in Appalachia and the South. We work with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny. Through popular education, participatory research and cultural work, we help create spaces - at Highlander and in local communities - where people gain knowledge, hope and courage, expanding their ideas of what is possible. We develop leadership and help create strong democratic organisations that work for justice, equality and sustainability in their communities and that join with others to build broad movements for social economic and restorative environmental change.' (Highlander mission statement)

If you would like to support the 'Generations To Come' campaign: visit www.highlandercenter.org or facebook.com/highlander.center or you can send a donation to Highlander Research and Education Center, 1959, Highlander Way, New Market, Tennessee 37820 USA.

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.

You are invited to **'The S Word: A conversation about feminist sex and relationship education**

17th February 2013 11am until 4pm
Whitmore Community Centre, 2-4 Phillipp Street, London N1 5NU

We are a group from a diversity of backgrounds with an interest in the attitudes surrounding Sex and Relationships Education. We feel that a key reason why much SRE for young people is unsatisfactory is that as a society we have problems discussing, and having, sex and relationships in empowering ways. We therefore believe that in order to change attitudes, to question and become more comfortable with our own relationships and sexuality, and in short to build a society which is less squeamish about sex, we need to start with ourselves.

Following discussions over the past few weeks these ideas have grown into planning a platform for educators - in the broadest sense - to meet. We are all potential learners and teachers of SRE throughout our lives. Whether you are a sex-educator, campaigner, parent, carer, teacher, health worker, or are simply interested in the subject, you are welcome to join us.

On the 17th February 2013, we are planning a gathering in the Whitmore Community Centre, near Old Street, London. An informal opening session will lead to three sets of two parallel workshops. Topics have been proposed such as 'Communication and consent'; 'Where do our sexual values come from / is our sexuality our own?'; 'Body image and sexuality'; 'The language of sex'; 'Speed debating'; 'non-heteronormative sex'; and 'A manifesto for my sexual desires'.

If you have an interest in this area or something to contribute we'd be keen to hear from you:
1. Would you like to run or facilitate one of the workshops? Perhaps one of those proposed above or of your own suggestion?
2. Would you like to have a stall on the day?
3. Would you be interested in coming along?

Contact us at: feminist.fightback@gmail.com

There will be a creche and the venue is fully wheelchair accessible. Please specify any childcare or other needs you have before the day.

Costs will be waged £5, unwaged £3 to cover venue hire.

Can we rebuild the Plebs League tradition?

We print here a summary by* Joyce Canaan *of the meeting at Northern College on 24/11/12, followed by two documents written by people who took part

A really engaging and important day event was held on 24 November at Northern College, an adult education college, organised by the Independent Working-Class Education (IWCE) Network (http://iwceducation.co.uk/). This was the seventh such event with an eighth planned for 2 February 2013 in London (see the website for details). This network aims, as the website states, 'to learn the lessons of history to inform current class struggle'. Clearly this project aims to inform, enhance and critique the work of education activists in informal (ie trade union, adult and worker) and formal education (such as university lecturers - as the last talk of the day, by Colin Waugh, indicated). At a time when the world and its people faces multiple crises (ecological, economic, political), when activism in many nations is uneven and struggles could be much more interconnected, education to help build such struggle is of utmost importance.

The day was organised in an open, welcoming and non-sectarian way through both small group discussion and speakers' talks. Almost all speakers and participants are or were involved with education, and expressed concern about how formal and informal education are increasingly compromised and co-opted spaces where students are to be taught 'skills' they supposedly need for entry to the (shrinking) job market they seek to enter after graduating / completing educational processes (at a dramatically rising cost). As Colin Waugh, one of the IWCE co-organisers (Keith Venables is the other), pointed out in his pamphlet, *'Plebs': The Lost Legacy of Independent Working-Class Education* (PDF available at www.post16educator.org.uk), this radical alternative is part of a wider and longer process of working-class people developing 'really useful knowledge' to counter elite efforts to contain working-class resistance (Johnson 1989).

The first two speakers discussed how they had been positively transformed by formal education, a process that had led them to become trade union educators committed to facilitate others' political understanding and action. **Alan Roe** spoke of his pleasure in realising that he had educational potential after the formal education system failed him, a realisation he has long utilised as a trade union educator seeking to help generate students' intellectual and political development. **Dave Berry** discussed how, as a new shop steward, he was introduced to Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which, like other fictional (and non-fictional) works, profoundly deepened his appreciation of the history of working-class exploitation and resistance in the workplace. He noted that such accounts continue today, as indicated by Louise Raw's (2011) *Striking a Light: the Bryant and May Matchwomen and Their Place in History*. The clear ideological bent of these kinds of books, Berry noted, reveals the continuity of capital's exploitation of labour. Alongside such books is a strong and enduring working-class oral tradition through which insights gained from one generation of workers are passed on to the next. Berry argued that both of these learning tools (and, I would add, virtual material) can potentially contribute to greater worker consciousness of their conditions and possibilities for resistance.

If awareness of the past is crucial for understanding the present, as Roe and Berry noted, then the third speaker (**Hilda Kean**, former Dean of Ruskin College, a progressive working-class college created in Oxford in 1899) revealed how the working class past remains under attack today. Kean spoke about the recent shredding of some of Ruskin College's archives by the current principal. Kean cited Brecht's poem, 'Questions from a worker who reads', as indicative of the ways that dominant history has long rendered invisible working-class contributions as warriors, workers and slaves to ruling-class victories in battles, monumental buildings and daily sustenance. For Kean the Ruskin archives were 'like gold dust to labour and social historians enabling a better understanding of the political and cultural life of working-class people in the twentieth century'. The destruction of student admissions and trade union records, as well as dissertations, has eliminated some aspects of working-class activist history from present and future generations. This need not have happened; institutions that had already taken some Ruskin archives (ie Manchester People's History Museum and Bishopsgate Institute) reportedly would have housed these additional archives. The current principal's recent statement that 'we must live by our future', speaks,

Kean noted, to the ongoing wider disavowal of, and severance from, Ruskin's activist past. Indeed, the archive shredding is part of a wider, literal eradication of Ruskin's roots as the college's central Oxford site has recently been sold to Exeter College and the college is now being moved to the outskirts of the town.

The shredding of Ruskin College's 'gold dust' was a theme echoed by the fourth speaker, **Alex Gordon**, president of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union. Gordon viewed this destruction as a deliberately 'hostile act' aimed at erasing earlier working-class educational and political activity. Ruskin was important for the RMT; its 1905 forebear, the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants (ASRS), sponsored students to attend Ruskin. Those trained at Ruskin helped organise the 1911 national strike of 70,000 rail workers that forced the then Liberal government to set up a royal commission to examine workers' frustration with the 1907 Conciliation Board, ostensibly set up to negotiate rail workers' and managers' disputes.

Gordon claimed that the RMT commitment to progressive education by and for workers continues; despite the fact that other unions are pulling out of education centres, the RMT has recently completed a new college [extension Ed.] in Doncaster. The RMT recognises the need of forthcoming generations of workers to understand their past in order to help build a better future - which Gordon maintains is needed in the current era of massive attack on workers more than ever.

Edd Mustill, the fifth speaker, discussed the pre-World War 1 proliferation of socialists in political groups and of radical authors and activists (like those of the early 20th century ASRS of whom Gordon spoke). Education, through public meetings, classes and pamphlet publications, was seen as central to the work of political groups such as the Social Democratic Federation, the Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party. This was the era when labour Sunday Schools, Clarion Choirs and newspapers were popular, when radical tracts like Oscar Wilde's (1891) *The Soul of Man under Socialism* were circulated, as were the writings by the Czech / Austrian Marxist economist Karl Kautsky, and those of the radical American writer Henry George. Left activists and writers, such as the Irish dramatist and pamphleteer Bernard Shaw, and the Scottish socialist John MacLean, writers/ educators who believed that being an activist and going on strike was essential to working-class education, gave lectures respectively to Irish and Scottish workers. The heart of all these efforts was the belief that an independent working-class movement needed to become more aware of its long history of struggles between labour and capital so that workers could help build a radically different, more egalitarian, society. I have little doubt that this is a belief that has motivated Venables and Waugh to create the Independent Working-Class Education Network.

The final speaker, **Colin Waugh**, raised important questions for the recent emergence of popular universities aiming to realise alternatives within, against and beyond the public university. Waugh cautioned these educators to heed the lessons learnt by the 1909 Ruskin College strikers, who, nine years after the college's creation, expressed their dissatisfaction with how the Ruskin educational programme served to contain working-class resistance to ruling class power. Workers, along with the then Ruskin principal, Dennis Hird, broke from Ruskin and set up the Plebs League and Central Labour College. The latter was supported by mining and rail unions and created an educational programme that aimed to promote working-class resistance (as Gordon's talk suggested). The Plebs League, whose successor the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC) lasted until 1964, was itself part of a wider upsurge of working-class educational programmes at home and abroad, such as the Ferrer Circle created in Turin in 1910 that promoted political and cultural education.

Waugh's talk thus urged those attempting to create alternative educational programmes at all levels today to consider whose interests the education they are creating serves, and to place praxis at the centre of their efforts. Waugh pointed to Antonio Gramsci's critique of educational alternatives such as the so-called Popular University of Turin that, Gramsci noted, was neither 'a university nor popular' (Gramsci, 1916). It did not consider working people's prior educational history but only its creators' beliefs about the education they thought workers needed. Knowledge was presented as facts, dessicated bits of information, detached from their contexts that, 'like food parcels . . . [may] fill the stomach, perhaps cause indigestion, but then leave no trace, bring about no change in people's lives' (Gramsci, 1916). Teachers thus did not view knowledge as an historical process that students could help deepen by reading / thinking and by engaging in 'act[s] of liberation' (as had prior thinkers / researchers).

Based on Gramsci's work, and his own research on the Plebs League, Waugh thus argued that formal and informal educational alternatives today need to be forged from and for below, connected to and continuing economic and political struggles. They must link theory and practice with the aim of contributing to a process of radical transformation of working-class people's conditions today.

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IWCE: a note for the meeting on 24/11/12

Mike Martin

What do we mean by 'independent'?

Education, generally, is dominated by ruling class ideology and the failed political consensus. Workers' interests stand opposed to this.

The Ruskin students who set up the Plebs League had clashed with the Oxford elite because they wanted to study Marx not Marshall, Labour Theory of Value not marginal utility.

What would this mean today?

The post-war political consensus that dominated Western Europe in the boom years has broken down. Welfare, education, health and near full employment was needed for capital during the period of economic reconstruction and expansion, and was needed also as a sop to the working class as an alternative to the Soviet model. Significant gains were possible.

In the period of globalisation, involving unrestrained competition between companies, national and financial markets, these gains by the workers are under attack in the race on all sides to extract more surplus value.

Workers need a response that breaks out of the dominant themes of neo-liberal and Keynesian economics. The view is still widespread in the Labour and TU movement that the current economic problems can be solved by a little less austerity and a little more growth - a nod in the direction of the Keynesian notion that governments should borrow and spend in a recession. That made some sense for individual national economies in times of general economic growth, but does not address any of the fundamentals posed by a general slowdown, serious imbalances in global trade and currencies, and the dominant role of financial capital. Not to mention the class nature of society. At the same time, a retreat into 'national' perspectives would be disastrous.

In short, we should be shaken out of the comfort zone of yearning for a return to the old consensus. A healthy debate is needed that is prepared to challenge Keynesian as well as neo-liberal assumptions, and that centres on how a global crisis requires a global perspective for the working class.

Bearing in mind that the original Plebs League / Labour Colleges movement was choked off by its relationship with the trades unions, how can we guard against similar absorption?

There are plenty of options for anyone wanting to study career-related subjects or 'orthodox' ideologies. We should not confine ourselves to the relatively safe subjects such as social history. Priority areas for promoting independent working-class education could include:

Marxist and other radical critiques of capitalism
Histories of class struggle, popular movements and the early unions
Environmental issues and future growth strategies
Practical skills
Significance of identity politics
What future for working-class organisation?

We need to discuss methods of delivery; chalk and talk or something more interactive on the Ruskin students' model. Use of modern media.

Working-class education

We print here a paper drafted by* Rosie Huzzard*, in collaboration with Chris Marks, as a contribution to discussion amongst activists in the PCS union

In a climate for trade unionists where our facility time agreements and access to trade union time are being squeezed and slashed up, we have to look more carefully at the ways in which we do our labour movement work.

Part of the attack is on trade union education, and it seems likely that learning agreements in the civil service (which currently allows us union learning rep [ULR] facilities) will be demolished in the near future.

While these should be defended, and we should argue for an increase in funding to these resources, it will take a while for them to include the ideological arguments that we need to equip our colleagues for the fight ahead.

Presently, the TUC- and PCS-accredited training schemes offer useful information in training reps and members on workplace, legal and campaigning skills. However, these training schemes are a far throw from the ideological training and political education that was afforded to working-class activists and workers in the days of the emerging trade union movement.

New Unionist movements such as the Plebs League advocated the arming of workers with ideas about their situation in the world to offer a different consciousness to the one that they were brought up with as part of the capitalist system. It was their fundamental belief that it was trade unions' role to not only organise but educate, and educate on their own terms.

The trade union studies we have now is in large part funded through the Government and this partnership has both benefited the ability of trade unions to offer learning, and hindered the independence of trade unions to provide 'political' education.

The potential withdrawal of government funding brings the question of how we educate, and what we educate about, within the labour movement to the fore. Whether we continue to receive funding or not, we should evaluate the education we provide.

Training reps, and training committee members maintains a two tier position within our movement of 'activists' and 'workers'. This serves the bosses quite well. For one, it means that the pool of people who are educated is very slim. Secondly, it entrenches a hierarchy within our own movement. Lastly, it contributes to the false dichotomy of 'service / organising model' (as presented by TUC training) of trade unionism, ie 'I pay my subs, you do the political work'.

I would like this paper to open up a discussion within Independent Left on how we relate to Union Learning. I have clearly set down my own views here, but this is not a motion, it is a discussion paper which will hopefully lead to perhaps taking something to conference, or implementing things in IL branches.

Rank and file groups like Independent Left are built on the premise that successful industrial struggle is played out by the active involvement, participation and mobilisation of *all members*, and that ideas, strategy and organising are done at the grassroots. This means attempting to educate every member up to the standard we would expect to educate ourselves - not necessarily in bureaucratic manoeuvring or knowledge of HSE law (which is important to do our work, but should not be the be all and end all of education), but in understanding why groups like IL exist and why they should participate. This isn't about recruitment to IL, this is about implanting our consciousness as political actors into the consciousness of our fellow workers. What is capitalism? Why are we as workers important? How do we get rid of it?

Some people might say that it is strange to talk about education without accreditation or qualifications, but this comes down to a question of

'what is education?' Despite living in a society which measures education by tests and qualifications, radical educators from the New Unionism movement and Plebs League understood education as being far more than that. For a start, people learn in different ways, people come to conclusions through different methods (and come to different conclusions). From my experience, the best educational experience is a discussion, debate or argument, and coming to conclusions on your own terms, not on those of a curriculum or course outline.

The only way this can be achieved is through political education as opposed to /in addition to whatever formal education the TUC / PCS requires or encourages us to take part in.

Some of this work can be achieved under the existing ULR framework (though whether this continues to be the case remains to be seen), which can encompass informal education as well as accreditation. It also allows education for ordinary workers, not just reps. We should use this where we can but also be aware that the very fact that the ULR framework exists as a partnership agreement between management and the trade unions does compromise what we can 'get away with'.

There is no 'getting around' the fact that anything we pursue in this vein won't be under the same accessibility constraints as *any meeting* that we put on in work time. For example, women workers, carers, people with second jobs, students and Disabled people. But for the same reason we don't cancel other meetings (eg on strike days, IL Conference, big demos in London and socials), we wouldn't not put on such education out of work time. That said, obviously there is a case to be made for demanding funding for childcare, facility time and creche facilities during political education, and that is ultimately what we want. Secondly, we want a society where constraints such as childcare, inadequate disability support and horrendous working conditions are a thing of the past. As working class activists we know the only way to achieve this society is to educate our class towards another consciousness.

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