

# Robbins remembered and dismembered

Patrick Ainley

50 years ago the Robbins Report on higher education initiated a phase of progressive reform to change society through education.

Robbins recommended expansion of HE beyond the limited pool previously considered educable to all 'qualified by ability and attainment'. Robbins thus preserved a selective system and was not an entitlement or even expectation of HE for all who graduated high school as in the republican French and original US model. Following Robbins, the official introduction of comprehensive schools from 1965 was not accompanied by curricular reform so that comprehensives were left competing for still selective university entry with the surviving grammars and private schools on the uneven playing field of academic A-levels, even after the introduction of GCSEs in 1986.

Primary schools were, however, freed for child-centred education while there was also further growth of FE. Unlike 11+ selection, which became a thing of the past in 80 per cent of English secondary schools and more in Scotland and Wales, reforming state education at all levels no longer aimed to reinforce existing social hierarchies but to break down class divisions by opening equal opportunities to careers for all. The logic of comprehensive reform carried forward to inclusion of children

with special needs, a common exam at 16 and a National Curriculum presented as an entitlement for all, as well as – more recently – widening participation in HE to nearly half of 18-30 year olds.

This period of attempted reform has been ended by the 2010 Browne Review of HE and the following White Paper. Now a market-driven *Great Reversal* to a minority HE is intended in a society where, once again, education teaches young people their place and aims to keep them there. Instead of the limited upward social mobility from the working to middle class that existed for a short period in a growing economy and expanding welfare state after the war, even young people who succeed in education today start life in positions from which ascent is difficult and any mobility is likely to be downwards. This reality is disguised by, on the one hand, reinventing largely spurious and oversubscribed 'apprenticeships' that employers don't want and, on the other, reintroducing 'a grammar school education for all' – if not grammar schools themselves and/or vouchers plus privatised state schools – alongside colleges and universities for which fees function as *de facto* vouchers.

Despite Bernstein's 1970 well-known warning that 'Education cannot compensate for society', teachers typically thought that it

could. This was partly because of our own experience of education, particularly HE which grew from around 2 per cent, mostly young men, after the war to around 7 per cent, including a growing proportion of women, by the time the baby-boomers went to university in the late 1960s. This was a generation of students most of whose parents – even if middle class – did not themselves go to university but these students' HE experience made them middle class if they were not already.

The new universities aimed to spread traditional HE in the arts, humanities and social sciences, while extending redbrick Humboldtian sciences to the Colleges of Advanced Technology. Instead of more Robbins universities, the polytechnics from 1965-1992 aimed at both an HE on the cheap and a new HE for adult students living locally. Despite some brave experiments, this proved illusory. So too did the latest phase of widening participation to HE sustained on a reduced unit of resource from 2003-2011 by more illusions, this time in the transformative powers of new ICT to include nearly half of 18-30 women at least – now fallen to around one third of 18+ women and a quarter of men.

Vocationalism, which was originally deployed as a progressive critique of 'irrelevant' academicism, was appropriated in the 1980s by claims for the

vocational relevance of the youth training that substituted for the collapse of industrial apprenticeships in the 1970s. From there its language of 'skills' permeated all levels of learning until Mrs Thatcher could declare to her last Party Conference that the battle for the economic future would be won 'in Britain's classrooms' by teaching the future generations of workers to spell properly! Similarly, the latest curricular revanche announced to the House of Commons by Michael Gove on 11/6/13 effectively held the examinations system responsible for the UK economy's 'failure to compete' with Pacific Rim countries.

As for research, universities are shifting from being guardians of national knowledge to ancillaries in the production of knowledge for global corporations. Research selectivity has concentrated funding and restructured the system. In a new mixed economy, private sector penetration of increasingly entrepreneurial public universities is perverting the 1918 Haldane principle that public funds for research should be allocated on the basis of academic criteria, not political or economic considerations.

Combining a free market with strong central control, the new market-state introduced by Thatcher is exemplified in English education at all levels, changed from being a national system of schools and colleges locally administered to a national system nationally administered and including higher education. It operates on the principle that power contracts to the centre whilst responsibility is contracted out to semi-privatised but state-subsidised 'delivery units', as the schools, colleges and universities have become. Yet, with the important exception of £1,000 a year higher education fees, introduced for home students in

1997 and subsequently twice tripled, most services remaining in the public sector were not monetised; nor were they privatised by New Labour. In fact, state spending on education, particularly on schools, was increased by the Blair-Brown governments.

Widening participation to higher education from 2003-11 has not led to fair or equal access to higher education or outcomes in the labour market as systemic inequalities have deepened between institutions and subjects. Like Thatcher's previous encouragement of home ownership, this presented itself as a professionalisation of the proletariat whilst disguising a proletarianisation of the professions. Far from a 'knowledge economy', automation leading to deskilling and outsourcing have infiltrated the employment hierarchy to undermine previously secure professionals, including academics.

Meanwhile, student motivations become increasingly instrumental as they will do anything they have to to get the grades they need. Even becoming indebted up to £27k+living expenses in hopes of the 15 per cent higher lifetime earnings than people with lower qualifications that the Million+ group of former-polytechnic universities estimate as their 'graduate premium' for one of the around 40 per cent of occupations that have reportedly become 'graduatised', bumping other less qualified applicants further down the jobs queue. This is corroding relations between teachers and taught as their lecturers are also locked into a simulacrum of learning as students run up a down-escalator of inflated qualifications.

The new social formation of a working-middle/middle-working class in a class structure going pear-shaped perhaps potentiates

support for progressive politics. Certainly the new class formation puts in question Gramscian hegemony based upon a traditional working class and creates the possibility of resistance *Kicking Off Everywhere*, stimulated by new media. A new politics will still need the old alliances, however, and its falls to labour movement organisations – not least because of their considerable resources and their continued ability to dislocate production – to move beyond simply defending their members' immediate interests and develop policies recognising that the majority in society are undermined by the latest degeneration of a moribund capitalism that is wasting its human as well as its natural resources.

The market is so omnivorous that even positive alternatives, like efforts at Lincoln University to do away with grading, tend to get assimilated as brands if they are successful. System-wide reform is therefore necessary as well as larger societal change, such as a return to progressive taxation rather than any proposed graduate tax in place of fees. Peter Scott at May's Brighton University Convention for Higher Education was surely right to call for 'a revival of radical thinking about HE', whilst 'accepting that HE needed reform but not this reform'. Therefore to celebrate and not apologise for a mass system and fight for an increase in student numbers not 'consolidation' – 'the job is only half done!' as Scott said. This is not to demand everyone necessarily attends HE at 18+ but that there is a universal right to do so based on a general certificate of high school graduation. This will require relating schools and colleges to universities in regional learning infrastructures as long suggested by *PSE*.

This does not preclude dedicated specialist research institutes such as already exist in this and other countries, especially for 'Big Science', but in general teaching should be combined with research as a means of introducing students to an academic community that critically learns from the past to change behaviour in the future. Such development will widen the still available critical space afforded by higher education in

which a defence of the public university built up since Robbins can be conducted.

#### References:

Allen, M. and Ainley, P. (2013) *The Great Reversal, Young People, Education and Employment in a Declining Economy* from [www.radicaled.wordpress.com](http://www.radicaled.wordpress.com)

Mason, P. (2012) *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere*, London: Verso

## Lambeth College redundancies struggle

**Lambeth College is facing compulsory redundancies - 97 posts affected and 42 full-time equivalents - plus the biggest funding cut in the college's history. £3m has been cut already and this figure could be higher when the impact of the 24+ loans takes effect in September.**

**Lambeth UCU branch has submitted extensive counter-proposals to management which outline a clear strategy for growing the areas they are proposing to cut. These proposals include ideas for improving and expanding the curriculum, putting on courses to meet demand, increasing funding and bringing in new funding streams.**

**In addition the branch has urged the college to use all possible methods for avoiding compulsory redundancies. This has been done in the past and the college has successfully avoided compulsory redundancies over the last three years. However, management have so far rejected these suggestions.**

**At the last, very well-attended branch meeting, UCU members voted for a programme of escalating industrial action to defend jobs and courses. This will start with a one-day strike on Thursday 4th July. The branch will continue to negotiate with management to try and secure no compulsory redundancies.**

**Please send messages of support to the branch secretary Mandy Brown at [mbrown@lambeth.ac.uk](mailto:mbrown@lambeth.ac.uk).**

## 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.*

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# A young people's charter: preparing to meet the challenges of the future

Ken Curran\*

**T**he people of the world face an extremely difficult future during the next decade or so. It is very difficult to state accurately just how bad things will become, for so much depends upon the behaviour of the human race itself. Across the globe people are all experiencing changes in the climate: in some places extreme drought; in others extreme rainfall; in some cases very hot days followed by very cold days and nights. Farmers across the world face a nightmare trying to produce our food in such difficult circumstances.

Unfortunately the climate is only one of the headaches facing mankind. Over-population is another. And another major problem is the chaos in the economies across the world, which is creating misery and great uncertainty.

In 2009 Tony Judt published his book *Ill Fares the Land*. It was his penultimate book before he died of an incurable condition. He wrote it as a farewell to all prepared to heed his very sane and profound message, full of love and concern for all of our futures. His book opens with the words: 'We cannot continue living the way we have done over the past thirty years'. He then proceeded to describe our profligate spending, our apparent lack of concern for both the world we inhabit and its many people – our selfish way of life. Despite Judt's death this message remains with us, although judging by the behaviour of our businessmen and women they are not interested in calls for morality in their business dealings. Our politicians too have not yet got the message that humanity is on a knife edge. All that appears to really concern them is their own futures.

In contrast, the future of our own young people is very uncertain. Over the recent past we have neglected proper training and apprenticeships. Today we have a dearth of engineers, builders and other key people to help rebuild our crippled and dysfunctional economy. All the while, our young people are expected to be patient, placid, well behaved and patriotic while they have to hang around in the hope that soon something to their advantage may turn up. There are thousands of our young people in dead-end jobs, employed in burger joints, washing pots, sweeping up, carrying out all of the menial tasks imaginable. While that is happening we see stores installing self-checkout machines in order to get rid of checkout operators. We have created a veritable mad house, with people being hounded for not being in employment and many seeking work where there is none, while supermarkets, for example, are installing these serve yourself machines in order to reduce staffing costs and maximise profits. Just how can these ludicrous situations be reconciled?

In such circumstances we expect our young people not to get angry and riot. Yet these are the very circumstances that we have collective responsibility for! We have allowed our children to become bargaining chips in the great capitalist casino – the global market! We expect our young people to be respectful, well behaved and patient, awaiting training or job opportunities to appear - yet the world they inherit from us is full of problems, few if any of which are really of their making. The fact that they were born was not their choice either. It

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has been their misfortune to be reaching adult status at such a critical period in our history. They are now having to face the consequences of the actions of past generations.

We may say it was ever so, but I believe that is not so, and that the size and number of very serious problems they will have to deal with are greater than those which faced people in years gone by. Over the past thirty years or so we have consumed more of the world's natural resources than at any time in known history. As Tony Judt wrote in 2009, we cannot go on living like this. Do we have to wait until the last moment before we are prepared to accept the inescapable facts? The road mankind has taken is extremely dangerous, and the potential of mankind killing itself off is perhaps greater than ever. The forces we have set in train due to our behaviour in the last four decades have reached the tipping point, with all the signs of its getting out of control. We have disturbed the balances of nature itself.

### Coalition

The schemes which the coalition government give their support to involve awarding contracts to their friends in the private sector so that they can use our money to make a profit out of our young people. This government are guilty of absolving themselves from having any direct responsibility either for unemployment itself or for training young people. They have outsourced their responsibilities to the private sector, for whom the primary function is to make a fortune out of the circumstances of their clients.

This coalition government is ideologically driven, and determined to try and destroy public services as we have known them for generations.

In their view, anyone can provide services. They are trying in a matter of about five years to take us back to the 19th century view that all people have to be responsible to themselves and others, but whether or not everyone has either the mental, physical or economic ability to do this is given scant consideration by the state. In spite of the fact that the school leaving age has gone up from 14 to 16 and now to 18 for a good number, the number of students who drop out from around 13 upwards appears to grow. (Some are also expelled because of their behaviour.) It is those misfits who present the greatest problems both for themselves and society in general.

The present training schemes are almost all of a very short term nature, and neither long enough nor as focused as is needed to actually have practical benefits for either the students or the public at large. One could say the present schemes are a waste of

public money, beyond keeping these young people off the streets for a few weeks.

There is a glaring omission in government thinking: any money spent upon our young people should be regarded as an investment in the future of Britain and its young people.

Because of the short-termist thinking of all our current politicians and their parties, they seek overnight solutions to issues of a very deep rooted nature. The problems confronting today's young people are extremely complex and difficult, and time will be required if ever we are going to get to grips with the issues. Our politicians and their parties have to forget the date of the next election and concentrate their minds upon the following. Why do so many young people leave school before they should? Why is it that so many reach their teenage years without being able to read, write or do simple arithmetic? Why is it that so many people don't vote at election times? Do the liberalised alcohol policies contribute to the way our young people behave? If so, who is to blame? Is it the politicians, their parents, shopkeepers or society in general?

Instead of politicians paying their political advisers to come up with gimmicks in order to win them the next election, politicians and political parties should spend some of their time and money finding genuine answers to the many problems facing society. Scientists and environmentalists have spent years preparing reports about the deterioration of our quality of life. We have pollution on a grand scale; noise pollution, air pollution and pollution in our fields due to the over-use of insecticide. Politicians – though only grudgingly – acknowledge that these sorts of problems exist, yet are still half-hearted in promoting real solutions, because it would mean changing our life-styles, which may make them unpopular in the eyes of the electorate. (They shouldn't worry on that score, because as things stand only bankers are distrusted as much as they are.)

### New deal

Young people need and deserve a new deal – a well thought-through programme, properly funded in order to attract them. Anyone who has worked among young people from our difficult inner city areas would tell any enquiry into the issues raised in this document about the great antipathy many young people have towards both educational institutions and educationalists in general. Many are afraid of being identified as failures and therefore evade the system. Many see the system as being there not to assist them but to show them up in front of their peers.

Preparing to address the problems facing our young people in the future requires a young people's charter, a contract between the state and young people, a set of mutual commitments and promises that are bold and deliverable by both youth and the government. Education and the training of young people need to be joined up.

On 19th August 2012, Stoke upon Trent MP Tristram Hunt called in an *Observer* article for the re-invention of polytechnics. I fully support this call. However, we need a new model of polytechnics which, while retaining the old concept, develops it further by introducing fresh elements and creating a holistic approach where subjects are given equal value, in the sense that a curriculum would be of less value if any of these subjects were not included. We need to build a clear route offering young people choices which would have regard for all students, whatever their abilities. This would require a wide range of subjects, from educational to social and philosophical, plus vocational training and physical development.

As well as having polytechnics sited in towns and cities, I propose that, as part of the reinvented polytechnics, youth villages should be constructed, built and planned by our young students. Obviously they would require help and supervision in such projects. They would, in effect, be getting trained on the job, and experience is the very element that is lacking in many schemes at present. For young people to actually build their own future accommodation would give them a sense of pride in their achievements. It would give them memories, and a sense of values which would influence all their futures. I anticipate that they would plan and build the teaching rooms, toilets, rest areas, kitchens and dining areas, sleeping accommodation, theatre, drama studios, gymnasium, showers and changing rooms. I envisage that they would lay out the land, dig the foundations, lay the drains, do the brickwork, joinery and electrics and also the cooking and catering, designing and decorating their village.

One of the objects of these youth villages would be to create as nearly as possible self-sustainable communities. The use of natural resources to heat and light the villages ought to be one of the objectives – again, installed by students, giving them experience to take back into society. It would be possible also to have a farm in order to produce food to help feed the students in the village, plus a sewage farm both to process waste and derive by-products for sale. Such proposals could give thousands of young students skills and practical experience.

I envisage that each youth village would be self-governed, although professional staff would be required to help steer the governance and

management of the village. Students could stay for a period of around one year, and leave with qualifications based upon their work within the village community.

The proposed youth charter, including the re-establishment of polytechnics along with youth villages, while not eradicating unemployment and all of the uncertainties of our unstable markets, would produce far more skilled and confident young people, who eventually would have a very significant impact within society, benefiting all concerned.

*\* Ken Curran is Chairperson of the Sheffield Branch of the Co-operative Party. This article is a contribution to discussion of a Youth Charter within the Sheffield School of Democratic Socialism, founded by Ken, Harry Barnes and John Halstead.*

## CAFAS Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards

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# Tom Sharpe interviewed (1981)

*We reprint here from Liberal Education 42 Robin Scott Beveridge's 1981 interview with the novelist and former FE lecturer Tom Sharpe, who died in June this year. (Sharpe's Wilt novels had a big influence on media perceptions of the work of General Studies lecturers with industrial release students in FE.)*

## **How do you feel about having gone to public school?**

T.S. Whatever advantages there were, when I went to the Marines, I went as a bootneck. To be an officer you had to go in for twelve years and I wasn't mug enough to do that. I was in a squad of 50 and I think that 35 of them were Glaswegians, six or seven were Welsh and the rest of us were English.

I was probably one of the worst marines ever – certainly in that squad and here were blokes with none of my advantages in terms of education etc. who were far better, not simply at polishing boots – as it happens I was rather good at that – but in terms of leadership qualities although that's an awful phrase.

I must say that absolutely blew my mind. It made me think and it seemed to me that there was something fundamentally wrong with a system which didn't give these people the same opportunities I had. That was my feeling at the time and it's probably stayed with me ever since.

## **After Cambridge you went out to South Africa to work . . .**

T.S. Yes. The first job I ever had was in a finance corporation. That was for three months and I wasn't built for that. They put me in charge of the current account books so I filled in the ledgers and at the end, when I totalled it all up, there was something like £36,755/4/2d missing. Well, the first £30,000 was easy, but then it got worse and worse trying to get down to this 4/2d. Clearly I wasn't interested so I

went and got a job in the Non-European Affairs department. I worked in what's now called Soweto. My first job was visiting people who had TB and taking them food parcels. Meanwhile one of the blokes I'd known at Cambridge turned out to be some sort of South African millionaire. That was clearly a mad and insane society where you had this extreme wealth. There's no excuse for South Africa. The greatest impression I got from South Africa was that human beings were having to live in pain.

## **You then moved from this work to teaching. What did you find?**

T.S. I found that you don't have to teach clever children and that everybody has a skill. It's partly the business of a teacher to find that skill no matter what it is, and not just to run a particular syllabus. I'll show you what I mean. My brother was a policeman till he was fifty. One day he was in the Botanical Gardens in Queensland, chatting about plans to this man. After a while this bloke said, "Do you know who I am? I'm head of the Botanical Institute and I'd like you to come and work for us". My brother said, "That's very nice of you but I haven't a degree or anything. In fact, I've nothing".

To which this chap said, "I don't care a hoot what you've got – you've got a great deal of knowledge about plants".

So he really only discovered his skills – or was allowed to discover his skills in a very open society where they didn't give a tuppenny damn about qualifications and simply because he knew his stuff.

**You were deported from South Africa and returned to England where you eventually ended up at the Cambridge College of Arts and Technology. Did you like working in a Tech.?**

T.S. What I was doing when I was teaching at the Tech in Cambridge, and why I liked Tech teaching, was that you were actually dealing with people who were very intelligent, who had potential (I'm not necessarily talking about Liberal Studies here) who had been to secondary moderns and who hadn't passed the eleven plus.

If they could only go through 'A' level I didn't care in the end – the history didn't matter. Getting through an 'A' level was such a revelation to them that it boosted their confidence so that they could tackle other things.

My theory is that the best teacher is the lazy teacher for he motivates the students to actually work for themselves. Getting an 'A' level provided the motivation. I'd do anything to get someone through an 'A' level.

**That's an instrumental view of education. Why then does Liberal Studies exist?**

T.S. I don't know. That baffles me. You see, I'm against Liberal Studies. Too often it becomes a talking shop. One of the things which is wrong with English education is that it is opinion-oriented. The arts subjects in this country are over-rated to the nth degree. Reading English doesn't turn out better writers but people who can express opinions. They get marked on these opinions providing the lecturer agrees with them. I find this thoroughly uncreative. What I'd like to see is a balance between opinion-oriented subjects and the sciences and engineering. People doing humanities should do a compulsory science. But it works both ways. After all, ask a scientist who George Eliot was and you'll get the reply "wasn't he T. S. Eliot's brother?"

**Can you remember your first experience with a day-release class?**

T.S. Absolutely. I went into plasterers and they were sitting reading or rather they were supposed to be reading Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. I was doing my teaching practice and their teacher said to me, "All you've got to do is let them read a bit and then stop them and check that they've understood the sex bits". That's absolutely true.

Well, they knew more about sex than I did, for God's sake. I had some interesting discussions. That was in the days when Liberal Studies was nine hours of *Lord of the Flies*; nine hours of *Candide* and nine hours of Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*. The only

one of these books which I can now look at without vomiting is *Candide* – although Golding is a good writer.

**Why else do Meat One resist Liberal Studies?**

T.S. Partly because they've got plonked in front of them some pontificating ass like me who's been to university and he's not telling them anything they want to know about. They don't give a damn about what happens to Piggy in the *Lord of the Flies* and they're not interested in the symbolism of it because it doesn't have any relevance to their lives.

When I first went to the Tech there was a man who was said to be a fascist. Actually I don't know how fascist he was. Anyway, I would get his classes afterwards and they said he'd talked about the disadvantages of eating white bread while teaching them to read and write.

**G.S. has sometimes polarised between those who emphasise 'English' and those who emphasise a different 'Liberal Studies' tradition.**

T.S. There was a head of department who woke up to the fact that reading and writing might be the answer. So he changed it all and there was a big rumpus. I'd left the Tech by this time. A friend of mine went to the head and said "Look, when I came here you asked me to teach socialism and abortion and now you're telling me that we have to do this. It's not on." That was, in a sense, true but in the end it gets down to finding out what the student can do.

**You mentioned relevance earlier. Relevance, like committed, is a difficult word. In Wilt one of the heads asks, " 'Committed to what? . . . Abortion, Marxism or promiscuity? It's bound to be one of the three. I've yet to come across a Liberal Studies lecturer who wasn't a crank, a pervert or a revolutionary and a good many have been all three'." [Wilt p12]**

T.S. Well, they don't know what the hell it's about. Liberal Studies was put into the Techs and nobody knows what it is. The term 'Exposure to Culture' was honestly used when I first began teaching Liberal Studies. Well, who was being exposed to whose culture?

What I said was that, in a way, Wilt had been taught more by Meat One and the Gas-fitters and those blokes than he had taught anybody. I happened to get on very well with day release classes – well, printers were a bit difficult. We went all over the place but I didn't mind that.



### **Does this exposure to students' culture help teachers?**

T.S. Yes, up to a point. I don't think you should go on. I think there should be a rapid turnover and I'm fully convinced of one thing. Anyone teaching anything ought to take Liberal Studies classes for at least a year. In the same way, I don't think that people should be creamed off into 'first-rate' schools. I think they should get experience. It's a prejudice caused by my going into the Marines. Bloody well learn how the other half lives – always supposing you know which half you're in. At least get a breadth of experience. It infuriates me when you get teachers who go straight into Tech teaching and they've never taught in a primary or at ESN level. I think that teachers should do these things and be shunted around a lot more.

### **Are Liberal Studies teachers born or made?**

T.S. The best teachers are born to be made. I don't think the best teachers can be harmed by being taught to be better and you can weed out the ones who are absolutely useless. I think there ought to be a proper 2-3 year probationary period although I wouldn't like to see people in fear of their jobs.

Having done all this Liberal Studies and having done sixteen years of teaching altogether, I was really impressed when one day the R.A.F. Sent a lecturer to us. This was when the machine teaching was coming in which, of course, it hasn't. Anyway, he gave the most brilliant lecture.

Now, the army or the air force can take a bloke, let's say with average intelligence whatever that means, and in a crash course in Russian they can teach that guy sufficient Russian to enable him to determine what is being said between two Russian planes over E. Europe.

### **But it doesn't encourage freedom or creativity in education, does it?**

T.S. No, but at the end of the day you've got a bloke who can do something. My feeling is that he needs to do something in a society such as ours where there is a differentiation between the highly articulate and the less articulate. You have a tremendous lack of confidence in many and to overcome that lack of confidence is half the battle of education.

I can teach anybody clause analysis. I had a technique. Now, if you like, it was absolutely uncreative but having blokes who couldn't dream that they could begin to do this sort of stuff and having them come up to the desk (I love this business of people moving about the classroom) thinking and

able to do this, gave them confidence that they could do something and without that confidence you don't have creativity. Instruction leads to attainment, then confidence, then creativity.

### **But certain skills are devalued in our society. How do you go about changing this?**

T.S. Well, on a pragmatic level I'd say pay maths and science teachers a damn sight more and get them back into teaching. That won't go down well but I don't know what you do.

In some countries, after going to university, you have to spend time teaching. I'm not in favour of drafting in any way but I do think that the status of teachers has got to be improved. Now this depends to a large extent on the teachers themselves. It seems to me rather a matter of the weeding out of bad teachers early on so they don't get into the profession. I'd have a low salary early on with considerable increases later on so a good teacher could look forward. We're back in the class thing but I feel that teachers should be like doctors, lawyers etc.

### **We are in the midst of cutbacks in education.**

T.S. I know of a child who goes to a school, not locally, where they haven't got enough geometry textbooks. How they divide them up, I don't know. Anyway, this kid hasn't got one and her parents couldn't buy one because it had gone out of print. Meanwhile some teachers are moaning about the buildings.

Now, if you go back to the nineteenth century, there was a great deal of belief in education and its values, possibly for its own sake. Working-class adults would go down on an evening and read small-print novels in gaslight. There was self-improvement and motivation then, partly religious. The Tech at Cambridge was part of that whole movement and these mechanical institutes are the roots of Further Education. We would do well to remember that.

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# Introductory writing stimulus questions

Colin Waugh

I devised the questions on p13 about three years ago, and since then have used them at the start of each year in my first lesson with new students. The students in question are 17, 18 or 19 year olds in the first year of a BTEC Extended Diploma in IT. This is a level 3 course, although the lesson where I use them (Functional Skills English) is at level 2. (I also take these same students for Unit 1 (Communication and Employability Skills) in their main programme. The site where I work is in Wembley, in the London Borough of Brent.

I am under pressure from the employer to put these students through the West Notts Basic and Key Skills Builder diagnostic test, but I have found over a long period that the approach embodied in these questions is more useful.

My procedure is normally as follows. I introduce myself and explain what the Functional Skills at Level 2 will involve, for example about the reading and writing tests and the speaking and listening assessments and so on, and answer as best as I can any questions the students want to ask. Then I say that I would like them to write something about themselves that will help me to get to know them and also to form an impression of how near they are to the standard needed for passing the Functional Skills. (I try to make my stance towards this like that of a driving instructor towards a driving test - ie that, regardless of the rationality or otherwise of this test, they want to pass it and I will do anything I can to help them do so. I explain that as lecturers we see examiners' reports and example tests but not real past tests or scripts.) I make the point also that, although they are quite likely to be taking the actual tests online and with a dictionary available, a piece of writing done by hand without spelling and

grammar checkers is a good indicator of what somebody can do and where they might benefit from help.

Before giving out the questions, I also give an undertaking that nobody will see their answers other than each of them and me - ie I will not show them to anyone else in the class or outside it. I also emphasise that I am not trying through these questions to find out personal details, and advise them not to put anything private or personal. Lastly I give two or three details about myself, for example my age, my family, a couple of jobs I've done or similar.

When I give out the questions I also say that they can answer them in any order they like. My experience is that the students nearly always make a really good effort to deal with all the questions.

Before the next lesson with these students I read all their answers so as to get an overall impression of abilities within the group. I don't make a practice of going through each script in detail with the student who wrote it. However in the current year I have found a further use for these scripts as follows. A good way through the year, after some students have passed the reading and writing tests, I type out, without introducing any corrections, the scripts of those who have difficulty with writing, and email this typed version of their work to each of the students concerned. I then sit with each one, and together we go through the typed version on the computer, discussing what spelling, punctuation and grammar corrections need to be made, where the meaning is not clear and so on. (We have a copy of the original questions in front of us while we are doing this.)

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**Write something about yourself, covering as many of the following as possible:**

Who would you most like to meet, and what would you tell them / ask them?

Say something about schools or colleges you have been to. Were they any good and what did you learn in them?

If you have done paid or unpaid work, say something about it.

What do you think is the most important invention or discovery? Why?

What languages do you speak, and which is the hardest to learn?

Say a bit about somewhere where you have lived, here or abroad. Where would you most like to live in future and why?

If you could change something, what would it be?

If you could pass a law, what would it be?

Say something about your family, and/or your ancestors, if you know about them.

What do you most like to do?

What is the best and/or worst thing that has happened to you?

What films or TV programmes or channels do you like? What is good about them?

Comment on something that's in the news now, or has been recently.

What do you want to be doing in 5 years, 10 years or 20 years from now?

Say something about your childhood. And/or if you were bringing up children now, what would be the most important thing to do?

# The need for socialist education today

*This article is based on Stan Newens's notes for a talk given by him at a meeting of the Independent Working-Class Education (IWCE) Network on 1st June 2013 at London Metropolitan University*

**A**nyone of my generation who compares the Labour movement of today with that which existed in the early or mid 20th century must be struck by the contrast between the political education available today and that which was provided 50 or 60 years ago.

Many of the people coming forward to serve as Labour councillors, Labour MPs or other representatives have no knowledge – or very little – of the history, the economics or the long term objectives of the movement. I recently asked an individual seeking selection as a Parliamentary candidate if she was a member or a sympathiser with CND. 'What is that?', she asked. I asked about her attitude to the Co-operative movement. 'Oh, we do our shopping at ASDA', she said. 'Mum used to work there'. I asked an undergraduate who had joined the Labour Party about Chartism, the subject of a lecture I was organising. He had never heard of it. Today, when it is the fashion for would-be candidates to promote themselves, I see a variety of leaflets sent in. Most are singularly lacking in any indication of the issues at stake and are an exercise in public relations. The word socialism is not even mentioned.

As a history teacher for twelve years of my life, I taught a syllabus in four years that went from the origins of the earth to the contemporary political scene. I taught kings and queens and dates, but I also taught the development of modern politics, of which the history of the working class was an important part. Many teachers today just teach modules, and pupils may opt out at 14 or before. Much modern history may be left out completely.

Even at university [level], Labour history has been relegated in many cases to a lower order. The media project reactionary ideas and brainwash the population. The idea that Margaret Thatcher saved the country is nonsensical. The policies she pursued helped create the present crisis but the media still portray her as the country's saviour.

The National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC), which was established at Yardley, Birmingham in 1921 and functioned until it was taken over by the TUC in 1964, provided an enormous volume of educational cover, which was primarily utilised by trade union members but was also available for Labour Parties, Co-operative organisations and many others.

The country, including Scotland and Northern Ireland, was divided into eleven (later twelve) regions, in each of which an organiser or tutor was appointed, and he arranged upon request talks, lectures or courses for branches and meetings within his region. Some he would cover himself; others were covered by voluntary lecturers, of whom I was one in the 1950s. In London, the organiser was at first George Phippen and later Syd Bidwell, and, when I was in Stoke-on-Trent, Alex Murie. I gave lectures on historical and economic issues, on branch administration and other topics, from Slough to Southend and later in the West Midlands.

In addition to lectures, there was a postal courses department, operated for years by Christine Millar, which provided courses on over 50 subjects, which included English, Arithmetic and Mathematics for Trade unionists, as well as Socialism, history of the British working class, political geography, public

speaking etc. Hundreds, and sometimes several thousand, people took these courses each year, and they were highly successful. Up to 1929, there was the Central Labour College (CLC) which provided full time courses.

As a reflection of the impact made by the NCLC, J. P. M. Millar claimed, after the Labour government was elected in 1945, that scores of ex-NCLCers had become Labour MPs. Including those who had gone to the College. Arthur Jenkins, Hubert Beaumont, Meredith Titterington, Ellen Wilkinson, Aneurin Bevan, Jim Griffiths, E. J. Williams, Ness Edwards, William Leonard, Arthur Woodburn and Ellis Smith had been educated through NCLC or CLC courses. Jim Mortimer, ex Secretary of the Labour Party who died earlier this year, relates in his autobiography how he learnt from the NCLC.

Organisers and tutors were expected to have a knowledge of Marxism and the Marxist approach to society but courses and classes were never rigid or doctrinaire by intention. Len Williams, later the Labour Party's national agent, wrote a pamphlet on Marxism. The Communist Party and the Trotskyist movement also educated their members in Marxist ideas, although on a more sectarian basis – Palme Dutt was critical of the NCLC's attitude to imperialism, for example. The result was, however, that the active members of the Labour, trade union and co-operative movements were very knowledgeable about politics, international affairs, economics and in some cases philosophy. I can remember sitting at the Victory Cafe in Dagenham during a break in activity at the Briggs/Ford strike in 1952 and one of the shop stewards talking about Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, which his father had told him to read.

Having indicated why I believe the provision for socialist education today is very inferior to what existed at the time of the NCLC, I would point to one of the consequences: the Labour Party was taken over by New Labour with minimal resistance from its membership. The first speech made by Tony Blair as leader to the Labour Party conference indicated that he intended to get rid of Clause 4 and the commitment to public ownership. I can claim to have played a part in resisting his proposal but the majority of the rank and file and T. U. leaders felt no compulsion to object. Not only has the vision of democratic socialism ceased to exist for many, the Labour Party is now prepared to accept that private ownership is generally superior and preferable to public ownership. There is no commitment to renationalise railways or the energy and water industries. Even Keynesian economics have not been embraced by the present leadership and many MPs, who seem to accept that austerity, on a less harsh basis, would be acceptable.

I would like to see these ideas challenged throughout the movement by encouraging education on the issues at stake. It is highly disappointing that, in the worst economic crisis since 1929/31, which could become chronic, there is no powerful political or economic challenge from the left. There is, however, a movement to the right. This underlines the need for socialist education, but I am pessimistic about the possibilities of a significant socialist educational movement at the present time. The history of the NCLC reveals that the trade unions and the TUC were half-hearted about the NCLC in its heyday, and when they took over, in 1964, they effectively ran it down. Syd Bidwell, London and District organiser, later MP for Southall, bitterly blamed Vic Feather. The Labour Party declined to take it over, and gradually watered down its own message anyway.

The scene today is totally different and there is no significant demand for socialist education. There are very few TUs [ie because of amalgamations], and they run their own systems. Through Labour Heritage, we organise meetings and produce a bulletin, but I am afraid it is marginal in importance.

I possess many of the books published by the NCLC and the Plebs League. They were scholarly and comprehensive but simple to read. Today the internet and facebook are probably more important than books but perhaps some effort should be made to produce a series of socialist books on the model of the Left Book Club.

I still undertake speaking engagements like today. I spoke recently at Northumbria University on the political ideas of Ray Challinor. If we could recruit volunteers to staff an organisation like Labour Heritage and bombard Labour Parties, T.U. Branches and Co-op Parties to invite speakers to their meetings, [and] if we could then supply speakers to attend meetings and give enlightening talks, we could envisage some progress, but I fear that this is not yet possible.

Although I am pessimistic about the possibilities in the short run of coming within a thousand miles of the achievements of the NCLC, I am convinced that resistance to chronic recession will eventually grow, and our task is to keep socialist ideas alive and, hopefully, pass them on to a future generation. Although in the 1930s and early 40s the outlook was bleak, in 1945 there was an incredible upsurge of socialist energy. Our time will come again – even if some of us are not here to see it – and we should therefore work in all the ways that we can to rebuild the tradition and renew independent working-class education.

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# Education, social control and *The Great Reversal*

Robin Simmons

PSE 71 carried a review by Colin Waugh of Martin Allen and Patrick Ainley's latest book *The Great Reversal: Young People, Education and Employment in a Declining Economy*. The first part of Colin's review enthuses about the way Martin and Patrick explain how the education system – if indeed system is the correct term – is descending into chaos, and how a succession of governments have attempted to use education as a 'cure' for various social ills, including deindustrialisation, economic decline and youth unemployment. I can only agree with Colin's endorsement. *The Great Reversal* provides an incisive and broad-ranging account of social and economic change and debunks pervasive notions about education and its role in the so-called knowledge economy, as well as various negative assertions about the causes of youth unemployment. One of the key strengths of the book is, in my opinion, the way in which it illustrates that, rather than lacking the skills, qualifications and abilities necessary for work, nowadays most young people are in fact overqualified and underemployed.

*The Great Reversal* is an engaging and accessible book, and it is suitable to a broad readership – if you are involved in education and training, advice and guidance, or welfare and support services for young people you should buy it. Perhaps more importantly, students should read this book too: if your students are training to be teachers, youth workers or social workers they should get a copy. Not only will it help them understand and critique what is going on around them, it will enable them to argue for more just and meaningful alternatives. This last point brings me back to Colin's review and the questions he raises about what these alternatives should be. Colin argues that *The Great Reversal*'s call for a range of institutional and curricular reforms as well as

broader changes in the distribution of work, income and the role of trade unions and local authorities is rooted in particular views about education and social control – and he is not totally convinced that Martin and Patrick's position on this is correct.

Whilst he argues that securing social control has traditionally been a central role of state education, Colin also reasons that, nowadays, the need for education to perform this function is fading. Basically, Colin's argument is that today the ruling class have a range of far more efficient ways of maintaining social control at their disposal – and it is not difficult to see how the systematic creation of debt, job insecurity and housing shortages can act as powerful disciplinary tools, especially for young people. Moreover, the mass media, in its various guises, is clearly far more pervasive nowadays than ever before, and is highly effective in promoting the interests of capital through a range of overt and covert practices. Colin's argument is interesting, as is his proposal to rebuild independent working-class education as an alternative to the status quo. Either way, it is difficult to disagree with the suggestion that the ruling class now has access to a great range of powerful ideological tools, many of which were either unavailable to them or were less influential in previous times. However, having said this, I also believe that social control remains one of the key functions of the education system. There are a number of reasons for this, some of which I sketch out below.

Whilst the ruling class may well have a range of new and potent forces at its disposal, this does not necessarily mean that education's usefulness as a mechanism of social control has become redundant. The crisis of capital which began in 2007-08 has been so deep and so sustained that the ruling class needs every weapon in its armoury to legitimise the massive restructuring of wealth and opportunity

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away from the poor and into the hands of the rich which is taking place not only in the UK but across the world. Also I am not sure that I agree with some of Colin's logic about government's changing approach to education. For example, I would not agree that the Coalition's higher education policy is evidence of the state's loss of interest in education. Abolishing public funding for teaching all higher education courses – other than for STEM subjects – whilst massively raising tuition fees for students can just as easily be seen as part of an attempt to reassert social control. The humanities and social sciences have long been the home of dissent and the Coalition's actions can be interpreted as a crude attempt to deprive working-class students of access to the 'dangerous ideas' they are likely to encounter on sociology, philosophy and politics degrees, and on a range of other courses. Cutting public funding for higher education also represents a form of de facto privatisation and an attempt to promote a consumer culture across the university sector. In any case, the former polytechnics and other institutions where working-class people tend to study have always been far more reliant on public funding than Oxbridge or the other elite universities where the ruling class send their children.

Whilst I think that Martin and Patrick are arguing that the state's withdrawal from the direct provision of education is at the heart of *The Great Reversal*, I do not think this means that the ruling class has abandoned its attempts to use education as a form of social control. In a recent paper entitled 'The reluctant state and the beginning of the end of state education', Stephen Ball (2012) argues that, by turning more and more of the state education system over to religious bodies, charitable foundations and profit-making companies, essentially the Coalition is attempting to turn the clock back to the nineteenth century: an era in which people from different social classes received radically different forms of education, and a time when education was seen as a commodity which the rich bought and the poor received via charitable bodies. The current policy of bringing private and voluntary providers into the educational mainstream is, I believe, part of a deeply ideological class-based strategy to dismantle a central part of the social democratic welfare state, and yet another way of imposing a combination of a crude free market dogma and old-fashioned conservative elitism on everyday life. The promotion of 'diversity of choice' in education, via the bewildering range of free schools, academies, studio schools, and various selective institutions, is also a way of loading the system against working-class parents and their children. Lacking the social, economic and cultural capital

necessary to be able to work the system, working-class people are systematically disadvantaged in the 'education market' in contrast to their more privileged counterparts who are able to use class-based advantages to gain access to more desirable and prestigious forms of education.

On another level, research I have carried out on the experiences of young people classified as NEET (not in education, employment or training) with my University of Huddersfield colleagues, Ron Thompson and Lisa Russell, has found that many training programmes which claim to equip them with 'employability skills' are, in many ways, little more than thinly disguised programmes of social control. As I reported in *PSE 65* (Simmons 2011), unfortunately, many NEET young people find much of the training they receive on such programmes to be neither stimulating nor of practical use – and, at its worst, they find it boring, irrelevant and, frankly, soul-destroying. Moreover, such training often provides participants with little or no labour market returns. It is therefore unsurprising to find that many NEET young people are reluctant to engage with them. Much of the training NEET young people are required to undertake is based upon inculcating them with so-called 'soft skills' such as 'problem solving', 'thinking skills' and 'learning to learn'. Typically other activities include repeated CV writing, skills audits, interview skills and the like – and, whilst such activities can sometimes be worthwhile if embedded in particular vocational, intellectual or social contexts, it is difficult to see them as anything other than an exercise in social control when they are delivered without an underpinning core of knowledge and skills. Whilst, over the years, various forms of education and training have been accused of 'warehousing' young people (see for example, Finn 1987), the concept of education as social control is perhaps more evident than ever in low-level vocational education programmes aimed at unemployed young people today.

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# The fight for the future of FHE

*We print here an article by Colin Waugh based on a talk given at a meeting of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts held at Birmingham University in December 2012*

**T**his talk is intended to help prepare a discussion in the anti-cuts and anti-fees movement on how we should think and talk about further and higher education (FHE) – that is, the FE colleges and the post-1992 universities, especially those which were previously polytechnics (as distinct from teacher training colleges). Where does FHE come from historically? (By ‘historically’ here I mean: up to 1993.)

There were in the 1800s at least three forms of provision from which FHE now derives.

First, there were the mechanics’ institutes. In England the earliest of these, now Birkbeck College, was set up in the 1820s. By the mid 1800s such institutes existed in many towns. They were essentially places where artisans and other skilled workers could come to hear – and sometimes give – lectures and papers about science and technology with a broad relevance to their occupations.

Secondly, later in the 1800s industrial employers began to use some of their profits to set up HE provision in the towns where their factories were concentrated. The main aim of this was to make available to skilled workers and managers scientific and technological knowledge not readily available through traditional universities. For example, the steel magnate and arms manufacturer Mark Firth provided funds to set up Firth College and the Technical School which became Sheffield University.

Thirdly, by the 1880s existing universities, especially London, had begun to provide extramural coaching – that is, evening classes in which lecturers helped lower middle class people prepare

for exams in fields like book-keeping or law that would allow them to become or progress as what would now be called para-professionals.

Between the 1890s and World War 2 more public money was put into each of these fields. One consequence of this was that wider groups could participate. For example, starting in London through the influence exercised over the Technical Education Board by the Fabian ‘socialist’ Sydney Webb, this period saw the growth of polytechnics. Following the 1902 Education Act, it also saw local authorities begin to set up and receive state funds to support evening class provision, geared especially towards people who were trying to progress within business and skilled industrial employment. It also saw an expansion of day continuation classes – that is, provision through which minimum age school leavers could continue aspects of their general education, especially reading, writing and calculations, through part-time day rather than evening attendance.

With respect to the technical side of evening classes in particular, it is important to understand that, starting with the Engineers Strike of 1897-98 and continuing through WW1, especially in armaments manufacture, there were big struggles over the position of engineering craftspersons within industry. From the early 1900s one factor in this was the development, initially in the USA, of Scientific Management as pioneered by Frederick Taylor, a central aim of which was to weaken the control exerted over production by skilled workers in engineering trades. These struggles affected technical education in complex ways.

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After World War 2, and especially from the late 1950s, there was a sharp expansion in apprenticeship-related technical education, carried on in institutions of which some are now polys and others are FE colleges. A wider group of young people, overwhelmingly male, were recruited by industry to jobs through which it was intended they would progress to skilled status, and part of this involved them being sent to colleges, typically on one day a week, or via a system of block release, to follow technical courses that commonly related to companies' in-house training arrangements. Quite a lot of these young people were on indentured apprenticeships, lasting typically five years. The 1964 Industrial Training Act regularised arrangements of this type via a levy/grant system covering participating firms, many of which were unionised. The apprentice's day at college also regularly included an hour or so of Liberal or General Studies – that is, a non-technical lesson intended to broaden their minds. The bodies which set exams covering the technical side of day-release curricula (for example the City and Guilds of London Institute – CGLI) normally required colleges to provide this non-technical element and made suggestions about the material to be taught and learnt in it, but did not include questions on it in their exams.

From the mid 1970s onwards, however, the expansion of technical education began to be reversed. This was part of a renewed attack on working-class self-organisation which first became evident with the public sector cuts introduced under Callaghan in 1976 and continued more sharply under Thatcher from 1979. Unemployment was used as a weapon to help restructure production, the workforce, organised labour and the working class. In particular, young people were expelled from the mainstream labour market, and, as part of this, apprenticeships under union control were effectively abolished. At the same time, the state organised fake substitutes for jobs, such as the Youth Training Scheme, introduced in 1983 but preceded by other schemes such as YOP, STEP and WEEP. There also grew up within FE colleges full time vocational courses catering to a layer of 16-19 year-olds whose parents could afford to sustain them as students. At the same time, unemployed adults were forced to sign up for courses in 'life skills' on pain of being denied benefits.

Historically, then, FHE developed mainly on an industrial base, and at least until the 1980s was somewhat less under direct ruling class control than schools or traditional universities. But what is it like now?

I consider that changes implemented in 1993 represent a decisive turning point in the history of

FHE. To see why, we need first to be clear about the process of change, often summed up in the term 'de-industrialisation', which in Britain was carried through under Thatcher. This process included several distinct but connected elements. First, major areas of UK-based industrial production were closed down, and the capital that would otherwise have been invested in them moved to lower wage economies elsewhere. Secondly, much of the industrial production that remained in the UK was subjected to technological changes, usually combined with new management techniques, which resulted in labour being expelled, and control being concentrated amongst sections of the workforce upon whose loyalty management could normally rely. Such technological changes included in engineering the introduction of CNC machines and flexible manufacturing systems, and, in freight transport, containerisation. Thirdly, either as a prelude to these changes and/or in the process of their being made, the power of key groups of unionised workers – for example, steelworkers, mineworkers, shipbuilders, car-workers, dockers and printworkers – was broken, partly by the use of state power against pickets, partly by the collusion of union leaders in the ruling class offensive, and partly by a reluctance of workers in different fields to support one another. Fourthly, many of those expelled - or henceforth barred from entering - industrial jobs were then pushed by economic pressure either into unskilled service sector employment or into the small business sector – that is, into a newly reconstructed petty bourgeoisie. Fifth, specific parts of the service sector, especially in finance, were expanded. Sixth, the basis was laid, in the UK as elsewhere, for the emergence of a globalised service sector, and with it labour processes dominated by information technology.

In 1988, the Thatcher government 'incorporated' polytechnics. These institutions, previously controlled by local authorities, now became legally independent (and thus financially more dependent on central government). In 1993, the Major government, as part of an attempt to overcome the difficulties created by the collapse of the poll tax, did the same thing for FE colleges, while simultaneously giving polys the right to award their own degrees and thus be designated as universities.

The incorporation of FE colleges had a number of short term effects. The dominant section of principals, organised as the College Employers' Forum (CEF), set about worsening lecturers' pay and conditions by imposing new contracts. The former union official Roger Ward, now employed by the CEF, led this drive. There followed two years in which the lecturers' union, NATFHE,

registered the highest number of strike days of any union. Ward sought to counter this by, among other things, setting up an agency, Education Lecturing Services (ELS) to supply scab labour. Eventually resistance to the contracts was broken, and at least 18,000 tenured lecturing posts in FE were abolished. At the same time there were high profile cases in which principals, encouraged by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFCE), were caught stealing public money through franchising swindles.

The Blair government set about reining in these rogue principals so as to clear the field for senior managers more generally, along with IT contractors, to enrich themselves. The FEFCE and associated Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) set up by Major were renamed the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). This organisation and its successors then implemented - and are still implementing - the agenda implicit in incorporation. The effects include: the reduction of the number of colleges, through mergers and take-overs, from about 500 to about 300; the reduction in the number of FE lecturers who are union members from more than 50,000 to not much over 30,000; big reductions in the security of all FE workers' employment; the accelerated introduction of IT, including both management information systems, PCs in every classroom and, more recently, interactive whiteboards; an unprecedented degree of management dominance over curricular and pedagogic decisions; above all the destruction of the rationale provided by the connection to industrial production.

Other factors developing more recently within this overall picture include: the growth of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision occasioned by the globalisation of the labour force; the imposition of Functional Skills and now of school-derived English and maths as the dominant form of general education; the effects within FE of changes to HE, especially the growth of student debt, the cuts to funding and the tripling of fees, specifically students' uncertainty about their post-FE destinations and attempts by FE colleges to provide HE themselves; a drive, especially through Ofsted, to push colleges further towards privatisation. In short, FHE now is in crisis, and this is essentially because a radical diminution of working-class self assertion and power across society has placed a question-mark over its traditional *raison d'être*.

Let us now turn to consider what movements for radical, democratically-controlled adult education have existed in the past.

Between the French Revolution and the defeat of the revolutions across much of Europe in 1848, including the reverse suffered in that year by the

Chartist movement, there existed a number of movements through which artisans, and waged labourers organised themselves for the ideological dimensions of class struggle. Some of these movements, for example the London Corresponding Society, the struggle for valid economics teaching in the London Mechanics' Institute, and the 'really useful knowledge' strand within Chartism, were focused strongly on education.

Similarly, in the period of working-class resurgence that began with the Matchworkers' strike in 1888 and continued through to the TUC's betrayal of the General Strike and mineworkers in 1926, there flourished amongst activists a number of initiatives by which activists tried to equip themselves ideologically for class struggle. These initiatives included: the classes in Marxist economics organised from the 1890s within the Social Democratic Federation, mainly in London, by Jack Fitzgerald; a similar practice organised by James Connolly and George Yates within the Socialist Labour Party in Scotland; the classes organised by the anarchist Rudolf Rocker with Jewish migrant workers in the East End of London in the lead-up to the 1912 tailors' strike; the movement for a Scottish Labour College initiated on Clydeside by John MacLean in 1916; and the Plebs League and system of independent working-class education (IWCE) created by Noah Ablett, George Sims, George Harvey, Will Craik and other students and former students at Ruskin College in 1908-09 that eventually became the National Council of Labour Colleges (NCLC).

Lastly, in the period of working-class militancy from the Labour landslide in 1945 to the defeat of the miners' strike 40 years later, there were some developments that can be viewed as embryonic forms of workers' education analogous to those in earlier periods. These include History Workshop, the day-release scheme for mineworkers run at Nottingham, Sheffield and Leeds Universities, the attempt by Ralph Miliband to create Socialist Education Centres, and the further moves by Ken Coates, Tony Topham and Michael Barratt Brown to develop this, which led to the setting up of Northern College. However, none of these movements were created entirely by workers themselves independently of state funding in the way those in earlier periods were. Before investigating why this was the case, it will be helpful to look at another 'movement' that developed in the same period, this time inside FHE.

Within the majority of industry-related and industrial release courses in FHE as it existed in the 1950s - ie at a time when polytechnics and what would now be called FE colleges formed a single sector - there was, as noted earlier, an element of

non-technical education usually known as Liberal or General Studies.

The roots of this 'subject' lay in Workers' Education Association (WEA) provision of the type pioneered by Christian Socialists in the Oxford Extension delegacy. It was against this that the 1909 Ruskin strikers in essence organised. Between 1909 and the 1950s this WEA tradition, backed at all times with state funding, extended itself into other fields. For example at the end of World War 1 it extended itself via the Workers Educational Trade Union Committee (WETUC) into trade union education. During WW2 it took control of the Army Education Service and the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, and in the aftermath this influence continued into the civilian Bureau of Current Affairs, and shortly afterwards into Liberal/General Studies in FHE.

In the period of militancy associated with the Wilson and Heath governments' attempts to curb union power, and the latter's attack on the miners, what went on in Liberal and/or General Studies underwent a degree of radicalisation, and then over the period 1977-85 there occurred struggles in which practitioners in this field tried, in the end unsuccessfully, to defend it against attempts by awarding bodies to impose narrower, more 'skills'-based content. This imposition, it can now be seen, foreshadowed the direction that FE as a whole would take. At the same time, the struggles against it can with hindsight be seen as a sort of watered-down and unconscious re-enactment of the struggle at Ruskin in 1909. We the practitioners did not understand either the extent to which Liberal Studies depended on the release of students from unionised industry (and hence its vulnerability to 'de-industrialisation'), nor did we know enough about the previous development of IWCE to draw the lessons for our own struggles. Given also the powerful forces arrayed against us, the result was that no valid model of general education within FHE was put on the policy-making agenda, either at the start of de-industrialisation or at incorporation.

Given this failure, what should we do now?

First, the nearest thing now to the Liberal and General Studies that existed across FHE from the 1950s to the 1980s is probably ESOL, especially where this is provided on a servicing basis within vocational courses. ESOL lecturers have shown themselves capable of organising along with their managers and students to defend ESOL at the level of their own courses. Therefore, especially if there is in the reasonably near future a degree of re-industrialisation, some of those involved in servicing vocational courses may become radicalised, and through this an opening may grow for other lecturers

who want to build or extend valid forms of education within FHE more generally.

Secondly, it is no good informing ourselves about the IWCE tradition now if we do not also develop an analysis of why by 1964 that tradition had decayed to a point where the TUC could so easily suppress it by shutting down the NCLC, or of why no new IWCE-type movement developed from below in the 1960s, 70s or 80s.

A crucial factor, arguably, has been the ruling class's expansion of state HE between 1909 and 2010. Just as at Ruskin the powers-that-be tried to use adult education to create from amongst those who would otherwise become working-class activists a compliant layer, so over the years since then they have used the expansion of HE, especially in the humanities and social sciences, to cream off and produce as professionals and para-professionals a layer of working-class young people many of whom would otherwise have become shop stewards, union organisers and the like. The Coalition's decision to abolish state funding for HE teaching in these fields suggests that they think compliance can now be achieved more easily by other methods. However, this does not mean that working people's appetite for such knowledge has been irreversibly suppressed. Therefore we may have in the near future an opportunity to rebuild the IWCE tradition, and we should try now to develop embryonic forms of this, especially in unions.

Thirdly, such efforts can succeed only if we simultaneously think through to a threshold level a conceptual basis on which they can be made. For example, one field where an IWCE presence could be built is the unionisation of migrant workers. This in turn would almost certainly involve the development and extension of ESOL currently provided for such workers through union education structures (as for example in Unite), thereby putting on the agenda at once the question as to whether the ideas of Paulo Freire, or at least the version of them current now, are adequate to the purpose. I have argued elsewhere, for example in PSE 71, that we are most likely to arrive at a valid conceptual base both for rebuilding IWCE and for reviving a Liberal /General Studies-type movement in FHE through a reappraisal of Antonio Gramsci's thought. That is because in my opinion he went further than anyone else in formulating theoretical lessons from the IWCE-type movements that flourished between about 1900 and 1930.

To sum up, then, we need to build, on the one hand, an IWCE-type movement in unions, and, on the other, a movement for valid education in FHE, and to make sure these two are linked.

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# Vacancy: solicitors required (working class need not apply)

Daniel Rahnavard

**T**his article deals with the discriminatory practices facing working-class law graduates and their entry into the legal profession as solicitors. The focus of the discussion will be on the Legal Practice Course (LPC: the professional stage of training for prospective solicitors) and the solicitors training contract. In order to qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales a place on the Legal Practice Course must be obtained. The course is the prerequisite professional stage of training for would-be solicitors and its content is weighted entirely towards legal practice. The solicitors' profession has grown substantially in recent decades with the number of registered practising solicitors seeing an increase of 114 per cent since 1980. The number of undergraduate law students is rising very quickly (an increase at 1st year level of 50 per cent since 2006-07) and it is imperative that expectations of aspiring solicitors are managed to bring about realistic hopes of qualification as a solicitor (Dixon, 2012). This is especially important given the economic slump which has now seen the number of training contracts fall and subsequently an over-supply of applicants (Dixon, 2012).

The first barrier facing those from a working-class background is finance. Full time LPC fees range from £7,300 to £12,900 (Chambers Student, 2013). This prominent financial barrier is more difficult for those from a working-class background to overcome and, perhaps unsurprisingly, working-class students were more likely than their middle-class counterparts to use a commercial loan to fund their LPC rather than receive financial support from parents or any kind of sponsorship. 42 per cent of law graduates cited financial reasons as justification for not pursuing the LPC (Shiner and Newburn, 1995). Class inequalities are noticeable to those many working-class law students who do not receive sponsorship. There is often a need to finance their

studies through paid employment, resulting in a detriment to their studies (Vignaendra, 2001).

Funding for the LPC is possible through the sponsorship of large commercial firms, and some argue that this is the legal profession's way of providing equality of opportunity. There is, however, a deep-rooted irony here, as working-class students find it much more difficult to obtain such funding because the profession, especially elite commercial firms, remains largely closed to outsiders, especially those from a working-class background (Sommerlad, 2007). Therefore such sponsorship effectively subsidises the rich. If funding students through their LPC, most leading law firms prefer to take on the middle-class student from an old or elite university who possesses specific forms of institutional and embodied capital which are arbitrarily legitimised and relatively scarce when compared with relevant qualifications and credentials. The middle-class student possessing various forms of social, cultural and economic capital is more likely to be recruited by a firm because they enable the firm to present a more 'upmarket' image, thus verifying their own claims to knowledge (Ashley and Empson, 2013). This is particularly prevalent in the current economic climate and has been encouraged by leading law firms which have expanded and amalgamated, with the result that client loyalty has diminished and the fight for clients has intensified (Segal-Horn and Dean, 2011).

In order to practise as a solicitor, a graduate of the LPC must also successfully complete the two year 'training contract'. The number of training contracts has fallen from 6,012 in 2006-07 to 5,441 in 2010-11, increasing the difficulties faced by those from a working-class background, with the discrimination suffered now magnified. Law firms discriminate on the basis of social class as a

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response to conflicting commercial imperatives: initially to entice 'talent', and secondly to limit risk and augment image. What is deeply worrying is that discriminating on the basis of social class is considered 'fair game' and a rational commercial strategy for increasing (and protecting) image and subsequently charging higher fees (Ashley and Empson, 2013), as well as preventing the profession from 'working-class contamination' (Empson, 2001).

The recruitment strategies of law firms disadvantage those from working-class backgrounds in many ways. There is an inherent bias and preference for students from old universities and in particular Oxbridge (Ashley and Empson, 2013). Aware that this means an inherent recruitment of fewer trainees from working-class groups, they believe that it is the education system that is in need of reform, rather than themselves, in order to assist working-class students to realise their potential and attend 'traditional' older universities or Oxbridge. This defence is supported by research. Class identities and identification play a key role in university choice, with working-class students drawing upon intuitive affective responses to higher education institutions, often citing the feeling of 'fitting in' as key, and going somewhere they feel they belong. Working-class students perceive elite universities to be the preserve of the middle and upper classes (Reay et al, 2009). Not only are working-class students less likely to apply to elite universities but they are less likely to be admitted should they even make the choice, a disadvantage compounded for certain working-class minority ethnic groups, particularly Black British applicants (Boliver, 2011).

Larger firms will seek to recruit training contract applicants using various activities (law fairs, presentations, workshops and so on) which focus on Oxbridge and the pre-1992 universities. This obviously benefits those who attend such institutions. 38 per cent of pre-1992 graduates and 21 per cent from new universities were found to have attended such a recruitment activity from a potential employer, compared with 53 per cent of Oxbridge graduates (Halpern, 1994). This suggests that inequality towards the working-class student becoming a solicitor is compounded by the greater involvement between firms and their preferred universities (Rolfe and Anderson, 2003). Law firms are noticeably absent from new universities, suggesting that those students face an increasing amount of barriers after the LPC stage of their careers (Rolfe and Anderson, 2003). Students from old universities (not including Oxford and Cambridge) were nearly twice as likely to secure training contracts as those from new universities (The College of Law, 2008).

The institution students attend is often linked to the school they attended. Young people from working-class backgrounds are less likely to get high A-level scores and subsequently a place at elite universities, because they attended less well-resourced schools working in an environment of multiple disadvantages (Metcalf, 1997).

Those from a middle-class background with much greater degrees of social and cultural capital are more likely to have a friend, relative or close contact within the profession. Some firms even specifically allocate work experience places to contacts of staff. This would go some way to explain why working-class students have difficulties in finding and carrying out work experience. Those with contacts within the profession are more likely to acquire information regarding routes into the profession, criteria for interview selection and advanced notice of who is recruiting and when.

Diversity strategies within the legal profession had limited success. Target Chances' City Law for Ethnic Minorities is a programme that is distinctive in its belief that differences should be recognised and responded to in order that past disadvantages may be overcome. Sound in principle, but it in no way challenges or impacts upon attitudes to social class held by professionals and protected by organisational cultures and processes.

In order for there to be a reduction in discriminatory barriers faced by the working class attempting to enter the solicitors' profession there must be a change in the deeply entrenched attitudes of firms and recruitment strategies. It is difficult to suggest whether such a strategy should be enforced, voluntary or legislative. One such strategy with a degree of (limited) success is The Sutton Trust's Pathways to Law (Ashley, 2010). Larger in scale and more proactive than its predecessors such as Global Graduates and City Law for Ethnic Minorities, it acknowledged the degree of professional prejudice within the profession. It also recognised that social class is not a priority group within the legislative or diversity agenda, and it engaged with the reality that there is differential access to educational advantage within the UK. Such approaches may provide an answer but would be cautious in their approach. Analytically they can be contradictory because they offer a level playing field to one's peers and more equality of opportunity when applying to law firms through the vehicle of differential treatment for non-traditional candidates.

Recent research suggests such social class inequalities as those discussed above are reflective of a wider society (Reay, 2012). It is suggested, therefore, that the issues raised in this article are indicative of a broader need for social and economic change.

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