

The Whistleblowers: Sir Alec Clegg

Alec Clegg became Chief Education Officer for the West Riding of Yorkshire at a turning point in the social life of the county, when social reconstruction and reform was taking place at the end of the Second World War. A brief account can give the only a suggestion of the character, hopes, ambitions, misgivings, optimism, contained in the cultural life of the time. His personal lectures and writing, nevertheless, demonstrate uncanny premonitions regarding some present-day problems.

He served on a wide variety committees, including Newsom and Crowther, whose work encompassed the recognition of deprivation and delinquency and the context in which young people actually lived. His continual preoccupation was, how to make children think and use their knowledge, rather than produce the suffocation of over-stuffed minds:

"But there are two kinds of education: the education of the mind by imparting facts and teaching skills, and the education of the spirit, and the material to be worked on here is the child's loves and hates, his hopes and fears, or in other terms, his courage, his integrity, his compassion and other great human qualities."

These questions were central for Alec Clegg: *'What do we know? How do we know? What do we make of what we know?'* *'We are living in an illiterate society in spite of a great deal of formalised, complex education.'*

All children should have quality in their lives – school, he believed, gives a base for some, a refuge for others, and for all a common ground and a foundation for intellectual independence.

He met colleagues, counsellors and caretakers with the same equanimity and ease. He wrote of the richness of an extended family group which gave him the background and the base for his independent outlook:

"I take courage from the fact that in my wider family there have been individuals who have worked in one way or another in almost every type of educational institution from nursery schoolteacher to vice chancellor, from a governor of a school for disruptive pupils to a Cambridge Don, from an independent school governor to a technical college lecturer, and I might add that between them, my grandfather, my father, and I have served the public education service in England since it began in 1870, and finally perhaps I should add that as an adolescent I attended a state secondary school, an independent boarding school and a brief but significant period, a German girls' boarding school in the township of Weimar."

Born in Sawley in 1906, he was the only boy, the youngest of family of five, (one sister was lost in childhood), by a good number of years. He therefore acquired brothers-in-law early and an extended family. He began his secondary schooling under a very strict father who was head master of Long Eaton Secondary Grammar School in Derbyshire. At 14 he was boarded at Bootham School. Here, the Quaker emphasis on the value of the human being clearly influenced him. The Quaker concept of basic human worth was an incentive to a continuing search for ways and means of bringing about a lively, inspirational school.

Alec Clegg's personal interest was languages. He went up to Clare college after a year in Weimar, and took a first in French and German. At a time when most graduates went straight into

that all teachers should train and that initial training should only be a start. The consequences of this thoroughly held belief led to the establishment of seven colleges which together served every stage of the teaching profession, in schools and in college. 'Life long learning' featured in his vision.

His love of language showed itself in pleasure in children's spontaneous writing, and resulted in two publications, *The Excitement of Writing*, and *Enjoying Writing*. His office walls were decorated with examples of children's art. There was much encouragement of music, drama and physical movement, but also insistence on the primary place for reading, writing, and speech.

Alec Clegg's teaching experience was gained at St. Clement Danes secondary grammar school, Holborn. In 1937 he moved into administration taking posts in Birmingham, in Cheshire and in Worcestershire. He said that it was in Worcestershire that he came to understand what it meant to be part of a humane education service. The broad experience from these three educational authorities gave him some insight into the many different conditions of daily living and left him with considerable sympathy for the deprived and neglected, but also for gifted who could miss opportunities. He moved on to become deputy in the West Riding of Yorkshire, then the largest local education authority in the country. Only a few months later Alec Clegg, at 35, became chief education officer.

He insisted that the teaching of art, craft, music, drama and physical movement demanded equal attention with academic studies. The tramlines of exams were challenged: *'... The more pupils there are who get certificates, the greater the responsibility for those who don't.'* He aimed at a skilled, intelligent population recognising that trends and many changes in occupation in the final analysis could bring about increased leisure and choice to those least equipped to use it. He had encountered a strong, cultural shock through service on the Newsom and Crowther committees, looking at the education of the least privileged.

He began when the West Riding Development Plan was presented to him in his first year as chief education officer, and in the year of his retirement faced the breaking up of the County. He died in 1984. Through each stage and phase he worked for a humane, educational plan which would work for the entire youth population:

'... we asked (the Newsom committee) for a change of heart towards the children with whom we are concerned... If the change of heart does not come about, I personally believe that in the next fifty years we shall run into social difficulties which will make those of the last fifty years trivial.'

'... an education service is not a factory which produces glass bottles or motor cars or radio sets or other inanimate devices. It produces people.'

Dr. Nora George is now retired and has just written the book. *Sir Alec Clegg: Practical Idealist*, Barnsley, Wharnccliffe Books' ISBN 1-871647-99-1

It is available, price £13-99, from N. George, 85 Pinderfields Road, Eastmoor Road, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, WF1 3PJ

NOT QUITE THE REVOLUTION : EIGHT PROBLEMS WITH CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

grammar schools, he went on to train at Borough Road Day Training College, London, under the renowned Sir Percy Nunn. He took the London teaching diploma. He developed the view

Introduction

As somebody who taught social sciences, including politics, in schools and who went on to be a tutor on a social science PGCE course, it would be expected that I would welcome the introduction of compulsory citizenship education in English secondary schools for the first time from 2002. Up to a point this would be true. In some schools and in the hands of some teachers some good work will be done that would not otherwise have been done and as a result some pupils will leave school more politically literate and more democratically inclined than they might otherwise have been. However, the claim in the Crick report that 'We aim at no less than a change in the political culture of this country both nationally and locally' (Advisory Group on Citizenship,1998:7) does for the moment seem a little ambitious and far-fetched. Below I try to set out some major problems with citizenship education that may well blunt its impact in terms of the major contribution to the democratisation of British political culture that the Crick report aspires to.

What's in a Name?

'It also means teaching by stealth; keeping the dreaded citizenship word, with its pious overtones, off the agenda. Part of Blunkett's vision is of a syllabus that includes voluntary work in the community, a concept that goes down like wet sick with many teenagers' (Crace 2000).

Why is the new subject called 'citizenship education' ? I have in front of me a book entitled 'Education for Citizenship in Secondary Schools' which was published in 1936. In the late 1970's and during the 1980's before the introduction of the national curriculum, the pressure was rather for 'political education' as part of a broader study of the social sciences and 'education for citizenship' was seen as having dated, almost imperial connotations of passivity, loyalty, obedience and nationalism rather than the critical spirit and proclivity to action of a political literacy approach. As the Crick report rightly states, the term came back into use in 1990 with the report of the Commission on Citizenship appointed by the speaker of the House of Commons. This document, as Crick also notes, emphasised 'active citizenship' by which it meant 'welfare being not just provision by the state but also what people can do for each other in voluntary groups and organisations'. Furthermore, the Crick report is puzzled at the failure of the Speaker's Commission to discuss more political notions of what it means to be a citizen (Advisory Group on Citizenship:10). Perhaps such coyness is understandable given Kenneth Baker's presence on the Crick's Advisory Group. Kenneth Baker was, of course, the Conservative Secretary of State for Education responsible for the national curriculum which deliberately excluded political education (and sociology and economics) from the school curriculum and instead relegated citizenship education to a cross-curricular theme.

However, as I wrote nearer the time,

'Just after the introduction of the national curriculum in the Education Reform Act of 1988 talk began in government circles of the need for "active citizenship", in particular from Douglas Hurd the then Home Secretary. This was then immediately linked to education for citizenship...In the four years since there has been much discussion of education for citizenship but little clarity as to what it is. This is because different people

mean different things when they use the phrase but...evidence suggests that the general interpretation is very much closer to the traditional, conservative 'civics' model than to a political literacy approach. Part of the reason for this lies in the origin of the debate. It is very clear from an article written at the time by the present Secretary of State for Education, John Patten, that what the government means by 'active citizenship' is getting individual citizens increasingly to take on jobs and roles via voluntary work and charities that have previously been done by (in their terms) the 'nanny' state. It is part of the right-wing ideology of the reduction of collective social provision and the privatisation of social and economic life. Education for active citizenship in the government's terms then is about motivating young people to be active in taking on the worthy and necessary tasks left undone by the welfare state. 'Active' in this sense means supporting things as they are and does not also mean critical and informed participation in democratic political debate and action' (Harber,1992:17).

The naming of such an initiative is important because of the signals and implicit meanings it transmits to teachers. While the Crick report places equal emphasis on three strands of citizenship education - social and moral education, community involvement and service and political literacy - the history and existing nature of citizenship education as a cross curricular theme and the educational context into which it is being introduced (see below) suggests that the first two strands will be much more significant than the third.

Who Will Teach It?

The interpretation of citizenship education in practice will depend on who is teaching it. Here there are big problems. If citizenship education was at least partly to employ a critical social and political perspective examining the nature of the social structures that shape our lives - the economy, 'race', gender, power structures etc. - it would require a conceptual analysis of society based on the social sciences. This would require teachers with social science degrees and social science teacher education. Yet since 1988 only graduates with a degree in a national curriculum subject have been allowed to enter teacher training which effectively barred social scientists from entering the profession. Many of those teachers with social science qualifications, never a large proportion in the first place, have left school teaching. Don Rowe of the Citizenship Foundation said 'This is a significant issue which seems to weaken the whole capacity of schools to deliver a sound social education' (Barnard 1998). In 1999 there were only six higher education institutions offering places in social science and one in sociology (Davies, Gregory and Riley,1999:112). Moreover, my weekly perusals of the jobs columns suggests that Schools of Education in higher education have not yet begun to take new initiatives in this area of initial teacher training to any significant extent. This may be because they are not convinced about the market for the subject, because the low level of funding for initial teacher education in higher education does not encourage enterprise and risk taking or because there is no guarantee that citizenship education will survive the return of another Conservative government.

There are also problems with the processes of teacher education. If teacher education is to prepare teachers for teaching education for democratic citizenship then it must provide student teachers with congruent experience of operating democratically, of having some say over the content and nature of their course. This is precisely what happened on one teacher education course for social science teachers in the 1980's which began with a discussion of a number of possible ways in which

the course could be run, all involving students in decision-making to some extent. However, one option which many groups chose was what was termed a 'democratic learning cooperative' where students decided completely on the curriculum of the course, when chosen topics would be covered, how and by whom (Harber and Meighan 1986). However, the advent of much greater centralised control over teacher education through the Teacher Training Agency and Ofsted would make such an approach much more difficult now. Discussing the democratically organised course just described, some writers have recently commented that,

'In today's climate, such radical action would be accepted only in certain modified ways. Nevertheless, some way forward must be found if we are to escape the negative mechanistic managerialism that characterises at least some of the current practice in teacher education' (Davies, Gregory and Riley, 1999:114).

In the same way that there are conflicts between the processes and practices necessary for education for democratic citizenship and the wider context of the national curriculum in schools, so there are conflicts between the processes necessary to educate teachers of citizenship and the current centrally controlled context of teacher education.

What about existing teachers? A recent national survey of 679 teachers found that citizenship education 'barely figures as a curricular concern'. The teachers had a de-politicised or apolitical view of citizenship and overwhelmingly saw citizenship as about meeting our obligations to fellow members of a community. It was perceived as being about active concern for the welfare of others,

'Time and time again the language of caring, unselfishness, co-operation and demonstrating respect is used to give substance to the distinguishing characteristics of a good citizen, be the context school or the wider community...it is perhaps not surprising that the notion of participation in the community emerged as a key theme on how one discharged the responsibilities of being a good citizen' (Davies, Gregory and Riley, 1999:50/51).

The teachers were reluctant to get involved in teaching about controversial views and one of the most common ways that teachers thought schools could promote good citizenship was by encouraging pupils to pick up litter, though obeying school rules, coming to class on time and taking pride in your school were also seen as important. The teachers put far more emphasis on the first two legs of Crick's citizenship stool – social and moral education and community involvement – than the third leg of political literacy and were reluctant to get involved with this approach. This indicates both the likely nature of citizenship education after 2002 and the scale of professional development required if it is to be more than a rather pious and conservative exhortation to be good and help others.

The National Curriculum

'I think in terms of experiential learning and wonder how pupils are expected to grasp the ideas of democracy and citizenship when they have been trapped in a totalitarian educational system which does not recognise their right to choose what they learn or how they learn it. Isn't the whole of their schooling a lesson in living under a dictatorship?' (Clarke 2000).

Putting citizenship education in the curriculum is aimed at educating democratic citizens. Indeed, the QCA guidelines on personal, social and health education and citizenship for key stages 1 and 2 notes the importance of developing independence and responsibility (QCA, 2000a:5). Yet these aims are contradicted by pupils' experience of the national curriculum where subjects, subject content and reading are centrally prescribed and routinely tested and where pupils have very little opportunity to exercise independent choice or take responsibility for their own learning. Even compulsory citizenship education itself is the result of government fiat.

If citizenship education is about more than being preached at about democracy then pupils must learn how to behave democratically through experience of democracy. This must involve young people having some control over their lives at school which includes some say over what they learn, when and how. At the moment the national curriculum makes this impossible by providing exactly the opposite experience, that of authoritarian imposition. A recent study of the actual operation of the national curriculum over a five year period involving 7000 pupils, 250 teachers and the observation of lessons in 97 primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions concluded that,

'...the National Curriculum, in operation, enforced a limited course restricted to the rote-learning of subject-specific knowledge so that pupils may perform well in written tests of memory. It is my contention that this knowledge-based, assessment driven curriculum demands didactic drill-training to ensure examination success; and that such a pedagogy suppresses the development of a critical disposition, so that the school leaver becomes a passive serf or discontented outlaw rather than an emancipated citizen or productive worker' (Griffith, 2000: xvii).

However, the national curriculum is also problematic in another way. How seriously will schools take citizenship education anyway and how much priority will it be given in a context where schools are judged on exam results and their consequent places in league tables? Will the pressure on the timetable created by other national curriculum subjects, the lack of league table ranking points for citizenship plus lack of teacher expertise and enthusiasm mean that many schools will subvert citizenship education through such means as 'citizenship days' of intensive community involvement or extra history lessons?

Personal, Social and Health Education

Though the Crick report warns against simply conflating citizenship education with PSHE, it does accept that there is considerable overlap and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has provided joint guidelines for key stages 1 and 2. In practice, given the already crowded timetable and lack of space for a new subject plus existing teacher dispositions and experience as discussed above, it is likely that citizenship will often be taught through the PSHE slot. Here the problem is with the word *personal*.

In PSHE the emphasis is on the individual and what s/he needs to survive and prosper in contemporary society and preferably not become a problem for the state. Topics dealt with, for

example, might include drugs, nutrition, road safety, sex, careers, the environment, emotional literacy/feelings, personal finance and parenthood. Whilst these are important and relevant topics there is a danger that the emphasis on the personal and the individual will mean that structural issues are played down or ignored. It is important that pupils are also encouraged to utilise a wider perspective to develop critical awareness of the social structures and forces – gender, ‘race’, social and economic inequality, ideology – that shape individual behaviour as well as the personal skills needed to function socially. To exemplify the difference in approach, while in PSHE health education might stress nutrition, sex education and hygiene, a social scientist would want to look at evidence on the social distribution of illness (e.g. by social class), the relationship between illness and other social structures such as housing and patterns of state and private health provision.

There is a need to combine the critical analysis of social science with the practical, individual-orientated approach of PSHE. If both approaches are not used there is a danger that education for citizenship will be little more than a descriptive and prescriptive preparation for existing society. It is unlikely to be the exercise in democratic learning permitted by social science in the sense of an examination of a range of alternative ideas, policies and structures which helps to open pupils’ minds and allows them to choose for themselves.

Democratic School Structures

‘Delivering a talk to 100 educationalists at the British Library, Emma,15, and James, 16, seized control by asking the audience to stand. Distinguished delegates were then asked to sit down if their hair grew over their collar, if they wore ostentatious jewellery, or if their clothes were unacceptable in the youngsters’ eyes. In the end only a few were left standing. This emphasised, said Emma and James, how frustrating it can be when school rules are simply imposed on young people. To the amusement of the audience one of those who reputedly fell foul of the teenagers’ rules was none other than Professor Bernard Crick – former tutor of Education Secretary David Blunkett and the man who has led calls for compulsory citizenship lessons. He had to sit down because his phone was switched on. Emma and James, who both attend schools in Northumberland, were speaking on behalf of the organisation Article 12. It campaigns for recognition of Article 12 of the UN convention on children’s rights. This calls for authorities to take the views of children into account when taking decisions that affect them’ (Mansell 2000).

If pupils are to be educated for democratic citizenship then they must experience it in their daily lives, not just be told about it. This means that pupils must have some role in the decision-making structures of the school. Arguably, experience in elective and decision-making procedures is the most direct and important form of education for democratic citizenship in terms of a first hand way of democratic learning skills and values and a democratic political vocabulary. The Crick report recognised this,

‘There is increasing recognition that the ethos, organisation, structures and daily practices of schools, including whole school activities and assemblies, have a significant impact on the effectiveness of citizenship education’.

However, although the Advisory Group considered making school councils compulsory they rejected the idea ‘for fear of overburdening schools and teachers’. Instead they aimed to

‘plant a seed that will grow’ (Advisory Group on Citizenship,1998:36,25/6).

While there seems to be some evidence that interest in school councils is increasing and that around 50% of secondary schools and 25% of primary schools already have a council, the author of the article that provides these figures also notes that,

‘Somehow the idea of school councils seems oddly out of step with the flavour of education in Britain today. We’re all aware of the current of authoritarianism at the heart of the government’s reforms: sitting in rows and getting back to basics on the three Rs doesn’t seem to fit with giving youngsters the right to speak out about things, still less to actually change them’ (Moorhead 2000).

The government seems to be giving out mixed messages about democratic decision-making in schools. Summerhill School in Suffolk is perhaps the best known democratically run school in the UK and possibly in the world. In 1999 David Blunkett issued a notice of complaint threatening the school with closure after Summerhill had received a critical inspection report from Ofsted. The major issue was that Ofsted inspectors had used criteria they normally used when inspecting state schools and had therefore ignored the democratic philosophy and goals of the school. Although the Department for Education and Employment finally withdrew its complaints just before the case went to court, it was a salutary reminder to all other schools subject to Ofsted inspection that it is dangerous to take the practice of democratic education too seriously. Given that democratising an existing school, as opposed to setting up a new school on democratic lines, is a difficult and complex process (Trafford 1997), the attempted persecution of Summerhill does little to encourage schools to set out on this path.

At present British schools and educational authorities have got a long way to go before they take education for democratic citizenship sufficiently seriously. A recent study of pupil democracy in Denmark, Germany, Holland and Sweden (Davies and Kirkpatrick 2000) found a large gulf between the UK and other European countries in terms of the status of children in schools. In these four countries there is :

- A legal requirement on schools to involve children in a wide range of decision-making committees
- Participation by children in the development of curriculum and teaching methods
- Pupil representation on local, regional and national education committees
- Funding and support for national unions of school students

As the authors of the study note, in these four countries

‘Children are encouraged to express their views, contribute to school life at every level, to challenge those things which are not working for them. The outcomes are clear – more equitable teacher/child relationships, positive school environments, confident, articulate children with experience of participating in democratic processes’ (2000:97).

Racism

Racism is a significant and ugly aspect of Britain culture. The Macpherson Report on the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999) was a clear reminder that racism is currently embedded in

British society and institutions and that it is the opposite of, and a threat to, democracy. Surveys regularly reveal the extent of the problem. In a survey carried out just after the Macpherson report, more than 80% thought there was 'some' or 'a lot' of racial prejudice in the UK (Johnston 1999). In a survey carried out by the European Commission one third of Britons said that they were either 'very racist' or 'quite racist' while another third said they were a 'little racist' (Dutter 1997). Racism also affects young people. Childline, a national children's support group, did a study of 1600 callers to their trauma lines and concluded that 'blatant, unrelenting racist harassment and bullying plays a large part in the daily experience of many black and ethnic children at our schools and in our streets'. A similar study ten years before had found the same results (Trench 1996). The European Youth Survey carried out for the satellite music channel MTV suggested that although racism was a problem with youth in other European countries, British youth were by far the most racist. Almost 30%, for example, disagreed that all races are equal and 26% said that they would never consider dating someone of a different colour (**Guardian Weekly** 16/12/97).

There is considerable evidence of racism in the education system generally (Osler 2000a) and worrying evidence of racism amongst teachers and student teachers. In a survey of over 20,000 teachers carried out by the Commission for Racial Equality (Ranger 1988) nearly two thirds of white teachers and 81% of ethnic minority teachers thought there was racial discrimination in schools generally. A recent survey of 400 PGCE students broadly representative of trainee teachers generally suggested that up to one in ten had racist attitudes and others complained of ideas such as anti-racism or anti-sexism being 'shoved down their throats'. Cynicism about politics was widespread. A quarter believed tension was inevitable when different races lived together. A fifth thought black people did not do enough to embrace British culture and more than a third believed positive discrimination had gone too far. The author of the report, Chris Wilkins of Reading University, warned that unless PGCE courses helped students to understand concepts like social justice, attempts to introduce citizenship education would fail to make an impact (Barnard 1999).

Indeed, the Crick report itself has been subject to considerable criticism in regard to its failure to even mention racism and the assimilationist, patronising and somewhat colonial use of language (Osler 2000b). However, the QAA's initial guidance for schools for citizenship at key stages 3 and 4 (QAA 2000b) is an improvement on the initial Crick report making reference, for example, the need for schools to consider local issues 'such as particular manifestations of racism and its removal' and among key concepts to be studied 'human rights (including anti-racism)' – though the parallel guidelines on personal, social and health education are quiet on the need for anti-racism (QAA 2000c).

Concern with anti-racism is a relatively new phenomenon in Britain with many books on the subject not appearing until the mid-1980's. Moreover, this has always been a highly contested and controversial terrain. As Osler argues, while there are teachers, teacher organisations and local authorities that have promoted anti-racist education, such initiatives have been consistently attacked by the political right and its allies in the press,

'The political right attacked anti-racism in education and presented it at one level as a distraction from what was emphasised as central, the acquisition of basic skills, and at another as a dangerous tendency which would not only

undermine "standards" but which would threaten British values and undermine British culture' (Osler 1997:22).

Yet if citizenship education is to be aimed at a genuinely democratic citizens and society then it must explicitly confront racism in the school and the classroom. At the moment the nature of the national curriculum, the legacy of nearly two decades of right-wing political hegemony, the nature on initial teacher training, the shortage of teachers trained in the social sciences and teaching controversial issues and the lack of emphasis on racism and antiracism in QCA guidelines for the most likely curriculum slot for citizenship (personal, social and health education) suggest that this key area will not receive the overt prominence it should have.

Assessment

Assessment is important in any curriculum area as teachers tend to start with what is going to be assessed and work backwards – teaching methods are heavily influenced by types of assessment. The QAA guidelines on citizenship at key stages 3 and 4 stress that 'assessment in citizenship should not imply that pupils are failing as citizens'. David Brockington, who is the citizenship education sub-group on assessment agrees and argues that assessment in citizenship,

'...must allow individual pupils to be judged in relation to their own progress, rather than by an externally-imposed national standard. Technically, a system which is individualised rather than norm or criterion-referenced' (Brockington 2000).

The QAA guidelines duly state that,

'Teachers will need to keep a record of pupils' progress and results of assessment, for example, through pupil profiles, record sheets or portfolios, to provide evidence of progress towards the attainment target. Pupils should be encouraged to review and record their own progress, and develop other skills in managing their learning through use of the national record of achievement and progress file' (QAA,2000b:25).

While this is something to be supported in principle, the problem is that it is hard to reconcile it with the type of assessment required for the rest of the national curriculum and it would not be surprising if students and teachers attached little importance to citizenship style assessment unless major reform of national curriculum assessment is forthcoming:

'Even though its advocates swear blind that citizenship is about the practicalities of life, the only practicalities that many schools are interested in are GCSE results. And although Blunkett has said that citizenship teaching will be assessed – though there are no details at present – unless a last-minute rabbit is to be produced out of the hat, there are going to be no league table ranking points at stake' (Crace 2000).

The Crick report and the QAA guidelines put considerable emphasis on participation in voluntary groups in the community as a key aspect of citizenship education and Brockington (2000) stresses the importance of assessing the process of community activity in citizenship education. However, in practice in British society with its attendant popular press and its market-driven school league tables this could involve schools in some difficult choices. If community participation is important and the right to choose is an important part of democracy what happens when a pupil or pupils choose to volunteer to work for a local gay rights organisation? Or a legalise cannabis organisation? Or

local fuel protesters? Or an anti-immigration group? All perfectly legal organisations but likely to bring bad publicity for a school with potentially negative effects on pupil recruitment. Perhaps pupils interested in community involvement will fast learn the limits of freedom in a democracy.

What Happens if the Conservatives are Returned to Power?

A major problem with education for democratic citizenship in Britain is that it is the subject of serious party political division. The present initiative is occurring very much because there is a Labour Government in power. The Conservative Party government of 1979-97 was consistently hostile to the social sciences and political education in schools. From the mid-1980's publications emanating from right-wing groups close to the Conservatives sought to minimise informed discussion of politics by young people by repeatedly attacking the whole idea of schools being involved in political education (Scruton et al 1985; O'Keeffe 1986). One right-wing group, for example, the Campaign for Real Education opposed the teaching of sociology, politics, peace studies, world studies and political education, was critical of anti-racism and anti-sexism and claims to have been influential in the framing of the national curriculum (Hempel 1988). While this may well have some truth in it, the Secretary of State for Education who introduced the national curriculum, Kenneth Baker, claims that a key influence was Mrs. Thatcher's hairdresser,

'On the curriculum she did have views, which as far as I could see came from her hairdresser or it may have been her cleaner who lived in (the left-wing run London borough of) Lambeth, who was worried that her children were going to be educated by a lot of Trots....She believed basically that all one needed in the national curriculum were English, mathematics and science' (Sunday Tribune Durban 2/6/1996).

The Conservative Party has always been unenthusiastic about a genuinely open and realistic political education that uses evidence and encourages young people to make up their own minds for the simple reason that this has been perceived as a potential threat to their 'natural' (and historically empirical) hegemony in the political system. If schools do not openly and democratically tackle social and political ideas then they serve to reproduce the existing dominant values of the surrounding society and political culture which the Conservative Party have seen as primarily favouring themselves. It is not therefore surprising that the National Curriculum introduced in 1988 deliberately excluded social and political education. Schools and teacher education institutions will rightly now be cautious about wholeheartedly investing time, money and personnel in citizenship education as set out in the Crick report if there is even a possibility that in a year's time the Conservative Party is returned to office. After the scorched earth policy of 1988 even the prospect of a Conservative government in five years time might well make schools and universities reluctant about giving the subject the permanent, committed, fulltime staff it needs to really take off. Michael Portillo's statement in January 1997 (supported by John Major) calling for cadet corps to operate in all schools because military discipline and good citizenship go hand in hand (Nahra 1997) is a salutary reminder of times not so past.

Conclusion

At the moment citizenship education looks like the seed that did not fall on fertile ground. The main problem is that it is being introduced into an education system that is currently undemocratic and does not have anything like the congruent structures, procedures, values, assessment and staffing required to make it a significant contribution to changing British political culture. If it is to survive and succeed it will need long term political commitment and resourcing which is by no means certain or secure. Although I have highlighted some key problems of implementation, I actually wish the reform well and even hope that the contradictions it might help to reveal will eventually contribute towards the demise of present wider regressive educational policies. But I won't hold my breath while I wait.

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Flotsam and jetsam

Caroline Benn Tributes

Caroline Benn, who died recently, wrote from time to time in support of the work of *Education Now*. Her support was much appreciated.

Clyde Chitty wrote: "... Caroline was deeply saddened by New Labour's willingness to continue with the right-wing policies that had been pursued by the Thatcher and Major governments, (but) one of her favourite sayings was Tom Paine's dictum ... ' we have it in our power to begin the world all over again'."

Roy Hattersley made the comment: "*If Labour had taken Caroline's advice, our schools will be a great deal better than they are.*"

School league tables on the scrap heap

School league tables have been variously described as 'a cancer' and 'educational pornography'. Northern Ireland has responded by declaring that tables will no longer be published in the province. More than 1,000 consultation responses showed a 75 percent majority opposed to them.

Instead, schools will supply details of exam results and other information directly to parents on request.

Standards not worth reaching

"No satisfaction comes from reaching these new targets as most teachers don't think they are worth the paper they are written on ... the skills required to get such results are to do with fulfilling narrow targets rather than true education ... Woodhead's values suited Blair and Blunkett's own grim view of education: Gradgrind."

Ros Coward in *The Guardian*, 16 January 2001.

Shortage of guns at school

After a shooting at an Oregon school in May 1998 in which two pupils were killed by a fellow student, the Gun Owners of America (GOA) issued a press release headed: 'lesson of school shootings: more guns are needed at schools'. The new US Attorney General has recent links with GOA. In *The Guardian* 13th January 2001.

Those unschooled minds ... and fingers

"When the performance of a little known 16 year-old pianist wins superlatives from jazz observers ... you know something unusual is going on. Tommy Scott has played the piano since the age of six, but is largely self-taught ... educated at home rather than the conventional system (an experience he shares with the classical piano virtuoso, Joanna MacGregor) Scott discovered music in his own time and his own way, and audiences are just beginning to hear the fruits of it."

From *Jazz UK*, December 2000. (Tommy Scott is due to appear at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival in May)

Caution - professional at work

It is worth remembering that the Ark, which did work, was built by amateurs, whereas the Titanic, which did not work, was built by professionals. (via Don Glines)

This way to the killing fields

Perhaps one of the saddest pieces of news is the claim by the chairman of BAE Systems that his company is now the first choice of the UK's engineering graduates. Do our brightest youth really want to devote themselves to what he calls 'a prime contractor of the digital battlefield', i.e. A high-tech killing system? *CAAT News* 159, January 2000.

Escape committee - another bumper year

David Hart, general secretary of the NAHT, said: "*the record level of vacancies for school leaders is alarming. Head teachers are leaving their jobs in almost unparalleled numbers.*" From *The Guardian* 12th January 2001

Bullying watch

7,000 pupils were questioned by the charity *Young Voices*. More than half of all British schoolchildren have been bullied, with some driven to suicide. The study found that home life plays a vital part in determining whether a child will be a bully or victim. "*For both the victims and the bullies, parenting was markedly less positive, colder and more controlling. Bullies were far more likely to see aggression at home.*" In *The Observer* 7th January 2001.

No more revolution

NOP Family is conducting a poll of the youth market for the Observer. *"Four out of five rate 'having a good time' and music as a 'most important to me'". Designer clothes are more important than the environment, and making money rates higher than helping others. Far from rebelling against corporate success, youngsters cannot get enough of it. "Young teens do not use politics, religion or class to express themselves; they speak a new language - consumerism."* 'They used to want a revolution. Now they just want money' in *The Observer*, 19th November 2000

A life of denial

"By teaching them at home we are denying them the life giving possibilities of getting beaten up in the playground, ignored in class, humiliated in the gym and reduced to tears on the pavement. They are not receiving the sensible knocks that fate has prepared for them. It is true that certain forms of training entail discomfort, but it never ceases to amaze up me how keen grown-ups can be on children suffering. Maybe it makes them feel a little better about the childhood mysteries that they once endured.

"There is only flaw in this argument: it is wrong. Miserable or frightened or bullied children learn no better or faster ... as to the endless warnings about our children being insufficiently socialised, they too have been proved wrong. Our children are perfectly at ease with other children as well as with adults and delighted to meet someone new. They have become neither withdrawal nor clannish."

Alan Wall in *The Times* 1st March 2000.

Parent league tables?

"In Chicago, parents, as well as pupils are graded by schools on their performance. Parental Involvement Report Cards are being sent out, rating parents from A to D on everything from whether they have checked their children's homework, to getting them into class on time. Parents rated poorly receive home visits from school officials. Some parents called it an insult." *The official response* was "it is natural development of educational reform". In *the TES*, 15th December 2000.

Educational Beachcomber

OFSTED settles out of court - again

Following the Summerhill humiliation, another school mounted a legal challenge after being branded a failure. Two days before the hearing, OFSTED agreed to re-tract the decision to put the school into special measures. It will also pay the cost of governors and Greenwich council. The move could now pave the way to similar legal challenges from schools unhappy treatment meted out by inspectors. *TES*, 1st December 2000.

OFSTED disease

"For most of the 1990s OFSTED was seen by central government as the 'cure' or at least the major means of diagnosing the 'ills' of the education system which undoubtedly existed to some degree. Almost ten years on, at last it is perhaps being seen by some politicians as a major contributory factor to the 'disease' affecting teachers and schools and leading to unprecedented levels of stress, alienation and requests for early retirement."

Colin Richards in *TES*, 8th December 2000.

OFSTED speak

"One inspector described a lesson as being 'on the sound side of satisfactory'. Later in the week a different inspector summarised a session as 'on the satisfactory side of sound'.

Another teacher, with 25 years teaching experience, told me that her feedback stated, 'your lessons are generally good and never less than sound'. A quarter of a century in a nutshell.

What on earth do words such as 'sound' and 'satisfactory' do to improve someone's performance? I watch dozens of lessons in primary and secondary schools. OFSTED speak never features.

Nor does it figure in any aspect of daily life: 'these frozen peas are generally sound'; 'Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is well above the national average'; 'this car needs to go into special measures'. I think not ... few people working in education feel they can take its pronouncements seriously.

Ted Wragg, *Guardian Education* 28th November 2000

Some Useful Quotes

Marshall McLuhan: *"Schools are more houses of detention than attention."*

Merrill L.Tew: *"Schools are more houses of confinement than refinement."*

John Taylor Gatto: *"Schools are Tools of Fools."*

Learning to be controlled

"... as children spend more time in structured learning environments they, not surprisingly, become successful in navigating and excelling in such closed environments."

Many may learn the rules to success, and as long as the rules don't change, they can succeed. Many learn to feel comfortable in settings where things are structured and controlled for them. *"Believe it or not humans are in fact pre-disposed to think for themselves, and we are very good at it when given the proper upbringing."*

From *21st Century Learning Initiative* report December 2000. (see www.21learn.org)

Arrival of the leisure society?

The organisation for economic corporation and development whose members are developed countries, estimates that in the next 25 years, 25 million in member nations will retire while only 5 million will enter the labour market.

TES, 8th December 2000.

Drugs watch

Drug misuse among schoolchildren is on the increase according to a government survey published in November. Surprisingly, the greatest use had been among children in relatively affluent neighbourhoods. Users tended to be children with low self esteem. A sense of failure at school seemed to be likely to the children to drugs. Drug misuse was heavily associated with other forms of anti-social behaviour, with drug users four times more likely to steal, smoke cigarettes, try alcohol and truant.

The Guardian, 24th November 2000.

The Don Varley Room

There are several 'distinguished' supporters of *Education Now*. We can cite one with a knighthood, one or two OBEs, a lieutenant colonel or two, several successful businesspeople, a few of the livelier-minded professors of education, some head teachers, a prominent musician or two, some TV actors, and so on. But now, we have a supporter with a room dedicated in his honour.

Don talking to South African Minister of Education, Professor Bengu

Don Varley has had a room named after him on the new Jubilee Campus of the University of Nottingham. It is in recognition of his services as an outstanding teacher of business studies and economics. A number of Don's former students have become successful businesspeople. When some of them were asked to donate towards or sponsor some of the costs of the new campus, they agreed on the condition that a room be dedicated in recognition of their former tutor's teaching - not his research, nor his administrative skills, but his outstanding teaching.

The style of his teaching was to support students as they learnt to think and make informed decisions, rather than mere formal crowd-instruction. And so, the Don Varley room came into being.

This is not Don Varley's only claim to fame. He has a long and distinguished service record to the Scout Movement. He proposed the radical idea, many years back, that there should be mixed camp of Scouts and Guides. Eventually, he was able to persuade the wary leaders of these two movements to agree, and the first mixed camp, of small groups working on co-operative projects, then took place.

Around the same time, Don proposed to the University of Nottingham that there should be a mixed Hall of Residence. Until then strict segregation of the sexes had applied. Here, too, Don eventually persuaded his colleagues to move with the times. Rutland Hall became the first mixed Hall of Residence under the wardenship of Don and ably supported by his wife Joan.

Don has been retired from University work for a few years now, but he is still in demand for management training weekends and for his services on a variety of voluntary sector committees.

In addition, he still plays a lively jazz and dance band piano, and can turn his hand to a cool tenor saxophone. Congratulations, Don!

Roland Meighan