

## Naming of parts

### Abstract

This is my attempt to clarify some relevant concepts and to get to grips with what I hope is literature appropriate to the general theme of Social Fracking. There is always too much to read and more being written as you write. While writing the following I was mostly reading (for the third time in about forty five years) *To The Finland Station* by Edmund Wilson. I cannot recommend it highly enough for making critical sense of the history and significance of socialist thought from before the French Revolution, even before it could be identified as socialist thought, to that crucial arrival of Lenin at the Finland station prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. If you think this and dialectical approaches to history have no relevance to the policies of Blair, Cameron, Gove et al I hope to convince you otherwise.

I also try here to get to grips with concepts such as the post war consensus and Thatcherism. They are not as straightforward as they are often presented and in terms of education I sometimes give myself the pleasure of imagining that I am informing a Tory going on about bringing back grammar schools and, therefore, secondary moderns that true Thatcherism means bog standard comprehensives. After all, as Secretary of State for Education, she created more comprehensives than all other secretaries of state of both parties put together. How about that for Thatcherism?

Once again, despite his apparent removal from education, I have not bothered to change from present tense to past tense when referring to Michael Gove. And I am, as ever, annoyed that politicians are so eager to label children, schools and teachers that they can't be bothered to do their jobs properly. Education is not about labelling. It is not!

I begin with that well-known and very comforting story called Whig history.

### Main text

I want to take some time here to look at some of the concepts and terms used in this essay (or collection of essays) although some are also dealt with in specific sections.

### Whig history

Whig history is generally regarded as telling a story that begins with the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Bill of Rights the year after and the end of absolute monarchy in the form of James II. It is a tale of 'progress' and 'reform' that takes in the abolition of slavery, the extension of the franchise, the welfare state, Gladstone's Education Act of 1870 making schooling compulsory and lots more. Harold Wilson (a former member of the Liberal Party who, as a Labour prime minister, kept a picture of Gladstone on the wall of his office<sup>1</sup>) used to say that by bringing into being the Open University he had completed Gladstone's work. For me the professional thrill of comprehensivisation<sup>ii</sup> in the 1960s, 70s and 80s felt as though we had finally got close to where we had been striving to arrive in education. I consciously (though clearly over optimistically) linked going comprehensive with the moderation of privilege and the eventual ending of hierarchical society. The supporters of James II and absolutist government were, by the way, known as Tories. I guess that should make me an educational Whig. It is such an attractive notion. And I do want to see education play its part in furthering what I regard as social progress. Seeing it become devoted to social regression and fracture is heartbreaking and accounts for my current

depression. Somehow I feel that for a while both Labour and Tories had signed up to a Whig educational agenda but that, for New Labour, it all turned into an urge to encourage us to aspire to obtain the fruits at the top of the tree while for Tories the game remained the same: keep most of the fruit out of reach while from time to time deliberately dropping a little to the lower orders to ensure that they pursued their lives in accordance with the hierarchical values of conservatism.

Of course the Whig approach to history suffers from a tendency to assume that from the start all participants believed in or had a shared vision of where we would end up. That has to be doubtful and ascribes to people living in very different times, contexts and cultures the values of today; or at least it interprets their motives via the values of some people today. Taking an unquestioningly favourable view of Whig history also means ignoring a Whiggish tendency to oligarchy<sup>iii</sup>, which continued well into the nineteenth century, some pretty breathtaking corruption, particularly during the eighteenth century and, for many Whigs, a relative unwillingness to accede to demands for more democracy. The differences between Whigs and Tories were not always sharply defined. Disraeli long harboured the hope that Gladstone would return to his High Tory roots and join him in the modern Conservative Party.

### **An aside**

*Perhaps we have never since witnessed such a clearly developing and yet confusingly contradictory contrast between personal political visions and backgrounds. Disraeli the Jew: an outsider who, even though seen as only a convert to Christianity, became a hero to the newly developed but still Tory Conservative Party; and Gladstone the Anglican insider defender of privilege and hierarchy whose sense of moral outrage drew from him a determination that the state had a duty to respond to the needs of the poor and, in the newly minted name of Liberalism, to take a stand against oppression. It was as though, partly propelled by personal antipathy, they passed each other as they crossed to the other side of the road. Standing on the same side at the same time was never an option for them.*

The power of reactionary forces to destroy and distort what Whigs have seen and presented to us as progress and reform is, however, very strong. The current irony is that the Whig Party, with a few others, became the Liberal Party during the time when WE Gladstone was undergoing his personal conversion from Toryism and a strong belief in social hierarchy to a belief that the state had a duty to right social wrongs. His sense of moral purpose was sometimes mocked. Queen Victoria is said to have felt that he addressed her as though she were a public meeting. But there is no doubt that it was strong and that it inspired others who were also dedicated to improving the lot of the weak and the exploited. Imagine a Britain today without all that we have been given by Gladstonian Liberalism and that of his successors: it is not something to wish for. He provided enormous moral impetus to Asquith, Lloyd George and so many other great reformers including, I suggest, the outstanding Atlee governments from 1945 to 1951. And, furthermore, the question of Irish self-government (Home Rule) would have been settled thirty years earlier than it was

if Gladstone had been able to overcome Tory (and some Liberal) resistance to it<sup>iv</sup>.

By entering into coalition with Tories the LibDems can be said to have betrayed so much that the Liberal Party and many of their Whig ancestors stood for in terms of social progress over many centuries. For some of them power trumps values<sup>v</sup>. Disrespect for history, even the most recent history, helps. More than one LibDem MP has shown willingness to work with Michael Gove as he sets out to destroy the potential of education to create a 'big society' in which we really are 'all in it together', though on a basis that attempts to approach fairness. In fact the former minister for children and families, Sarah Teather<sup>vi</sup>, like the leader of the LibDems, Nick Clegg, very publicly signed an historical pledge not to do what she actually did after accepting the offer of the seals of office. She and he signed that pledge presumably not only because of a haunting memory of their historical values which they wished to publicly perpetuate but also because they felt that demonstrating their values like this would enable them to obtain votes! They won't get them twice and, to add insult to injury, I note that Clegg's apology on this subject was not about breaking his pledge on tuition fees but about making it in the first place<sup>vii</sup>.

I am reminded of my mother's father who was born in 1859 in the very sectarian and socially, racially, culturally and politically diverse and divided city of Liverpool (as was Gladstone fifty years earlier)<sup>viii</sup>. He referred to politicians as "rantin', cantin' hypocrites"<sup>ix</sup>. It took until he was fifty-two years of age for the 1911 Parliament Act to, as was thought, enable us to cast off the shackles of aristocratic power and slowly work towards a more humane, generous and civilised society.

1914, however, a mere three years later, was to witness the continuing and still strongly established power of royalty and aristocracy to use millions of ordinary people, throughout Europe and beyond, to play at soldiers: how quickly we moved from Lloyd George's 'Peoples' Budget' establishing National Insurance to compulsory call up<sup>x</sup>, death and destruction for so many of those same people. We still live with the consequences and far too many of our politicians continue to find it far more exciting to divert national income away from pensions, education and health in order to go to war: to wars whose purpose continues to elude<sup>xi</sup>.

### **The conceptual framework of a dynamic dialectic**

Edmund Wilson wrote *To The Finland Station* (published in 1940)<sup>xii</sup> as a history of socialist thought up to the point when Lenin arrived at the railway station in 1917 to begin what became the October Revolution. For me it is an unputdownable book full of intellectual car chases. I wish I had read it when I was at university in the 1960s studying *Political Theory and Institutions*<sup>xiii</sup> because it would have provided support for me when I tried to question Marx's use or adaptation of Hegel's dialectic. It is relatively straightforward to understand thesis, antithesis and synthesis (the three dynamic components of the dialectic) as a process for carrying out an argument. But to accept this process as an iron rule governing the dynamic of history is something quite else,

particularly when the dynamic is supposed to stop at the point when all falseness, confusion, exploitation and alienation end and we all live fulfilled lives in communion with our true selves and the true selves of others.

I am not alone in finding it very difficult to make sense of the dialectic by wading through Hegel's metaphysical reasoning. John Plamenatz said that a) it is essential to understand Hegel's metaphysics and that b) it is impossible to do so (here I am depending upon my fond memory of something I said in a seminar in 1965 so please read the end note)<sup>xiv</sup>. For me there are three major problems with the dialectical approach to history and its use as a conceptual framework.

As I have suggested earlier, it seems odd to say that history proceeds dialectically from one form of society to another and yet also to assume that there will be a final synthesis when everything reaches a continuous end with the dialectic, like some giant segmented wheel, stopping upon reaching its final destination: when the final segment is resting upon the final point of history. I dare say that there are ways of accepting this if you believe as some have done that, for example, the Prussian state or the American Century are worthwhile and believable end points that will last forever. The phrase 'end of history' comes to mind. Having been used so many times over the years the phrase now has its own history<sup>xv</sup>.

My second problem with the dialectic is deciding when you begin rolling the wheel. How about 1494 and the Italian Wars, the first between nation states thereby signifying an end to feudalism; or 1750 and the discernable early stages of the Industrial Revolution in Britain; or 1789 with the French Revolution and the introduction into political discourse of the terms left and right; or 1848 and the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*? Or, as towards the end of his life Marx contemplated, with ancient societies of thousands of years ago. If you believe that the dialectic determines the dynamic of history it really does matter when the wheel begins to roll.

A third problem is to know how long a dialectical stage must be. Marx, Engels and others saw lots of false dawns when they imagined revolution was about to begin. They also had a tendency to want to slow down other, more impatient, revolutionaries on the grounds that a particular stage of the dialectic had yet to work through to the next stage. There was a lot of re-starting the clock going on by both Marx and Engels. And then there was the related problem of applying a model of a philosophic/economic revolving or spiralling time scale constructed for the economic and political conditions of France, Germany and (mostly) Britain to a very different country such as Russia. I guess that you could sum up the approach chosen by Lenin after he returned to Russia as driving the wheel faster and not worrying about those crushed beneath it because they could not get out of the way: out of the way, that is, of inevitable, but driven, history<sup>xvi</sup>.

In the case of Marx, however, religion also plays a part. Well, I think so, although making this point in the oral examination component of my finals in the 1960s did not seem to go down too well. Karl Marx was born into a German family that on both sides had for generations produced rabbis (roughly in Hebrew 'teacher') and the German word for a synagogue, used also in Britain and in the United

States, is *schule* (school). There is something in Marxism that combines long and deep study of teachings with a belief that if you dedicate yourself to working hard to understand, live by and spread those teachings you will obtain your just deserts: heaven will come to you and yours. Judaic notions of afterlife are not as detailed as those of its offshoot, Christianity, but they do exist. True communism equates to heaven if you think like this and Marx himself had something messianic about him, at least to many of his followers<sup>xvii</sup>.

Marx and Engels were more than capable of showing that the problems and points I am raising are facile and lacking the backing of the literally huge amount of research they had undertaken; what they usually claimed to be 'scientific' research because of its dialectical underpinnings. In fact they could be intellectually ruthless at times when attacking people with whom they disagreed. And they would usually win all the arguments because they did far more research, had prodigious powers of analysis, never gave up and had a wonderful ability to write. To me, however, when taken too seriously the dialectic is a constraint which limits our thinking because we are constantly trying to fit unexpected events into its framework. Imagine a PhD student devising or borrowing a conceptual framework for their thesis and, rather than testing it, trying to fit into it even the most awkward of evidence. Probably it could be argued, by people more steeped in Marxism than me, that Marx and Engels always tested their conceptual framework as they examined new evidence when it emerged. I think they overstretched it.

### Yet another aside

*Philip Gould was a midwife to New Labour and Tony Blair. His book<sup>xviii</sup> is littered with references to Hegel's dialectic. I believe that the New Labour approach was more akin to a continuous reconciliation or, perhaps, manipulation of what were taken to be, or posited as, or presented as, opposites in order to generate new notions that became new policies and by substituting focus groups for democracy they were able to claim that their awareness of the 'consciousness of the people' legitimated policies. Blairism certainly had a changing, powerful dynamic and lots of movement masquerading as progress but no goal of inclusive value. For that reason it simply allowed the forces of unregulated greed to continue unopposed.*

### Passionate denunciation of exploitation

Despite the difficulties of the dialectic as a determinant of history it should not detract from the most impressive aspects of the work of Marx and Engels: their passion, the focus and analysis of what drove and prompted that passion and their detailed and extremely well researched evidence. They are passionate in defence of exploited workers, many of who worked in conditions that we may think are difficult to imagine occurring today but, outside the immediate gaze of Westminster and our celebrity obsessed media, do still exist, often because of the actions of UK based corporations and banks. They are passionate too about condemning exploitative capitalists; and such people have not only not gone away but have increased in number and power. Marx and Engels are focussed and detailed about those conditions and about those capitalists, having carried

out research based not only upon what could be found in the Reading Room of the British Museum (a lot) but also, especially in the case of Engels, considerable first hand and direct observation and experience.

How can we not join them in their hatred of both open exploitation and also of exploitation disguised by the stealing of progressive words and concepts by regressive forces and their transformation into what have become today's weasel words and concepts such as 'reform' and 'fairness'; words and concepts that once were so respected? It is no wonder that their anger mounts as they see revolutionaries castrated by the cleverness of, for example, the social reforms of that arch conservative Prussian Otto von Bismarck who, by stealing the clothes of socialists (we based our system of National Insurance upon his), thereby keeping them and the workers quiet, allowing a little democratic representation and whipping up nationalism, moulded Germany into a unified industrial, military and imperialist super power.

And where did that end? Even the bloodiest of German socialist revolutions before 1914 (possibly just after 1890 would have been a good time when Kaiser Wilhelm II dispensed with Bismarck as the Chancellor who was expert at controlled, short wars) could have prevented WWI and, consequently, WWII. Which would you rather: capitalists complaining that the workers were being paid too much and keeping down their profits or those two World Wars?

We are led by Marx and Engels to consider the notion that education systems are not there to serve the interests of all of those being educated. They are in place to serve the interests of those few that take most out of society. It is a perversion of the professionalism of educators to deploy their expertise in order to maintain inequality. Whatever educators tell themselves in order to justify working in a socially exclusive institution, whether a school or a university, is likely, to me, to be no better than a self-deceiving compound of arguments rationalising privilege.

### **Using education to commit a social crime**

To talk of averages in terms of performance levels as our politicians do is to condemn 50% to be eternally below average<sup>xix</sup>. To then talk of improvement in terms of having to rise above the average is to cynically burden young people and their parents and teachers with an unattainable target. This is a use of education to commit a social crime and ascribe blame to those that are already disadvantaged for not being where the advantaged are. Talk of equality and social mobility by politicians who are prepared to do nothing at all to, for example, remove the huge publicly funded advantages given on a plate to certain highly privileged schools and universities is not merely humbug (rantin' cantin' hypocrisy) but also has the effect of further embedding inequality multiplied, this time round, by yet more negative labelling of those unable to swim against the tide of social privilege.

We seem unable to do education without ascribing blame. When politicians refuse to acknowledge their role in maintaining inequality and set up systems of education based upon the game of snakes and ladders the blame for failing to

climb a ladder has to be placed somewhere else. Higher and Further Education, schools and colleges, teachers, parents and children all play their part in shielding politicians from blame. Maybe shielding politicians from blame should be openly part of the job description: get a job as an educator, become a parent, be a child and prepare to take the blame; unless, of course, you began life on the ladder, not the snake, in which case you take the praise and win the prizes.

### **Thatcherism, perverting the post-war consensus, death, torture, false imprisonment, the deliberate wholesale destruction of communities and the cult of Leadership and Management**

There were (are) nuances within Thatcherism (it is not dead though it has a tendency to reincarnation). Another word for this is inconsistencies. We have to remember Margaret Thatcher's somewhat late conversion to the ism added to her name. We might also remember that from 1970 to 1974 as Secretary of State for Education under Edward Heath she created more comprehensive schools than all other secretaries of state, regardless of party, put together. This is not the kind of Thatcherism for which today's Tories yearn.

I don't think it is as easy as we sometime assume to put Thatcherism forward as a cogent or coherent political philosophy. A former fellow student of hers at university once told a colleague and me that her one notable strength while she was there was her memory. Our informant did not mention her intellect. She was unable to respond intelligently to the challenge to define what she claimed to be against: socialism. She could not do it<sup>xx</sup>. Her anti-socialist stance came from inherited and reinforced inarticulate gut instinct rather than from intellectual engagement with the values of socialists. Her famous 'Is he one of us?' question was probably meant to probe the extent of a person's general commitment to less and looser regulation, less government, more monetarism, more and more privatisation and artificially created rigged 'free markets'.

And yet, while all of that can be said to have been the leit motif of her administrations, as her Secretary of State for Education Kenneth Baker was at the same time doing the opposite by ruthlessly nationalising the school curriculum and system of assessment. My guess is that he sold her the National Curriculum and its associated Assessment Orders on the basis that he was actually suppressing all of that progressive, socialist education stuff in defence of all that she instinctively knew to be good, old-fashioned didactic teaching. If so, he was: suppressing progressive education<sup>xxi</sup>. Baker made Sir Keith Joseph, until then perceived as a scary right-wing Secretary of State for Education, seem like a liberal agonising over the ill treatment of the disadvantaged<sup>xxii</sup>. Today's devotional cult of Leadership and Management is now dedicated to the achievement of pre-set targets. Albert Einstein and Alexander Fleming would not have flourished in schools in which line managers, keeping an eye on centrally imposed institutional targets, managed the performance of their teachers who managed the behaviour of the children<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Michael Gove claims to follow Baker; and it is true that he has gathered to himself a much greater degree of the power to control education than Baker had; but he is more Thatcherite in the sense that he has thrown education up

into the air to see where everything lands. Like her he wants to describe his market as *free* but, despite his pretence, he will ensure that it is a rigged one. So where everything lands can, to a large extent, be predicted. There are no free markets and in education Gove is the rigger. He intends to do nothing to prevent those with advantages picking up the choicest parts when everything comes to earth. I detect very little professional or parental support for what he is doing but, no doubt like Baker, he will claim that we are entitled<sup>xxiv</sup> to what he forces upon us. How generous!

Margaret Thatcher is often accused of destroying what is usually called the post-war consensus. It has also been suggested that she actually had a lot of respect for the achievements of the Atlee government that can be said to have laid the foundations for the consensus with, it is only fair to say, contributions from the Liberals in the form of the Beveridge Report and the Conservatives in the form of the 1944 Education Act. Unlike the present Coalition she did not set out to damage the NHS, for example. She may have wished to but for one thing her desire to win elections usually overrode any ideological commitment and, with a few exceptions such as the Community Charge or Poll Tax, her political antennae were far more finely tuned than those of George Osborne who, we are told, is the super strategist of today's Tory Party.

Nevertheless, the post-war political consensus, if not totally destroyed by Thatcher administrations, was shifted far to the right and Tony Blair and New Labour were very enthusiastic supporters of this shift. Stewart Lansley<sup>xxv</sup> shows us very clearly that beginning in 1979 when Thatcher became Prime Minister (followed one year later in the USA when Reagan was elected President and introduced what was known as Reaganomics) the British government began widening the gaps between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Many people accepted the argument at the time that we were suffering from wage inflation but the response to that problem was to effectively lower the wages and salaries of the majority of people while more and more credit was provided for them to, in particular, buy houses that were being allowed to rise in price at an ever-increasing rate. Providing more and easier credit for buyers encouraged sellers to raise the asking price: they knew the buyer would get the loan. Instead of buying what your wages told you that you could afford you bought what your credit rating told you that you were able to borrow. Look where that ended. Actually, it hasn't ended.

At the same time, if you were rich enough to start with, your wealth went up while your tax burden (your contribution to society) came down. Electing Tony Blair and New Labour in 1997, far from reversing all of this, quickened its pace. New Labour ignored the values that the electorate had voted for in favour of those it had voted against. I call that a crime against democracy. Afghanistan and Iraq are not the only reasons why Blair ought to be in prison. We like to convince ourselves that we live in a democracy but we do not. Sometimes we get close to it but then we elect politicians who have no respect for the electorate and who invest hugely in self-serving spin in order to ensure that next time round the electorate will choose the values that disconnected politicians prefer.

If it is not easy to put forward Thatcherism as a coherent and all-encompassing political philosophy it is, nevertheless, very easy to tell what it signified overall. It encouraged and gave us individualistic greed, the exploitation of labour, a huge rise in unemployment disguised by many times changing how it was measured and widening social gaps. If there was a philosophy it was borrowed from the Chicago School of Economics and ultimately from a group of Austrian economists. The first trials of this philosophy were in Chile. Cheered on, aided, abetted and financed directly and indirectly by the USA the privatising, exploiting, extractive, rapacious enemies of the properly elected socialist government brought it down in a coup. The President, while soldiers approached with clear intent, committed suicide<sup>xxvi</sup>.

Free marketeers become highly exercised about nationalisation, public service, living wages and benefits that compensate for exploitation and unemployment; about free education and free medicine for all; about paying any kind of taxes; and about open government and thinking critically. Hearing the very word 'socialism' induces apoplexy. The people to whom they object are not only politicians who work for all of the people rather than for a few, trade unionists defending their members against oppression, dissenting economists (especially Keynesians) and social/political activists but also artists, poets, playwrights, musicians, novelists, schoolteachers, academic researchers and journalists: the intellectual awkward squad. They are sometimes prepared to assassinate, illegally imprison and 'disappear' those that look like they might have even the slightest interest in something less than a full-blown free market; though, being free marketeers, they usually sub-contract the dirty jobs. We should never forget the support given to General Pinochet, the dictator of Chile, by Margaret Thatcher when he came within an ace of being extradited from the UK for his crimes against humanity<sup>xxvii</sup>.

The Big Society of David Cameron has, as a political philosophy, far less substance than Thatcherism, if it has any at all. I think it will go down in history along with the Cones Hotline<sup>xxviii</sup> as just party political hot air from a politician strong on rhetoric, imbued with prejudice, keen on power but weak on varied social experience and also upon detail. Detail can be difficult, especially if you have never had a proper job. This lack of substance and attention to detail does, however, create the conditions for exploitation and disintegration.

### **New Labour, Blairism, modernisation, aspiration and sofa government**

Was all that study of Hegel and the Dialectic by Philip Gould always only intended to provide philosophical cover for policies that widened social gaps and made us a more unequal society? It certainly achieved that; possibly because there was no one in New Labour with values that rose above the banal. But I doubt very much that Gould's liking for Hegel's Dialectic inspired much discussion within the party. As with Jonathan Powell's fixation on Machiavelli<sup>xxix</sup> I think it was a personal philosophical comforter and little else.

What was really new about New Labour was that its choice to move to the right carried with it a reduction of its belief in democracy. It inverted the concept of accountability so that the people were held accountable to

government and not government to the people. Try coping with an Ofsted<sup>xxx</sup> inspection if you do not believe me.

It was not enough for New Labour to have community comprehensive schools managed by local government that was accountable to voters. Whether they liked it or not parents had to become consumers with lots of choice. When, however, these differentiated schools began to emerge and become free from democratic accountability it was they that began to exercise the power to choose. It is unsurprising that Gove loves Blair. If aspiration is the most powerful value that you offer the electorate; if you serve it up with choice and competition; and if you label everything that you do 'modernisation' you not only threaten the cohesion of society but your choice of terminology makes it seem almost churlish for people to object.

Headteachers, some of whom are now extremely well paid, have said to me that the old Local Education Authorities were not very good and to be independent from them is liberating. I am sure that quality was variable but critics forget the decades during which the resources of local government were reduced by central government while, at the same time, squeezing out their capacity to create local policy and operate an inclusive educational service ranging from nursery to higher education.

People who preferred privilege and a classed society always sniped at comprehensive education. To have stuck as a policy comprehensivisation needed to chime with a health and welfare system in which all were treated equally, a pay and remuneration system with narrower differentials and a taxation system in which the proportion of burden did not become less the richer you were. The values of New Labour discouraged a society like this<sup>xxxi</sup>.

In the early years of the French Revolution to sit on the left in the National Assembly was to associate with those that believed that government should not be absolutist and exclusive: to sit on the right was to associate with those that believed it should. Yes, that is an imperfect and incomplete description of the meaning of the terms 'left' and 'right' but the point I am trying to make is that New Labour's encouragement of a differentiated society went hand-in-hand with its approach to government and politics which got very close to absolutism at times. Philip Gould, Michael Barber, Jonathon Powell, Geoff Mulgan, Alastair Campbell and others were not part of anything democratic: they were simply courtiers. Sofa government was throne government. They served the monarch. The consequences for Britain have been bad: the consequences for Afghanistan and the Middle East have been disastrous.

### **The rediscovery of equality**

Does the recent publishing of books about the value of equality and the damage done by inequality indicate that the subjects of equality and inequality can be openly discussed once again? Might it mean that equality can be advocated and promoted? Dare we move away from that awful phrase 'equality of opportunity' which hides so much that is unequal? Can we consider equality of outcome without being accused of practising a political perversion?

We are, of course, given an exclusive form of equality of outcome whenever political parties become concerned about their reputation for gender imbalance among their MPs. When they think this will harm their reputation they impose upon often-unwilling constituency parties all female lists of candidates, thereby ensuring an outcome that can be presented as demonstrating their full commitment to gender equality. To do this they have to drop their more normal advocacy of equality of opportunity, as in 'everybody has the opportunity to become a millionaire'. A few female Conservative MPs may have been helped into the House of Commons by pressure upon local associations but once there the opportunity to obtain ministerial or cabinet rank mysteriously shrinks<sup>xxxii</sup>.

Conservative Thatcherites, New Labour Thatcherites and Orange Book<sup>xxxiii</sup> LibDem Thatcherites might rationalise greed and privilege but if they are not opposed effectively exploitation shall be the only name of the game. We shall, of course, be given circuses but to go with them we shall (most of us) get crumbs not bread.

### **Back to the beginning**

I began with what I regard as the comforting notion of Whig history: a notion into which we have sometimes tended to fit further notions such as 'progress', 'reform' and 'modernisation' without at any point problematising them. However, especially as they have now become desirable labels to be disputed and fought over, they are extremely problematisable, even problematic. In the field of education they can become dangerous.

It is tempting to imagine a simple spectrum from left to right with left meaning good and right meaning bad. Unfortunately, even the simple is not always so simple. I used to work for a local education authority dominated for a while by Militant Tendency<sup>xxxiv</sup> who were often perceived by the media as extremely left wing. I thought of them as right wing thugs who had no intention of allowing outsiders to participate in establishing public values and who demonstrated a complete disdain for democracy. For me the key concepts that Marx and Engels have given us are commodification and alienation. To treat people as commodities is to extract their humanity and to extract their humanity is to alienate them not merely from society as a functioning community but also to alienate them from themselves or the selves that they had the potential to become.

I used the title, **Naming of parts**<sup>xxxv</sup>. A pretentious borrowing of the title of Henry Reed's poem; a poem that combines two threads: one a thread of nuts and bolts instruction and the other a counterpoint thread of wistful, dreamy meandering thoughts. I think that by choosing that title I was hoping to achieve a little of the same effect. If your attention wandered while reading any of the above mine certainly did while writing it.

Can we perhaps see in our history a thread of justifiable optimism? Or has our history been a roller coaster whose apparent progress is demonstrated merely by technological change? As humans do we treat each other better than we

used to? Who gets to define 'better'? Perhaps the following questions might help.

### Questions for critical conversations

1. Have you perceived any evidence of political values or ideologies affecting education policy and/or practice?
2. Have you perceived any evidence of *changes* in political values or ideologies affecting education policy and/or practice?
3. Ought educators to consider the social values promoted by politicians when deciding what and how to teach and what and how to assess (not the same as evaluate)?
4. Ought politicians to consider the professional values of educators when deciding what should be taught and how and what to assess (not the same as evaluate) and how?
5. Does the kind of society in which children live have an effect upon their education?
6. Does the kind of education that children get have an effect upon the society in which they live?
7. What are schools, colleges and universities for?
8. In whose interests are we governed?
9. In whose interests should we be governed?
10. In whose interests are we educated?
11. In whose interests should we be educated?
12. In whose interests are we assessed, examined and evaluated?
13. In whose interests should we be assessed, examined and evaluated?
14. In whose interests do we go to work?
15. In whose interests should we go to work?
16. In whose interests are people unemployed?

In order to critique the above you may find the following link useful.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebcriticalProfessionalConversation.doc>

### Notes, references and links

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<sup>i</sup> This is anecdotal. I was told about the picture of Gladstone on the wall by a senior Liberal (not LibDem) politician who saw Wilson from time to time. Knowing that Wilson had been in the Liberal Party he asked him why he had left. 'Oh I still am a Liberal', came the reply, 'but to get anything done I had to join the Labour Party.' It was a journey undertaken by other Liberals.

<sup>ii</sup> As Secretary of State for Education and Science Anthony Crosland gave us Circular 10/65 which encouraged, but did not require, the establishment of comprehensive secondary schools. He did not invent comprehensive schools. A few were in existence earlier.

When talking about Crosland the focus is often upon his desire to get rid of grammar schools as though that was some sort of destructive policy. If, however, we look at it from the perspective of the approximately 80% of children who, after taking the 11-Plus, were sent to secondary moderns, labelled as not being in need of a 'good' education and had

far less money spent on them than things look different. The raising (in effect the equalising) of the school leaving age in 1971 complemented the increase in the number of comprehensive schools and created a much more socially equal distribution of educational resource.

iii Oligarchy is government by the few and during the eighteenth century the Whigs held power for a long time. We must remember the small size of the electorate at the time and the ease with which constituencies could be 'owned'. Add to that an expectation that those with power are unlikely to be challenged and oligarchy is what you get. Corruption is often a product of oligarchy but not necessarily entirely of the financial kind.

Ferdinand Mount was a member of Thatcher administrations and is related to David Cameron. He has been known to become upset if Tony Blair is criticised. Below is a link to a review of his book on oligarchy in Britain today.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/9243512/The-New-Few-Or-a-Very-British-Oligarchy-by-Ferdinand-Mount-review.html>

iv The history of Irish Home Rule is long and can be tortuous but, given the incoherent and piecemeal approach presently being taken to constitutional change in the UK, worth looking at again. For now I simply want to point out that it was never a straightforward case of people being for it or against it. A number of politicians, of whom Lloyd George was one, were in favour of a federal approach. This would have taken a strategic and coherent approach to devolution and constitutional change. Our usual way of tackling such subjects resembles a two handed person trying to cover three leaks in a hosepipe.

v Odes on the Nativity of our ConDemNation

Lines on the forming of a coalition

**Gladstone, Asquith and Lloyd George,  
William Beveridge and Maynard Keynes,  
What think you of this alliance forged?  
Your party imprisoned by Tory chains?**

**Heroic days of the Welfare State,  
Of old age pensions and votes for women,  
Values lost at an alarming rate,  
In pursuit of power and a cabinet position.**

**How will you face the electorate next time?  
Will you enthuse your grassroots mob?  
Not sure you'll get this vote of mine,  
Since your conscience was shed for the sake of a job.**

**Cliff Jones 12<sup>th</sup> May 2010**

vi I now feel better disposed to Teather. Becoming a minister in a department run by Michael Gove must have been a nightmarish experience as evidence and due process were brushed aside in pursuit of an obsession to create chaos. And she takes Guantanamo Bay very seriously. We all should.

vii My prediction is that, as with the last lot of student debt, the current ever enlarging debt mountain will eventually be written down and sold off to a debt collector. The old system of grants was manageable and predictable and no more expensive.

<sup>viii</sup> Philip Waller (author of *Democracy and Sectarianism: A Political and Social History of Liverpool 1868-1969*) was once invited to talk to what I think was called, back in the 1980s, the Scotland Road History Society. This is the part of Liverpool that could be described as most Irish Catholic, though up the hill is a building belonging to the Orange Order. In the early 1970s the area was virtually destroyed to build another Mersey tunnel. This was on top of very intensive bombing during World War Two.

Waller's talk was to be in the school in which I was teaching so the lecture hall was booked, room for thirty people. Two hundred people turned up thirsting to make sense of the life experiences of their grandparents. We had to use the assembly hall.

Here is a link to the beginning of A.J.P. Taylor's review of the book. Taylor grew up in Birkdale, to the North of Liverpool. He was aware of something unknown to many: Liverpool's huge working class Conservative support, now evaporated (a Liberal Party achievement).

<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v03/n13/ajp-taylor/some-scenes-from-the-battle-of-liverpool>

<sup>ix</sup> He did not live long enough to see his eldest grandson (not me) become a politician and President of the Liberal Party (another story).

I was only eighteen months old when he was knocked over by a Ribble (private company) bus at the Five Lamps (unlit) in Waterloo (now part of Sefton, Merseyside) during the blackout (caught pneumonia in hospital and died). If Cherie Blair is reading this (some chance) she will know the area intimately because she was brought up very near, not in Liverpool, as, in his book, her husband seems to think. To get to Liverpool she had to travel through Britain's most bombed town, Bootle.

Here is my review of Blair's book.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/bookReviewBlair.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> For a theatrical 'take' on the start of the First World War click here.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5JNE2i5lfM>

<sup>xi</sup> Growing up hearing my parents talk about 'the war', reading history books that seemed to concentrate a lot on war, having teachers who at the drop of a hat would reminisce about their experiences in the war and watching films showing our gallant lads fighting against 'the enemy' I thought I knew what war was.

Since then I have heard of lots more wars, the War on Want, for example, and, of course, the war so beloved of politicians: the War on Terror. 'Terror' happens to be an abstract noun so when I say that the purpose of some wars 'continues to elude' it is that war I have most prominently in mind. I cannot work out where and when such a war starts and I certainly have no idea where or when it might finish. Are there boundaries? Might there be the equivalent of castles, strongholds and towns to be attacked, defended and captured? Of course not!

If there is a purpose to a 'war on terror' it is to be discovered in George Orwell's *1984*. We must have war and we must have an enemy; and we must have voters that fear and hate someone. Without fear and hatred of 'others' politicians might have to engage in the construction of a fair society and the fair interaction with other societies.

For another view of the morally bankrupt pathetic purpose of much so-called war today it might be instructive to hear again the words of Eisenhower back in 1961.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8y06NSBBRtY>

<sup>xii</sup> The book was first published in 1940, just before the assassination of Trotsky. In 1972 Wilson wrote a new introduction in which he explained that earlier he might have been too kind about Lenin.

It is important to remember that at the time of writing there was no 'Cold War' and the USA had not entered the Second World War. Had he been writing during that war we might justifiably have searched for signs of support for the Soviet Union. Had he been writing during the 'Cold War' we might have searched for signs of subtle support for the cultural war waged against Communism by the CIA. The book is immune from both of those influences.

He was actually writing during the later inter-war period when the turmoil caused by a disastrous war (the war to end war), having been capped by a disastrous peace (the peace to end peace), was now coming to a head. And yet I have no sense that his book attempts simply to make sense of recent history. Its perspectives are longer, wider and more insightful. As W.H. Auden might have said: a good book and I like it.

<sup>xiii</sup> As a name for a degree course Political Theory and Institutions hardly trips off the tongue. In the early sixties I was looking to study politics and only found three universities offering it: Swansea, Leeds and Liverpool. I am ashamed to say that back then I did not know that the full title of the LSE was the London School of Economics and Political Science. Neither Oxford nor Cambridge offered such a degree. I was aware of Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) at Oxford but it had such a terrible reputation that it was not taken seriously as a degree. I went to Liverpool at least partly because of its options (now called modules), which included, in the final year, twentieth century Marxism. By my final year it was off the menu.

But Liverpool! Where else could have been better to live and breathe the cultural revolution of the sixties?

<sup>xiv</sup> In *Man & Society, volume three*, (1963 and, revised, 1992) John Plamenatz discusses Hegel's metaphysics. My memory of that seminar back in the mid sixties is, I think, accurate but it illustrates the eagerness of an undergraduate to make a facile point. Plamenatz does say that he finds Hegel's metaphysics difficult to understand but he also points out that among his confused and misleading concepts and arguments it remains possible to discern concepts and arguments of value: worth the struggle.

As this discussion of metaphysics comes at the beginning of the book it should not be difficult to gauge the effort that, as an undergraduate, I expended on the struggle.

<sup>xv</sup> *1066 And All That* by Sellar and Yeatman tells us that 1919 saw the end of history and the beginning of nowadays.

Wikipedia is probably useful if you wish to read an annotated list of the people, including Hegel and Fukuyama, who have used the phrase 'end of history' in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. I, however, still think that Sellar and Yeatman are hard to beat. They were pre-postmodernists.

<sup>xvi</sup> The inevitability of history, even when driven hard and fast, is a very seductive concept. And to become one of those adepts with the knowledge of how history is destined to proceed is to be imbued with enormous confidence and a tendency to disparage and pity the ignorant, poor uninitiated and to despise those that choose to get in the way of inevitable history.

An accompanying tendency is to look back and retrospectively make sense of what happened by means of the chosen conceptual framework. Again, this is seductive because it confirms belief. Who might wish to question belief?

<sup>xvii</sup> I am not sure that I have worked alongside many obviously Messianic schoolteachers but I have certainly worked alongside schoolteachers who exploited their charisma and treated children as followers.

<sup>xviii</sup> A project that I have yet to finish (one of many such) was to collect together a number of book reviews written within a conceptual framework provided by W.H. Auden. If you click on the link below you will see my explanation for this plus, because it is the subject of this endnote, a review of Philip Gould's book.

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/bookReview\\_Gould.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/bookReview_Gould.pdf)

<sup>xix</sup> There are many examples of innumerate politicians complaining that too many children or schools are below average, so just one example for now.

Shortly before Key Stage One (KS1) assessment began for children who were around seven the University of Leeds had a contract to look at how children of that age might be tested. There had been (there still was) dispute between those that favoured the word 'task' and those (led by Margaret Thatcher) who favoured the word 'test'. I was a member of the research associates employed by Leeds to visit schools to assess KS1 children.

Two things became clear to me. The first was that there was no need for separate tasks/tests for English, Mathematics and Science. It would have been very easy to devise an activity that included all three. As a teaching/assessment instrument, that would have made assessment more fun. Anything wrong with that? The second was that, although we had (back then) ten level descriptors for each attainment target, it was not easy to predict which range of levels we ought to expect from children around seven years of age (or any age).

Talking this over with a colleague it became obvious that we should regard the level descriptors as sets of criteria but, crucially, we would have to use them over a good period before we could discover a reasonably reliable set of norms against which to set performance expectations. I had already witnessed a level of performance in spoken English from a seven year old that seemed to me to go off the clock.

By this time Kenneth Clarke was Secretary of State for Education. Taking time to discover reasonably reliable norms was not a priority for him. I doubt if he ever devoted one minute to considering this. He told us that KS1 would be restricted to the bottom three levels of ten and that he expected the average to be at level two. At least we could credit him with knowing that two came between one and three but his numeric skills were soon to plunge.

In English 28% of children got level one and below (that used to be referred to as 'working towards'). Clarke then announced that it was disgraceful that one third of children were below average. We might allow him that 28% is close to 33% but how, we are entitled to ask of a man who later became Chancellor of the Exchequer, could he not have known that when you talk of averages the ratio of above to below is always 50:50? He asked for an average. He got one, even if he mistook 28% for 50%.

His successor was John Patten who told KS1 that he would allow level four for the assessment of seven year olds. Children who previously had been banging their heads on the ceiling of level three were now free of that restriction and could go up a level. Some did. What would you expect? Patten announced that this represented an improvement in performance and justified the introduction by government of the National Curriculum and its associated Assessment Orders.

Sometimes it becomes very difficult to establish a baseline of stupidity for politicians.

My major point, from which the above story may be distracting, is that once politicians say they know where an average is or should be they ought not to punish, deride and criticise those who are below average because they are not above average. We simply cannot all be above average and politicians should be ashamed for using their own innumeracy in order to blame children and teachers for failing to win an unwinnable and cruel game.

The phrase 'I shall not rest until every child is above average' is usually attributed to Sir Keith Joseph who was not only one of Margaret Thatcher's Secretaries of State for Education but also credited as being a prime influence making Thatcher into a Thatcherite. I remember sitting next to my old prof at a Politics Association conference at which Joseph was speaking. My old prof leant over to me and murmured, 'Not very bright is he?'

<sup>xx</sup> John Sergeant's book *Maggie, Her Fatal Legacy* (2005 edition) includes an account of an interview with Tony Blair about Margaret Thatcher. Blair says how impressed he was with her intellect. 'She was a very fine intellect' were his words.

'Intellect' and 'intellectual' are words used a lot by Blair in his book: a book that is dangerously easy to lampoon. What he means when he applies these words to people is that they are direct: they aim at the target and hit it. He does not mean people with doubts or more than one perspective. Such people were not admitted to his circle.

Although the book is about Thatcher it shows how connected to her was Blair and the, for Sergeant, surprising extent to which Blair consulted her, particularly over Kosovo over which she was 'immensely helpful'.

There is so much more to be said about what I see as the difference between focussing upon a target to such an extent that other options and points of view are brushed to one side and an intellectual engagement with issues, in which minds may change, is avoided.

<sup>xxi</sup> For my account of post war education policy wobbles you might find this interesting.

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/WebFor%20DH%20Lawrence.pdf>

<sup>xxii</sup> Keith Joseph really did agonise over 'the bottom 40%'. But, being ignorant of the system of public examining put in place by successive politicians, he had no understanding of how that 40% figure was arrived at. He sort of realised that there was not much down for them and wondered what might be done but he had no knowledge, for example, of the artificial assumptions that lay behind normative curves.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Probably because we were given both a National Curriculum and associated Assessment Orders plus a tough inspection regime the chances that schools might develop as democratic societies rapidly diminished and, instead, we got leadership and management focussed on targets. Schoolteachers were now required to perform and deliver. The knock on effect of this was, naturally, the need to manage the behaviour of the children.

In my view New Labour had the view that the entire country should be governed like this: our leaders set the targets and our performance and behaviour were managed so that we hit them, or else.

<sup>xxiv</sup> In the 1980s, before the National Curriculum, there was much talk of an *Entitlement Curriculum*. Essentially, it was a question: since the school leaving age is sixteen, to what knowledge, skills and understanding are young people entitled at that age?

In his National Curriculum Kenneth Baker answered that question for us: 'you are entitled to what I am giving you'. Prior to his gift, however, in Local Education Authorities (LEAs)

such as Wigan (one of my favourites), the entitlement question had been a matter for discussion involving teachers, parents, children and local authority advisors.

Such discussion would not have been neat and tidy and not completed to a deadline; but that is the thing about pedagogy: it is a continual process that does not stay still for long enough to become a liturgy or a manual.

<sup>xxv</sup> Stewart Lansley, *The Cost of Inequality: Why Economic Equality is Essential for Recovery*, Gibson Square Books, 2011.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ken Loach <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVdObF1MF60>

<sup>xxvii</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/dec/11/post783>

<sup>xxviii</sup> When Cameron arrived in No. 10 he gave us his great idea. It was called 'The Big Society'. Here is the announcement of the intention.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/78979/building-big-society\\_0.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78979/building-big-society_0.pdf)

Here is a reflection on it in reality.

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/20/the-big-society-civil-exchange-audit-shows-coalition-contempt-and-hypocrisy>

John Major also had a great idea. It was called The Cones Hotline. Here is a comment on it that includes a reminder of another 'great idea': The Citizens Charter.

<http://www.politicsworldwide.com/tag/cones-hotline/>

<sup>xxix</sup> I never finished my review of Jonathon Powell's book so here is the unfinished version. I hope it gives some idea of my view of the book.

## *The Diary of an Apparatchik*

### THE NEW MACHIAVELLI

How to Wield Power

In the

Modern World

By Jonathan Powell

So, yet another account of life on the sofa; except that Powell claims that Blair didn't do government like that. He makes this claim while writing 313 pages demonstrating that he did. Powell was Blair's Chief of Staff and I had hoped for better from the brother who at least pronounces his own name with an awareness of its etymological derivation. Unlike posh brother Charles who clearly felt while doing the same job for Margaret Thatcher that it was important to pretend to be English and a snob.

To borrow from Auden, this is a seriously bad book because the author purports to be a member of the Labour Party, a republican and an atheist. He maintains all of these positions, each one of which suggests a certain philosophical commitment, as though

they have had their essence sucked from them. As a socialist smoker he chooses Silk Cut Extra Mild: no Capstain Full Strength for him; and he does not inhale.

Yes, it is a bad book but (Auden again) I like it because, despite several examples of the author's ignorance and inability to think past Blair's simple prejudices, the book is full of political minutiae and, even better, gossip.

And, and, and, at long last, I have discovered who came up with the slogan 'Education, education, education'. He did! Imagine that, thinking up a slogan that claimed to summarise the priorities of an entire government: a post Thatcher government (as we hoped in 1997): a slogan that has been and shall be quoted for years: a slogan that gave us lots and lots of activity but ersatz education.

Why Machiavelli? There are two reasons why he brings Machiavelli to the party. First, Mr. M is famous for having written *The Prince*, a handbook for people trying to acquire and hold on to power in Italy 500 years ago. Tony Blair is Powell's prince and he thinks that if he rehabilitates the reputation of Machiavelli, who has given his name to a rather cynical approach to politics, he just might do the same for Tony. Nice try but nul point this time. The second reason for using Machiavelli as a recurring set of reference points throughout the book is good old-fashioned pretentiousness. No real harm in it.

Er, that's all folks.

<sup>xxx</sup> [http://www.fascinatingaida.co.uk/videos/view/ofsted\\_song](http://www.fascinatingaida.co.uk/videos/view/ofsted_song)

<sup>xxxi</sup> As the time in office of Gordon Brown's administration was coming to a close I wrote this about the Values of New Labour.

[http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/The\\_Values\\_of\\_New\\_Labour.pdf](http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/The_Values_of_New_Labour.pdf)

<sup>xxxii</sup> What follows can also be found in *Gone to the Doggerel* on this website.

The place of women in this government

Women in government, whatever next  
They should be home looking pretty  
Or dusting the dado, looking *in* NEXT  
Not thinking or planning the economy  
A fresh G&T when I finish my day  
Is what I want from my lovely  
Not questions of fact on pensions and pay  
Or the state of our new foreign policy

Good old Theresa, O how we tease her  
For wearing such fancy footwear  
Her pedal extremities couldn't be better  
But I cannot think how she got here  
Was she at Eton, was she a Wykehamist  
Has she been out with the Quorn  
There were no silver spoons as her head was kissed  
On the day that she was born

Now we men have asserted our natural rights  
To be in the cabinet dominant  
We can bring in some ladies who eventually might  
Show our desire to be tolerant

For we really do like them, honest we do  
As long as they remember their place  
Which is not at the top; that would *not* do  
For even when clever, as some of them are, they're only a pretty face.

Cliff Jones 17<sup>th</sup> May 2010

<sup>xxxiii</sup> David Marquand has a lot to say below about the LibDem Orange Bookers and the contrast with the Yellow Bookers of 1928.

<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/features/is-britain-still-liberal>

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Michael Crick wrote, I think, two books about Militant. His perspective was certainly wider and longer than mine. But I had to work for them when they controlled the City of Liverpool. Dissent, dispute, differences and democracy were all suppressed. They were replaced by dictatorship, accompanied by hypocrisy. There you have it: my calmly reasoned view! On Militant, don't, as we say, start me!

<sup>xxxv</sup> <http://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/naming-of-parts/>