

Social fracking

Abstract

Here I try to justify my use of the terms 'frack' and 'fracking' in social and educational contexts in order to explore what the Coalition Government has been doing. I believe that that using them helps to show up what is happening in a slightly different but useful light. And the words sound so good as well.

This is the most substantial part of my essay or series of essays. I suggest that we are ruled by politicians who do not understand or believe in proper politics; who do not like and are damaging democracy; who are not only unintellectual themselves but are having a de-intellectualising effect upon education and society; who pervert the potential of our education system to enable all children to be fulfilled in favour of fulfilling the few; who remove fairness from society; and who continue to get away with it.

One part of what follows on the subject of anti political politicians is about professional responses to poor policy making. For much of this I travel back to the introduction by Kenneth Baker of the National Curriculum and its accompanying Assessment Orders. This section reflects my enduring concern that the professional energies and ideals of teachers can be first perverted and then captured as they become conditioned to first respond to and then convert to official, orthodox educational religions. That is not the way to treat and respect hardworking, dedicated professional educators. And it is bad for society.

This section (essay) is a bit long so, rather than wait till the end I have distributed **Questions for critical conversations** throughout the component parts.

As usual, in order to stimulate critical conversation, at the end I provide a link to a document designed to help critique what I have written.

Main text

I want to explore what I think is happening, particularly in terms of education in England, by using the term 'social fracking'. This is not a traditional descriptor for what is taking place but, apart from the satisfaction that its sound provides, it could be interesting to use a word that is topical in another context to see if it is an aid to understanding what our government is doing as successors to New Labour which was itself the successor to and, in far too many ways, a follower of Margaret Thatcher's New Rightⁱ. Let me first offer some technical explanation.

The term fracking is derived from 'fracturing' and is used to describe the process of exerting hydraulic pressure on permeable rock deep under the earth so that it breaks up and oil and gas come to the surface for collection and sale, profiting some while diminishing the living conditions of those on the nearby surface and ultimately possibly endangering us all. Earthquakes and pollution have been known to follow the fracking process. Underpinning rock that was relatively solid is solid no more and people living above all this who cannot afford to move house may lead a life less certain with a future more stressful and dangerous. Those that can afford to move house and live a better life from the profits of fracking may find that their advantage is not permanent as the negative consequences extend further than they anticipated.

So, what does it take for politicians to do something similar to society, to engage in social fracking? And, if I am right, how do politicians get away with it?

Assembling the components needed for social fracking

I suggest that politicians, from all of our major parties, have, possibly unconsciously, assembled six components to create effective social fracking. The components interlock quite easily. Individually each is very damaging. When, however, they are combined, their destructive force is enormous. They represent a long lasting professional failure or unwillingness on the part of politicians to do their job properly; a failure quite possibly based upon prejudice and ignorance but certainly made worse by their lack of experience of life as lived by most of the electorate. Peter Osborneⁱⁱ has written very convincingly on the rise of a class of people almost completely socialised by having worked for, to, under, alongside and over fellow politicians and would-be politicians doing the same and inhabiting the same world. Ours is not the first era to have seen people assume the life of a very senior politician at a very early age. I doubt, however, that any of our current crop of narrowly and shallowly experienced politicians could match Pitt the Younger.

Things may already have gone too far, meaning that we are being taken towards a precipice at a pace that blunts our sensibilities and weakens our power to reverse course. What awaits us is not just the inability to get a mortgage, the struggle to make ends meet, the stunting of personal ambition, the loss of libraries, extra cardigans instead of turning up (or even on) the heating, second hand clothes for the kids, soup kitchens, food banks and undignified death for the elderly. What we are heading for is a deliberately de-civilised society. Certainly we shall continue to retain the capacity to maintain very exclusive, and excluding, schools and universities. If they cannot be entirely sustained from within the UK they have built up such perceptions of brand value that they will draw in resource from overseas. It helps that our media make free with the word 'elite' to describe such institutions, making them sound desirable. Schools, colleges and universities that try to retain their connections to and support for an inclusively minded society will form the backdrop and unwilling comparators against which elites can set themselves off. There will be a period when many schools, colleges and universities lacking, but desiring, the elite label will try to cluster themselves around, and demonstrate connections with, those that have the precious label. This will reduce to second or third-rate status institutions wishing to build perceptions of value based upon inclusive public service.

Vice Chancellors can so easily become obsessed with attaining World-class excellence status. They do not mean World-class at open access or World-class at service to the local community. Their notions of what constitutes civilisation require the promotion of elitism and the necessary demotion of the excluded.

One way of indicating to what we now have to refer to as 'customers' that you are part of an elite is to be able to point a finger at those who lack the desirable label. Many headteachers (especially those that refer to themselves as 'headmasters' and 'headmistresses') are little different. They will hug to

themselves their notions of excellence while colluding in a general de-civilising process.

Component one: anti-political politicians

Policy-making should be preceded by real politics, which, for me, is an inclusive process of arriving at public values to which most of us can commit, at least for a while. Policies emerge from values. If those values have been arrived at by achieving the consent of most of us, on a fair basis and with a minimum of what these days we call 'spin', then the policies can be said to be legitimate. I am not saying that this automatically makes them wise policies but real politics makes it more likely that more of us can spot, draw attention to and recover from poor policies.

However, policies such as the top down wholesale reorganisation, deforming and devaluing of the National Health Service suddenly appeared without sufficient early warning or discussion or any electoral endorsement. The policy was constructed without a prior political process during which government could, if it had wished, have discovered what it was that people valued. It is an imposed policy, reminding us that the UK remains a monarchy whose powers are exercised by whoever can control a majority in the House of Commons. Yes it did emerge from values but not from values that have been consensually arrived at: it emerged from the values of people who were unwilling to reveal their intentions prior to the last general election. Did they think that all they had to do in order to enact their hidden policy was to obtain power? I think they did. They seem to have conveniently forgotten that the party from which this policy emerged did not actually win the general election. The electorate did not grant them the power to implement the policy. They obtained that power by means of a deal with another party that happened to be prepared to sacrifice its values for power. That was the extent of the political process in which they engaged. Perhaps if the electorate had been granted more knowledge of what was planned the Conservative vote would have been even lower.

I guess that this was in the mind of David Cameron when he loudly proclaimed before the general election that there would be no top-down reorganisation of the NHS: that it would be safe in Tory handsⁱⁱⁱ. George Orwell called this sort of thing doublespeak when he wrote *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Is it not wonderful when you discover real live examples of politicians behaving in accordance with the imaginings of people who write landmark cautionary fiction? Perhaps not wonderful: depressing.

It might be argued that by-passing the political process and going straight to policy-making does not automatically contribute to social fracking: that if the policy is good and brings a benefit we may be gaining rather than losing. At one time the phrase 'benevolent dictatorship' seemed to cover this sort of situation: a title usually chosen for themselves by dictators or by their sycophants. It might also be argued that large numbers of people are quite cynical about politics and resigned to putting up with policies they do not like so why bother with democracy.

I suppose that for the eleven years during which Charles I ruled without calling a parliament there were plenty of people who were quite happy for him to do so. But we should remember that those years ended with a civil war and the decapitation of the monarch. Failure to do proper politics allows resentments and a desire for radical change to build up. We had riots in 2011 because of feelings of alienation. The response of government was not better politics. It was more blame and more repression. And, as if wishing to provoke more riots, we now have fewer full-time jobs and less support for the young and disabled^{iv}: less reason for them to feel wanted, acknowledged and respected.

In my days of working in the 1980s on what was called a 'Low Attaining Pupils Project' I often reflected that the kids who had by the age of fourteen decided that schools were offering them nothing that they wanted just might have been making perfectly rational decisions. After all, while schools were flogging the official line that qualifications led to jobs, the children could see for themselves the factories in which their fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and neighbours had worked being closed down and demolished. So many of us either unwittingly or unwillingly collaborated in deception. Our professionalism was perverted^v.

Tony Blair has been a role model for people like Michael Gove who also put policy-making before politics. Gove has, for example, no electoral mandate for his so-called 'free' schools or his version of academies but that does not stop him. He has his own values, devises policies to suit them and any political process is then confined to forcing or manipulating them through. Certainly Gove was more forthcoming than Andrew Lansley in the Conservative Party manifesto. We were given a pretty clear idea of what he was planning. His plans were not, however, legitimised by the electorate. Does that not matter?

There is a difference between the Coalition and New Labour. Blair gave us a lot of counterfeit politics based upon focus groups^{vi}. The Coalition does not bother quite so much with them partly, I guess, because it has been trying to work very quickly and also because, being composed of two political parties, its political activity is confined to internal negotiation. The nearest it gets to Blair type focus groups are lunches and dinners with people who have bought the opportunity to influence. The Coalition, just like New Labour did, focuses on the powerful, the privileged, the rich and the posh.

They are also very nervous about losing the loyalty of people upon whose support they could normally count. For the Conservatives it is the rather unruly right wing, anti immigrant, anti Europe, anti benefits, anti welfare, anti green pro greed, nationalistic recent intake of MPs: an intake that keeps looking over its shoulder at UKIP. For the LibDems it is those former members of the Liberal Party who often felt most comfortable when positioned slightly to the left of the Labour Party^{vii}.

In the days of New Labour this was easy for LibDems to do. The Dem part of the LibDems may have originally emerged from the Labour Party via the Social Democratic Party (SDP) but they exited from Labour stage right and these days seem to have few problems accommodating Thatcherite individualist policies.

As a consequence of internal discontent the political instincts and energies of the Coalition government are concentrated upon watching their backs and party management inside Parliament. And, I nearly forgot, spin. That is for the rest of us so that we remain docile and unaware of what is really happening. A right wing simple-minded media focussed on celebrity and easily tapped prejudice helps.

Anti political behaviour by politicians drills deep down into the foundations of society making them weaker and threatens its collapse.

What follows has already appeared under **comment and editorial** on this website. I think it helps move along the arguments in this essay so I have also included it here in slightly modified form. I originally intended to make it part of this essay.

Education policy created without politics: six possible professional responses

Anti-political behaviour by politicians creates a distance between policy-makers and those for whom the policies are intended. It turns teachers into instructors who are under instruction to implement received policy. It requires performance management of teachers so that targets can be hit and, as a direct consequence, the behaviour management of children so that they conform. Since the days of Kenneth Baker the required professional role for teachers has been reactive and responsive: creativity confined. Anti-politics avoids the difficult and, for impatient politicians, tedious process of consensually arriving at values that can lead to policy. Instead it gives us policy out of power. Genuine politics is slow cooking. Power is microwaving.

Without more and better politics we are at the mercy of those with power. When unwanted policies are imposed upon those without power there are six possible responses: reluctantly acquiescing; avoiding awkward knowledge; rolling up sleeves to make policy into something better; seeking fulfilment elsewhere; protesting and attempting to change the minds of policy-makers; and converting to the current official orthodoxy.

I want to look at this in more detail. Lets go back for a while to the introduction of the National Curriculum and its Assessment Orders in the late 1980s: a time when the school education system was subject to a huge shock.

Reluctantly acquiescing

In the late eighties and early nineties I worked in a team that trained schoolteachers in the National Curriculum, particularly on the

assessment side. Before that I had been working on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies, trying to switch on children who had switched off. It was exciting to work alongside schoolteachers prepared not only to experiment but also to involve children in designing and carrying out new ways of learning. This was not a case of using children as guinea pigs. It was about jointly making sense of learning in different ways.

There was not much enthusiasm for the policy being introduced by Kenneth Baker. A lot of professional autonomy was being removed. The teacher unions, however, were preoccupied with the issues around financial devolution, as were headteachers and governors. Then there was appraisal and the beginning of an inspection regime that became dedicated to finding out not what was right but what was wrong. The later creation of the National College for School Leadership heightened the profile of headteachers, first as managers but increasingly as leaders; and yet the increased importance given to league tables also heightened their sense of being under threat.

What I believe was lost in all of this was recognition that professional educators should be creatively concerned with the development of learning and its assessment. Decision-making about the curriculum and assessment was taken out of the hands of teachers. What was happening was akin to teachers becoming alienated from both government and from their own professional values. Later there were so many educational initiatives, especially under New Labour, that schoolteachers became conditioned to respond. It is almost impossible today to talk to a schoolteacher in a language that has not been sanctioned by government.

Today professional educators must not only suppress expression of their expertise and values by adopting techniques that have taken the fancy of a here-today-gone-tomorrow secretary of state but they must also work in schools operated by people with some very unusual beliefs about life, the universe and everything. Revealing reluctance to an inspector or a boss is, however, unwise. Tell an inspector that synthetic phonics is but one of many ways to encourage children to read and it will do you no good. Tell the head of a sponsored academy or a so-called free school that they are participating in an anti-democratic fracturing of society and your career prospects will dive. You are supposed to believe in what they claim to believe.

Avoiding awkward knowledge

My colleagues and I encountered some headteachers in the late 1980s wilfully avoiding acquiring the knowledge that they needed in order to do their job as it was coming to be defined. I remember teachers from one school bringing their concern to me that their headteacher was ignoring the National Curriculum. They were worried that they would not be ready when it hit them, especially in the form of tests. I

explained that I could not simply walk into the school to carry out some training: I had to be invited by the head. Eventually, over a pleasant cup of coffee in the head's office, talking about this and that, I mentioned the National Curriculum. 'Oh', said the head, 'we have received none of those documents you talk about'. And there they all were on a shelf behind the head's desk. There was, as I remember it, a lot of 'If I don't look at what I don't like then it can't hurt me', a professional equivalent of hiding under the blanket.

There was another form of deliberate avoidance of knowledge. As a member of my local union executive in the run up to full implementation of the National Curriculum and its accompanying Assessment Orders it seemed to me that there was a distinct lack of interest in this aspect of professionalism. Terms and conditions of service were the subject of much discussion but what should be taught and how and what should be assessed and how were topics to be avoided. You might, I suppose, expect trade unions to be like that because, unlike some other countries, the UK tends not to bring unions into the process of making decisions jointly with what we tend to call the management. Even when relations are at their most cordial the interests of unions and management are usually seen as separate, even opposite. In the case of education, however, I have always felt that this separateness has helped to prevent proper professional involvement in making decisions about the business of teaching, learning and assessment.

These are only recollections but it seems to me that I am still encountering people who quite simply do not want to hear anything politically or professionally unpleasant. We are, I fear, a politically disengaged country. In terms of education this is no less than professional suicide.

Rolling up sleeves to make policy better

Professional pride and the need to keep a job make this the favoured response. I recall a burst of creative energy in the late 80s as we strove to transform policy into something that retained deeper educational values. My motto at the time was 'do what you have to do while protecting and promoting what you want to do'. To that end I worked on blending records of achievement with GCSE and the National Curriculum, believing that in the process we could enhance learning. At first I believed that, although the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) had been abolished by Kenneth Baker, removing the means of researching reliable expectations of levels of performance by children, over time we might be able to use the levels of the National Curriculum to discover some norms. Unfortunately Baker's successor, Kenneth Clarke, imposed his own norms without bothering to undertake any research and we have suffered ever since. The new head of Ofsted is not the only one to misunderstand averages. Clarke, having told teachers where to find the average, complained that some children were below it.

One of the words that often crops up in response to policy is 'collaboration'. As the 80s became the 90s I came to liken myself more and more to a conscientious policeman in occupied France. At first I decide to stay at my post in order to mitigate the worst evils of the Nazi invasion. But after a few years I notice that little kids in the street are throwing stones at me and shouting 'collaborator'. Surely, to collaborate is a good thing? Or perhaps not. In whose interests are you working when you collaborate?

Seeking fulfilment elsewhere

Maybe this ought to be called leaving the field to the enemy. Or is that unfair? Early retirement with the ability to take your enhanced pension early is not available these days but my impression is that a combination of National Curriculum, the associated Assessment Orders and an inspection regime led by someone who seemed determined to find fault resulted in many teachers choosing to get out in the early 90s.

At the same time LEAs were having to reorganise the services that they offered to take account of the marketisation of education and the attempt to transform schools and colleges into small business enterprises. This led to a wholesale shedding of authority staff who were, in many cases, glad to go. Many of them set up their own small business enterprises selling to schools what they used to get for free.

I was one of those that left. Visiting former colleagues afterwards I had to try to keep the smile off my face. They looked to be under so much pressure while I told myself that I was leaving to paint on a much larger canvass. Actually, once I began working at a university I was. Had I stayed the professional frustration for me would have been unendurable.

Today I see teachers who for years have been regarded as enthusiastic and competent who are being driven out because of, yet again, the effects of policy. To look good for the inspectors desired results have to be achieved so that is where the effort goes: grade Ds, for example, must be turned into grade Cs. When these teachers joined up it was not simply to concentrate upon one slice of children. The problem is compounded when inspectors criticise teachers for neglecting the other children in order to get the results that the inspectors demand. The job is rather like trying to stop three leaks in a hosepipe with only two hands.

My experience tells me that teachers begin to lose energy just when their experience is beginning to pay off. It is frustrating to see teachers becoming worn out at this stage while often taking on more responsibility. I think that we have not been good at managing this. It would often be better, I think, if we could maximise the benefits of a teacher's experience and expertise by lightening the workload as they come towards the end of their working life. But one thing is certain: verbal abuse of teachers by politicians and their servants, adverse

changes to pay and conditions, confusing structural changes to the system, disregard of evidence that does not support policy and a constant flow of half-baked ideas do not help to keep good teachers in their jobs.

Protesting and attempting to change the minds of the policy makers

Please note that I did not use the word 'revolt'. We are simply so bad at revolt that governments intending to introduce wholesale harmful education policies do not need to worry about teachers overturning busses or hurling Molotov Cocktails from the barricades.

The Liverpool Association of Secondary Heads (LASH) was, in those days, the nearest we came to a collection of enthusiasts for blood sports in education. LEA advisors coming into a meeting of LASH poorly prepared to announce bad news could expect a mauling. Explaining what National Curriculum assessment required them to do was, however, not a problem. They wanted accurate details setting out what was required. Perhaps they and their colleagues throughout the country ought to have gone to the barricades. It might have prevented the descent of education into what became a competition to be the best box ticker. I am afraid that the teaching profession, responding to the priorities of its unions, limits its protests to pay and conditions of service. Bad policy-making with regard to curriculum and assessment generates no more than moans. And yet curriculum and assessment are the main business and purpose of the profession.

As for changing the minds of the policy makers. I have written elsewhere about going with colleagues to see Charles Clarke to persuade him to change his perceptions. It worked. He did change his views. Not only that, he asked for more meetings. But he was a mere secretary of state. We had not taken account of the way that Blair did government. Policy-making was confined to Blair's sofa and Clarke was not a soferite. Like us he was only regarded as an implementer and replaced soon after by Ruth Kelly who cancelled all scheduled meetings. Thus ended my best chance of changing the minds of policy makers. I believe that for professionals to affect policy they have to gain access at the highest effective level. Under Blair that meant either him or Gordon. Blair told us that education was his only priority. He suffered, however, from that well-known disease of politicians: guruitis. Show some politicians a guru, especially one that can tap into their prejudices, and the gullibility that rests (or should that be lies) within them turns snake oil into a policy quicker than you can say *surely we ought to critically examine evidence from more than a single perspective and also involve the professionals in devising policy that they will be expected to implement.*

Of course, there is another way that ought to work. £250,000 could get you into Cameron's flat for a chat. Oops, forgot. The Conservative Party does not do things like that.

Converting to the current orthodoxy

Political religions proselytise. They provide comfort for the soul by banishing doubt and providing certainty. Faith overcomes questions. Proselytising policy makers range from emollient persuaders such as Kenneth Baker drawing educators into his new religion by use of words such as 'entitlement' to the more forthright Gove who expects instant born-again converts to his religion. Prior to Baker the notion of an entitlement curriculum was emerging from teachers, advisors, inspectors, parents and children working together. After Baker everyone was *entitled* to what he said was good for them. Nevertheless, he took a lot of trouble to establish his religion. Gove is not such a patient man. Convert to his religion immediately or have your head chopped off.

If you cut out criticality, narrow your perspective, have a tendency to enjoy being told what to do this could be the response for you. You may have to accept that words such as *deform* are now expressed as *reform*; or accept that mathematics has been altered to allow everyone to be simultaneously above average or be punished; and instead of perceiving professional educational words as part of a means of communication see them instead as part of a liturgy for the most recent educational religion invented by the gods gazing down on us.

It is possible that in your career you will have so often been required to adopt new religions that you have become what people working in prisons call a recidivist: someone who feels unsafe when out of gaol. Being born again so many times in the course of professional life prepares you for educational nirvana: one day all suffering will cease: doubt will drop away because you will have been absorbed by the gods.

Followers of the latest educational religion must love Big Brother, even when he tells them to forget what they had been worshipping and adopt an entirely new set of beliefs complete with a new liturgy. 'I shall always comply' is now the motto of true believers. The further up the religious hierarchy they go the stronger become their beliefs. Or do you think that I am again being unfair?

A question

If the new boss of Ofsted claims to be able to tell if a school is a good one within half an hour of visiting it how long does it take the average teacher to tell if a new boss of Ofsted is going to be any good? Or, for that matter, a secretary of state!

29th March 2012 (just as the General Teaching Council for England closes)

Comment since the above was written

Contexts change over time, we are given new sets of initials to memorise and the screw of accountability for the delivery of policy that professional educators have played no part in constructing is turned ever tighter. More than two years after the above was written the power relationships remain the same and it looks as though Tristram Hunt intends to impose more unthinking, undemocratically based Blairism upon professional educators and so transmit the same to children and society at large.^{viii}

Questions for critical conversations

1. As an educator do you feel that your professional knowledge, experience, expertise, interests, anxieties, concerns and values are taken into account when education policy is constructed?
2. In terms of policy do you see the education profession as reactive or proactive?
3. Does your professional life involve at any point, including within your institution, the consensual arrival at values leading to policy? If so who is included in the process and how?

Component two: anti-democratic politicians

Democracy is one of those words that we often casually assume needs no defining or questioning. Some countries assume that having regular elections automatically grants them the status of being a democracy. People, or at least governments, seem to love the label and it can provide cover for some really bad behaviour. Atrocities are justified on the grounds that they reflect the will of the people. Play the democracy card and you can get away with stealing the lands of others, invading other countries, torture, imprisonment without trial, massacre, secretly compiling nuclear weapons, classifying groups of citizens as less worthy of the full benefits of citizenship and ignoring United Nations resolutions. We are told that such things and more are all needed to defend democracy. And if the USA, whose politicians often appear to regard themselves as having been anointed as promoters of democracy at the point of a sword, perceives a benefit from supporting such a country then that is also guaranteed, backed up by frequent use of its power to veto UN resolutions^{ix}.

Barry Goldwater told us back in 1964 when he was trying to become President of the USA that 'Extremism in defence of liberty is no vice'^x. He was not elected but clearly his views resonated with some because so many members of the Republican Party that followed him have had few qualms about killing, torturing and illegally imprisoning people from other countries in order to liberate them so that they could live in approved democracies.

Eventually we got Ronald Reagan matched with Thatcher, Bush Senior matched with Major, Bill Clinton and GW Bush matched with Tony Blair and a bit of GW with Gordon Brown. Between them they did a lot of damage to democracy. It certainly has been a 'Special Relationship': one devoted to imperialism and exploitation. Coming to the presidency one year after Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister Reagan joined her in a deliberate policy of encouraging greed, widening social gaps and promoting private over public. Stewart Lansley^{xi} shows very clearly how since those two got to work the gaps between the rich and the poor have widened. Thatcher and Reagan may have started things but the others enthusiastically joined in. What, however, has this to do with democracy and, more importantly, with anti democratic behaviour by politicians?

In my view democracy is weakened when the gaps between social groups widen: when the institutions of government are made to work in favour of a few. Taking a view on this, however, brings into question the very notion of democracy. It calls for an attempt at a definition. John Keane^{xii} reminds us that the origins and forms of democracy are older, more widespread and more varied than they are usually presented. He also cautions us to avoid tautology when describing why we wish for it: 'democracy is good because it is good'. If we define it like this then we can avoid having to think very hard. I believe that we must, however, try to establish sufficiently what we mean by the word before employing a possibly tentative, perhaps temporary but certainly not static definition to examine how our politicians behave.

I have indicated my view that governmental action that works for the benefit of a few weakens democracy so I guess that means that I believe that democracy is strengthened when governmental action is more inclusive. My general thesis is not that in the UK we are experiencing a simple drift to the right and the favouring of the favoured but that we are experiencing social fracking and that education policy is contributing to it.

I have previously mentioned how an unequal distribution of sweets to four-year-olds would soon be remarked upon as unfair, even by those receiving the sweets. Under our present government there will be no ordered re-distribution of sweets so that everyone gets a fair share. And although the extremely rich and privileged will continue to be protected and favoured they too will be affected when a smaller number of sweets is thrown into the air to be fought over.

My definition of democracy inclines towards the prevention of such conflicts. I am, however, entering dangerous territory. I have no wish to advocate social uniformity, unless it is uniformity of respect. But I also have little time for the concept of 'choice' when it is used to camouflage the exploitation of power and privilege. I take my stand upon a definition of democracy as an approach to government that enables us to engage in proper politics. I have said that I believe that politics is an inclusive process of consensually arriving at values prior to deciding policies. Democracy is, therefore, for me, a process of governing that allows and enables: dissenting voices to be heard; authority to be challenged; open government; and fair treatment for all. Yes, each of those propositions is variable in terms of its degree of tightness, looseness, nature and

extent but at least they provide starting points for questioning the kind of government we have now.

Kenneth Baker^{xiii} not only began the process of de-professionalising schoolteachers by altering their role from co-operating creators of curricula and modes of assessment to receivers and implementers of centrally decided policy but he also did the same for advisors and inspectors. An effect of this was to make less relevant Local Education Authorities (LEAs) with their democratically elected education committees responding to locally defined needs within a general national policy framework. We now have an ever quickening dismantling of the connections between schools and local democracy and, although it might at first appear that schools are now, instead, more closely connected to democratically elected central government the relationships are, increasingly, commercial and, therefore, less open to public scrutiny. The irony is that while, as Osborne has shown, we are more and more governed by professional politicians who have done little else in their adult lives the respect for democracy by those professional politicians is so slight. We are now offered E-Petitions and Twitter and soon, I guess, it will be government via Facebook. Schools, meanwhile, are busy joining LinkedIn groups, sometimes to obtain useful advice that they once got for free from local government and sometimes because they are desperately seeking a hand to hold as policy forms round the whims of a Secretary of State who disregards evidence and the expertise, experience and values of dedicated professional educators.

Questions for critical conversations

1. To what extent does your professional life allow and enable: a) dissent, b) challenge to authority, c) open decision-making and d) fairness for all?
2. To whom do you feel accountable?
3. To whom do you believe you should be accountable?
4. Who do you feel is accountable to you?
5. Who do you believe should be accountable to you?
6. Who decides how the educational sweets are distributed?
7. Are they distributed fairly?

Component three: anti-intellectual politicians

Intellectual can be an intimidating word. In his book^{xiv} Tony Blair uses it a lot when he wants to convince the reader of the brainpower of the people who supported his approach to government, politics and society. For me real politics and intellectual behaviour go together.

For this component of what it takes to frack society I propose to cheat a little by making use of some writing I prepared earlier and have already placed on this website. I might do more of this cheating.

Trahison des clercs

It was in the early 1970s when I first heard this powerful French phrase at the annual conference of the Politics Association; that is to say, the association for *teachers* of politics. I have seldom heard it since. Maybe people believed that the notion of clerks' treason or treason of the intellectuals had lost relevance. At the time I took the phrase to mean that professional educators had to be true to their calling, whatever that was, and hold out against the changeable partisan influence of politicians. I believe that this interpretation of the phrase remains relevant especially because the unsettling consequence of multiple changes of policy means that we remain unsure of our calling. Professional values have to be recalibrated as new policy is introduced but there seldom seems to be time to do this adequately, if at all.

Julien Benda's first use of the phrase back in 1927 was mostly directed at people regarded as intellectuals who attached themselves to the large nationalistic and racist movements and ideologies of that time; but it is a useful phrase for us when we look at and try to make sense of what has been, what is and what might be happening to education. Are professional educators now captive intellectuals? Worse, maybe they are not conscious of being held captive. Worse still, their consciousness may be false and their professional experience, expertise and energies devoted to hurting that which they should most value.

Current ideology

Does anybody not believe that we are going through a period marked by deliberately contrived and ideologically motivated educational chaos and confusion? The last vestiges of local democratic influence upon education are being swept away. Central government is taking more power over the school system and using that power not merely to make schools part of a rigged market economy but also teachers and children; further education, universities, their tutors and students likewise. Destroy what has kept the system relatively fair and it becomes possible to open the gates to people driven by the profit motive or by the urge to promote some strange beliefs or both. Chaos and confusion are pre-conditions for the takeover of the educational system by the powerful, the privileged, the profit motivated and the single-minded. The same is true for health, just as it was for British Railways, the General Post Office, the Girobank and the public utilities. If I am right what can be done to protect and promote values based upon the notion of fairness? Or do we not care about such things any more?

Internalising the official version of things

In such a context educators are pressured to implement policies and accept changes to the structure, conditions and values of professional life that, at least, make them uneasy. Since my active involvement in this profession began in the late sixties one feature of professional

response to policy has been the gradual internalisation of the language and values of policy makers, no matter how strong might have been the initial feeling of professional revulsion. The impact of Kenneth Baker made this more marked. Internalisation has often been accompanied by professional amnesia, the atrophy of critical faculties and the loss of perspective. We may dislike a policy and express our views vigorously but when we realise that funding will dry up and that we shall fail an inspection if we do not implement the policy we roll up our sleeves, suspend our disagreement and do what we are told. After a while there is no one left in the staff room who remembers other ways of doing things. People are already forgetting that LEAs and advisors ever existed and it is possible to imagine a future generation of schoolteachers who will believe that academies are the only model for schools. Somehow, however, that peculiar British/English invention, the private 'public' school, will survive and continue to distort society by reinforcing privilege.

Kenneth Baker took from teachers the key to what some people referred to as the secret garden of education and ever since politicians have kept hold of it only allowing access to the garden for people of whom they approve. Teachers still talk about *progress* and *improvement* and so on but government now provides the meanings of such words and phrases. Government does not research standards and performance in order to establish reasonable expectations; it simply makes demands about them based upon a desire to appear tougher than their predecessors. As a result professional educators devote themselves to the achievement of these targets. Given the educational antics of the present government this is a good time to think about clerks' treason, or treason of the intellectuals, in respect of the role of professional educator. I raised earlier the notion of captive intellectuals. Maybe I should elaborate. Teachers may want to get back into the educational garden but in order to do so they must offer themselves as captives and learn the language and accept the values of politicians. In today's educational garden the gardeners must cultivate (and weed) according to the plans of the keyholders.

Educational professionals as intellectuals

Professional educators should be placed in, or returned to, the category of 'intellectual'. The effect of government policy for the last twenty-five or so years has been to de-intellectualise teachers; and for me that is the same as to de-professionalise them. There is a huge body of writing that attempts to define the word 'intellectual'; and I would encourage readers who are unfamiliar with the literature to delve into it in order to refine or dispute what I say. People on the right often argue that to be an intellectual is to be without common sense. The caricature is of someone with their head in the clouds, unable to see things the way that 'ordinary people' do. There is more than a hint of insult in that view. Some people assume that all intellectuals have to be of the left because they tend to ask awkward questions of the status

quo; and those who belong to the establishment can see questioners as trouble causers. Others, such as Gramsci, came to believe that all ideology requires intellectual activity.

I guess we can see something in each of these approaches to defining what might be intellectual. I accept that when intellectuals engage in a lot of 'blue sky thinking' they can forget about the immediate and the practical; and I can see that defence of privilege against attempts to reduce inequality can also call for some pretty nifty thinking; but I am drawn most to the notion of intellectuals as critical sense makers who, while holding to some basic truths, also allow themselves to have doubts and use more than one perspective to examine and challenge orthodoxies, even those to which they are committed. The awkward questioning in which they engage also applies to their own beliefs.

In what do professional educators engage that could be accepted as intellectual? It might be argued that university lecturers have to be automatically included in the category because they read, write and talk about theories: they engage in 'research'. It is, on the other hand, a well-known cliché that if you mention the 'R' word in a school staff room you will be ridiculed and reminded that it is raining, there is a high wind and a full moon, all combining to make the children uncontrollable and any amount of theory useless. But all teachers engage in research and operate intellectually. That is to say, on the basis of their present knowledge they formulate notions that they proceed to test. They constantly acquire, apply and question new knowledge. Possibly their knowledge base is insufficient. Whose isn't? Possibly their tests have weaknesses and limitations. What academic has not pointed out that their research findings have limited scope and that further tests could and should be made? Possibly other teachers might find that there are different, even better, ways of doing things. Are university academics immune from this?

To teach is to plan intervention in learning. Sometimes it is also about planning not to intervene in learning. Teachers not only transmit knowledge but they also mediate it. They create the conditions in which students produce new knowledge. They may be called teachers but they are also learners collaborating not only with colleagues but also with students. They make sense of things and help others to do likewise; and they make use of more than one kind of conceptual framework. Surely that is to behave intellectually? Unfortunately, given their present status as implementers rather than constructors of policy the dominant conceptual framework is that provided by government. Intellectual activity is constrained and distorted because of this.

Governing the wrong way round

In the UK we suffer from being governed by non-politicians or even anti-politicians. In other words, our major political parties tend to be dominated by people who do not understand that politics is about

values and achieving consent first and designing and dishing out policies second. In my view they do not know their own business. They, for example, throw education policies at professional educators without bothering to include them in any pre-policy making examination of, or reflection upon, educational values and knowledge. Perhaps the most outstanding recent example of governing the wrong way round was Andrew Lansley's introduction of his plans to drastically change the National Health Service. The plan was devised away from public gaze and without political discussion and then introduced. Unfortunately for him the consequent uproar halted him in his tracks and he then had to do the politics, though badly. The Conservative members of our current government have made the mistake of taking at face value Tony Blair's assertion that he should have moved further and faster in his first administration. This urge to act first and engage in proper political activity later gets us into wars from which we can find it very difficult to extract ourselves. It also means that professional educators and others are constantly adjusting to and coming to terms with policy that emerges from partisan ideology: having to be reactive rather than proactive.

Back in 1927

Trahison des clercs was the title of a book by Julien Benda published in 1927. The book was written at a time when huge ideas of how societies should be formed and ordered were swirling about much of the World. The Second World War had a number of long and short term causes, including powerful economic factors, but the clash of ideas meant that ideologies contributed to the language of war. We talked about Totalitarianism and Fascism and National Socialism. We also talked about 'The Democracies' as representing a set of values in defence of which lives could honourably be lost. Devotion to ideologies caused anguish for some intellectuals when Hitler and Stalin found it expedient to agree over the carving up of Poland. Hitler used the language of race and Stalin used the language of universal communism, though both were totalitarian. Those of their supporters who were held to be intellectual had a difficult time rationalising this rapprochement of opposites. Fortunately for true believers on both sides the friendship did not last. Refuge was, once again, found in pre-judgments. Prejudice can be so comforting in foreign affairs as well as in education.

The Crufts Educational Show

Before and during the Second World War people who were regarded as intellectuals were often drawn into promoting and justifying policies based upon notions of race. We now ridicule, for example, the establishment by Himmler of an intellectual industry devoted to finding evidence to support racial myths. Such dangerous foolishness belongs, we like to think, to the past. Unfortunately, it is not a past that is dead and buried and pre-war National Socialism is not the only example of such intellectual perversion. In the UK we continue to operate a school

system that was very much influenced by educationalists, politicians and psychiatrists who strongly believed in eugenics: the eradication of 'poor' racial specimens and the promotion of the 'best' ones. The phrase 'best in class' was not confined to Crufts Dog Show: breeding was everything. The 11+ examination was designed to separate those considered worthy of being taught from those for whom learning was considered largely a waste of time. Some parts of the UK continue to make decisions about which kinds of children can go to which kinds of school on the basis of such an examination. Very few people would these days be prepared to advocate using the educational system to achieve racial purity. It is, however, impossible to deny that the preservation of social privilege is embedded into the ways that we do education; and the acquisition and retention of social privilege is not disconnected from selective breeding. Some of us will never even be allowed to enter the Crufts Educational Show. Our current cabinet is, however, full of a lot of 'best in class' Crufts winners.

More intellectual delusion and the Mad Hatters

Other so-called intellectuals of the time of Benda's book were drawn into justifying and promoting policies designed to ruthlessly accelerate the pace of history in an attempt to reach at least the first stage of communism. How ironic it was that, in the name of an ideal devoted to human fulfilment and fair treatment, so much intellectual energy should have been devoted to promoting and justifying inhuman behaviour. Gulags and Five-Year Plans and enforced Collectivisation and Show Trials would have horrified Marx and Engels.

To many people the end of the Soviet Union is regarded as the fall of communism. Some politicians from the USA, for example, appear to have no other way of describing what happened after perestroika and glasnost. They believe that Anglo-Saxon style capitalism triumphed over socialism and communism. In the sense that carpet-bagging exploitative capitalists descended on the former USSR in order to grab what they could that might appear to be true. To others, however, the USSR should never have been allowed to use the word communist or to call itself socialist. One result of simplistic sense making and labelling of ideologies has been to embed into many cultures a misleading definition of communism and socialism. In fact it may be going too far to use the word 'definition' because that would imply that some thinking had been done rather than an instinctive reaction based upon ignorance and prejudice.

I really want to make fun of the Tea Party and every time I see a headline with those words I expect to see that a sub-editor has added the words 'Mad Hatter's'. Unfortunately, the powerful urge of people such as Sarah Palin to seek for simple-minded prejudice-fuelled solutions represents a huge threat to all our futures. This is not funny. Even less funny is the rationalisation and justification of the movement by people claiming to be intellectual.

Lack of perspective and unfairness

I would argue that there is no such thing as a one-dimensional intellectual. To focus upon finding evidence to support a single point of view is, in fact, anti-intellectual. Archaeologists who gleefully celebrate digging up evidence to support a cherished myth and don't want to ask awkward questions; servants of politicians who devise dodgy dossiers to support a case for war and hide discomfoting evidence; and leaders and managers of schools, colleges and universities who concentrate only on the learners who will improve league table results and not only neglect the rest but also narrow all learning: all these are at best non-intellectual and at worst anti-intellectual. In my view to be anti-intellectual is also to be anti-societal. Society needs a sense of fairness. It is the basic political instinct. Gather round you a group of four-year-old children. Hand round a bag of sweets. Deliberately miss out one of the children. I guarantee that even those that get the sweets will remark on the unfairness. One-dimensional thinking leads to target setting and the loss of perspective. It means that the perspectives and values of others who have different life experiences and priorities are excluded from consideration. That is foolishly unfair. It damages society.

Back to Benda

Benda wanted intellectuals to reason dispassionately. He did not approve of them becoming attached to or advocates of and apologists for political movements based upon nationalism, romanticism or racism. It might be argued that his own belief that intellectuals ought to remain dispassionate was not consistent with his earlier involvement with the movement to release Alfred Dreyfus and correct the huge injustice done to him that stimulated a French intellectual civil war underpinned by racist prejudice. I guess that Benda would have argued that he was entirely consistent because in doing so he was speaking for those eternal truths with which intellectuals should be concerned. Benda's claim to be working to eternal truths also meant that he usually rejected the passionate and the subjective as though they had nothing to contribute. Later in his life, however, he joined the Communist Party and was to be found defending Stalin and the suppression of dissent. He was not always a good exemplar for what he advocated; but, being Jewish, well known and forced at first to wear a prominent yellow Star of David and later to go into hiding in occupied France with his life under constant threat I cannot bring myself to attack his inconsistencies. He has provided us with a phrase and a notion that I believe we would do well to reconsider for our time.

Values of a professional educator

What, I want to ask, are the eternal truths with which professional educators should be concerned? And what would make a professional educator guilty of *trahison des clerics*? If politics is a process of examining values and achieving consent that ought to precede the construction of policy then for professional educators to be involved in politics is entirely justified. The problem is that we do our politics the wrong way round and professionals are forced to come to terms with some very bad policies. But supposing we did politics the right way round what values would professional educators bring to the attempt to arrive at consent?

Let me provoke discussion with just a few assertions that you might wish to dispute and turn into a set of 'eternal truths' for professional educators.

- 1. Educators should build a more equal society.**
- 2. Educators should not reinforce social privilege.**
- 3. Children should be treated equally.**

I suggest that if, after discussion, you accept or modify or add to any of the above, you move on to deciding at what point the compromises made by professional educators in order to earn a living might amount to *trahison des clerics*.

And now for some more that I prepared earlier

Constructing a personal philosophy of education

A starter critical conversation

Is it possible to build a personal educational philosophy around just three concepts? Yes, I know that is a big question but maybe we can at least begin to hold a critical conversation about it. Here are some beliefs and ideas to start the conversation. I am not doing heavy stuff here about Rousseau or Marx though, of course, you might wish to, especially as they and many others provide valuable insights. Neither do I spend time digging deep to define the concepts. But at a time of accelerated educational change and some confusing and contradictory educational policy making I want to encourage a bit more critical conversation.

After each short discussion in which I talk about some personal hobbyhorses I raise one or two questions that can be used to encourage conversation. By all means replace or modify these concepts or add ones of your own and raise questions.

Concept One: Accessibility

I believe that we should work to remove barriers to learning. Would you agree? One consequence would be that examinations should not be linguistic obstacle courses for learners designed to trip them up. This also applies to teaching. Learners can easily be confused by teachers and examiners failing to provide fair opportunity for them to acquire and demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

Talking of examinations, there has been a lot of hot air released recently on the issue of questions that cannot be answered. When I used to set examination questions I did not always expect answers. I mostly expected responses. They are not quite the same thing. The first suggests that you can only pass if you can guess or know what is required. The second suggests that the examiner has to make sense of what is offered to them.

To put this another way: answers imply the use of closed questions; responses imply open questions. When a student responds to an open question they can be taking an examiner into places they did not expect to go and so the examiner has to engage with and make sense of what they are seeing. The more that we use open questions the more we are differentiating by outcome. Differentiating by task inhibits the capacity of learners to exceed what is expected of them. It is, therefore, a barrier. Or do you like streaming and setting?

Some barriers are, however, beyond the power of teachers to remove. Social privilege cannot be ended easily, certainly not by a schoolteacher struggling to do their best in a classroom. Nevertheless, I guess that if you believe that social privilege brings unfair educational advantages you would not dream of reinforcing it by teaching in that British anomaly the so-called public school. Or would you?

Might the concept of accessibility form part of your educational philosophy? And if so how far would you take it?

Concept Two: Critical Engagement

I believe that education and society benefit when professional educators engage critically with theory, policy and practice. Theory can shine a light on practice but critically examined practice can enable us to challenge theory. The same is true of policy. It can be poorly implemented when not critically examined from the perspectives of theory and practice. Would you agree?

Taking this a bit further, uncritically examined policy is not only in danger of being poorly implemented it is also likely to have been badly designed if criticality has played little part in its construction. Unfortunately, these days professional educators are usually excluded from bringing the perspectives of theory and practice to bear upon the process of policy making. Governments like to throw policies at

professionals and expect them to make them work. If they don't work who do you think takes the blame?

Whenever and wherever it is possible to bring criticality to bear I believe it is the duty of professional educators to do so. Perhaps I should qualify this. A former boss of mine used to say that Ofsted was the only game in town and we had to win it. Inspection does not allow much professional wriggle room but to undergo inspection with your mind closed to anything but the surface demands of inspection will, I suggest, impair professional performance. My old boss was right and we did well because we combined focus on the task with a wider and deeper understanding of what was happening. Well, I think so.

How far should critical engagement extend? I think it should extend into the local community and beyond. There has for some time been an emphasis upon teaching subjects. This should not mean that professional educators have to confine themselves to the textbook. All teaching and learning takes place in context. Learners bring something to the classroom. They are not empty vessels. They have perceptions, experiences and values that interact with what teachers have to say. If, for example, there is widespread unemployment in the area it cannot be ignored by the teacher. It will be a factor irrespective of the subject being taught and, therefore, demands critical engagement. So do children.

What do you think about critical engagement? If it becomes part of your educational philosophy how far would you go with it?

Concept Three: Disclosure

By this I mean that learning is diminished when learners become reluctant to disclose what they perceive to be failure. Sometimes teachers can create an atmosphere in which learners fear to ask questions or to reveal what they do not know. This extends to learning to hide apparent failure. In such an atmosphere the real failure is that of the teacher who has not created the conditions in which learners can work to their optimum. Would you agree? I believe that in a professional context the failure to disclose mistakes and misunderstanding can have far-reaching negative consequences.

We can be grateful, for example, to the pharmaceutical companies that invest enormous resources in research to produce drugs to save lives. The cost has to be high because, in order to be successful, they have to try so many things that don't work. So far so good: they believe in the positive usefulness of failure. Unfortunately they don't publish their failures and so other companies have to invest more than they need and unknowingly repeat the same mistakes. Hidden failure is not good.

Do you remember that old phrase: 'It's not a failure but a learning opportunity'? I have seen lots of research carried out both by children

and by schoolteachers in which things have not gone according to plan. A first reaction has often been to see this as failure. And so it is if that cast of mind prevails. Add a little critical engagement, however, and the learning blossoms. The real failure would be the failure to disclose and prevent learning taking place.

If you think disclosure should be part of your educational philosophy how might you create the conditions in which learners feel permitted to do it?

As you can see, the above is not a substitute for the serious study of educational philosophy. I do, however, believe that this is a good time to talk about our values and perhaps the above can help.

June 2011

Questions for critical conversations

1. Do you feel that those that construct educational policy make use of more than one perspective?
2. Do you feel that constructors of policy allow implementers of policy to make use of more than one perspective?
3. To what extent would you regard each of the following as an intellectual activity? A) Educating. B) Teaching. C) Learning. D) Instructing.
4. Do you believe that educators are regarded as engaging in intellectual activity?
5. In what form is doubt allowed to enter the mind of the professional educator and what happens if it does?
6. To what extent do you believe that the examination of properly researched evidence plays a part in the construction of education policy?
7. To what extent do you believe that professional educators have the power to subject education policy to critical examination?

Component four: anti-educational politicians

Let us go back to the Latin. There are two words that count. *Educere* means to lead out but our government is leading out some and holding back others. *Educare* means to grow but for our politicians this means encouraging and stimulating the growth of some while stunting the growth of others. And although singing and playing sweet music have been put forward as effective means of propagating plants I have never heard that they grow better if you shout at them and at their gardeners. To train to be a schoolteacher ought, these days, to include a module on learning to cope with blame.

The main problem is that politicians want children to achieve high scores because they believe those scores to be the best demonstration that their education policy is good. In other words, this is not about the education of children but, rather, about the use of schools, teachers, parents and children to show how brilliant and vote-worthy are the politicians. In addition they want the

education of children to concentrate upon approved aspects of approved subjects taught and examined in an approved manner. For me the best part of GCSE was what it borrowed from CSE and discarded from GCE O-Level. CSE examinations were designed to include a variety of styles of questions plus long-term project work that developed research skills and encouraged sustained learning. Unlike O-Level it was not a sudden death test of memory.

I was the CSE Chief Examiner for my subject and the A-Level Chief Examiner for the same subject was someone who had taught and examined me for my first degree. There was supposed to be a very large ability gap between the two examinations. We were asked to write the specimen paper and mark scheme for GCSE. I took him a copy of a CSE paper I had set. He looked at it, paused for a while, then said, 'But you ask the same questions as me except that while I hide the meaning of the questions you let the candidates know what they are about'. Its called 'accessibility' and is probably why some people think that public examinations have become easier, that and a natural human tendency to believe that everything was tougher 'in my day'^{xv}.

I remember another example of accessibility being mistaken for a lowering of standards. A teacher who was invigilating an examination I had set told me that he thought some of my questions were very easy: anyone off the street could answer them. I asked for an example. 'What influences the way people vote?', he quoted. I had to agree that almost anyone could have a go at that question. 'But', I replied, 'they might not get many marks. What, for example, do you know about the Michigan Voting Model?'. He knew nothing about it. I am afraid that it is the closed question with the 'right answer' that comes into the minds of too many people when they think about assessment. Open questions encouraging a range of responses that have to be made sense of have failed to dominate the public discourse of assessment and examination.

I am now very concerned that Michael Gove's intended changes to public examinations will mean a return from differentiation, especially differentiation by outcome, to discrimination. When GCSE was being created one of the values kept in mind by its developers was that we should move away from systems of assessment that aimed to achieve mere rank order: to discriminate. Our purpose was educational: to help create the conditions in which students were able to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do. To achieve that the teaching and the examining had to be accessible also and so we were very much taken with the idea of differentiating by outcome. What Gove seems to want is a form of discrimination not only in terms of his approach to the business of examining but also across society. In my view Gove will disconnect public examinations from education and use them to generate a social rank order.

Questions for critical conversations

1. Should public examinations be vehicles for and a part of learning?
2. What educational purpose do ranking and grading serve?
3. What social purpose do ranking and grading serve?
4. What is the purpose of inspection, as carried out by Ofsted?
5. Why do we engage in international competitions such as PISA?

6. What are the costs and benefits of league tables, including international league tables?

Component five: anti-social politicians

It is not merely the case that many politicians are now committed to possessive individualism and so this is all that we must deal with. Thatcherised Tories are now a fact of party political life and beginning to resolve into a clear form that, while difficult to dislodge because of their control of the levers of power, are easily reduced to an intellectually bereft, nasty set of defenders of privilege and greed. We must, sadly, also confront the failure of people who claim membership of the Labour Party to connect the two notions of fairness and fulfilment. When Philip Gould and Tony Blair put forward 'aspiration' as the key value of New Labour they failed to make the connection. If we remove fairness from the equation then fulfilment will be for a few at the expense of the rest. This is to be anti-social.

We learned from David Cameron's speech at the October 2012 Conservative Party conference that he too would like to adopt 'aspiration' as a slogan. But because he appears to have thought this one up very quickly in order to grab the headlines I think that to call it a 'value' at this stage is going too far. With Ed Miliband now proudly appropriating Disraeli's 'One Nation' slogan we seem to have entered some sort of party political game called 'swap the slogan'. At what points, I wonder, do slogans turn into values and values turn into policies? And who, I also wonder, is allowed to take part in the process of transformation? Does the process work in that order? Are our politicians content to skip from slogan to policy without bothering with the intervening troublesome business of involving society in the discussion about values?

There are many decent MPs in the Labour Party. If you read, for example, the diaries of (now retired) Chris Mullin^{xvi} you can come away thinking that with just a few more like that in positions just a bit higher than such people usually manage to reach the country might just about edge a little closer to equality and to a set of domestic and foreign policies that could contribute to universal fairness and possibly slow down the headlong drive to frack the entire planet socially as well as physically. Mullin is not misty-eyed about society and the unemployed he encountered in his constituency. His sympathy for misbehaving youths, for example, is well under control. But I think that he can see quite clearly the disastrous consequences of politicians creating and implementing policies that lack an inclusive social dimension. He and his like were not, however, admitted to the ranks of the Blair soferites who made the big decisions. I can see why: he was not a social fracker, just the opposite (though his support of Tony Benn may have helped to frack the old Labour Party).

I almost wrote that Blair and New Labour laid the foundations for the coalition government to frack further our society. What they did, of course, was to weaken the foundations so that they could be more easily fracked by the coalition government.

If we think about education and society, particularly for school children: would anyone propose that we design and operate a social system that deliberately prevents fulfilment for large numbers of children? I don't just mean disabling their chances of getting the highest marks they are capable of, although that is a factor. I include life chances, the quality of those lives and their eventual access to influence and power. These three are connected, sometimes too exclusively connected.

The similarities in educational and social background of so many members of the current cabinet clearly demonstrate what kind of school and university and society will deliver the best chances of obtaining exclusive influence and power. Those chances are, however, only effective chances if they are limited to a few. David Cameron told his conference that he wants to spread privilege, an idea so ludicrous that we can only conclude either that his tongue got the better of his brain or that he thinks the people listening to him were too stupid to notice how meaningless the idea is. The way that we make sure that limits are placed upon life chances, life quality and access to influence and power is to operate a distorted society, one that excludes the majority and only permits a few approved plebs to penetrate the patrician social membrane from time to time. I recall the Assisted Places Scheme as one of those cynical devices or relief valves that reduced pressure from below while, at the same time, converting a handful of selected plebeians to something resembling patricians with the values of privilege. The answer to my question, *would anyone propose that we design and operate a social system that deliberately prevents fulfilment for large numbers of children?* has to be 'yes'.

Big Society is a concept so diminishing and false that it will contribute to social fracking. It has very little substance, which is a reason why its advocates fail to articulate it by means of anything but empty rhetoric but, insofar as we can put words to the idea, it is an anti-social concept because it seeks to replace democratically determined and accountable public service with a combination of do-it-yourself service provided by lots of people working for nothing and profit making private companies keeping down the wages, not bothering with staff training and taking short cuts with quality assurance. Attempts are made to make a DIY plus privatised welfare state sound attractive, especially by a prime minister whose only experience of the world of work was in public relations (a job obtained by family influence) and whose experience of society continues to remain inside a rather comfortable bubble. Big Society chimes in with the exhortation to see ourselves as 'all in this together'. It is intended to bring to mind acts of charity, neighbourliness and community spirit. But, as was the thinking of Tony Blair, it is bogus. We are not all in the same society. We are in a lot of differentiated societies. The extent of what I believe to be deliberate social differentiation is such that it amounts to anti-social behaviour on the part of politicians with power and influence. But, on the other hand, Big Society might be a concept worth capturing! Could Ed Miliband do that? He would, of course, have to do this on a basis of social inclusiveness: perhaps Big Society meets and marries One Nation? It has to be better than Thatcherism meets and marries New Labour.

Bill Clinton had a winning slogan: 'It's the economy, stupid'. What you hope for is a politician who says: 'Its society, stupid'. Tony Blair told us that his priority (singular) was 'Education, education, education'. He ought to have said: 'Society, society, society'. We are entitled to know the thinking, the views, the values and the ideas that politicians have about society before we vote for them. The dominant partner in our coalition government was, however, at great pains before the last general election to present itself as a socially inclusive political party. The toxicity of Thatcherism had, we were led to believe, been expunged. Like a slick seller of health giving detox drinks and supplements David Cameron carefully crafted an image that reassured by telling us, for example, that the NHS would be safe in their hands: the 'Nasty Party' label could no longer be applied to them. Now we know that to be ill, disabled, unemployed, part time working, parents of too many children, an immigrant and living in the wrong part of the country with one bedroom too many means that you must bear the cost of paying off the deficit created by casino bankers and financial wizards. The worst that can happen to them is a light slap on the wrist: even perhaps being taken off the list for new peerages and demoted (temporarily) to the list for new knighthoods.

The deficit certainly required a set of economic, financial and industrial responses in the form of policies. When the coalition government took over the existing policies seemed to be having a modestly positive effect and the economy was growing. George Osborne, however, seems to have taken the opportunity to use the deficit as an excuse to attack all those measures that have previously helped us to believe that we lived in a relatively civilised society. A prime example of an ideologically charged fracker is George.

One of Osborne's most enthusiastic allies is Michael Gove whose education policies have to be seen as opening up another front in the war against a fair, fulfilling and inclusive society. Schools are being bullied away from local democracy. Decisions once taken locally by people accountable to electors they might meet socially are increasingly being taken by someone in London who manages a commercial contract with a business devoted to making a profit or spreading some strange beliefs. National agreements about pay and conditions are under threat. The hiring and firing of teachers will soon come to resemble that old de-humanising social evil condemned by Beveridge and many others over many decades: casual labour. The ties connecting schools to society are being cut and they will float away to be judged by their share price, not their social value. As for the idea that Free Schools are part of or arise out of a society that is in any way inclusive, how far do their sponsors get if they are poor, single parents or out of work? Or not white?

Questions for critical conversations

1. Can all be fulfilled in an unfair society?
2. Are all schools, teachers, children, parents and politicians 'in it together'?
3. How can educators contribute to the making of a fair society?
4. How can educators sometimes help prevent the making of a fair society?

Component six: politicians getting away with it

The one thing that our politicians can be said to be good at is getting away with it: getting away with being anti-political, anti-democratic, anti-intellectual, anti-educational and anti-social. It helps that they are allowed to misuse language so that, for example, *deforming* the NHS is referred to as *reforming* it. It also helps that we have a very rightwing press that is seldom interested in raising the level of political discourse and prefers to build its stories upon prejudice or the, sometimes invented, lives of celebrities, some of whom do seem to have risen without trace. Even the BBC is ready to allow politicians to self-define regressive policies as progressive and to hide behind that blanket word 'modernisation'. Without raising even a single eyebrow to indicate their awareness of the irony BBC political correspondents and newsreaders refer, for example, to the 'reforms' of education and health, 'reforms' that are, by the way, being imposed without prior political discussion or electoral endorsement.

But perhaps the main reason that politicians can get away with so much is that we are a monarchy. Our passports use the word 'citizen'. Citizenship is taught in schools and subject to public examinations, though not studied by many. What, however, we need is political education and media studies. Kenneth Baker put an end to political education in favour of citizenship and, for reasons that I can only believe are based in the desire of politicians to wish us to be ignorant of how the media manipulates news and opinion, media studies has been subject to belittlement and ridicule. Instead of being enabled to participate in proper political activity we are taught to be good subjects of the Crown and we are not encouraged or enabled to critically scrutinise how the media presents to us the behaviour of politicians.

For me our democracy is infantilised by our eagerness to celebrate royal events. I believe that this is made worse by our liking for ritual in public life. We sometimes justify ritual on the grounds of symbolic tradition. For example, we tell children that before the Queen's Speech which outlines what *her* government is going to do, when Black Rod has the door to the House of Commons slammed in his face as he summons its members to hear the Queen in the House of Lords and must, therefore, knock upon it with the instrument from which he takes his name, it is to remind us all that the Commons has a mind of its own and will not be bullied by the monarch and the Lords. Maybe there is a case for keeping that traditional ritual in terms of its charm but it does rather hide the fact that the speech about to be read out by the monarch was written for her by the governing party that controls a majority in the House of Commons. In other words, it is all humbug. And many of what we take to be ritualistic traditions regarding, for example, coronations go back only to the nineteenth century. We are so good at following ritualistic traditions that we invent new ones. We even export them to former members of the British Empire. What we seem unable to do, however, is to agree a reasonably democratic way to vote or to produce a second house of parliament that could represent the electorate rather than special interest groups and political parties wishing to entrench their power.

There may be some people who continue to think that we have three separate balanced powers in our constitution: the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. Looking at Britain in the eighteenth century Montesquier thought that was the case. It wasn't and it isn't. His thinking, however, influenced the framers of the constitution of the USA, which still attempts to operate as though the powers are separate. There are indeed three such powers in the UK but separate they are not. If leaders of political parties can win votes in the House of Commons they get to exercise monarchical, executive powers; they even get to control the judiciary. General elections in this country are all about competing to obtain monarchical powers. Yes, there are limits and constraints on those powers and prime ministers, cabinets and governments can, at times, lose those powers quite suddenly as kings and queens of the past often learned. They are, nevertheless, monarchical powers.

This is not because we have a totally unwritten constitution. Generations of schoolchildren have learned that Britain is special because we do not have a written constitution. It is true that convention plays a big part in the way that we do government; but it is wrong to assume that our constitution is entirely unwritten: that somehow, with the help of a special British/English genius for muddling through, we are superior to all of those poor countries that, in order to make a decision, must rely upon finding the right paragraph in the right page of some dry document. In fact it can be said that in a sense the British Constitution is overwritten; there are possibly too many documents specifying and, perhaps more confusingly, interpreting how we do government. At no one point did a group of 'wise men' sit round a table and hammer out for all time a single succinct and comprehensive set of principles, rights, responsibilities and powers with carefully calculated checks and balances. There may have been a number of occasions when such people felt that they were coming up with something that would never be changed or interpreted in a variety of ways; but over many years the constitution grew. That growth was documented. It continues to grow and continues to be documented. The collection of documents recording our habits of government does not, however, pass the test for what makes a written constitution. The extent of the monarchical (dictatorial) powers that a British government can sometimes exercise meant that during WWII by being able to direct labour and requisition supplies we produced more aircraft than Germany. It also means that Michael Gove has, almost without anyone noticing, acquired many times the power of Kenneth Baker to shape schools, teachers and examinations in any way that he fancies. A proper written constitution would control this urge to exercise unrestrained power. This illustrates why we need one.

Governing parties with clear majorities and strong internal discipline do not have a need to engage in proper politics. They can simply exercise power. The bigger the majority, however, the more difficult it can be for them to rely upon strong internal discipline, partly because many backbenchers feel freer to express themselves, except, perhaps, as the next general election looms when those that got into Parliament by winning marginal constituencies begin to become nervous. Political activity for parties in the early stages of having big majorities is concentrated upon keeping control of members and closing down free expression. Blair and Cameron have, however, both shown that these days

losing votes in the House of Commons, with large numbers of your own party voting against you can be shrugged off. A good spin-doctor outweighs any number of democrats.

Chamberlain overwhelmingly won the May 1940 vote of confidence in the House of Commons but he resigned because it was pointed out to him that, despite the big vote in support of him, a significant number of his own side had abstained. Blair would not have even considered resigning in such a situation.

Governing parties with small majorities often behave with stronger discipline because members are aware that losing votes in the House of Commons is more likely and could bring down the government. This does not encourage radical policy-making and neither does it generate a need to engage in proper politics: the need is to stay in power. At times, however, small majorities may provide opportunity for obsessive groups within a party to hold their leaders to ransom: you scratch my Euro scepticism and I'll scratch your need to retain power.

The present coalition government is somewhat different. Members of two parties had to be given jobs. This means that there are two sets of people who have been disappointed. Together the parties of the coalition have a reasonable majority. They each, however, contain backbenchers that are not frightened to rebel.

Questions for critical conversations

1. To what extent do you believe that your elected representatives (Councillors and MPs) interest themselves in the views and values of professional educators?
2. What have you done to make your views and values known to your elected representatives?
3. We vote less and less. If we just think about education why might this be?
4. Can you think of three educational issues that could persuade you to contact one of your elected representatives?
5. What do you know about Enabling Acts, Delegated Legislation, Orders in Council, Statutory Instruments? They are some of what governments use to govern us, usually without us noticing. Might they help politicians to 'get away with it'?

Notes, references and links

ⁱ The term New Right does its best to evade clear definition. It means different things in different countries. At times it borrows words and ideas from anarchism, which you might expect to be on the left. It can remind you of Poujadism, which, coming to the fore in 1950s France, might best be described as an instinct in favour of small rural shopkeepers and a vision of or yearning for French provincialism in revolt against a sophisticated urban elite who sent out tax collectors and inspectors to disturb the lives of true French

people. Margaret Thatcher had some of this instinct within her, leading at times to an atavistic reaction against some of the toffs in her own government.

Here, though, I am thinking of the term as used to describe the approach taken in Chile, not only to the economy but also to democracy and society, by General Pinochet in 1973 and then, with less bloodshed, in 1979 by Margaret Thatcher and, in 1980, by Ronald Reagan. It was an approach that tore up wage agreements, gave free rein to exploitative corporative ventures and enormously widened the gap between rich and poor. I once heard this approach summed up by one of Thatcher's economic gurus as (my words) poor people can be motivated by being threatened with less income but rich people must be motivated by being offered greater income. To say such a thing is to rationalise greed.

I think it would be very difficult to argue that New Labour was not of or influenced by the New Right.

ⁱⁱ Peter Osborne, *The Triumph of the Political Class*, Simon & Schuster, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ For a reminder of some of the promises made before the last General Election <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1240061/Cameron-fires-starting-gun-election-launches-Tory-Year-Change-campaign.html>

^{iv} We hear so often from the Coalition government, particularly from its Conservative members, about the increasing number of people in employment. That is what happens if you transform full time jobs into part time jobs. Number of people employed goes up: amount of income goes down.

For an account of one aspect of government policy towards the disabled you might find the following useful. <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/oct/30/remploy-factories-close-disabled-workers>

^v One of the things I discovered from working on a project that attempted to 'turn back on' fourteen year old young people who had 'turned off' from school or from what it offered was that ability was irrelevant. It can be very easy for schoolteachers and their bosses to assume that young people are doing badly because they are simply not capable of performing well or they are lazy or they come from a 'bad' background. My overall conclusion from working on that project and from reading reports on similar projects was that the key word was 'engagement'. And engaging young minds is not the same as pressuring them to fit an official educational template.

^{vi} I believe that the Focus Groups of New Labour contributed to the pretend politics of the time. Central Government is often impatient with Local Government, especially when it develops a mind of its own. Instead of incorporating the voices of locally elected councillors in the processes of policy-making New Labour preferred to bypass them. The process went something like this: use focus groups designed to represent a cross section of an interest group or even the general public, ask them some policy related questions, be quite thorough about this by forcing yourself to listen to the unpalatable, summarise very carefully what you hear then submit a report to Tony Blair and those of his courtiers allowed to sit on the sofa. Policy will be made, targets will be generated but before implementation there will be a consultation process.

Under New Labour consultation became an art form. Ask awkward questions and you were told that it was not possible to challenge X because X was a 'government given'. If you could take your eye from what was happening at the front of the room you might notice a young man at the back with a keyboard. His fingers never moved when he heard dissent but set a personal best for speed typing whenever anything was said that fitted what government wished to hear. When you read the report you would discover that you totally agreed with something you hated. And Tony Blair could claim to be close to the consciousness of the people: a manufactured and manipulated consciousness.

^{vii} The meanings of the terms 'left' and 'right' vary. What they mean at any one time helps form our social/political discourse. 1968 not only gave us the Prague Spring but also a general set of values quite different from those of the 'free market', the bonus culture and the devil take the hindmost values of Thatcher and Blair (Blair called it 'aspiration').

If anyone can remember the Young Liberals they would not have been regarded as on the left by those that adhered to dialectical materialism but compare them with, for example, the Miliband brothers and they seem to me to occupy a place in the political landscape unreached by and even unknown to today's fully paid up members of the Labour Party.

Yes, I know that Wikipedia is not a watertight source of knowledge but if anyone is interested in finding out more they could start with the following.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_League_of_Young_Liberals

^{viii} The link below is to the group within or independent of the Labour Party (I cannot tell which) to which Tristram Hunt belongs. Draw your own conclusions about its values.

<http://www.progressonline.org.uk/about-progress/who-we-are/>

^{ix} Deciding to use the Veto in the Security Council of the United Nations in order to prevent the views of other countries from taking effect suggests that there are huge issues of national self-interest at stake. The USA, however, mostly uses the Veto to prevent another country being held to account for its actions. It also subsidises and arms this country. In my view the consequences for Palestine/Israel have been disastrous.

I offer no analysis of what seems to me to be the most foolish of behaviour. I do, however, suggest that it is leading us to international social fracking.

^x <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVNoClu0h9M>

^{xi} Stewart Lansley, *The Cost of Inequality: Why Economic Equality is Essential for Recovery*, Gibson Square Books, 2011.

^{xii} <http://www.thelifeanddeathofdemocracy.org/>

^{xiii} It was once said of Kenneth Baker: 'I have seen the future and it smirks'. His close involvement in the creation of the disastrous Poll Tax (officially known as the Community Charge) seems to have been brushed under the carpet of history. It is the National Curriculum and its system of assessment that is remembered. Whether or not that counts as a contribution to education is another question.

^{xiv} You can find my review of Blair's book here

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

It has been said that reading the title of the review is all that is necessary.

^{xv} Deciding whether standards of examining and performance have fallen or risen is an extremely difficult thing to do. I go into this at length on this website in

http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/The_Values_of_New_Labour.pdf

Clearly politicians wish to be able to link improved performance with their policies and if performance goes down they need someone to blame. The pressure to demonstrate improvement is massive and made worse by the strange decision to introduce performance related pay. One natural consequence is that teachers and examination boards are likely to be accused of dumbing down.

^{xvi} [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Mullin_\(politician\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chris_Mullin_(politician))

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

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