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The empty spaces above tell their own story..... still drafting.

Preface

For far too long in my life I subscribed far too much to a naïve but comforting belief that things would get better. In terms of education I assumed most people shared my view that for all of us to be fulfilled we must all be treated fairly and that education had a very significant role to play in creating a more fair society. Very few people would have the nerve to advocate the opposite, I allowed myself to believe. Maybe I mix with others on too narrow a professional basis but I still encounter people who signed up to their teaching careers with a strong belief in public service and the wish to help every child (yes 'every', not a selected privileged few) become fulfilled. Since May 1979 and the election of a Tory government led by Margaret Thatcher, such people have been working against the grain of government.

The ecstasy of getting rid of the Tory Thatcherites did not last long. They had put into reverse the motor of social equality and placed their foot hard on the pedal. I had my doubts about Tony Blair and the New Labour Thatcherites but surely I thought in 1997 he and they will wish to narrow social gaps created by Thatcher and make us all at least a bit more equal. His priority was, he loudly proclaimed, *education, education, education*. This did not mean what it seemed to mean. Under his big banner of modernisation flew two smaller banners for competition and choice. Each could be made to appear desirable until it was realised that in social terms they actually meant that stronger dogs must eat weaker dogs. Education in the UK, particularly in England, has always had faultlines. Under Blair, with faith schools, specialist schools, academies, non-stop legislation, more educational initiatives than you could shake a stick at and a focus on the so-called gifted and talented, thereby labelling most children as not gifted and not talented, and also upon league tables, those faultlines began to fracture. So did society with ever widening gaps between the rich and the rest.

Many years ago the tobacco companies were wont to point out that no causal link had been established between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. They eventually had to admit that there was an association between the two: people who smoked tended to be subject to lung cancer but it was not at first possible to demonstrate how one led to the other. It is now. I believe that we are at the same stage with Coalition education and social policy. There is an association between the recent and intended further fracturing of education and the recent and intended further fracturing of society but maybe as yet we lack sufficient testable evidence of a causal link. Gove and his colleagues are going much further and much faster than Blair and will, I believe, provide us with that evidence. They have already prepared their excuses by blaming the poor, the disabled, the unemployed and the sick for being the authors of their own misfortunes and for any low scholastic attainment. Those misfortunes and

those attributions of blame are set to multiply because it is now policy to blame the victims of policy for the effects of policy.

I want to explore all this. I have not, however, forgotten that there are other links such as economic and financial policies that have been shown to be causes of social fracture. Gove does not travel alone.

Please think of this essay as an exploration carried out by a keen explorer who tends to the polemical from time to time. Yes, I am angry. I shall, however, try to keep the anger under control in order to make sharper points and one way to gain control over anger is with knowledge gained by exploration. We shall see if knowledge tempers anger or if anger distorts knowledge. You shall judge.

My concept of social fracking opposes what I see as the comforting assumption that in a kind of Gaia or even dialectical fashion all will normalise at some point: that we ought not to become over anxious about the bad effects of government education and associated policies because very soon they will be reversed as we move from the political swing to the political roundabout. Possibly that is the case and we can rely upon a long-term tendency to achieve policy equilibrium but I do not believe it. Especially, I do not believe it while the parliamentary opposition to the government on education and related policies continues to be dominated by adherents to Tony Blair's agenda. If, after the next general election when Michael Gove and company are sent packing, we intend to build a more equal society with, as a foundation for it, a fair and fulfilling education system we shall, as a result of the behaviour of Gove and co., discover that we are working on a bombsite. And when Ed Miliband sends in the architects, quantity surveyors and skilled workers to build his New Educational Jerusalem it will not help if he hires them from the New Labour Recruitment Agency (prop. T. Blair). Having swung so far towards inequality we now need a swing so far towards equality that it will probably exceed the ability of the Labour Party to accomplish it.

From 1945 to 1979 it was often the case that there was sufficient commonality between parties for policy changes at election time to cause relatively little disturbance to a general social democratic consensus. In 1979 the consensus changed and became about rationalising greed, laying waste whole communities and lowering the incomes of wage earners while encouraging debt. It caused big social gaps and severely damaged the lives of far too many people: the kinds of people who over the years have been called upon to sacrifice their lives in patriotic war after patriotic war, not one of which was started by them, and sacrifice their jobs in recession after recession, the fault for which did not lie with them. The post 1979 economic model was based upon the belief that rich people could only be motivated to work harder by offering them even more riches. The poor, by contrast, would be motivated to work harder by being threatened with more poverty. This, in two sentences, sums up Thatcherism.

From the formation of the present coalition government by two political parties who failed to win the last general election that consensus has come to include

even more serious attacks upon the political process, democracy, intellect, education and society. Restoring society even to pre-Thatcher values, let alone introducing values such as equality, will require a sharp reversal of a lot of damaging policies. I doubt that we have politicians that are up for it, let alone up to it. Possibly the deliberate damage caused by Gove and his companions in crime will create the conditions for radical policy reversal, including public acceptance of the need for it. Even if so I doubt there is the political will to engage in radical policy reversal because not only are the frackers of society well entrenched but the Labour Party remains far too much in thrall to Blairism, having forgotten and discarded most of what it used to believe. Those that retain socialist values also seem to have lost the confidence to express them.

Possibly it is my age (born 1942) and intimations of mortality that drive my need to speak against what I see as a betrayal of humanity and I simply cannot understand how any professional schoolteacher can work in one of our so-called 'public schools', which are anything but public, and continue to claim to be committed to education, let alone socialism. I understand the need to compromise principle for a job and the desire to engage with bad policy in order to mitigate its worst effects but I guess that some people have an unlimited capacity to rationalise away their exchange of old values for new and their preference for exclusion over inclusion. I began by referring to my naivety so I guess that I must also come to terms with the fact that there really are people in the education business that can persuade themselves that when unfairness and inequality are presented to us in the guise of choice and excellence they can be thought to represent a social good. They do not and we must fight against those that propound such beliefs.

Notes, references and links

To be completed

Introduction

I have called this an essay. We have come to think of essays as relatively short pieces of writing and indeed it is possible to consider sections of what follows as a series of connected short essays. I wish, however, the complete document to be seen as an essay in the French tradition of making an attempt, in this case an attempt to make critical sense of things; in other words, more 'essayer' than 'essay'. At one point I refer to 'my general thesis'. On reflection thesis sounds rather a grand word implying a claim for the cohesiveness of my writing higher than I believe it can sustain. I have left it in, however, partly because although I do edit my work I also wish it to retain some spontaneity and a sense of my responses to events taking place during the writing. This is perhaps why I may sometimes seem to argue against myself or return to and repeat points previously made and examples previously given and why in places I insert the date of my current writing. This is what happens when you *attempt* to explore and to write warmly rather than coldly. I think the word is discursion.

I have not approached this piece of work as if it were to be submitted as an assignment for an academic award or publication. For one thing I do not always adhere to the usual conventions regarding citation and bibliographies. Because of its electronic presentation I have set it out so that as you go through the contents you can click to get to the bits that you fancy reading, just as you could flip pages with hard copy. Each major section is preceded by an abstract that might help you decide if you feel it would be useful to read the full text. References are usually included in the notes for each section.

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Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Stratification: that's the name of the game and each generation they play the same

Abstract

I begin this section by quoting a famous comedy sketch on social class from The Frost report of 1966. It involved a very tall John Cleese, a medium sized Ronnie Barker and a diminutive Ronnie Corbett. I wonder who knows or remembers it. Yes, even in 1966 it was a simplification but I use it here as a kind of icebreaker. We can easily guess the different types of school to which each of these people went.

Main text

'I look down on him because I am upper-class.'

'I look up to him because he is upper-class; but I look down on him because he is lower-class. I am middle-class.'

'I know my place. I look up to them both. But I don't look up to him as much as I look up to him, because he has got innate breeding.'

'I have got innate breeding but I have not got any money. So sometimes I look up to him.'

'I still look up to him because, although I have money, I am vulgar. But I am not as vulgar as him so I still look down on him.'

'I know my place. I look up to them both; but while I am poor I am honest, industrious and trustworthy. Had I the inclination I could look down on them. But I don't.'

'We all know our place but what do we get out of it?'

'I get a feeling of superiority over them'.

'I get a feeling of inferiority from him but a feeling of superiority over him'.

'I get a pain in the back of my neck'.

This was how social classes were portrayed in a famous comedy sketch of 1966 (The Frost Report). Even then social stratification was more complicated than it was popularly portrayed, though we can easily picture the three different kinds of schools to which people of these classes went. Today we are getting closer to a break up and re-ordering or, worse, a disordering of society that will at first appear to benefit the already privileged but actually do widespread and long-term damage even, I believe, to the super rich and privileged. Education policy, particularly in England, will contribute to this.

There have been attempts to reduce the number of strata, narrow the gaps between them or even eliminate them completely. Politicians attempting to do this have, in the past, been called progressive and the word 'reform' applied to their policies. We only have to recall the abolition of slavery, the factory acts, the introduction of compulsory schooling, the extension of the franchise, the introduction of National Insurance and old age pensions, the establishment of the National Health Service, the introduction of the Open University and, to the credit of Margaret Thatcher whose party would rather like it to be forgotten, the comprehensivisation of secondary schools: all progressive and reforming policies that emerged and were introduced and implemented after much proper political activity generating general consent.

The champions of such policies are celebrated as having reduced inequality and increased social fairness. The opponents of such policies have, except when they have somehow managed to capture and distort the discourse as first New Labour and then the Coalition have done, been regarded as

defenders of privilege, rather like those members of the House of Lords called 'the last ditchers' who fought to the end to prevent the passing of the Parliament Act of 1911 and the curtailment of the power of the unelected over the elected. And it is worth reminding ourselves that the 1911 Parliament Act was in response to Tory aristocratic unwillingness to accept Liberal Party sponsored progress towards increased social equality, even towards mere social justice. In July 2012 Tories remain reluctant to accept progress towards a democratically accountable House of Lords.

The present Coalition government would, I am sure, hate to be shown to be advocates for the reversal of progressive, reforming policies, introducing yet further social stratification and reinforcing a class system preserving, even promoting, privilege for some at the expense of others. They would hate even more to be perceived as socially destructive. After all, the name of the Conservative Party implies the maintenance of a kind of structural stability, albeit one that favours the favoured. But, despite the theft and misuse of words such as *reform*, *modernisation* and *progress* to present their policies, that is exactly what I believe they are doing and what they are. Slowing down, perverting and, when possible, reversing progress towards equality is the entire purpose of Conservatism. The difference from the Frost Report of 1966 is that an analysis of social structure could no longer use just three main, clear-cut categories of people who are sure of their place. Indeed, knowing or wanting to know your place in society by reference to old class certainties seems so strange in these days of instant celebrity culture: of people who, in the words of Kitty Muggerage (niece of Beatrice Webb), rose without trace. Interestingly, it was David (now elevated to Sir David) Frost of the Frost Report to whom she was referring.

Questions for critical conversations

1. Do educators ever think about their schools, colleges and universities and their pupils, students and colleagues in terms of social class?
2. Is social class reflected in the educational system?
3. If social class is evident in the educational system how might that affect what is taught and how and what is assessed and how?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Equalisers, stabilisers and a contrived social collapse

Abstract

In this section I argue that the Welfare State and state education were not generous gifts from the haves to the have-nots but foundations for a relatively calm and cohesive society, even progression to greater fairness. They are now under attack. I also refer to the way in which a policy can be perceived from different perspectives to be both progressive and regressive.

Main text

What is happening now is not just the continuation of the oft-told and oft-simplified story of the struggle between Whigs (eventually becoming a large part of the Liberal Party) and Tories (they included some Whigs as well): the struggle between progress and privilege; between democracy and absolutism; between the promotion of equality and the maintenance of inequality; and between the disadvantaged and the advantaged. We are now, I believe, confronting a contrived social collapse for the majority, a process begun by Thatcher, in which the possessive individualism of a few becomes the dominating value. You could call it Social Darwinism and clearly there are signs of eugenics that are re-emerging as the Grammar School Tendency becomes emboldened to promote negative labelling for eighty percent of us in letters to newspapers that ought to know better. They have to be confronted because the essential value that is being promoted, in continuation of the policies and values of Tony Blair, is that if you cannot get or do not even wish to get to the top you must be inferior. Indeed it is inevitable that most of us will be classed as inferior because inequality is about to become wider and even more embedded. An unequal society inevitably makes use of labels such as 'superior' and 'inferior', 'successful' and 'failure'. And those labels can be very sticky as schools labelled 'outstanding' and, especially, 'failing' know.

Prior to Thatcher we lived for a long time in a society in which there were sufficient equalisers and stabilisers for the majority of us to convince ourselves that we felt relatively cohesive and supported, with the hope that progress towards greater equality would continue. If we had not felt like that there could have been far more social unrest. Two major equalisers and or stabilisers were the welfare state that we can trace back to the budget that the 1911 Parliament Act allowed to be passed and state education that we can trace back to Gladstone's Education Act of 1870. Both of these equalisers and or stabilisers used to be subject to and a product of a combination of local and national democracy. Together they helped to ensure that although the super-rich and privileged could semi-detach themselves and get most of the prizes we could manage the subsequent social distortion and hope for better.

The maintenance of those equalisers and or stabilisers has, I believe, also been of benefit to the super rich and privileged. It allowed them to live in and connect to a society relatively free of crime and almost completely free of riot and bloody revolution. In other words, the welfare state and state education were not simply benefits generously provided by the haves for the have-nots but were social equalisers and or stabilisers that also enabled a few people to remain or climb very high indeed with little risk of falling or, if they did, suffering the worst effects of falling. As a result of these equalisers and stabilisers the foundations of society were sound enough for this even if the social building above it had a lot of levels.

Let me clarify my use of the terms equaliser and stabiliser. Over the years and through many changes of government a policy such as the introduction of national insurance may have been seen by one group of people as part of a plan to reduce inequality but at other times and by other people to stabilise society and prevent disorder. While one political party may construct and perceive a policy in order to lead to a more equal society another party may

construct and perceive a similar policy in order to damp down demands for equality. The so-called Great Reform Act of 1832 that to some extent rationalised the franchise is capable of being both celebrated as a progressive equaliser and condemned as a cynical regressive stabiliser.

The 1944 Education Act (the Butler Act) has generally been given a kind press because it was perceived to extend compulsory education. It was, however, in no way an equaliser. In fact it was designed to confirm a division of society into mostly three levelled parts topped with a very small fourth part reserved for the children of the extremely privileged. It purported to be a national act of parliament but it made sure to preserve privilege; and, furthermore, being underpinned by the eugenic beliefs of people such as Sir Cyril Burt, it labelled almost 80% of children at the age of eleven as ignorant and worthy of only elementary education. Advocates of grammar schools and segregated systems of examination would do well to remember this unless, of course, they like the idea that eugenically based labelling of humans should determine life chances.

Questions for critical conversations

1. How might you classify recent education policy: progressive or regressive, reforming or deforming or what?
2. Do professional educators recognise social inequality to be an issue?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Endangering the super rich and privileged: the social ox-bow lake

Abstract

Here I write about finding it difficult to understand why right wing politicians pursue policies that will isolate, disconnect and endanger the super rich and privileged. The richer and more privileged you become the smaller becomes the bubble in which you live and interact with others. The formal education of the offspring of the super rich and privileged will take place behind walls that the vast majority cannot penetrate. Can that be good, even for them? I also manage to bring those notable historians Tacitus and Gibbon into the discourse. I am afraid, however, that the fantasy into which I stray near the end may take a while to gain substance.

Main text

The puzzle is why politicians of the right would now wish to endanger the super rich and privileged by further distancing them from the rest of the population while simultaneously dismantling the stabilisers: the greater the riches and the greater the privileges the greater will be the risks for those possessing them if society's foundations are weakened. Some rich people know this instinctively. In my local Co-op I often see a World famous footballer with his kids. He also takes them to the local swimming baths where they mix with other kids of the neighbourhood. He is rich but connected to the rest of us

because, in my view, he values social cohesion no matter how imperfect it might be (I believe he also votes Labour). He does not wish his family to live lives that are insulated from all but a few fellow rich people. But he is merely rich. And he does a job that pleases a social cross-section. In this country now, according to Stewart Lansley (.....), there areHow many of us do they please? How connected are they?

While, as Owen Jones reminds us in *Chavs, the demonization of the working class*, you are more likely to suffer from crime if you are poor the perception is that it is the poor that present a threat to the rich. The risk will be that in order to maintain basic security and insulation from more and more alienated people more and more social and educational Berlin Walls will be constructed to defend the privileged. What kind of life will that be for the super rich and privileged and for their children as they grow up in their bubble? Indeed, the word 'privileged' does not look so desirable when the guard of your gated community begins to look like a member of the SAS. And, it is worth considering, what will a so-called United Kingdom look like as huge areas of it degenerate while others prosper? Courtesy of Margaret Thatcher we already know much of the answer to that question.

Tacitus gave us the phrase: "They created desolation and called it 'peace'" (this was referring to parts of Britain under the Romans). That is a pretty good description of and judgment upon Margaret Thatcher's treatment of those areas of the UK that had the misfortune not to vote Tory. But, turning this round, might it not be possible to also view those in the bubble of privilege as swimmers in an ox-bow lake? They have money. They have expensive cars, private jets, mansions and 'the best of everything' but their lake is stagnant: it is not connected to the mainstream of humanity. It is an incestuous World. It could be under threat. Perhaps a future Gibbon as yet unborn will pen a great work called 'The Rise and Fall of the Greedy Empire' telling a story of hubris and decline. Maybe future generations will wander through ruined mansions to reflect upon the fragility of the glory gained by greed.

But, as you can guess, I am seeking comfort by fantasising. The reality is that not only are these people super rich and privileged but also they are powerful. They really are connected to the mainstream because they control it and make it flow how they wish: it serves them, for now.

Questions for critical conversations

1. How might the school curriculum and our modes of assessment be designed or modified to respond to unemployment and austerity? Should they?
2. How might the curriculum and modes of assessment differ between areas of high and low unemployment and high and low wealth? Should they?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

The naming of parts

Abstract

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

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

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

Main text

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

Whig history

Whig history is generally regarded as telling a story that begins with the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the Bill of Rights the year after and the end of absolute monarchy in the form of James II. It is a tale of 'progress' and 'reform' that takes in the abolition of slavery, the extension of the franchise, the welfare state, Gladstone's Education Act of 1870 making schooling compulsory and lots more. Harold Wilson (a former member of the Liberal Party who, as a Labour prime minister, kept a picture of Gladstone on the wall of his office) used to say that by bringing into being the Open University he had completed Gladstone's work. For me the professional thrill of comprehensivisation in the 1960s, 70s and 80s felt as though we had finally got close to where we had been striving to arrive in education. I consciously (though clearly over optimistically) linked going comprehensive with the moderation of privilege and the eventual ending of hierarchical society. The supporters of James II and absolutist government were, by the way, known as Tories. I guess that makes me an educational Whig. It is such an attractive notion. And I do want to see education play its part in furthering what I regard as social progress. Seeing it become devoted to social regression and fracture is heartbreaking. Somehow I feel that for a while both Labour and Tories had signed up to a Whig educational agenda but that, for New Labour, it all turned into an urge to encourage us to aspire to obtain the fruits at the top of the tree while for Tories the game remained the same: keep most of the fruit out of reach while from time to time deliberately dropping a little to the

lower orders to ensure that they pursued their lives in accordance with the hierarchical rules of conservatism.

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

An aside

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

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

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

I am reminded of my mother's father who was born in 1859 in the very sectarian and socially, racially, culturally and politically diverse and divided city of Liverpool (as was Gladstone fifty years earlier). He referred to politicians as "rantin', cantin' hypocrites". He did not live long enough to see his eldest grandson (not me) become a politician and President of the Liberal Party (another story). It took until he was fifty-two years of age for the 1911 Parliament Act to, as was thought, enable us to cast off the shackles of aristocratic power and slowly work towards a more humane, generous and civilised society. 1914, however, a mere three years later, was to witness the continuing and still strongly established power of royalty and aristocracy to use millions of ordinary people, throughout Europe and beyond, to play at soldiers: how quickly we moved from Lloyd George's 'Peoples' Budget' establishing National Insurance to compulsory call up, death and destruction for so many of those same people. We still live with the consequences and far too many of our politicians continue to find it far more exciting to divert national income away from pensions, education and health in order to go to war: to wars whose purpose continues to elude.

The conceptual framework of a dynamic dialectic

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

confusion, exploitation and alienation end and we all live fulfilled lives in communion with our true selves and the true selves of others.

I am not alone in finding it very difficult to make sense of the dialectic by wading through Hegel's metaphysical reasoning. For years I had it firmly in my memory that John Plamenatz said that a) it is essential to understand Hegel's metaphysics and that b) it is impossible to do so. The memory came from a small seminar in 1965 or 1966. Having now obtained a second hand copy of the relevant book I have to say that Plamenatz expresses the point in more subtle terms. For me, however, there are three major problems with the dialectical approach to history and its use as a conceptual framework for making sense of events.

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

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

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

In the case of Marx, however, religion also plays a part. Well, I think so, although making this point in the oral examination component of my finals in the 1960s did not seem to go down too well. Karl Marx was born into a

German family that on both sides had for generations produced rabbis (roughly in Hebrew 'teacher') and the German word for a synagogue, used also in Britain, is *schule* (school). There is something in Marxism that combines long and deep study of teachings with a belief that if you dedicate yourself to working hard to understand, live by and spread those teachings you will obtain your just deserts: heaven will come to you and yours. Judaic notions of afterlife are not as detailed as those of its offshoot, Christianity, but they do exist. True communism equates to heaven if you think like this and Marx himself had something messianic about him, at least to many of his followers.

An aside

I am not sure that I have worked alongside many obviously Messianic schoolteachers but I have certainly worked alongside (I hope it was against) schoolteachers who exploited their charisma and treated children as followers.

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

Later I shall say something about the approach to the dialectic of Philip Gould and Tony Blair. I believe that their approach was more akin to a continuous reconciliation or, perhaps, manipulation of what were taken to be opposites in order to generate new notions that became new policies and by substituting focus groups for democracy they were able to claim that their awareness of the 'consciousness of the people' legitimated policies. Blairism certainly had a changing, powerful dynamic and lots of movement masquerading as progress but no goal of inclusive value. For that reason it simply allowed the forces of unregulated greed to continue unopposed.

Passionate denunciation of exploitation

Despite the difficulties of the dialectic as a determinant of history it should not detract from the most impressive aspects of the work of Marx and Engels: their passion, the focus and analysis of what drove and prompted that passion and their detailed and extremely well researched evidence. They are passionate in defence of exploited workers, many of who worked in conditions

that we may think are difficult to imagine occurring today but, outside the immediate gaze of Westminster and our celebrity obsessed media, do still exist, often because of the actions of UK based corporations and banks. They are passionate too about condemning exploitative capitalists; and such people have not only not gone away but have increased in number and power. Marx and Engels are focussed and detailed about those conditions and about those capitalists, having carried out research based not only upon what could be found in the Reading Room of the British Museum (a lot) but also, especially in the case of Engels, considerable first hand and direct observation and experience.

How can we not join them in their hatred of both open exploitation and also of exploitation disguised by the stealing of progressive words and concepts by regressive forces and their transformation into today's weasel words and concepts such as 'reform' and 'fairness'; words and concepts that once were so respected? It is no wonder that their anger mounts as they see revolutionaries castrated by the cleverness of, for example, the social reforms of that arch conservative Prussian Otto von Bismarck who, by stealing the clothes of socialists (we based our system of National Insurance upon his), thereby keeping them and the workers quiet, allowing a little democratic representation and whipping up nationalism, moulded Germany into an industrial, military and imperialist super power. And where did that end? Even the bloodiest of German socialist revolutions before 1914 (possibly just after 1890 would have been a good time when Kaiser Wilhelm II dispensed with Bismarck as a Chancellor who was expert at controlled, short wars) could have prevented WWI and, consequently, WWII. Which would you rather: capitalists complaining that the workers were being paid too much and keeping down their profits or those two World Wars?

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

Using education to commit a social crime

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

inequality multiplied, this time round, by yet more negative labelling of those unable to swim against the tide of social privilege.

We seem unable to do education without ascribing blame. When politicians refuse to acknowledge their role in maintaining inequality and set up systems of education based upon the game of snakes and ladders the blame for failing to climb a ladder has to be placed somewhere else. Higher and Further Education, schools and colleges, teachers, parents and children all play their part in shielding politicians from blame. Maybe shielding politicians from blame should be openly part of the job description: get a job as an educator, become a parent, be a child and prepare to take the blame; unless, of course, you began life on the ladder, not the snake, in which case you take the praise and win the prizes.

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

X draws attention to the nuances within Thatcherism. Another word for this is inconsistencies. We have to remember Margaret Thatcher's somewhat late conversion to the ism added to her name. We might also remember that from 1970 to 1974 as secretary of state for education under Edward Heath she created more comprehensive schools than all other secretaries of state, regardless of party, put together. This is not the kind of Thatcherism for which today's Tories yearn.

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

And yet, while all of that can be said to have been the leit motif of her administrations, as her secretary of state for education Kenneth Baker was at the same time doing the opposite by ruthlessly nationalising the school curriculum and assessment. My guess is that he sold her the National Curriculum and its associated Assessment Orders on the basis that he was actually suppressing all of that progressive, socialist education stuff in defence of all that she instinctively knew to be good, old-fashioned didactic teaching. If so, he was: suppressing progressive education. Baker made Sir Keith Joseph, until then perceived as a scary right-wing secretary of state for education, seem like a liberal agonising over the ill treatment of the disadvantaged. Today's devotional cult of Leadership and Management is now dedicated to

the achievement of pre-set targets. Albert Einstein and Alexander Fleming would not have flourished in schools in which line managers, keeping an eye on centrally imposed institutional targets, managed the performance of their teachers who managed the behaviour of the children.

Michael Gove claims to follow Baker; and it is true that he has gathered to himself a much greater degree of the power to control education than Baker had; but he is more Thatcherite in the sense that he wants to throw education up into the air and see where everything lands. Like her he wants to describe his market as *free* but, despite his pretence, he will ensure that it is a rigged one. So where everything lands can, to a large extent, be predicted. There are no free markets and in education Gove is the rigger. He intends to do nothing to prevent those with advantages picking up the choicest parts when everything comes to earth. I detect very little professional or parental support for what he is doing but no doubt, like Baker, he will claim that we are entitled to what he forces upon us. How generous!

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

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

At the same time, if you were rich enough to start with, your wealth went up while your tax burden (your contribution to society) came down. Electing Tony Blair and New Labour in 1997, far from reversing all of this, quickened its pace. New Labour ignored the values that the electorate had voted for in favour of those it had voted against. I call that a crime against democracy.

Afghanistan and Iraq are not the only reasons why Blair ought to be in prison. We like to convince ourselves that we live in a democracy but we do not. Sometimes we get close to it but then we elect politicians who have no respect for the electorate and who invest hugely in self-serving spin in order to ensure that next time round the electorate will choose the values that politicians prefer.

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

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

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

New Labour, Blairism, modernisation, aspiration and sofa government

Ref Hegel and the dialectic...triangulation constant synthesis could also be seen as a constant watering down of socialist values, especially when reduced to the reconciliation of opposites.....was all that study of Hegel and

the Dialectic by Philip Gould always only intended to provide philosophical cover for policies that widened social gaps and made us a more unequal society? It certainly achieved that; possibly because there was no-one in New Labour with values that rose above Relevance to education and society and to New Labour....Hegel and Blair....religion again.....consciousness. Chou en Lai....western civilisation.... **As you can see, these are merely notes to myself.**

In New Labour I began with the notion that the project was about reconciliation....In two other places on this website....Blair review and Gould review....Blairish as a liturgical language....modernisation a cover up....aspiration Euch!

Trevor and Fred.... Kemmis.... Blair's sofa government meant the return of absolutism.....another word for this is Toryism....Major bathing

The rediscovery of equality as something to at least be discussed

In ...force field....I mention books by x and y and a and b...and Lipsey..... Does the recent publishing of such books indicate that the subjects of equality and inequality can be openly discussed once again? Might it mean that equality can be advocated and promoted? Dare we move away from that awful phrase 'equality of opportunity' which hides so much that is unequal? Can we consider equality of outcome without being accused of practising a political perversion?

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

Put in some summary.....

Questions for critical conversations

1. Have you perceived any evidence of political values or ideologies affecting education policy and/or practice?
2. Have you perceived any evidence of *changes* in political values or ideologies affecting education policy and/or practice?
3. Ought educators to consider the social values promoted by politicians when deciding what and how to teach and what and how to assess?

4. Ought politicians to consider the professional values of educators when deciding what should be taught and how and what to assess and how?
5. Does the kind of society in which children live have an effect upon their education?
6. Does the kind of education that children get have an effect upon the society in which they live?
7. What are schools, colleges and universities for?
8. In whose interests are we governed?
9. In whose interests should we be governed?
10. In whose interests are we educated?
11. In whose interests should we be educated?
12. In whose interests are we assessed and examined?
13. In whose interests should we be assessed and examined?
14. In whose interests do we go to work?
15. In whose interests should we go to work?
16. In whose interests are people unemployed?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Malintegration, hegemony and the porous walls between ideologies

Abstract

In 1964 Fred Riggs wrote a very interesting small book on *The Prismatic Society*. Structural functionalists can be almost impenetrable to read, particularly when they feel the need to invent an entire new set of terms, even a new language, in order to advance their arguments or to further their insights, so sometimes it feels right to retaliate and, doing your best to make clear the points at which you have used their concepts and terminology to form a language of your own, strike out in a new direction with some of the useful terminology they have provided for you.

'Malintegration' is a really helpful word that I learned from Riggs, especially if you want to think about how a cohesive society can be organised in the service of a few; and the word 'prismatic' helps us to picture the splitting apart of all of those groups that previously preferred and tried to keep together. Students of sociology may, however, be relieved to know that I have not introduced Talcott Parsons into this discourse.

I also look at the concept of hegemony because it provides another way of exploring how societies may appear to cohere and yet serve the interests of a minority. Eventually I go on to draw attention to what I see as the porous nature of some of the walls that we erect between ideologies. It is not very comfortable to realise that what you had always taken to be distinct differences between a preferred ideology and an ideology that you despise might not be either so distinct or so different. It may be even less comfortable to be reminded of some of the social and moral beliefs of the designers of our school and examination systems.

Main text

Societies, most of the time, sort of hold together. At least they usually try to even if they have a lot of structural inequalities; or display many cultural,

religious and political differences; or the institutions that they have established to carry out the business of local and central government creak a bit from time to time and require remedial action. Despite the apparent fragility of what holds societies together it requires the application of deliberate malicious pressure to weaken social coherence to the point where differentiation and unfairness become destructive: to the point where Thatcher's probably self-misunderstood statement that there is no such thing as society is fulfilled.

Michael Gove is not Margaret Thatcher. X reminds us that her respect for much of what had been achieved in post-war Britain included the work of Atlee's governments and she had a finer political instinct than present leaders of her party that often told her when to avoid radical policies: she always wanted to be re-elected. It was rather late in her administrations that she began to gallop really fast and to privatise public services that at one time she would not have dreamt of touching. Gove and Thatcher (along with Blair) do, however, share something: an intellectual shortcoming that prevents them from deploying more than one perspective. In the case of Gove this is compounded by his unwillingness to allow unwanted evidence to get in his way and what I take to be his disdain for the electorate which I guess goes as far as not caring if he or the government are re-elected as long as he does as much as he can to inflict wholesale destructive change upon school education in a short time and, as a consequence, threaten social cohesion that might have even a tenuous basis in the value of fairness. If only he had not read Blair's book.

It is, of course, quite possible, even normal, that societies cohere unfairly: what FW Riggs in *Prismatic Society* called *malintegration*. Such harmful integration can be achieved in favour of the dominant class or group by the forces of law, with civil power exercised by police, privatised security forces or army. It can also be achieved by religion, culture including popular culture, and false consciousness. Repression does not always look like or even feel like repression. There are people in some countries that assert that they live in a democracy that is an example to all, despite evidence to the contrary. Why? Because they are happy believing myths: they even need to believe them and cannot accept that what they like about what they perceive to be their own society is dependent upon or the consequence of the repression of others, even the repression of their own ability to think critically about their own society. The U.S.A. claims to be built upon the values encapsulated in concepts such as 'freedom' and 'liberty'. It is, in fact, built upon deliberate genocide, land theft, broken treaties, slavery (today's equivalent is millions of illegal immigrants working very cheaply), physical, cultural, economic and trade imperialism and a huge militaristic empire. The 'freedom' of the U.S.A. is the freedom to exploit and its liberty is hardly the liberty of the French Revolution.

It was in the 1790s that we learned to incorporate the word 'terror' into political discourse. Today this abstract noun has repeatedly had war declared against it by the USA and Britain. But, as Chomsky has shown, a journalist from Mars would have little difficulty in proving that both the USA and the UK are terrorist

states whose unashamed hypocrisy manages to dominate and distort worldwide discourse on the subject.

There are also people who are happy to 'know their place' or at least acceptant of it. To read, for example, the Lord Peter Wimsey novels of Dorothy L Sayers is to encounter an upstairs-downstairs world of deep-rooted deference to 'nobility'. Fictional that world may have been but hardly a strange one to the many readers of and enthusiasts for the novels and for the society they portray. The recent celebration of the Queen's Jubilee provided a vivid illustration of a huge collective desire to celebrate being subjects of the Crown. Our media outlets gleefully joined in this celebration, thereby contributing to the further infantilisation of British democracy.

Malintegration can go deep, wide and last for a long time: long enough to establish some very powerful and deeply internalised norms. The continued existence of so-called public schools in Britain and the ease with which their former pupils gain access to power that multiplies their advantages is, sad to say, a social distortion that we have lived with and taken for granted for a very long time.

Gramsci.....why in gaol.....more to him than hegemonyPopular University...

Porous ideological walls

Mussolini and Fascism are often the subjects of ridicule. Hitler and National Socialism, on the other hand, are popularly classified as seriously evil and exceptional: not at all, we tell ourselves, like the beliefs and behaviour of we normal humans. Mussolini is usually represented as bombastic and pathetic when compared with Hitler and the word *fascist* is, today, carelessly applied to any vaguely nasty right-wing organisation or form of behaviour. We use the word in order to caricature. I know that I have done that. And yet Fascism has a considerable philosophical historical hinterland and we too easily forget its links with early twentieth century socialism. It is worth remembering that the symbol of the fasces (the bundle of rods signifying the powers of Roman magistrates from which the word fascist is derived) was used by the Italian fascists to represent the cohering of the different components of the state; reminiscent, one might think, of Riggs' concept of the prismatic society. This was a different political philosophy from straightforward right-wing authoritarianism in support of the rich, the privileged and the powerful; it posited a corporate state. They were all supposed to be in it together.

Italian Fascism eschewed, while it could resist pressure from within and without to make claims that Italians were Aryan, the racial perspective and purpose of German National Socialism. Great efforts were made by the Nazis to search for evidence to support their racial beliefs. They were unsuccessful. National Socialism does, however, share with Fascism a sufficient overlap and affinity with aspects of socialism to have at times prompted proposals to merge and collude with socialist parties. They also share a philosophical background that includes notions of the Superman (nothing to do with DC Comics) and the cleansing power of action, especially warfare, and socialists of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries were not always immune from the attraction of such notions. Read, for example, GB Shaw's play *Man and Superman* to see how socialists were drawn to some of the same ideas that stimulated Fascists and National Socialists. I remember as a teenager being really taken with Shaw's description of what he termed the Life Force. Fascism and National Socialism were imbued with the same idea. So we ought to be careful to avoid over simplifying ideologies and we need to remind ourselves how porous can be the walls of classification that we erect between them.

We would also be unwise to forget the extent to which Britain has shared such now unwelcome ideas. It is unlikely that today anyone would openly frame arguments for school or examination systems that segregated children on grounds of racial worth (**UKIP Candidate expelled**). We continue, however, to operate both school and examination systems that have their foundations in the eugenics movement: a movement dedicated to encourage the flourishing of 'good' racial specimens and to discourage the flourishing (really the breeding) of 'poor' racial specimens. Until the end of the Second World War, by which time we deemed it expedient to distance ourselves from Nazism's potential to contaminate by association, eugenics had dominated the thinking of people in the UK who strongly influenced educational and social policy. Sir Cyril Burt for education and Marie Stopes for birth control, for example, were both believers in the importance of eugenics. He wished to retard the education of those he considered to be retarded mental specimens; she wished to retard the birth rate of those she considered to be retarded physical specimens.

Britons who revel in public ritual, not all of which is royalist, might also continue to miss the joke on themselves while making fun of Mussolini's symbols, parades and posturing but, perhaps more importantly, we should remind ourselves from time to time that in terms of our approach to racial purity Britain, with England to the fore, has not been as distanced from Nazism as it would like to think. Nor can we consign and confine the charge of racism to overtly anti-immigrant political parties and groupings. The reference to piccaninnies by Boris Johnson might be passed off as unintentional racism by a high-spirited member of the ruling class who has been granted licence to amuse and to be politically incorrect; it might also be seen to reveal some worryingly long standing and deeply rooted notions of superiority and inferiority regarding race.

However, despite all that can be said about the importance and seriousness of the philosophers, historians, artists, poets, musicians, campaigners and heroic figures whose writings and actions fed into both Fascism and National Socialism I believe that the two most significant factors in establishing them as major forces were the following. First, both Germany and Italy were lately formed nation states, having only in the 1850s, 60s and 70s emerged from the remnants of feudalism. What had, until that time, been abstract, though romantic, entities called Germany and Italy became actual. Try to imagine the impact upon the various peoples of those now officially unified entities as they attempted to come to terms with new national identities. Second, the effect of the First World War was to shatter so many old national certainties and to

increase the stress experienced by new nation states. Even nation states supposed to have been on the winning side after WWI, including Italy, found themselves in a confusing whirlpool of conflicting philosophies, assertions of new and old identities, demands for retribution and revenge, settling of old scores, feeling unfairly done by and betrayed, economic change, altered national boundaries, poverty and fear. The First World War fracked Europe, Russia and the Middle East. It also helped to create the conditions for the Second World War. The more widespread social fracking is the more damaging are the consequences and the greater become the opportunities for the single-minded, especially when they acquire power.

Politicians in the UK have, I believe, over the last thirty or so years, lost too much of a belief that progress and reform mean a commitment to reducing inequality and to combining fulfilment with fairness; and some of them, it has to be said, never ever held that belief. It is legitimate to wonder if the simultaneous loss of public respect for politicians and the political process is a coincidence.....voting numbers.... Stewart Lansley c.f. voting figures for last 30 years...Mount...

To behave politically has, sadly, become an insult, one used frequently by politicians themselves.....eg.... Behaving politically ought to be a compliment...My guess is that we are now a more noticeably malintegrated country and that because of the policies of this government we shall soon arrive at a prismatic condition. In other words, we are moving from relative cohesiveness and relative fairness to a state in which the selfish will triumph at a cost that will eventually extend even to them. Dysfunctional..... The only way of avoiding the nasty consequences of revolt may be in-built political inertia. And we are good at that.Peasants' Revolt....

Questions for critical conversations

1. Have you ever seen any evidence that your role as an educator has been devoted to the preservation and promotion of social inequalities?
2. Should educators work to reduce social inequalities?
3. Do some educators work to increase social inequalities?
4. Was the study of the historical significance of eugenics included in the programme that led to you qualifying as a professional educator? Was it even mentioned?
5. Is there any connection between our present educational system and the desire of eugenicists to improve the human race by selective breeding and selective education?
6. Do teachers sometimes oversimplify beliefs that affect how we approach education? Can you name any?
7. Do politicians sometimes oversimplify beliefs that affect how we approach education? Can you name any?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

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 is 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. 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 is a bit long so, rather than wait till the end, I have distributed **Questions for critical conversations** throughout the smaller parts.

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 Right. 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 Osborne () 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 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 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 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 the unwilling comparator 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 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 hands. 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. 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: 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 grandparents, 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.

Tony Blair has been a role model for people like Michael Gove who also put policy-making before politics. He 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. The Coalition does not bother much with them partly, I guess, because it is 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, pro patria recent intake of MPs (plus some that have always been like that). 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. In the days of New Labour this was easy 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.

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?

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 buses 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

Yet to be drafted

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.

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'. 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. It remains a continuing cause of deep human despair that Barrack Obama, as a Democratic Party President of the USA, indulges in the same policies. This smiling President, loving husband and father of young children has no qualms whatsoever about sending his drones to destroy the families of innocent foreigners.

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. Stephen Lansley (2012) shows very clearly how since those two got to work the gaps between the rich and the poor have widened. One example is.... Another.... Thatcher and Reagan may have started things but the others enthusiastically joined in. Pinochet in Piccadilly... But what 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. Keane (...) 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 fracturing and that education policy is contributing to it.

In....I 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 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 of 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.

..... differentiated schools....

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 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. Benda.... In his foreword to the....edition of *To the Finland Station*....WH Auden For me real politics and intellectual behaviour go together..... E.g. from education.... the de-intellectualising of schoolteachers... of all professional educators....

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.

Trahison des clerics

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 clerics' 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

Trahisson 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 discomfiting 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 clercs*? 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. matriculationJohn Major....GCSE.....from learning to grading...G&T....inspection.....Mode 3...

I was a CSE Chief Examiner for my subject and an 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'. It is 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'.

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. As Kathleen Tattersall says..... In my view Gove will disconnect public examinations from education and use them to generate a social rank order.

Who remembers Mode-3?

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. 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 while hopes for equality simply evaporate. This is anti-social.

We now learn from David Cameron's speech at the October 2012 Conservative Party conference that he too has adopted '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 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.

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 social circle 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 plebeians 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 and living in the wrong part of the country with too many bedrooms 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.

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 were 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 will increasingly be 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.

I said earlier that 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 and as such make possible rational government. 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 ten 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 normally 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: closing down free expression.....Marshall.... 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.

The May 1940 vote that brought down the Chamberlain government was, in fact, overwhelmingly won by Chamberlain but he resigned. Blair would not have even considered resigning in such a situation. E.g. from education...tuition fees....

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.....1974... 1978/9.... E.g. from education

The present coalition government is somewhat different. Members of two parties have 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.

Natural inertia....easily bought off..... circuses without bread

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 what governments use to govern us, usually without us noticing. Might they help politicians to 'get away with it'?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Political education and political literacy in schools or civics and citizenship

Abstract

I think that what follows ought to be viewed as a personal ground clearing prior to something more substantial I might write one day; hence the tentative tone of this abstract. I am trying to form a testable notion: the notion that by setting aside political education and political literacy Kenneth Baker probably did a lot of damage to our society. I believe that not only were citizenship and active citizenship not any kind of effective substitute but that they were a distraction, possibly an intended distraction. My professional involvement in the subject from the late sixties to the early nineties means that I must come to terms with how I was as a young professional: often confused, frustrated and bemused by my inability, with others, to persuade the guardians of what we called 'the fat cats of the curriculum' to accept that they should give timetable space to a subject they regarded as somewhat infra dig. I acknowledge that I need to catch up on the latest work done on citizenship in schools.

There are a number of 'asides' in what follows, probably because I seem to be unpicking so much of my career.

Main text

This is partly a personal professional tale of lost youth. The danger is that what I am about to write will too closely associate the decline of my faculties with a perception of past optimism gradually turning into recognition of a lost opportunity to make the World a better place. Maybe self-blame is a natural conceit and indulgence. Telling yourself that you could have done more of or better or differently the things that you did does not give you the right to make grand claims that everything hinged on you. Nevertheless, it could be worth telling this somewhat personal tale. It is, however, worth noting that my knowledge of the most recent work on citizenship is sketchy. I shall try to do something about that at some point. Again, I am merely writing a draft.

Alex Porter once introduced me to someone at a conference on citizenship in, I think, 1991 as a 'founding father' of the political education and political literacy movement. The date is forgettable but clearly the soubriquet has remained in my memory! As he and Bernard Crick were co-editors of the Report on Political Literacy (1978) this was very generous of him and as this very nice, honourable and good bloke is now dead I ought not to contradict him. In fact, however, back in the 1970s, in the early days of that movement, there were rather a lot of both fathers and mothers involved. What made me feel different from the other members of the Political Literacy Working Party and the Executive Committee of the Politics Association was that I taught in a secondary modern school in a part of Liverpool that had recently undergone drastic and discomfiting changes to its infrastructure, especially housing, plus a very high level of unemployment. Factories along the ironically named Commercial Road were closing down like candles snuffed out in sequence. Over the years driving to work became easier and easier as fewer and fewer workers crossed the road to clock on. You can imagine that it was less important to me that my kids were able to watch an item on the television news and identify it as, for example, an instance of 'social control': I wanted them to take part, somehow: to know what to do when things went wrong and to believe that they could take some action.

Before getting a job at the London Institute of Education Alex had taught in a sixth form college but, although not everyone else on the political literacy working party or the Executive of the Politics Association was an academic working at a university, the ethos was, I felt, definitely old senior common room and certainly well-connected as in: 'I think I'll just have a word with Shirley' (Williams, that is, Secretary of State for Education during part of that time).

From the beginning of my teaching career in the sixties I had not liked what I felt was the deferential, even reverential, tone of civics and citizenship school textbooks and public examinations. At A-Level the subject was usually called British Constitution and, since we do not have a written constitution, it had an air about it of admitting successful candidates to membership of a select group of adepts of a mysterious cult: only a special few could pretend to understand the mystery of government. Below A-Level existed the worshippers and a few altar boys: above A-Level there were the priests,

including a few high priests, performing miracles beyond ordinary comprehension. This was a time when the Conservative Party had not long ended the process by which its leaders 'emerged' from a closed and very exclusive consultation rather than an open election. How we were governed, how we should be ruled, deciding on: the wars in which some should die, the industries that would be encouraged to thrive and provide paid employment, the industries that would be discouraged and allowed to wither on the vine creating unemployment, the areas that would be helped to grow and prosper and those that would be written off and decline, the schools and universities some could attend but others could not and the unequal quality and distribution of our health and well-being; these were all matters for our betters to understand: for the priests ordained to perform miracles with their backs to the congregation and so preserve the mystery of government. George Bernard Shaw's satirical definition of Democracy as 'The election of superiors by inferiors' was so apt. Maintaining the political priesthood required the simultaneous maintenance of general ignorance and the restriction of participation. Might it continue to do so? I wonder. What do you think?

For me the issue was not exactly about choosing to teach people to be good citizens, as in learning to accept and live by a received set of balanced rights and responsibilities, versus enabling people to practise politics, as in learning to discuss and prioritise values and concepts prior to decision-making. It was becoming the fashion at the time to shift the emphasis of education from the acquisition of knowledge to the practising of learning processes. I believe that this was a very necessary shift after a period of examining by measuring the rate at which knowledge could be regurgitated.

From my professional perspective, however, knowledge could have a powerful de-mystifying effect. Fred Ridley had taught me. He often pointed out that it helped democracy to work if, for example, you knew whom to telephone when your dustbins weren't emptied. I think it also helped if you practised picking up the phone. And I did want a less deferential and reverential and a more inclusive approach to the business of government. People confidently picking up phones to ask awkward questions helps to create the expectation of a response from those with power. Possibly no-one else on the political literacy working party noticed but I did not put all my faith in teaching political concepts to children which, from memory, is where Bernard Crick placed the emphasis during our discussions. Maybe it was part of my teachery urge to be didactic but it was important to me that children were not inhibited from participation in politics and democracy because they did not know the terminology or the telephone numbers or how to pick up a phone.

Just discovered my obituary/remembrance of Bernard Crick that I did for Post-16 Educator...now with one factual error corrected and one update. Apologies for repeating some of what has gone before but I wanted to keep it more or less as I wrote it, very impressionistically, when I heard of his death, hence my use of email punctuation.

I can't believe it....Bernard is dead....not so long after his younger collaborator Alex Porter died.....I remember sitting before my professor in the early sixties

in Liverpool to defend an essay about Bernard's most famous book....a very short Pelican called 'In Defence of Politics'.....the difficult question to which I had to respond was...'Have you read this book?'.....I chose to say 'yes'.....but, apart from the blurb at the back, I had read none of it.....'I thought so' said my professor.....'because your essay is just like the book.... full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'.....on the Politics Association Executive Committee in the 70s (we met in the Hansard Society office which in those days was almost opposite the London offices of the TDA) I can remember....as the only school teacher (Secondary Modern in Scotland Road Liverpool) apart from Alex who taught in a sixth form college in Solihull before going to the Inst. of Ed.....I can remember being horrified as I realised that members of the committee, particularly Bernard, would casually refer to how they could wield influence and distribute favour.....they seemed to know everyone.....it was after an objection of mine to a long monologue from Bernard on this theme that he offered me the bribe that I wanted....membership of the Political Literacy Working Party.....of course I had to refuse sufficiently weakly so that I still ended up on the Working Party (well, I did have a degree in politics).....an eye-opener in many ways as I had never experienced high level funding of a project before.....there are some funny stories about the project....but perhaps the best is that as we were putting the finishing touches to the report at the huge round table of the Senate Room of the University of London with the wooden sentry box outside in which the mummified remains of Jeremy Bentham (minus his head which was replaced by a wax effigy) would be wheeled into the Senate Room because it is the custom that he be present at every meeting of Senate....Derek Heater (also a member of the Politics Association Exec.) who taught at Brighton Poly in those days said that as a student it was his job to wheel the old man in....anyway...back to the story.....people had come at great expense from all over the UK for this meeting and one person asked the question....'Is it acceptable that the report contains a reference to a school as being "democratic"?'.....Alex had written that bit.....well, being political scientists, we made a meal out of this.....first, for 45 minutes, we had to discuss if we were entitled to make such a decision.....we agreed that we were....then, for an equally long time, we had to decide HOW we made the decision...how we would vote etc.....THEN we had to MAKE the decision.....I remember spending some of that time trying to decline or conjugate Bernard's name in Latin....'Crook, Crank, Crick' and so on.....I was also transfixed by the huge ivory ring that he wore and used to wonder that should any of us manage to upset him sufficiently would he open the ring, extract the poison and expire before our eyes.....I still have somewhere the posh blotter that I stole after the meeting.....at the Politics Association Conferences he had a tendency to stay up late in the bar singing 19th century Irish Republican songs....you know the kind....'And now, verse forty three'.....once Enid Lakeman the veteran stalwart of the Electoral Reform Society who walked with a stick and always had her hair ...steel grey hair.....done up.....turned up at about 2 in the morning in her night attire with her hair down but stick up and waving to berate a sheepish Bernard for keeping her awake....it was a wonderful sight.....of course I never quite came to terms with his conversion to citizenship after we...the political education and literacy mob.....had rejected the concept as out-moded and wrong-headed (given that no-one in the UK

can be a citizen because we are all subjects and citizenship is about teaching people not to annoy the government).....he did teach Blunkett who gave him the citizenship project (maybe I should strive harder to overcome my prejudice against citizenship as it is presently conceived).....his death brings back so many memories and reminds me once again of all the years that I have spent travelling to London for meetings trying...as I thought...to make things better.....one last thing.....when I....a sort of disciple of Fred Ridley....suggested that it was all very well Bernard and Alex saying that the most important thing to teach in schools should be political concepts but that....to borrow a phrase from Fred.....it did democracy a bit of good if you also told people who to phone up when their dustbins were not emptied.....Bernard's response was....'They can get all of that from the Guardian'.....not in Scotland Road mate I said.....yes maybe he was an intellectual but if so I never felt that he had experienced the World in which I taught....I always thought that he conceptualised and categorized my kids...just about.... but could never empathise with them.....to me he kind of visited and researched the working class.....just as I, perhaps, kind of visited and conceptualised but failed to empathise with public intellectuals like himnot easy to work with was Bernard but if only for showing us that politics was not ignoble because it is what humans do instead of killing each other I remember him with thanks.....

Before New Labour's urge to performance manage the entire country the concept of accountability was focussed upon those with power. One quarter of the last GCSE Politics syllabus (or specification) was about governmental accountability. Under Blair, however, we received targets from government and were measured in terms of our success in hitting them. I do not accept that we exist to be managed and held to account by government: that our role is to serve government: to be appraised and, when found wanting, labelled as failures requiring remedial action. Unfortunately, we really are subjects of the Crown. From my perspective, however, we seem to have moved from a Crown that saw us as possessions, sometimes unruly but basically feudal subjects, to a Crown that sees us as component parts of a business plan: a plan that we have taken no part in making. Somewhere and at some point the chance that we might get in on the act of arguing, disputing, disagreeing and deciding social values slipped out of our fingers. General Elections are now the only ones that count but they are only about choosing a new Board of Directors and a new CEO. We seem to be shareholders with some small voting powers but lacking the clout of what were once called 'over mighty subjects' who inhabit today's corporative world and are given easy access to ministers. They are the big shareholders and it is in their interests that the company is managed.

I began this topic on a personal note so let me say that it continues to nag me that, somehow, the movement towards political education and political literacy became sidelined by what I regarded as false or, at best, restricting notions such as active citizenship. We are, as I keep saying, 'subjects' not 'citizens'. There is a difference. I want to say something more about this and to reflect upon what I might have done differently in trying to promote political education and political literacy. And no, I have not forgotten my need to catch up on

what takes place today in schools under the heading of 'citizenship'. As I said, this is a draft and I only claim to be an explorer; or, maybe a ground clearer for other explorers.

Approximately the first four years of the Politics Association (the association for *teachers* of politics) coincided with Margaret Thatcher's period as Secretary of State for Education. As a member of its Executive Committee I recall no significant clash of philosophies during that time. We had no opposition from her department and had constructive support from HMI, the Electoral Reform Society, the good offices and goodwill of the Hansard Society and many other organisations. Those four years also saw the creation of comprehensive schools at a record-breaking rate. I have often felt that my professional life has been conducted against the grain of government but looking back from a perspective of more than forty years, with Michael Gove now pulling the policy strings, the Heath administration, 1970-1974, can be made to seem to have given us a short golden educational age. Possibly being then forty or more year's younger helps form that perspective and accounts for my optimism of that time. Nevertheless, I think we were on to something with political education and political literacy.

As first a Chief Moderator, responsible for coursework, and later a Chief Examiner, for Government and Politics CSE I visited lots of schools and teacher centres, met many teachers and conducted lots of what were called consortium (standardising and moderating) meetings. Liverpool had so many schools studying the subject that we had to spread such meetings over two days.

An aside

As GCSE Government and Politics got going it was my job as the newly appointed Chief Examiner to travel around with masses of material in the boot of my Mark Two Cortina talking to schoolteachers about what they could expect. The meeting in the Queens Hotel in Leeds was the biggest. The hotel's largest hall was full.

Seeking to illustrate how I approached the setting of questions and the assessment of responses I distributed a photocopy of a CSE answer to a question that had been designed to stimulate discussion about the taking of direct action. In this case the candidate had written with feeling, calling upon family experience of the behaviour of the police during the miners' strike. Beryl Holt who had come with me and I both thought that this sort of response to that sort of question was just what we wanted. It was not a case of rewarding candidates whose opinions aligned with yours. What we welcomed was the engagement with issues, the formulation of argument, the deployment of examples and the sense that government and politics were being accessed.

The reaction of the assembled schoolteachers was interesting. Most of them felt like Beryl and me that had someone we taught responded like that we would have been really pleased. A substantial number, however, said that had they been marking that response they would have awarded no marks at all.

Why? Because it was personal; because the candidate drew upon family experience; and because they had not written in the third person.

As you might expect, my prejudices kicked in then and without any evidence at all I classified to myself the 'no markers' as a bunch of antediluvian grammar school teachers who taught subjects while real teachers taught children. A bit of prejudice can be quite warming don't you think?

Political literacy implied familiarity with the words of politics. It also implied being able to identify and associate actions and events with what could be regarded as political concepts. As I hope I have already indicated I believed that any practical definition of political literacy also had to include some kind of competence and the knowledge to go with it.

The danger with emphasising concepts while teaching children is no different from the danger in teaching educational theories to schoolteachers. It is so tempting to believe that all you have to do is to apply labels, as in 'Here we have an example of representative democracy' or 'What is happening here is an example of kinaesthetic learning'. Concepts and categories and classifications are useful but, as I like to emphasise, the walls we erect between them can be porous.

Another aside

Have you ever, I wonder, taken part in one of those group exercises that was supposed to find out what kind of learner you are? Despite a healthy cynicism the first time I did I became quite depressed when the exercise was complete and I was given my label: I felt judged, limited and constrained to follow the path of learning set out for me. Fortunately, the person in charge had the sense to set us a collaborative task immediately afterwards. We all soon realised that we could easily wear every label: that we were every kind of learner.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned back in the 1970s was from what was then called Home Economics. In those days, by the way, that almost always meant girls. Boys, rather short-sightedly I thought, were excluded. The Liverpool LEA advisor for Home Economics (sometimes called Domestic Science) had an idea that at the end of every lesson all girls would evaluate their learning. She (of course it could not have been a man) produced a set of headings against which girls would write down what they thought they had learned. At first, as I observed it, this was seen by both the girls and their teachers as an extra chore to be added to the lesson just before the bell went. Eventually, however, the headings became sufficiently internalised to be used to make sense of the learning while it was taking place; and because of the ever-changing variety of activities organised by the teachers there was the opportunity to avoid this becoming a rigid label-sticking process. It possessed a certain dynamism, I thought.

I pinched this idea when I went to work at St Brigids, our newly minted comprehensive. For some time I had been trying out different ways of

producing school reports, attempting to escape from the eternal set of variations on the word 'satisfactory' combined with 'very', 'quite', 'un', 'not', 'not very' and more. Remember them? In my view ministers and Ofsted have seldom wanted to imagine a world that goes far beyond that set of variations.

My idea was that all the kids were entitled to three things that so far had been kept from them. First, they were entitled to a framework and language that could help them make overall sense of their learning. Second, they were entitled to tell their teachers how they made sense of their learning. Third, they were entitled to be listened to before a teacher made any statement that made a judgment about them. There was a fourth entitlement. They had the right to contribute to the shape, nature, scope and language of the sense-making evaluation framework.

So I drafted a framework and, mostly with my own registration class, got it into a shape that we thought would work throughout the school. The next task was to persuade colleagues to accept it. Here I made what I believe is a classic error. I believed that those members of staff who did not object to it were accepting of it. Having persuaded senior management to extend registration on a Friday morning (the main task was to get the head of R.E. to forego one of his usual all singing, all dancing assemblies) we embarked upon what I believed was a journey into that socially fulfilling world called 'comprehensive education'.

Guess what? When it came to writing reports half the staff ignored everything the kids had written. I ought to have taken more care and more time to embed the project. I don't think it would have helped if I had held a more hierarchically powerful position than Head of Humanities because the key to gaining consent was the sharing of ownership and after thirty years the feeling of having persuaded the kids to come to a dance at which teachers failed to take the floor with them continues to gnaw at me.

Political education was about far more than just a named subject on a timetable. It was also about how a school functioned as a society.

We need to remember that concepts and theories are human constructs that are heavily dependent upon context and always open to challenge, testing, exploration, re-working and re-defining. Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks for a teacher is to show, illustrate, exemplify and define a concept and then to say, 'by the way, you need to carry a pinch of salt when applying this concept to anything'. Certainty is comforting but possibly misleading: uncertainty can be discomfoting but sometimes necessary; hence the need to mix the abstract with the practical; and also hence the need to share the sense-making process.

I believe that I ought to try to shed that constantly lurking, always lying in wait and nagging, dispiriting but well-known professional self-judgment of not being good enough. But it is not easy to do that, especially when you recall all the wonderful, interesting and fascinating young people whose potential for

fulfilment you, for a while, had some power over, including the ones at the time you wanted to strangle.

I was a schoolteacher for sixteen years. Every year I taught and entered for examination the full cohort of final year students. Apart from the occasional moment I don't think I performed at a level or in a manner that satisfied me. And yet, I do not recall ever getting less than the best examination results. I understood what it took to get good results and later, when I was an LEA advisor, I was able to observe other teachers doing the same. I have yet to complete my reflection on this but I know that I must address the question of what I might have been sacrificing when I concentrated upon what it took to achieve high scores. Maybe I am being too professionally precious even to raise the question: the kids wanted high scores and, mostly, I delivered. I just hope that I sneaked in a bit of good teaching as well. I think I was learning to become what I think of as being a good teacher by the time I finished. I was finding out that good results and good teaching did not have to be on different sides.

What might this have to do with political education and political literacy? In my view, the closer become the teachers and the learners the more they recognise that they are engaged in a joint sense-making enterprise, an enterprise with a social purpose. I believe that Kenneth Baker was very destructive. By structuring the curriculum as it would have appeared on the timetable of the selective schools that he attended he divided learning into separate 'subjects' for all ages. It is true that his National Curriculum came with Themes, Dimensions and Skills but really these were tokens to keep progressive educators quiet. At the meeting I attended when he outlined what we could expect I felt that we were being fobbed off. To a question about what he was doing about career education, which was thought to be a compulsory entitlement, he sounded defensive saying, 'Er, that will be a theme'. Citizenship was another theme. All of them could be ignored. Indeed, if you wished to be labelled 'successful' in accordance with Baker's values it was better if you wasted no energy pursuing them. I remember a teacher who had been working on alternative curriculum and assessment strategies that were designed to 'turn back on' teenagers who had 'turned off', a really professionally exciting project, switching to a lower paid job in a history department because he knew that was where the Bakerite future lay.

Yet another aside

The noises from government threatening us with not only a National Curriculum and means of assessment but also with what we might call a national pedagogy grew louder during the mid 1980s. By 1987 Kenneth Baker was ready to travel the country waving his very own little red book (it was actually A4 but thin) explaining what we could expect. From the perspective of political education and literacy I want to refer to some attempts to respond to the imposition of a much narrower learning experience for children.

First, back again to St. Brigids and the community it served. It was a Roman Catholic school in an area that was almost entirely Catholic and of Irish

descent. There was no sense of working for only one half of a community. I would not have liked to do that. I should, however, explain something that I feel outsiders (I chose the word deliberately) did not appreciate. In those days there were thirteen parishes in the Liverpool All Souls Deanery. In many ways they cohered. In many ways, however, they saw themselves as differing from each other. It was not unusual to hear the phrase 'funny lot of people over there' as someone pointed to a parish four hundred yards away. Indeed, it is still possible today to encounter people who have long ago moved away from parishes that no longer exist and to hear the echoes of old loyalties and prejudices. Those identities were deeply embedded.

Catholic it might have been but at times it felt estranged from some powerful religious orders and devalued by the church's hierarchy.

Some more notes to myself.....

Moirá.....community destroyed....confirmation....plus pressure....professional educators have limited power to create and sustain social changes unless they can ally themselves with people, parties and organisations that have bigger levers and better placed fulcrums....but that should not mean that we must always walk away.....to be a schoolteacher ought not to be about positioning your kids to be able to buy or be awarded a better BMW...

I shall go on to write about designing a Mode-3 GCSE for St. Brigids that attempted to create a positive dynamic between St. Brigids and the whole community and to transform the management style and structure of the school so that it was collegiate and involved the community...a community that managed to create the largest housing Co-operative in Western Europe....that also tried to create co-operative businesses....and about the revenge taken by Militant Tendency and the destruction of communities because they were old fashioned Labour....almost thirty years have passed since my masters dissertationwhich included a curriculum history of St. Brigids and the construction of a conceptual framework to examine it in terms of political education and literacy....it was chosen for publication but somehow that never happened....maybe at the age of 70 I am trying to wave my flag....I shall also say something about my drafting of a National Curriculum on behalf of the Economics Association, the Politics Association and the Association of Teachers of Social Sciences.....guess what....the government rejected it....meanwhile, I had a mortgage to pay and it is not so easy being a revolutionary while doing that ☺

Conservative voters emerging from the polling booth looking as though they have just been to holy communion....

Political literacy...education etc...Baker in Manchester...

From at least 1970 there was a determined effort to replace civics and citizenship in schools with political education. I was very closely involved through my membership of the executive committee of the Politics Association, the working party on Political Literacy and as a chief examiner in Government and Politics for CSE, 16 Plus and GCSE. I intend to say something about what I regard as deliberate policy pressure that squeezed

out political education from the curriculum. Media studies and RoA...Keith Joseph astonished...primary ... I think we were a movement that ran out of steam at a key moment. 1987....themes....draft wot I rote ... masters dissertation....themes, dimensions and skills were clearly the work of the educationalists on working parties trying to use such devices to prevent the National Curriculum reverting to the old model of separate subjects in silos.

Mode-3 GCSE.

And why not Media Studies and Records of Achievement?

To be drafted

Questions for critical conversations

1. Why is media studies sometimes described as a Mickey Mouse subject?
2. Have you looked at the work of Greg Philo and the Glasgow Media Group?
3. Why are Records of Achievement sometimes thought of as 'soft'?
4. We lost Environmental Studies and Integrated Humanities in favour of History and Geography. Was this a good thing?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Inability to penetrate the force field

Abstract

To be drafted

Main text

The term 'force field' came to mind because whenever I puzzle why perfectly good arguments, clearly expressed and supported by evidence fail to change the pre-judged minds of politicians I am brought back to a World of Dan Dare, of science fiction in which the puny guns of mere earthlings prove incapable of penetrating the force fields of alien forces. I heard yesterday of the death of Mike Baker, the former BBC Education Correspondent. He was present when Ofsted announced their report that concluded that the best way to learn to become a schoolteacher was on a university programme. He asked Christine Gilbert (then boss of Ofsted) if the report might be embarrassing for government. This should have been a killer question because by then everyone knew that Michael Gove had made up his mind to set up teaching schools. There was, of course, no embarrassment because the evidence was simply ignored, by-passed, evaporated and cast into an outer darkness.

Gove's force field was fully switched on. The alien from outer space has taken over.

For those that cannot remember The Eagle comic, Dan Dare's archenemy was called the Mekon. He bore more than a passing resemblance to Michael Gove. Whenever Dan spoke defiantly to him the Mekon would reply 'Prattle on vain Earthling'. His plan to make the Earth bend to his will was not going to be stopped by argument or by resistance. Gosh, those stories were prescient.

LinkedIn contributors talking about failure....Our real failure is the failure to question the bases upon which politicians define failure and, its companion in sophistry, success....Wilkinson and Pickett showed that..... as far as I am able to discover the only attacks upon their work have come from..... but their work has yet to show up as changing Coalition values or policies.... Stewart Lansley showed that.....He has yet to produce reactionary responses in the blogosphere but I have also yet to detect his influence upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer...except perhaps in the rhetoric he has deployed to counter certain criticisms of his 2012 budget.... Will Hutton and....argued very closely that..... but the last book of his that seemed so significant and promoted a new inclusive way of setting about politics and government ...Stakeholder....promised so much....A/S Level Citizenship... but ended up as merely providing rhetorical cover for New Labour's continuation of a policy of encouraging greater greed for those well-positioned to become filthy rich And now the Coalition are adopting the word 'fairness' Surely, they say, it is only fair that....people who pay their taxes should not be required to support benefit cheats.....supporting so-called 'public schools', non-doms,is fine...

This appropriation and distortion of language reminds me of climate change deniers who pretend that they are engaging in proper scientific behaviour when they challenge the evidence produced by scientists. At one level they are right: evidence must be critically examined. At another level, the level of commonsense perhaps, to challenge the evidence that the oncoming train, clearly seen by everyone else, will soon hit you seems perverse. What I believe will eventually hit the deniers and ignorers of the likes of Wilkinson and Pickett, Will Hutton, Stewart Lansley and Owen Jones, Joseph Stiglitz and even....Mount..., everyone of whom would, I believe, welcome some critical engagement with what they are saying.... will be the experience of having to live with greater and greater gaps of inequality. As the super rich become even more super rich so their numbers must shrink and they will become isolated. Their gains will not only be at the expense of the poor but also at the expense of the merely rich. The questions have to be: will living in an increasingly unequal society have such a negative impact upon the super rich and privileged that it will force them to wish to change and will merely very rich people such as most of our present cabinet put into reverse the policies that help to create social fracking?

It is not the same situation as when Marx and Engels, Marx in particular, made themselves unpopular with some well-meaning, often gifted and well-read socialists and communists, even those with impeccable proletarian

credentials such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon who gave us the phrase 'Property is theft', by telling them that their proposals were insufficiently based upon science. We can understand the failure of such people to penetrate the force field: their research and spadework was probably not good enough to support sustainable programmes of social and economic transformation and certainly they lacked the dynamic self-belief of Marx. In the case of W&P and H and L what I think we are seeing instead from so many politicians is an embedded fear of having to change their minds and their ways. The stronger the evidence that they should change the stronger becomes their need to resist, dismiss or feign not to notice that which makes them uncomfortable.

Not sure about the above

They are helped by apologists for exploitative capitalism who, often with the support of organisations such as the Adam Smith Institute, rush to pick a hole here and there in the evidence while seeking to establish by repetition and assertion that rich people are motivated to work harder by being offered the chance of more riches and poor people are motivated by threats to take from them what they have got.

I began by rebuking myself for a disposition to optimism.... What worries me is that the inability of books like.....no matter how powerful their evidence or how closely argued their points.....are unable to penetrate....the prejudged positions of our politicians....and if they cannot...then....now be careful that all the threads of this thesis are strong!!!! ***Just a reminder to myself***

The question that we must pose is what can we do to penetrate the force field? Tories have a very long history of capturing progression in order to pervert it and retain privilege. The extension of the franchise in the nineteenth century was at first resisted by the Conservatives and then captured. David Cannadine reminds us of the Primrose League, formed in memory of Disraeli in order to perpetuate his ability to simultaneously maintain an extremely layered hierarchical society favouring those at the top and yet to convince those at the bottom that it was in their interests to vote for it. At times religious and racial prejudice has been encouraged in order to ensure a strong working class conservative vote. (Philip Waller).....

The present day Tory Party is expert at diverting the critical gaze of the electorate away from the misbehaviour of extremely rich donors to the party by attacking a very small number of people on benefits to which they may not be entitled. Labels such as 'benefit cheats' and 'scroungers' are applied liberally, thereby stirring up resentment among poor people not on benefit. In this way Tories can appropriate the word 'fair' as in 'It is not fair that honest working people provide taxes that go to benefit cheats'. Pointing out the complexities of avoidance and evasion of tax by the rich or the far bigger number of people under-claiming benefit takes too long: the prejudice against people on benefit has, meanwhile, been embedded.

Here I am beginning to put together a series of ploys used by politicians representing the 'haves' to deny the 'have nots' and 'get away with it'....very sketchy at this stage

So that is the capturing the discourse ploy.

Then there is the keep shifting the ground ploy.

The straw man ploy.

In addition to the cynical subversion of argument and fact there is the psychological aversion to disturbing and uncomfortable argument and fact. Tony Blair avoided sitting in the House of Commons listening to the resignation speech of Robin Cook in which he forensically demolished all of Blair's justifications for invading Iraq but Blair went ahead anyway. To proceed with the invasion after having attempted to publicly confront Cook's arguments point by point, thereby acknowledging their validity, would have been too much, even for him. Instead, in my opinion, he refused to allow himself to be knocked off course by avoiding engagement with the arguments. In other words, he psychologically disengaged from reality. We might call this the **Evasion and Avoidance Ploy**.

Questions for critical conversations

1. In your professional life have you seen any evidence of use of the following ploys?
 - a) Capturing the discourse.
 - b) Keep shifting the ground.
 - c) The straw man.
 - d) Evasion and avoidance.
 - e) Manipulation and subversion.
 - f) Psychological disengagement.
 - g) Permutations of any of the above.

2. Can you suggest effective ways of countering any of them?

We have the manipulation and subversion of.... The shifting of ground ploy and psychological disengagement from reality.

Notes, references and links

Yet to be drafted

The charge sheet against Michael Gove

Abstract

Here I focus on Michael Gove as a prominent social fracker. Readers who attended either Oxford or Cambridge universities, especially those from Oxford who have a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE), might take offence at what I have written. I have, therefore, included an open invitation for anyone to get in touch that wishes to disagree and put me right. Anyone who agrees is also welcome to get in touch.

Main text

Michael Gove is on course to help his coalition colleagues frack society. Like so many pretend politicians he wishes to leave a legacy. His wish shall be granted. All must suffer as a result. The charges so far are as follows.

1. You have no electoral endorsement for your policies. Also you have taken no steps at all to include professionals, parents and pupils in discourse that could establish educational values leading to policy. Inclusion, gaining consent and even pausing to reflect do not feature in your way of working. Politics is the inclusive and consensual process of arriving at values prior to policy-making. You do not work like this. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-political**.
2. You are removing schools from democratically accountable local government and handing them over to private and profit making companies, disregarding the electorate's unwillingness to endorse your policies. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-democratic**.
3. You are unwilling to engage with evidence that might bring into question the narrow prejudices with which you began the job of Secretary of State. Ofsted reported that the best way to learn to be a schoolteacher was with a university. You ignored that evidence because it did not fit with your views. You are also de-intellectualising the profession by stifling its ability to undertake masters and doctoral level work. You see schoolteachers as instructors. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-intellectual**.
4. An education system should fulfil all young people. Its purpose is perverted when schools are differentiated by resource, religious beliefs, privilege and advantage. And yet you are creating a rigged free-for-all in which the favours will go to the already favoured while the rest shall be negatively labelled for life. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-educational**.
5. You are part of a government that seeks to dissolve institutions, policies and conventions that, under the banner of the Welfare State, have worked to minimise the damaging effects of privilege and inequality. Your education policies fit into a strategy that unfairly encourages the fulfilment of a few at the expense of the many. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-social**.

6. You have a boss whose educational, social and professional lives have all taken place in a series of small bubbles in which he mixed with people like himself. Like you he went to an exclusive university that has worked hard over the years to construct exaggerated perceptions of its brand value. He also studied for a degree famously designed for specialists in superficiality. You are, therefore, charged with **exploiting the ignorance of your boss in order to get away with it.**

Questions for critical conversations

I can't think of any polite ones.

I have already been rather rude to people who went to Oxford University and, by association, Cambridge, and about Cameron's degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE) which, when I was at school, was derided as a degree for 'debs delights' as those young men were called who accompanied debutants 'coming out' to 'do' the 'season' and become fully-fledged members of 'society' by attending a series of balls in West London. PPE now seems to have become the degree of choice if you wish to rule this country (badly). I acquired my prejudice against it long ago and still cannot stop thinking of it as what we used to call a general degree in which you did little of any depth: just the thing for so many of our politicians.

Do get in touch if you wish to put me right on such matters or on what I see as the disgrace that Oxbridge have for years been given vastly more public money to get students through to a degree at whatever level; or on how they hoodwink the general public into thinking that a 'double first' is twice as good as a 'first' when it is nothing of the kind; and, perhaps most fraudulent of all, how they sell masters degrees to graduates who do absolutely no work to acquire them. In terms of Higher Education those two universities are the equivalent of our so-called 'public schools' and, in my view, contribute to the distortion of society; answers on a postcard please.

Notes, references and links

Yet to be drafted

After the Children of Thatcher came the Children of Blair. Next (courtesy of Michael Gove) will be the Children of Coalition

Abstract

My concern here is that Thatcher did so much to weaken society and hold up as the prime example to follow the individual driven by greed. Blair, with his simple-minded notion of aspiration widened social gaps and allowed Mandelson's 'filthy rich' to become even filthier. These are socially destructive values. But if the Coalition continues on its way the children of Thatcher and Blair who ascribe value to themselves and each other based upon wealth and privilege will be followed by children whose sense of society: of being able to connect with each other in diverse ways; of believing in fairness; and of natural social empathy will fade away. William Gladstone not only gave us the 1870 Education Act providing compulsory

schooling but he recognised that there were social problems that could only be dealt with by the state which had a moral duty to do so.

How many people do you know that voted LibDem in order to keep out a Tory government? I can discern not one scintilla of LibDem educational and social values in current Coalition policies. So why are they in this government? Quite possibly there were too many optimists like me who had failed to give sufficient attention to the rise of people such as David Laws who think that Liberalism is about balancing the budget. Somehow they have blanked out of their minds the later Gladstone and Asquith, Lloyd George and Beveridge. They failed, also, to recognise the enormous ability of those old heroes to manage the economy in difficult times while also introducing progressive social reforms. If only the work of Keynes and Lloyd George in 1928 (The Yellow Book) had been taken notice of by policy-makers of the time. The Coalition might find it useful today to obtain a copy for study.

During those Thatcher days whenever we heard a phrase exhorting us to bring back Victorian values there would always be someone ready to remind us that this meant the return of rickets or some such poverty related illness. Having a poverty related health condition under the Coalition now brings with it blame for having inflicted it upon yourself.

1979!!!! Compulsory schooling begins at age five and ends at age sixteen.... The effect of New Labour and Coalition education and social policies has been to extend compulsion both below the lower and above the higher ages. The arguments have been made that to do this is all about the extension of a good to society: more nurseries mean parents (mostly mothers) can get jobs and staying on at school not only brings down the unemployment figures but also improves qualifications that can lead to jobs. ***This needs developing!***

Leaving aside for the moment the issue of the paucity of jobs for those mothers and those eighteen year olds, I want to consider the effect of drawing young people into the approved educational system for longer. If we suppose that formal education ends at eighteen these young people will still have had approximately fifteen years of it. Here we are in April 2012, at which point Blair's 1997 children have been in the approved system for fifteen years. Go back to Baker's 1988 Act and his children are now in their late twenties. The children of Atlee are losing the power to make things happen.

Commercial Road...

Questions for critical conversations

1. Does every child really matter?
2. Is there a more important question for educators?
3. Does every child matter to the same extent?
4. If you believe that they do what can educators do to act on this belief?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Counterpoint to the current Coalition Government: a discourse of humanity from our previous Coalition Government

Abstract

I wrote this very close to the 70th anniversary of the publication of what became known as the Beveridge Report. Having been born in the same year it strikes me that there are very few people living in the UK who are not, in one sense or another, *Children of Beveridge*. I believe that it is worth reflecting on this. The junior partner in our Coalition government might be discomfited to remember that Beveridge was a Liberal MP. I can't see him in today's version of the party. I doubt, however, that it agonises over its lost moral purpose or laments its lack of such talent. Just before Christmas 2012 Nick Clegg presented his party as of the centre. While his reason for doing so was clearly to imply that the Conservatives are of the right Clegg's 'centre' is far more to the right than that of his predecessors.

Main text

I recently acquired a second hand copy of *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1944) by Sir William Beveridge who, two years earlier had given us the more famous Beveridge Report that became the basis for the post war welfare state. It took me back to old Dr. Sytner who practised on Boundary Street in the Scotland Road area of Liverpool. The bombsite opposite his surgery (long since pulled down) remains unrestored. The school I taught in during the 70s was almost opposite. Helen who was in my class was doing a CSE project on poverty. The project, like so many carried out in our school, was also designed to contribute to a set of programmes to be broadcast on Radio Merseyside, which meant that, once it became technical, I could get more involved.

So we went to see Dr. Sytner because he had worked in the area for so long. What, we wanted to know, could he tell us about pre-war community spirit? He was having none of that bromide. 'It was', he said, 'a community of poverty'. He recalled a time and place of 'want', 'squalor', 'disease', 'ignorance', 'distress' and 'inequality': the 'giant evils' of Beveridge's book. A time when people without the money to visit a doctor or buy medication would treat a child's sore throat by wrapping round its neck a sock soaked in urine. A time of horse drawn carts, streets full of manure alive with flies that then flew onto your food. There were no fridges or freezers. It was also a time and place of casual labour and, being close to the docks, subject to extremely heavy bombing. Our school logbook recorded the last severe winter of the war when teachers went round the homes gathering in children because there was heating to be found in the school. Their mothers had sent them out scouring the gutters to see if any coal might have fallen off the coal wagons. Page after page of that logbook was full of the names of children that had left early because of ill health. In 1948, when the NHS began and those children became entitled to free medication, the next pages were, dramatically so, blank.

Reading Beveridge now is to go back to a time when it was very difficult to construct, articulate and propose values that would prolong or make worse social misery, although Churchill's Conservative Party did their best to oppose the introduction of the NHS and were generally speaking against any redistribution of wealth. The moral momentum of the time was with the Labour Party and the then very small Liberal Party. Beveridge actually became a Liberal MP for a short while. And Beveridge's *free society*, in which he felt we should and could have full employment, was nothing like the free market economy desired more than thirty years ago by Margaret Thatcher or today by George Osborne. It was the freedom for which tens of millions of people were dying, being bombed, losing their homes and being displaced. It was the freedom to live in a democracy that treated people fairly. To use a word that in those days we were not afraid of using: we wanted to live in a 'civilised' country. Who now asks what it means to live in a civilised country?

I do not intend here to write a review of Beveridge's book, to do that I would have to delve into a lot of detailed economics. The major point to make is that here was a coalition government which, despite including a number of social reactionaries, and despite facing financial, economic and military problems of a magnitude that shrinks into insignificance the problems of our present coalition government, knew that the needle of its moral compass had to point towards a more equal, a more fair and a more fulfilling society. The text below the title of the book is

"Misery generates hate".

Questions for critical conversations

1. Would it be possible today to begin a discourse of humanity?
2. What would a humane educational system look like?
3. What would have to change to make it happen?
4. Do enough people want it?
5. In terms of government priorities to what extent do you feel that invading Afghanistan and Iraq, light touch financial regulation, the renewal of our Trident fleet, the encouragement of casino banking and special tax concessions for big corporations were and are more important than maintaining the NHS, Sure Start, Every Child Matters and abolishing tuition fees?

Notes, references and links

To be drafted

Personal reflection

Abstract

Here you will find some family history, some anger, some frustration and an attempt to compose a battle cry for professional educators. I think we need one.

Main text

It is tempting to shrug resignedly and give voice to that old refrain:

'It's the same the whole World over. It's the poor wot gets the blame. It's the rich wot gets the pleasure. Ain't it all a bloomin' shame?'

What can be done about it? Must we simply accept sinking into a modern version of an extremely unfair, hierarchical and dysfunctional society? One in which our approach to education actually makes things worse? First, I think that we have to recognise the seriousness of the social fracking pressure exerted upon us. We are being prevented from participating in proper politics; what passes for democracy is being badly damaged; our intellects are under constraint; educational professionalism is being perverted; our ability to connect socially is in danger of becoming very limited (electronic networking does not change this and may reinforce it); and we are losing the ability and the will to hold to account the people who should take responsibility for all of this; all of this plus a propensity by our politicians to run governments in the interests of the avaricious while plucking the strings of popular prejudice against some of the most disadvantaged people in the country. I suppose that a preliminary question is: 'Do professional educators care enough to participate in confronting this?'

For the moment I want to get personal (even more so). Neither of my parents (born 1901 and 1903) went to school after the age of twelve. The major punctuation marks of their lives were war (WWI); severe economic depression induced by a combination of greed, governmental incompetence and social disconnection by ruling class politicians, particularly Churchill who as Chancellor of the Exchequer gave us his disastrous job destroying and wage reducing budget of 1925 which he followed up by, in the 1926 General Strike, declaring war (not for the first time by him) on the working classes; then more war (WWII); followed by the hardship of economic recovery compensated by the welfare state and the closing of social gaps (the Atlee government); also Macmillan's *Never had it so good* society when we seemed to have plenty of money; eventually, however, Thatcher re-opened and widened those social gaps by encouraging yet more greed. Then my parents died, unaware that the New Labour project would widen even further the same gaps in favour of the greedy. They came into a World that was very unequal but hopeful and seeming to be part of the progressive Whig tradition: they left that World as the Tory regressionists resumed power and consigned to the dustbin of history any belief that we ought to be working towards a more equal society.

My mother was eight and my father ten when the 1911 Parliament Act was passed enabling a Liberal government to begin to take serious steps towards social justice. For me this Act is of huge significance and if Michael Gove wants school history to focus upon landmark events (I think he calls them 'facts') this has to be one of them for having brought into legislation the belief that the power of elected representatives of the people should be greater than the power of unelected representatives of privilege and special interests. I do

not, however, expect Michael Gove wishes children to learn how hard the Tory Party of that time fought against democracy in the interests of aristocracy. To do that would be to draw attention to his party's continuing determination, more than one hundred years later to oppose constitutional reforms that would make us more democratic: reforms proposed, once again, by the Liberal Party in its new guise as LibDems.

In those days girls like my mother were often still expected to 'go into service' looking after their betters. But a mere three years after the 1911 Act brought us the chance to make progress the ruling classes of Europe, Russia and Asia Minor, without consulting those they presumed to rule, embarked upon four years of very stupid and extremely bloody warfare. My family was lucky because my father's teenage brother survived losing a leg while as a gunner defending a merchant ship under surface attack from a submarine in 1917. He only survived, however, until, while recovering in hospital, he contracted Spanish influenza in 1919 when he died unrecorded on his hometown cenotaph.

My father was luckier because, despite also going to war in the Merchant Navy at the age of fourteen, training as a gunner, and managing to evade attacks by submarines, he happened to be relatively safe below deck during the 1917 Halifax Explosion. He was probably more at risk in the Second World War working on the Mersey docks, especially those in Bootle which, after the bombing, had 73% of its houses uninhabitable and only 7% of them undamaged, though little of this is highlighted in recorded national history. We might like to think that today we can grow up, go to school, work and live lives free of such threats. It is worth remembering, however, the continuing contribution of British governments, in alliance with its successor imperial power, to the infliction of such death and destruction upon the innocent civilians of other countries: inflicted, these days, by means of far more effective technology. Drones!

In 1914 votes for women and Irish Home Rule were postponed and only grudgingly granted after the First World War finished. I remember taking a class of girls (mostly Catholic Irish descendants) to the local history section of the William Brown Library in Liverpool to show them the electoral registers for the years before 1928. My father was recorded there but no sign of my mother because, when women were graciously granted the vote in 1918, their presumed immaturity meant that they had to wait until they were thirty years of age, and supposed by then to have acquired maturity equivalent to men of twenty one, before exercising their new right to participate in the process of electing those that ruled them. In 1928 they were allowed to vote at the same age as men; another illustration of how the forces of regressive conservatism only give in gradually and grudgingly if at all. It was not until the general election of 1950 that, thanks to Atlee's government, we had universal equal suffrage.

Yes we should care. Those who are greedy for privilege and greedy for money and who are in a position to acquire the power to satisfy all of that greed damage, distort and may destroy the society in which we live. The

unfair society that they promote works to stunt the potential of the rest to grow and be fulfilled. Maybe you have your own reasons for wishing to confront those with the power to damage, distort and destroy. Even if those reasons are not prompted by personal histories I suggest that we can no longer afford compromise and gradualness. A schooling and assessment system that distains proper politics, deserts democracy, insults intellect, eschews real education, suborns society and gets away with it will frack us.

I shall probably change the following

The coping model that is too often adopted in response to the pressure of social fracking is similar to that preferred by politicians and corporations who, instead of responding to climate change by reducing our exploitation of the natural resources of the earth, seek for cleverer and cleverer ways of doing just that in order to fulfil an apparently insatiable desire to live a life based upon extraction and further damaging climate change. The benefits of this will go to fewer and fewer people and prove, eventually to be self-defeating. What is being coped with is the demand and absolute need to break an addiction to satisfying greed at the expense of others and at the expense of the planet's capacity to sustain us.

As I write David Cameron is responding to criticism that the government has removed funding earmarked for all children to participate in a wide range of physical activities by emphasising the need for traditional competitive games. Schools have not stopped competitive events. What they did was to diversify activities to become more inclusive and involve more children on the basis of health, enjoyment and fulfilment. That is not how he wants resources to be distributed. His concentration upon competition will mean exclusion rather than inclusion. Have you ever not been picked for a team or played in one that lost all its matches? Like the climate change denying politicians and corporations his perspective is singular. He can only see the World in hierarchical and competitive terms: in the terms with which he is most familiar. For some reason the default preference of people who share his values always involves exclusion: the winners get the prizes and the (necessary) losers are compensated with character building as in exhortations to 'get on your bike and look for work'.

Overall conclusion and recommendations

I hope that what I have written can be seen to be more than the incoherent moralistic meanderings of an increasingly angry and anxious superannuated professional educator. I believe that Michael Gove and his co-conspirators, if unchecked and not countered, will cause such harm to society that it will exceed, for many years, our capacity to take effective remedial action.

It is easy to avoid awkward knowledge and understandable why people wish to believe that if they do not look at something that can hurt or disturb them they will escape harm and the problem of having to think. It is also easy to limit our engagement with awkward knowledge to simplistic, even simple minded, moaning and to understand why people stay within that limit.

Professional educators, however, must confront and engage with the awkward and the threatening. To do so is to play a part in preventing social fracking. And I believe that working to prevent social fracking must now be a publicly declared intention for professional educators.

Schools and teachers that engage in proper politics; operate democratically; think intellectually; believe in educational fulfilment for all; and model a fair society will do their bit to prevent politicians getting away with it. How might they do that? Before I finish writing I want to stimulate discussion of how they might begin the process.

Questions for critical conversations

Yet to be drafted

Notes, references and links

Yet to be drafted

Educators doing their bit

Abstract

Yet to be drafted.... So far what follows are merely a few notes

Main text

Engaging in proper politics

Operating democratically

Thinking intellectually

Fulfilling educationally

Modelling a fair society

Critiquing the essay

What follows has already appeared on this website but it seemed a good idea to add it here because stimulating critical professional conversation is a large part of my intention.

A critical professional conversation

If you wish to engage in further critical professional conversation based upon this discursion you might find what follows to be useful. It is

merely an aid to help structure and stimulate conversation and I suggest that you use it or adapt it or think of something that serves you better. It could possibly contribute to the establishment of some professional values. If you think that my tone in what follows is overly teachery I can only apologise.

1. Assertion

Try to pick out **three** instances where the text depends upon assertion alone and where no or inadequate evidence is provided in support. Be prepared to explain your selections to others. You might, for example, feel that a point being made can only be justified as opinion which you can take or leave; you might feel that the opinion is accompanied by a qualification which makes it more worthy of consideration; you might feel that the point being made can stand as a fact if it can be verified; you might feel that the point is not worth making and should have been left out; and you might feel that the point claims more than can be justified on the basis of the evidence presented to you.

You do not have to agree or disagree with the assertions. You might even strongly agree with them but still feel that evidence is lacking.

2. Agree/Disagree

Pick out **three** points in the text with which you most **strongly agree** and **three** with which you most **strongly disagree**. When doing this try to put aside consideration of the nature, strength and significance of any evidence provided in the text because this is not a direct question about that evidence: it is about relating what you have chosen to your own experience and values: what is it that makes you agree or disagree? Be prepared to explain your choices. That is where evidence will come in; evidence from your own professional life.

3. Balance and Fairness

Would you say that the text is balanced and fair? You may wish to narrow this down to where you think it is and where you think it is not and simply point out some examples. I am not suggesting that you write an essay and, in any case, who says that everything has to be balanced and fair? Again, be prepared to explain what you have decided but remember that revealing to others decisions about what you consider to be balanced and fair may bring your own values not only to the surface but also into question.

4. Style

Style does matter because it is part of how we say what we want to say. It can both please and irritate. It can both highlight and hide meaning. It can both provide insight and deceive. Possibly the worst thing that a style of writing can do is to confuse the reader. So can you find places where the style of this texts did not help you? I guess that metaphors, analogies, examples, illustrations, punctuation and juxtapositions may provide the greatest sources

of confusion and irritation. Can you identify a few places where a different form of expression might have helped? Can you provide better ones? Would the meaning change if the style of language changed?

You might also like to identify places where you feel that the style helped.

5. Histories, classifications, formulations and testing of theories

It can be very interesting to trace the history of theories and to place them in appropriate groupings. Doing this can help the sense-making process.

A way of thinking about theory and groups of theories is that they are relatively settled sets or expressions of understanding that can be tested. They can be based upon really thorough enquiry. They can also be based upon very poor enquiry. Remember that Sherlock Holmes was always reluctant to formulate a theory too early in his enquiries but when he was ready to do so the next thing he did was to test it. Hercule Poirot was no different. Despite the efforts of Captain Hastings and Inspector Japp to prise a theory or an early conclusion out of him he first accumulated all the evidence before constructing a theory that could be tested.

Sometimes we forget that besides the field of education there are other areas of study that have used similar theories, often much earlier. Systems theory is just one example. Theories do not necessarily only grow in one field.

Sometimes we refer to theory and theorists so frequently that we get involved in a spot-the-theory game, lose perspective and become unable to take a step forward. The phrase 'cannot see the wood for the trees' comes to mind.

Sometimes we use theory without realising it. The dodgy research basis for the 11-Plus examination is seldom referred to these days but the assumptions that accompanied it remain to haunt us.

Can you identify and classify theories used in the text? Can you identify areas where you think that *theorising* is taking place before sufficient enquiry has been carried out? And can you identify areas where you think it would be appropriate to construct and carry out a test of something said in the text?

Theories are not always made explicit and a body of literature is not always identified so these might not be easy tasks. I advise managing your time carefully here. Try to remember that digging into a text to discover a hidden theory is not the desired end: the initial and main purpose of this exercise is to take part in critical conversations. Discovering, articulating, contextualising and challenging theories is part of that.

But this is not a solitary activity: your conversation will allow others to express their knowledge and you may have the chance to engage in some systematic, collaborative enquiry about theory.

6. Political stance

Can you identify and classify political positions in the text? It may help to distinguish between *political* and *party political*. I take the word 'politics' to stand for the process by which groups come together in order to make decisions about values. Political parties are supposed to have already established general sets of values from which policies emerge; although sometimes the line from value to policy may be tortuous and even broken. The general value positions of parties may also be seen as perspectives from which they examine the World.

So, can you see general value positions in the text and can you see value positions that you regard as those of particular political parties?

Explaining what you believe that you have discovered is, yet again, essential.

7. Orthodoxies and assumptions

Professional life does not always encourage us to challenge orthodoxies and assumptions whether they come from politicians or theorists or have emerged from years of practice. An example of what I mean is that it has become so normal to differentiate by task that some teachers do not even know about differentiation by outcome any more. On a larger scale you might think that society has come to accept the privatisation of education and so it is seldom challenged. Can you identify any such orthodoxies and assumptions called into question in the text?

On the other hand, the text may also make assumptions and follow or propound orthodoxies; maybe without realising it.

8. Inconsistencies and contradictions

There are likely to be inconsistencies so can you identify inconsistencies within the text? In particular you may find that a point being strongly asserted in one part of a text is contradicted in another part. Sometimes authors do this deliberately in order to arrive at a synthesised or reconciled final position. But sometimes they do it because their minds are wandering. There may be advantages in following a wandering author exploring un-charted territory: it can stimulate thinking; and there may be disadvantages to reading a text that is exceedingly well designed and assembled: it can resemble a set text that has to be learned unquestioningly.

You are not being asked to judge and grade this text. I merely suggest that you use any inconsistencies and contradictions that you identify in order to further your critical conversations.

9. Developed Further

Is there anything in the text that you would like to have been developed further? You might also feel that you would like to research or enquire further into issues raised or points of interest in the texts. Again, be ready to explain.

Not sure what to do with the following. It is an old joke that still has something to say for today so maybe I shall try to find a way of keeping it in.

The edge of the abyss

From memory this was the title of the talk given by Paul Black when he came to the University of Liverpool to talk about National Curriculum assessment. It also provided him with a great joke to tell which I shall now adapt for present circumstances.

The education correspondent of a large newspaper, looking for material to back up a serious editorial on the impact of the policies of Michael Gove, visits a large secondary school at the start of the new school year. Sitting in the office of the headteacher, sharing a cup of coffee, the journalist opens the conversation with a seemingly simple, but long, question.

“So, tell me, how are you and your staff getting on? You had a lot to cope with last year, including missing your targets because the GCSE grades were altered unexpectedly, then there was the pressure to become an academy, the application to become a teaching school, the alteration of the satisfactory Ofsted grade to a ‘must do better’ one, the threat that you might be inspected with no prior notification, the possibility that national agreements on teachers’ pay could be scrapped, the forthcoming E-Bacc, the establishment of a ‘Free’ school nearby and I can see from the state of the building that you desperately need refurbishment. So, how are you and your staff coping with all this while trying to do your normal job of helping young people to learn?”

“Well”, said the headteacher, “I can tell you that last July, as the school year was ending, I and my staff stood on the edge of an abyss. But since then we have stepped forward confidently!”

Part of what follows has already appeared on this website but I had the ambition to say something, long or short, about most of the books I have been reading while writing. This will take some time to complete but at least I have made a start.

Approaching the reading of books

If asked to state briefly what I believe **politics** to be about I almost always respond that it is about the ***consensual arrival at values***. If asked to state

briefly the **central social value** at which I would prefer us to arrive I almost always say **fairness**. If asked to state briefly the **central educational value** at which I would prefer us to arrive I almost always say **fulfilment**.

Is that it then? Is there nothing more to be said? I have, after all, clearly stated that the values at which I wish the consensual process of politics to arrive when thinking about society and education are fairness and fulfilment; for me a very pleasing combination of beliefs. Surely, all I now need are the means of identifying and measuring them. If only. Each of my beliefs calls for explanation, exemplification, contextualisation, challenge and testing. I want to explore how I attempt this by the reading of particular books.

When I pick up a book that touches on politics, society or education these three beliefs usually provide my initial, loose conceptual framework or reference points for making critical sense of what I am reading; and, it is important to say, I try to use the books to make critical sense of my own beliefs. I propose, therefore, to use them to review some of the books I have read. That may help to provide some explanation, exemplification, contextualisation, challenge and testing. I hope that the results will be interesting. Exploration ought to be.

There are, of course, other factors that affect my approach to a book. While some books, even if written badly, are almost unputdownable others, no matter how hard I try or how worthy the subject, are, to me, almost unpickupable. So, in addition to my very sketchy conceptual framework I shall also bear in mind the categories of judgment provided by WH Auden. In his *A Certain World, A Commonplace Book* (1971) he said

As readers, we remain in the nursery stage so long as we cannot distinguish between taste and judgment, so long, that is, as the only possible verdicts that we can pass on a book are two: this I like; this I don't like.

For an adult reader, the possible verdicts are five: I can see that this is good and I like it; I can see that this is good but I don't like it; I can see that this is good and, though at present I don't like it, I believe that with perseverance I shall come to like it; I can see that this is trash but I like it; I can see that this is trash and I don't like it.

Just one more point to add to this preamble: if you are musical you may be familiar with the metronome, usually placed on top of a piano. This dispassionate mechanism can be set to tick to the tempo as set by the composer of a piece or part of a piece of music. Designed to help musicians keep to the beat it will not deviate. As a conceptual framework it is rigid. It does not change. Musicians, however, cannot suppress their humanity. The beats of their hearts vary. They have emotions and can relate what they are performing to other cultural references. By the time that they reach the end of a piece of music they may be well off the beat of the metronome and yet have pleased their listeners, satisfied themselves and fulfilled the intentions of the composer. I am sure that this applies even to people playing their own

compositions. So, to adapt the famous quotation of a great hero of Welsh rugby, Carwyn James, I intend to get my excuses in first and hope to convince you that where and whenever I deviate from anything that I have written so far it will have emerged from creative human nature. In other words, conceptual frameworks must sometimes be stretched in different places; even, at times, pulled almost out of shape or departed from when used to make critical sense of what people have written.

Book Number One

Ersatz politics and deviant governance

The Unfinished Revolution: How New Labour Changed British Politics For Ever by Philip Gould (2011)

The first edition of this book was published in 1998 as *The Unfinished Revolution: How the Modernisers Saved the Labour Party*. The 2011 edition, published by Abacus shortly before the author's death, has a foreword by Tony Blair and additional chapters bringing the story up-to-date. The publishers present Gould as a World leading political strategist and a key advisor to Tony Blair during his time as leader of the Labour Party and as prime minister. They are right on both counts.

I am surprised that I did not read this book until the second edition came out. I wonder what difference reading it earlier would have made to my review on these pages of Blair's own book; very little I suspect. But the significance attributed to the earlier edition by so many commentators on New Labour forces me to ask if the sense that I made of government and politics at the time lacked perspective because instead of reading Gould's book I only read about it. It may be natural to want to defend the shortcomings of your own research but I feel that reading the first edition when it was published would have done no more than provide me with a deeper and even more depressing understanding of the sheer intensity of New Labour's high powered drive to attain power without principles or, at best, poor ones. (Please note that, without altering my opinion on New Labour, I say something about the usefulness of an earlier reading of the book later on in this review).

Gould and Blair went together. The one was devoted to his task of preparing the way for the other to assume the mantle of the Messiah that he knew he was. To a far greater extent than any other leading member of the Labour Party at the time, Blair had what it took to cast off the restraints and commitments of old values and become the superhero who was able to transcend normal party beliefs and ascend to his sofa from which he could lead us to a future in which activity would be defined as progress, greed and privilege approved of and lots of people in far away lands hurt, dispossessed, tortured and killed.

Rafael Behr, reviewing Gould's book recently in *The Observer's New Review* asserted that it provides an antidote to the lazy assumption that the Blair Project was a cynical stealing of Conservative clothes. I agree with him. Reading *The Unfinished Revolution* has reinforced my belief that what some people, including me for quite a while, perceived to be cynicism was only ever sincerity. This is one of the tragedies revealed by the book. They really did believe in what they were doing. The clear water between them and the Conservative Party was not ideology: it was technical proficiency. New Labour was a brilliantly effective vote-winning machine driving hard and fast towards the creation of a society in which reaching for the top would be rewarded and celebrated. Yes, there was a sufficient residual socialist soul left in the party to offer scraps to those at the bottom. There was, however, no intention to challenge the right of the rich to become filthily so while lengthening their distance from the poor.

I see the book as the story of a would-be genuinely good person who felt that politicians should support people when they, in order to be fulfilled, aspire to have what more privileged people have. That, of course, meant becoming more privileged and moving further from those remaining in the places and positions they once occupied. Gould led a life of focus groups. He listened to people. He used what they were saying to bring politicians to an understanding of what they had to do to obtain their votes. This, he believed, would not only get Labour back into power but it would also be justified on the grounds that the Party was engaging with the concerns, anxieties, interests and wishes for fulfilment of ordinary people.

Right words, wrong values

You may think that this ought to satisfy my belief that politics is about the consensual arrival at values and the book does abound with all the right words, such as 'fairness' and 'values'. Can I complain if the policy-feeding values consensually arrived at by all of Gould's questioning, discussion and listening were not to my taste? I think I can because, notwithstanding the change of nomenclature, he purported to work on behalf of the Labour Party. Despite all of the differences within and shortcomings of that party over the years since its beginning and the rows, back stabbings and stitchings up celebrated and condemned in diaries and memoirs, it was never committed to: making the rich richer and the poor poorer; illegal invasion of other countries; the use of torture; the falsification of evidence; the diminishing of local democracy; and the perversion of the educational system so that it helped to fracture society. All of this was done in the name of 'modernisation': a word used constantly by both Blair and Gould who disparages Harold Wilson for failing to transform the Labour Party into the natural party of government. The Open University, the Girobank and the successful resistance to pressure from the USA to join them in the disgraceful Vietnamese war stand as achievements against which the actions of Blair can be seen as pathetic and pandering to the rich and powerful, including right-wing press barons making money by reducing political discourse to the peddling of prejudice.

The book is sprinkled with Hegel (not Marx) and stopping points for reflection on, for example, how the dialectic is progressing. I guess we all like to do a bit of intellectual flashing now and again; no real harm in it you might think. But after each pause like this the book quickly resumes its usual high pace and we are back into the minutiae of party politics, microscopically examining the flowering and the withering of personal political relationships. I have no doubt that this is one reason why Conservative politicians and political journalists have devoured this book. As well as revealing the low down on how Labour managed the change to New Labour Gould also provides textbook guidance on how to win elections (although I would argue that it was the Liberal Party of Liverpool that first showed the way from the late 60s onwards). It reads like a remarkable book by a remarkable, well-liked and well-intentioned good bloke.

Good intentions are not enough

But when the earnest energies of the good and well intentioned work to support delusional people such as Blair, even to the extent of supporting the invasion of Iraq at the time and, later, treating it as a mere mistake that can still be justified it makes me ask at what point would Gould have baulked. When would he have told Tony that he could no longer stomach the job of keeping him in power? The holidays with Berlusconi perhaps? Maybe the destruction of 'bog standard comprehensives' in favour of specialist schools, academies and proliferating faith schools? Extraordinary rendition? Guantanamo Bay? Bank deregulation and bankers' bonuses? Sucking up to The Sun? The list of baulking points is much longer than this. None of them caused him to quit or to question his purpose. I conclude that, for him, either votes were prioritised over values or the meanings of his values could be stretched to accommodate some appalling policies.

In my review of Blair's book I used the word *gadarene* to describe his style of leadership. I sense it in this book because I am sure that if at the outset of his work helping to create New Labour Gould had known to what it would all lead he might very well have walked away. He was caught up in a stampede of his own making and seemed not to notice the price being paid when socialist values were discarded in favour of some very nasty capitalist values, all, as ever, in the name of modernisation which seems to have become a sort of value in itself.

Gould also lived in a World of targets and delivery and focussed consultation. I never took part in one of his focus groups or knowingly met anyone who did. If his focus groups were anything remotely like the New Labour consultations in which colleagues and I took part then the target and delivery culture will not have allowed much space for difference and dissent (he claims it did). Certainly it is clear that Gould's work meshed with policy formation and implementation as perceived and practised by New Labour. He distilled what he heard from 'the people' and reported it to the select group of policy makers who formulated a target and expected delivery. Consultation with professionals was usually limited to how best to implement policy and reach the associated targets.

New ways of formulating policy and doing government

I wish he had carried out focus group sessions with schoolteachers in England who were participating in Postgraduate Professional Development (PPD). Every year for, if we include the predecessor programme, more than the entire life of New Labour in government teachers wrote between 180 million and 220 million words at masters and doctoral levels critically examining their professional experience in order to improve the learning of children. I am sure that not one minister taking part in the formation of education policy ever read any of those words. I am now kicking myself because as chair of the CPD Committee of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) at a crucial time, with a degree in politics under my belt, I made the huge mistake of believing that government might still, just about, sort of, function as it used to and that if we could gain the ear of a key civil servant, a minister or a Secretary of State we would open a channel for the voices of teachers engaged in accredited programmes. For a few favoured gurus, telling government what it wanted to hear, it remained true that access to those ears worked. What, however, we should have done was to arrange focus group sessions with Philip Gould. Instead we worked hard to establish a proper, formal means of reporting to government and so carried out required annual impact evaluation reporting that fed into the publicly established and known political system. We also spoke to civil servants, ministers and, once, a Secretary of State. But we had little effect on policy. I did not realise that Gould's focus groups were the preferred new starting points for the formation of policy and the results went straight to Blair's sofa. Even Secretaries of State became mere implementers with this approach to government. So, yes, maybe I ought to have read the book much earlier in its first edition.

Gould and New Labour made wholesale changes to the way that we did government without any formal announcement that they had done so. In the process they made many school and university textbooks on government and politics appear to be quaintly naïve and old-fashioned about matters such as the accountability of central government and the role and democratically derived powers of local government. It took me far too long to realise the anti democratic intent of New Labour. The words of those schoolteachers never registered because the Gould/Blair way of working bypassed the system that outsiders believed still operated. Gould was the self-appointed gatekeeper who took upon himself the task of distilling, summarising and presenting for consideration by policy makers the views of the people. I suppose you can get away with a lot if you call it modernisation.

He asserts that New Labour changed British politics forever. Rather than changing politics, which is a natural human activity difficult to prevent happening, I believe New Labour tried to pass off focus groups as politics. It gave us counterfeit politics. It certainly did change the way that we do government and so diminished representative democracy. Its effect upon society was to embed the anti social individualistic values of Thatcherism and prepare the way for a government dedicated to further stratifying the country. I can only hope that a few of Thomas Gray's 'Village Hampdens' will emerge to show us how to do better than this. Unfortunately, the modernisation card has

been played and now anyone attempting much needed democratic restoration and a return to real politics is in danger of being labelled backward leaning. We know that the books of both Blair and Gould have become compulsory reading for Tories whose leadership of a coalition government began work at a pace that even Thatcher and Blair took some years to work up to. If you diminish real political activity, substitute an imitation such as focus groups, introduce new meanings for old words such as fairness, fulfilment and progress and control the discourse you can carry out the business of governing at a much faster pace. This is what many of today's politicians want. Maybe it is what we expect. I don't believe it is what we need.

Blair chips in

In his foreword to Gould's book Tony Blair gives readers fifteen pages of his governance credo, thereby making explicit the links between the work of Gould and the New Labour approach to government, politics and society. Blair believes that politics is about choice.

'That', he says, 'is the true story behind *The Unfinished Revolution*. We made the choices to obtain power, we made the choices in power. In doing so we contributed, in ways large and small, to progress.'

I am afraid that right now I lack the energy and the will to engage in much more discussion of Blair's approach to government, politics and, that forgotten word, socialism; or with his strange notion of 'progress'. I find the entire New Labour project to have been dispiriting, depressing and enervating. To employ one of Auden's classifications, what Gould and Blair have written is trash and I do not like it; but enough from me on this for now. If you wish to explore further you might find it useful to look at and engage with the views of Geoff Mulgan, former Director of Policy at 10, Downing Street and also Director of the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit and Michael Barber, former Director of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and now Chief Education Officer of Pearson, the World's largest education business. They both continue to flog the New Labour model to the gullible around the World. In fact they are more New Labour than Blair who, despite his assertion to the contrary in his own book, was not really a detail person, became impatient very easily and relied upon his silver tongue and charisma to win arguments. He also felt uncomfortable with people who failed to fall for the rhetoric. Blair was the leader, Mulgan and Barber the managers and Gould the strategist. Perhaps we should also find places for Andrew Adonis as the visionary and Peter Mandelson as the fixer. I guess that taken together their writings, pronouncements and actions form the New Labour intellectual cannon: a very destructive instrument.

A judgment

Auden needed another category for this book. Something like,

'It may look good but it is really bad and I cannot like it because it promoted and celebrated the substitution of counterfeit government and politics for genuine government and politics and propelled us down the

road to a life in which fulfilment comes to a few by means that are unfair to others.'

Cliff Jones December 31, 2011

To read *From Illusion to Delusion*, my review of Tony Blair's *A Journey* [click here](#). *Or shall I simply add it in?*

Book Number Two

Anglo-Saxon Hubris and Hypocrisy from the USA

Why Nations Fail, the origins of power, prosperity and poverty by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson (2012), published by Profile Books

Just look at that title: **Why Nations Fail**. How full of value judgment it is. How portentous. How pretentious. It suggests that we are about to read a great and defining work. And the book is not small: almost five hundred pages. Before we get to the title page there are fourteen fulsome endorsements from Nobel Prize winners, assorted professors, including one from Michael Gove's favourite historian, Niall Ferguson. Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History*, also adds his praise. The authors occupy, respectively, named professorships at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology where Acemoglu specialises in economics and the University of Harvard where Robinson specialises in government.

Faced with all of this academic and intellectual firepower readers are invited to form a favourable opinion before even getting to the preface. How, you are expected to think, could I possibly find any of what follows inaccurate, perverse, misleading and simply wrong? Very soon, however, confidence returns. It is a very dangerous book. It tells a tale of history that will comfort all those that believe that the Anglo-Saxon way of doing government and economics is best. I think that it is best to proceed by listing a series of irritants.

First irritant

Knowingly misleading your readers is a cardinal academic sin. A reader without any specific knowledge of British history would learn from the authors that the Romans invaded, ruled and, after approximately four hundred years, left England. How clever of them to do all of this hundreds of years before there was an England. The UK language that inherited from the Romans and still uses the Latin words for window, bridge, school, danger etc. and that largely counts in Latin is what we now call Welsh. And the word 'welsh' is

derived from old German. It means 'foreigner' and was used by the Anglo-Saxon invaders to describe the indigenous population. Very insulting behaviour from people invading another country!

It is simply wrong to falsify history. In this case, however, it also reinforces belief that Anglo-Saxon perspectives are the only ones that count and that other people and cultures can be disrespected and brushed aside. One wonders if this sloppy approach to academic writing might be replicated in other parts of the book where a reader might not have specific knowledge to challenge it.

Second irritant

The authors also give us arguments resting upon misleading and miss-used definitions. There is, for example, more than one way of defining a colony and the process of colonisation. It is misleading to mix the definitions. All of the American countries have been colonised by Europeans at the expense of indigenous populations. The people doing the colonising have usually been subject, at least for a while, to the direct or indirect control of what is often known as a 'mother country'. Colonists often perceive the ending of that control as the end of 'the colonial period'. Afterwards they see themselves as fully-fledged self-governing members of a group of nation states. In other words, they consign the word 'colony' to history and with it, they hope, the guilt of genocide, land theft, broken treaties, exploitation and enslavement. Unfortunately, in many cases these crimes continued, even continue, to be committed despite much reference to 'doing God's work' and to 'bringing civilisation to the savages'. I believe that the authors of this book have no sense of themselves as colonists. Far more colonising was carried out by the USA after independence than it was before. It continues today.

Another way of misunderstanding the term colony is to assume that simply because, for example, Britain administered a place via its Colonial Office it must have been a colony. Iraq was administered through the Colonial Office but there was absolutely no way in which it was colonised by Britain. Australia, part of what is now the USA, Canada, New Zealand, part of South and Central Africa and a few other places were colonised by Britain. West Africa and the Indian sub-continent were not. Becoming part of an empire ought not to imply automatic colonisation. And yet in attempting to promote their idea that....imperialism is not the same as colonialism.

This is not an unusual US choice of definition because it allows people of that country to pretend to themselves that they are not a huge colonial and imperial power.

Third irritant

At this point I am beginning to wonder why I am bothering with this book at all.

The book is based upon particular assumptions and values and upon a narrow perspective. The authors contrast extractive governments (bad) with inclusive governments (good). To be extractive is.... to be inclusive is.... For those with an Anglo-Saxon World view the thesis is pleasant, reassuring and plausible. They look at other explanations for what they have decided must be classed as failure....and then move on to show how small differences between institutions can make a difference. We get interesting little stories to illustrate the argument. One such is.....

Had Acemoglu and Robinson, however, taken a global perspective they just might have noticed that the biggest extractive power on the planet is and has for a long time been the USA. In many ways it is the ruler of the planet.....consent...fulfilment and fairness....all the devils are here... the institutions that they regard as inclusive operate, even within the USA, as negative forces...anti social forces....

Failure??? Set against what values, whose values? If professors in the USA believe their country to be inclusive and successful according to its own values and perspective then we must ask what labels the USA might be forced to wear when its behaviour is examined according to other values and perspectives.

Becoming what the authors regard as a successful country requires exploitation. Once again we are looking at a story in which fulfilment for a few is achieved by being unfair to the many.

No more. They do not deserve the publicity. Back to Auden, this is a bad book and I do not like it and even if I persevered with the review I would not change my mind. Though I shall have to tidy up what I have written.

Book Number Three

The Diary of an Apparatchik

THE NEW MACHIAVELLI

How to Wield Power

In the

Modern World

By Jonathan Powell (2011 published by Vantage Books)

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

To borrow from Auden's classifications, this is a seriously bad book because the author purports to be a member of the Labour Party, a republican and an atheist. He maintains all of these positions, each one of which suggests a certain degree of philosophical commitment, as though they have had their essence sucked from them. As a socialist smoker he chooses Silk Cut Extra Mild: no Capstain Full Strength for him; and he does not inhale.

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

And, and, and, at long last, I have discovered who came up with the slogan 'Education, education, education'. He did! Imagine that, thinking up a slogan for your boss that claimed to summarise the priorities of an entire government: a post-Thatcher government (as we hoped in 1997): a slogan that has been and shall be quoted for years: a slogan that gave us lots and lots of activity but ersatz education. While professional educators had to deal with initiatives like batsmen facing several fast bowlers at once schools, colleges and universities were forced to adopt the commercial values of the market place.

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

Overall, Jonathan Powell has given us both a good read and an insight into what it took to routinise the charisma of Tony Blair; but, alas, here is yet more evidence of New Labour's unwillingness to raise a discourse of equality and fairness. He does not even give us a socialist nicotine patch.