

**BIG  
FLAME**



**THE  
CRISIS  
IN  
EDUCATION**

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## Summary

The writers of this pamphlet are all teachers - science, language, english and general studies teachers in secondary schools and F.E.. The purpose of the pamphlet is to relate to issues beyond teaching - to reach young people, parents, trade unionists and we try to touch on the experience of black people as well. We are well aware of our limitations when it comes to discussing such wide-ranging issues, but we hope that we have made some contribution to the understanding of the educational crisis.

The main thesis of section one is to show that the crisis in education is nothing new and it is not primarily due to governmental spending cuts. We show how education is being restructured to meet the needs of a re-structured economy. An economy which increasingly relies on a de-skilled labour force in the factories, and a proletarianised white collar labour force in the schools, hospitals, offices, etc. So the educational system is being re-structured to make it more efficient and productive; to churn out machine minders with the rudiments of literacy and numeracy, and to churn out white collar workers with specialised, preferably technical knowledge and with the minimum of critical, general education. We show how progressive educational ideas cannot deal with these factors.

In Section two we briefly discuss how this crisis is affecting teachers, pupils and parents. In Section three we discuss the principles of socialist education and how we should organise for change. We give our answers to the questions raised in the so-called "Great Debate", showing how the real issues of re-structuring are being disguised. The basic principle of our proposals for the political work of teachers is that we have to go beyond the straightforward trade union issues of wages and conditions. We must deal with educational issues as well: in particular the question socialist curricula and teaching methods. We must take these questions outside the classroom, to involve parents, youth and other workers in the fight for a socialist educational system.

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Big Flame Teachers Commission  
217, Wavertree Road,  
Liverpool, 7.  
Tel: 051-263-1350

# Introduction

The massive cutbacks in educational expenditure have thrown the educational world into a state of disarray. Activists and teachers' organisations have made "Fight The Cuts" the battle cry and the focus for their solutions to the educational crisis. Meanwhile many teachers, and pupils, remain passive and 'apathetic'. A partial explanation of this paradox is that the opposition to the cuts has a very narrow focus, and it often carries the implication that all would be solved if we had 'more education'. But, in our view, the crisis did not start with the cuts. Everyday our schools have been producing more anger, disillusionment and frustration among teachers, parents and pupils. Each of these groups has their own special worries:

- The teacher
- \* Trying to keep order in bigger classes with less resources,
  - \* Trying to convince yourself that you are doing a useful job when few are listening,
  - \* Feeling dissatisfied with the end result and hampered by the school hierarchy; frustrated that you would be financially rewarded for moving out of the classroom and into administration,
- The pupil
- \* Wondering what is the point of learning when most of the jobs have little of no skill - and when there might be no job at all,
  - \* Hating the futility of the academic rat race, scrambling for qualifications which you know are necessary to reach the next step in a ladder you're not even sure you want to be on,
- The parent
- \* Worrying whether the kids are going to the 'right' school, learning the things they need,
  - \* Coping with the rumours of increase in school violence, illiteracy and lack of discipline,
  - \* Finding the ever increasing amounts of cash for school dinners, trips and uniform.

Clearly, different groups of teachers, pupils and parents will have different worries. The position for primary school teachers is different from secondary and different again from further education teachers. Among pupils, boys and girls, blacks and whites will have different problems. For parents, the crisis has a different meaning according to their class and race.

The writers of this pamphlet cannot hope to be completely accurate in characterising all these points of view. We are simply trying to suggest the **overall** position in education.

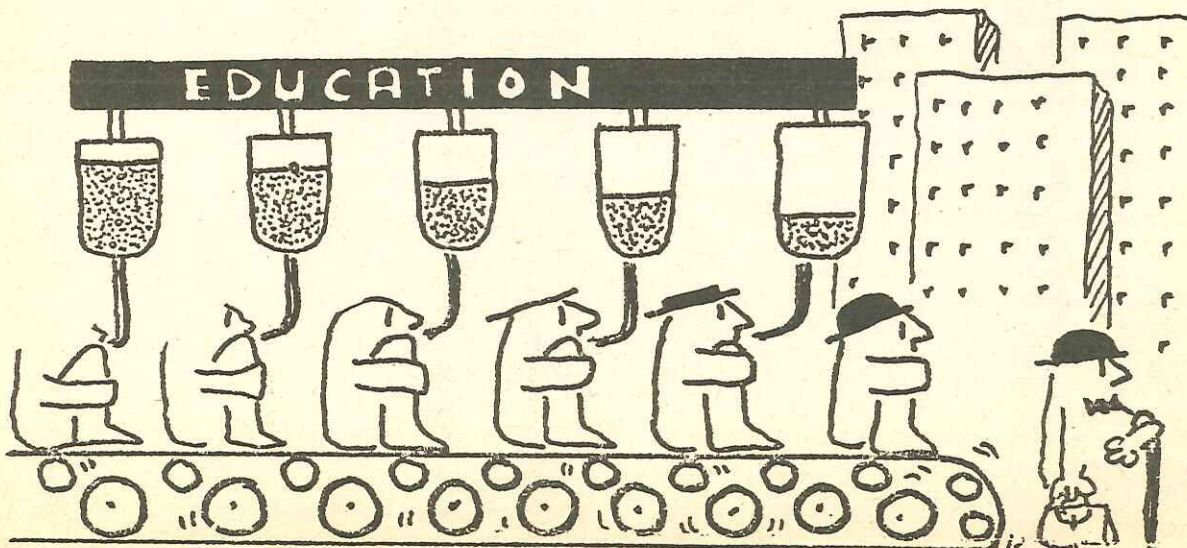
Questions of what kind of knowledge, skills, and discipline are appropriate, and how the changes can be implemented when millions are being cut off educational spending are central to the crisis. Ever more strident voices from politicians and pundits (like the Black Paper Brigade) are using the crisis to win support for an authoritarian solution - an end to 'experiments' and a return to traditional schools and methods.

We don't believe that the crisis is a product of the failure of radical changes and new ideas (which have only been applied a few schools anyway). The crisis in education is not just about the present cuts in expenditure - it has been brewing for years and has its roots in the changes in the economic structure of the country.

The crisis is a reflection of a hidden conflict. On the one hand we have the needs of students, teachers and parents for an education system that gives everyone an opportunity to develop their talents and knowledge so that they can get interesting and rewarding jobs. On the other hand we have the reality of a society and schooling that can only provide the type of education that few people want or find interesting and which leads to jobs many do not want to do.

We are not saying that there is a conspiracy willingly entered into by Teachers, Headmasters and H. M. Inspectors, rather that what they do is distorted and constrained by specific influences which we hope to identify. **For the crisis is not one of education but education in a capitalist society.**

Throughout this section we contrast the definition of an "education" which would meet the needs of parents, students and teachers with the reality of education in a capitalist society which we would rather call "schooling" or "training". We don't think that a capitalist society can meet the educational needs of its members. This is the crisis and we want to show why it arises and what's to be done about it.



# SECTION 1: THE ROOTS OF THE CRISIS

Since the end of the last war education has had a crucial role to play in the development of capitalist society. Working people came out of the war heroes in the struggle for a "free world", and were ready to struggle for a better life for themselves. They were sick of the conditions of their lives and the huge vote for the Labour Party in 1945 was a warning to politicians that there was no going back to the 1930's conditions of mass unemployment, low wages and no hope of change. But it was not simply a warning about the past, it was a demand for something better. This demand couldn't be measured simply by increases in the standard of living, ending mass unemployment or even the hard fought for creation of a welfare state and national health service.

To satisfy people there had to be a promise for the future and this meant education. To be more precise it meant the 1944 Act. This provided for universal state secondary education for all, raised the school leaving age, got rid of fees in the state sector and raised the slogan of equality of opportunity. These changes met the strong aspirations alive at the time and were meant to indicate to the working class that a better life was going to be possible for this generation and the next. As the arch-reactionary Quintin Hogg recognised then: "If you don't give the people reforms, they'll give you revolution".

As with most reforms, they were not aimed at basic change in the system. Instead, alongside other changes in economic and social sectors, they were intended to strengthen the system by replacing outworn structures and rebuilding peoples' faith in a dying system. The more far-sighted politicians and thinkers of the system, like Beveridge and Keynes, realised that if the system was to survive it could not do so by repressing peoples needs through wage cuts, unemployment and austerity measures as in the thirties. Given the wave of radicalisation during and after the war, the ruling class had to channel the struggles and needs of the mass of people back into these restructured institutions or the system would break. The aim was to simultaneously increase the power and control of the existing ruling forces, while giving the working class the illusion that the changes were working in their favour. This was no grand ruling class conspiracy. The reforms were introduced because the working class demanded them and they have been of undoubted immediate value to working people and their children. The point is that although these working class demands have benefited all sections of society, in the long run the resulting reforms have strengthened the ruling class.

Economically, this strategy entailed high wages and low unemployment. But equally important changes occurred with the development of the welfare state. All aspects of social life were reformed. As well as free education, the post war years saw the introduction of the National Health Service, the extension of social work and probation agencies and a comprehensive system of unemployment and family welfare payments.

While these reforms did improve social conditions and they did increase aspirations and confidence among the working

class, ultimately their effect was to extend the control of capital over all aspects of our lives. It is important to see education as just part of this process, and a non-educational example emphasises this point. In the propaganda of the time, family allowances were introduced to "alleviate poverty". In fact, they were actually used to encourage women to concentrate on child rearing rather than to go out to work. The underlying aim of this is to make sure that the family is a stable unit of **consumption and reproduction. The same analysis holds for the education, health and welfare services – while working people were encouraged to think that these were "our institutions", in fact the ruling class were gaining further control over social life, and were therefore able to subordinate social life to the needs of the economy.**

## THE PART EDUCATION PLAYED

The changes made in education clearly indicate these processes. The pre-war lack of unified state education system had resulted in a failure to develop the technical skills, selection processes and ideas necessary to help re-industrialise the ailing capitalist economy. Instead higher education was a series of ivory towers producing 'whole men' who could drive trams badly during General Strikes and understand Greek myths, but little else – while secondary education was not geared to producing an adaptable manual and white collar labour force. In the 1930's Keynes suggested raising the school leaving age and providing for widespread day release, but was ignored by the political and industrial establishment.

The aim therefore of the 1944 Act and later post-war reforms (Percy Committee, Newson and Crowther Reports, Plowden, Schools Council etc.) was to create a new ruling and managerial grouping alongside a more flexible work force educated in the 'right' ideas – adapted to the needs of modern industry.

Later we go into the way education was geared to a changing structure of the workforce – where jobs which once required skills are done by unskilled workers, and where white collar jobs become more like traditional working class jobs. (Processes we refer to as de-skilling and proletarianisation). Here we are looking at the way in which education is part of **social planning**. Grammar schools put forward social ideas appropriate for the future managers and civil servants; secondary moderns for the future workers. Liberal Studies was explicitly designed to socialise apprentices;

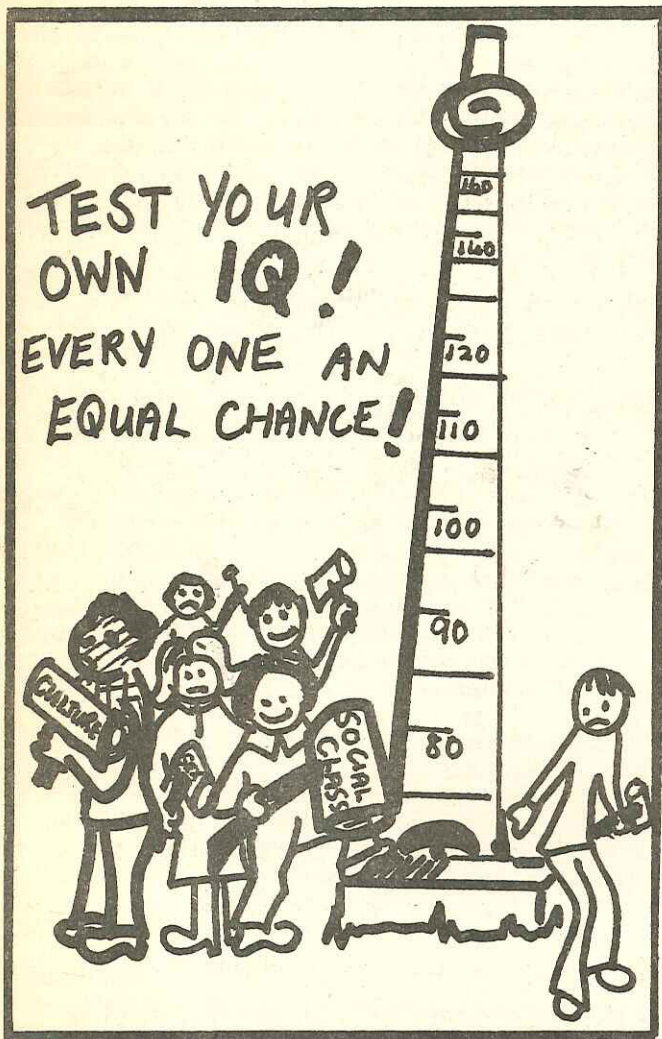
"to help young workers to be good and successful citizens and consumers and to help them form standards of moral values by which they can live".

("General Studies in Technical Colleges"  
Government Report.)

It was openly argued that Liberal Studies should counter the influences of working class family life and of communists in the trade unions. It is interesting to note that since Liberal Studies has tended to be taught by leftists it has not succeeded in making "Good citizens"

of its students. As a result the Technical Education Council, in consultation with employers, have drawn up General Studies syllabuses with little or no critical content.

## EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY



These post-war reforms had a profound influence on the attitudes of parents, teachers and pupils towards education. The changes in attitudes were a product of the rise of the **ideology** of the equality of educational opportunity that so powerfully accompanied structural change. Formal civic and political 'equality' in the voting process was no longer enough to convince people. They knew that the social classes had very different conditions of life. **Equality of educational opportunity posed the schools as the means of working class advance**, specifically the promise that their kids would have a real chance in the future.

In fact, the new structure of Grammar, Technical Grammar and Secondary Modern was a mirror image of the class structure: and the eleven plus exam, implied an idea of intelligence, fixed and measurable, which clearly discriminated against working class children. But the ideology that everyone had an equal chance of getting to the best schools took root.

From that point onwards the ideology of equality of opportunity has been a double-edged sword. Positively it has raised aspirations, challenged assumptions and provided a useful yardstick in judging how far educational reforms have effected the chances and performance of working class children. Negatively it has tended to **individualise** and **de-politicise** the educational process and its relationship to the class structure. The effect has been that a

lot of people blame themselves for not having a good job — they think that it's because they are 'thick'. The fact that schools discriminate against the working class and that the best jobs are often only available for the middle and upper classes, is disguised. Instead many working class parents see education as a means to success for their child, and they think in terms of individual solution for their lack of money and status.

This is precisely the idea that schooling as it stands, encourages. Success is presented as depending solely on individual talent, ability is presented as a natural order, doing well in exams and streaming as a reflection of the hierarchy of talent; failure as an individual defect. Many working class parents believed in the possibility that, through the educational system, their **individual** child would have an equal opportunity to succeed in this society. The effect was that this lessened their ability to view education as a class and push for **collective** solutions and changes. These parents could feel a sense of identification with the schools even if deferential attitudes towards teachers and cultural gaps prevented any real interaction and control. (Examples of such 'deferential attitudes' include the idea "Teacher knows best" or dressing up in your best clothes for parent-teacher evenings.) A minority of parents would be interested in Parent Teacher Associations, but these are almost invariably social clubs and have little to do with parent 'control' anyway. Part of this identification with the schools entailed what was often a real 'sacrifice'. For example parents were prepared to scrimp and save for uniforms and equipment. They swallowed their own frustrations and pinned their hopes on the future success of their children. Even though success was rare, the few in every community who do 'make good' serve to underline the possibilities if you are 'bright'.

That's right, I saw the headmaster, and I said: 'We've got this form with all these schools down, and we don't know anything about any of them'. 'Well', said the headmaster, 'what's his father's job?' 'He's a lorry driver.' 'Well, then you'd better be sending him to Mill Cross.' 'Mill Cross? Why, is that the best school?' 'No, it's not, but it's the best school for you.' 'How do you mean, it's the best school for me? Where would you send your lad?' 'Oh, I'd send my lad to Marburton College.'

Education and the Working Class.

Of course for many working class parents particularly in the traditional poorer communities, schools and education remained part of an alien, hostile world, where they just 'knew' that their kids didn't stand much of a chance. And they were right. So they continued to show hostility or indifference to the schools and would not 'interfere' as long as their kids were surviving, not 'getting messed about' and learning necessary, basic skills. These attitudes were often condemned by educationalists as not 'positive' and not taking enough interest in the child's progress. But it must be realised that the attitudes were based on real conditions and experiences, involving in many ways a realistic grasp of education and the class structure. In many cases it is not a lack of aspiration for the kids, but realistically lower expectations, combined with a lack of the understanding and necessary power to manipulate the child's progress in school that other middle class parents had. For these parents equality of opportunity had a slightly different meaning. It meant equal treatment and ensuring that the kids had the chance to do what they want, rather than simply 'getting on'. That's why there have been many battles, some publicised, some not, between working class parents and schools over victimisation and harassment of kids. The most recent example being the dispute in Newcastle where parents complained that kids from a Council Estate were getting worse treatment than those from middle class homes and were being picked on.

# The crisis develops

Equality of educational opportunity was always a lie in practical terms. Endless educational studies have shown that social mobility through education is fairly small. Although 60% of Britain's working population are manual workers only 28% of university intake comes from these homes and this figure has remained almost static since the second world war. Similarly studies show that the number of working class children reaching 'top jobs' in politics, administration and business is not improving. A middle class boy from Cardiganshire has 180 times more chance of going to university than a working class girl from West Ham. (Brian Simon in an address to a Conference for the Advancement of State Education.) No-one can argue that this boy was born with 180 times greater intelligence than the girl.

No - the educational changes made have not significantly altered the objective function education plays in a capitalist society - to reproduce the division of labour in the class structure; to ensure that through the selection and socialisation processes the 'right' people are put into their relatively predetermined slots.

**"There's got to be a certain amount of people who work in a factory, who are just going to be satisfied with what you tell them. If you had all the brainy people in a factory who could think for themselves, they'd take over the factory and run it. All they want is for you to listen to them and do as you're told. When a bell goes you jump and when a line forms up, you line up. You know what to do, you know where to go and what you're expected to do. It's like a kindergarten for Rowntrees.**

**I remember the teacher saying that the majority of girls would end up at Rowntrees. It might be true, but you've got dreams at 14/15 and you think you're grown up because you're leaving school. Then you find yourself in the factory at Rowntrees and the whole process with bells and rules starts all over again. In Rowntrees we even had an overlooker who sat at a big desk in the middle of the room, watching us all the time. I can only remember one girl in my class who did anything decent and she ended up doing nursing. Everyone else ended up in a shop or factory. In this society you are branded from the day you are born and at school you are told what you are worth.**

**(That was a quote from a woman working in Rowntrees Chocolate factory - and was taken from Rank and File.)**

This operates not only through the conventional processes of streaming, exams and competition, but also through the hierarchical relationships between teacher and pupils.

Early on kids learn that teachers have power, and to get on you have to please the teacher and take orders. They learn that they are being 'disobedient' if they question this authority. They are inadequate individuals who can never be given power over others. It is not surprising that many kids spend their lives devising ways to adapt, get round and destroy 'the rules of the game'. The pupils' experience of powerlessness prepares them for life in the factory, office or shop.

Many educationalists also see the function of education just like the Rowntree's worker quoted. The character of the education given both in the ideas taught and the process of schooling are heavily influenced by the economic function. To reproduce the class structure is necessary for schooling to impress upon pupils their 'place' and worth in the division of labour. Rhodes Boyson, ex-head - master and now Tory M.P., talking to a conference of school masters in 1974 said, "A return of discipline would only happen when teachers and heads again knew what their schools were for - the 3R's, the passing on of our culture, preparation for outside work. . ." As we shall see later it is precisely a decline in the certainty of what school is for that is at the root of the educational crisis. But the very organisation of the school teaches kids that they have a particular place and that they have to obey the rules of the school.

## CHANGES IN THE CLASS STRUCTURE AND THE EFFECT ON SCHOOLING

There has been limited change in who gets what job - but the economic function of education remains the same. Some working class kids now get into white collar jobs, some through higher and further education. These changes have come about because nowadays the economy requires less workers in manufacturing and more white collar and service sector workers (civil servants, hospital and office workers). **But these jobs are not the white collar jobs of old.** They are not privileged, but usually routine, not very well paid and increasingly based on factory type work methods. **In short they are proletarianised white collar labour.**

These jobs of course require qualifications, usually a number of 'O' levels or similar technical equivalents. This does not reflect the actual skill and responsibility involved in the jobs, but rather the absurd escalation of qualifications that has followed the changes in occupations. These changes have not been lost on pupils or their parents. There is less and less the feeling that entry into such jobs means a real 'going up in the world'.

In fact, office work is often unfavourably compared with manual work and there is evidence of a degree of mobility of the young between factory and office jobs in search of higher wages. Inevitably education as the magic ladder to another world has declined in credibility. Even further up the 'ladder' entry into higher white collar jobs through higher education is regarded with less than complete enthusiasm by students. For the social and technical jobs of teachers, social workers, technicians, scientific workers etc are taking on the characteristics of mass occupations, undergoing a gradual proletarianisation. The resulting radical attitudes and ambivalence about getting jobs sometimes confuses parents, who have often made real sacrifices for what they think of as 'upward' social mobility.

For the rest of the mass of kids in schools, a similar change in the relationship between occupational structure

**"It's interesting comparing the kind of office workers we have here in Sheffield with the ones we had in London. In London, factory job wages are high and are regarded as respectable, so the Tax Office could only recruit people who couldn't get factory jobs. We had young people who could hardly write. But in Sheffield there's still the feeling that office work is clean and secure compared to the steel mills or the pits, so we get people with lots of 'O' levels queuing for jobs. Usually they're too well qualified, but we take them and they do the same work as the London people, only more efficiently."**

**A Tax Officer.**

and education has also been creating problems. The number of apprenticeships is in sharp decline and there has been a reduction in available skilled jobs, whilst the jobs that are left are increasingly being de-skilled. In other words, jobs which used to require a skilled training are increasingly being done by unskilled workers using new machinery. The de-skilling of work goes along with mechanisation, assembly processes, standardisation and semi-automation in production.

The increasing division of labour on the assembly line has removed the need for highly trained and experienced workers, and this process is likely to continue with even the traditional skills of tool setting being replaced by computer aided machines. One third of school leavers go into such dead-end unskilled jobs every year, accompanied by the thousands going straight onto a never ending dole queue. (There were 210,000 unemployed school leavers in August 1976. There are still 40,000 unemployed in February 1977. There will be 550,000 school leavers looking for work this summer. (Sunday Times 14. 3. 77).

At the same time, we have a paradoxical set of standards about qualifications. Fords in Liverpool have an unofficial rule which says that no-one with any 'O' levels is given a job on the shop floor. An official has said that anyone with 'education' would either leave the job immediately or rebel in reaction to the stress of the work.

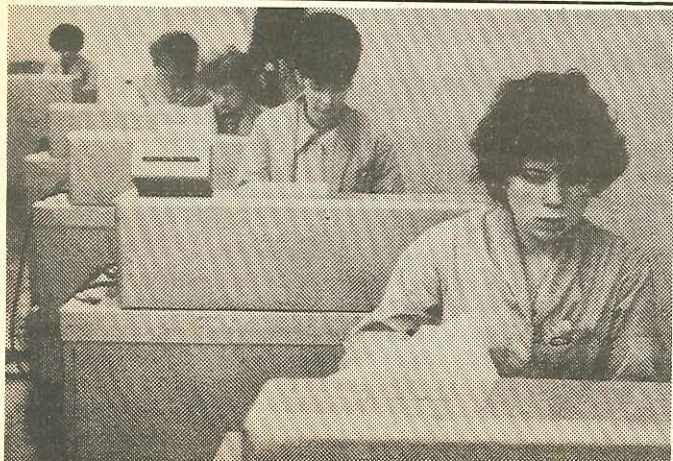
"When I started work at the DHSS I was given a book of cheques. All I did day in and day out was sign them. I needed 'O' levels for this job, but anyone who could write their name could do it. I'm bored stiff - but my parents are proud that I work in an office."

a member of the Croydon and Brixton Collective, the Black People's Organisation.

But along with this proletarianisation and de-skilling, the mania for qualifications grows. Between 1971 and 1975 the proportion of children leaving schools with qualifications leapt from 55% to 80% - and this is hailed as "a great leap forward" (Guardian 11. 8. 76). The reasons for this are simple, and have nothing to do with the old liberal ideas about education. Teachers find that their status is enhanced if their pupils pass exams. The same goes for most parents. More important, employers objected when youths left the old secondary modern schools without any 'qualifications'. Employers said they didn't know what job applicants were suitable for! Thus the interests of influential parents, teachers and employers coincided in the demand for exams and paper qualifications, despite the fact that these qualifications are irrelevant to the labour market.

The Clerk. (from R. Fraser ed. Work, Penguin 1968)

"The jobs being done by all of us on the floor were identical. We had a pile of stores vouchers, a register which tallied with the vouchers. You had to find the corresponding number, tick a space, turn the voucher from a pile on your right to one on your left. No talking, no contact, nothing - unless you counted the trips to the bogs."



"I stand in one spot about 2 or 3 feet area all night; the only time a person stops is when the line stops. We do about 32 jobs per car per unit, forty eight units as hour, eight hours a day. 32 x 48 x 8, figure it out, that's how many times I push that button." Spot welder, Car assembly plant.

"Complicated new machinery doesn't make the worker's job any more rewarding: the effect is the opposite, less rather than more skill is required. As machines grow more complex so they become more self-reliant. They need less looking after; and they get it."

"You don't achieve anything here, a robot could do it. The line here is made for morons. It doesn't need any thought. They tell you that. "We don't pay you for thinking", they say. Everyone comes to realise that they're not doing a worthwhile job. It's bad when you know that you're just a little cog." Huw Benyon - Working for Ford p. 115.

#### SOME FACTS AND FIGURES ON DE-SKILLING AND PROLETARIANISATION

##### 1. Number of Skilled Manual workers (male) in Great Britain

1961	5,086,480	i.e. Decline over ten years in number of skilled jobs :- over half a million
1971	4,567,780	

source: Census (the figure for skilled workers is the number given for socio-economic group 9)

##### 2. Skilled manual workers as % of Total Working Population.

1911	30.6%
1931	26.7%
1951	24.9%
1971	22.0%

source: M. Barratt Brown from Labourism to Socialism (Spokesman Books 1972) p. 18 and Census, 1971.

##### 3. Skill composition of Workforce in Engineering, Metal and Manufacturing.

In Iron and Steel, where over 100,000 jobs have been lost in the last 15 years, over half those jobs have been skilled. Whereas in 1961, about 47% of workers in metal manufacturing were classed as skilled, this figure had dropped to 42% in 1971

In Engineering, the traditional home of the skilled craftsman, the percentage of skilled workers in the industry has declined from 44% to 40% between 1961 and 1971, for men. Taking both men and women, by 1975, the % of workers in skilled manual jobs in the industry was down to just 25%.

Sources: Census, 1961 and 1971; Employment Gazette July, 1976

**The situation of Women and Office Workers.**

Whereas some 30% of all male workers had skilled manual jobs in 1971, only 6% of women were in this category.

It will be argued, that this has been compensated for by the rise of new jobs in offices, shops etc. But even using the census figures (whose definition of "skill" especially as regards non-manual jobs is open to a lot of questions), it is possible to identify some important elements of proletarianisation. Firstly, there is the large % of women in what are called "junior non-manual" jobs. (As opposed to intermediate and higher grade jobs). Nearly 40% of all women workers in 1971 were in "junior non-manual" jobs, that is jobs right at the bottom end of so-called white-collar work.

And even within this category, there is a growing proportion of jobs classed as "semi-skilled", both for men and women. For instance, in the "Miscellaneous Services" Sector (which covers such industries as hairdressing, cinemas, hotels, laundries etc) 35% of men's and some 12% of women's jobs were classed as semi-skilled. There are countless other jobs whose skill content has been drastically reduced by automation and various new office work systems. The work done by Harry Braverman on his for the United States (Labour and Monopoly Capital) has yet to be matched by a similarly comprehensive study for Britain.

But proletarianisation is also to do with money. The fact that average earnings for non-manual employees continue to keep ahead of those for manual workers masks the great differences in earnings within these categories. The bulk of so-called "white collar" employees have seen a relative decline in their earnings compared with manual workers in manufacturing industry. For example, in 1970 no less than 35% of male non-manual workers in distribution services earned less than £20 in 1970, and 54% of women earned less £12 (!); and in miscellaneous services the figures were 20% and 31% respectively. This compares with figures for manufacturing as a whole of 7.4% of non-manual and 13.7% manual male workers on under £20, and 30.4% manual and 20.9% non-manual women workers on less than £12. Looking at some more up to date figures :- in engineering in 1976, 38% of manual workers earned less than £60 a week, but over 50% of clerical workers took home less than this.

**Table. Changes in Earnings, manual and non-manual workers Index.**

Type of job	1959 (= 100)	£s	1970	£s.
<b>Clerical</b>				
Male	100	12.4	183	22.6
Female	100	9.3	188	17.5
<b>Manual Manufacturing:</b>				
Male	100	14.2	203	28.9
Female	100	7.0	200	14.0
Vehicles (Male)	100	15.3	212	32.4
Transport (Male)	100	13.1	226	29.7

Source: Barratt Brown p. 174

The Department of Education is concerned about this gap between qualification and the work situation; and despite reflecting the recommendation of the Commons Expenditure Committee that higher education provision should be shaped by manpower planning, it does accept that "post-graduate education" should be shaped not by student demands alone but **principally by the needs of the economy** and of society as a whole. (Financial Times 25.8.76. our emphasis).

It would appear that some participants in the "Great Debate" are now applying the same ideas to the secondary sector of education.

This process of gearing education closer to the economy has already begun. Indeed, it is only at times of relative affluence (like the 60's) when education for its own sake is allowed to develop. And even then, Harold Wilson rationalised university expansion with his claim that we needed highly educated managers for the white hot technological society he promised us. Now the question for the state is how to make education more responsive to industry without causing too much antagonism from those teachers who are concerned about education for its own sake.

The government's strategy is not just to cut educational spending and transfer resources to industry. It is to re-structure education. Their aim is two-fold: first to make schools and colleges more productive, in the sense of getting more people through exams with less expenditure on salaries and materials; and secondly to ensure that what is taught is more relevant to a de-skilled and proletarianised economic structure. So we are not being pulled back into the Thirties. We are being prepared for the Eighties.

There are several methods by which the government is seeking to do this. The most obvious is simply holding down our salaries and cutting the amount available to build or repair schools and colleges and cutting spending on teaching resources. But in the long term, the most important method is to take education out of the hands of educationalists and put it into the hands of administrators who are sympathetic to the "needs of industry".

This process is gathering momentum in further education, and it is already affecting secondary education. The spearhead is the funding of "education" by the Department of Employment via the Manpower Services Agency and its allies. Under the guise of getting the young unemployed off the streets, and providing jobs for unemployed teachers at the same time, there is a rash of "work experience" programmes (with 15,000 places) "Training Award Schemes" (44,000 places) "Job Creation" (60,000) and short industrial courses" (13,000).

The long term effect of these schemes is to replace traditional further education with a training programme devoid of educational content, run by teachers or skilled workers with salaries and conditions of service far below those of teachers in schools or Further Education. For example, an unemployed teacher with four years experience in Further Education was offered a job under the Leeds Education Department's Community and Industry scheme teaching "basic skills" (i.e. remedial), at £40 per week, 40 hours a week, 50 weeks of the year - on a one year contract. Education authorities are continually finding that money cut from education budgets can be "found" from the Training Services Agency for special courses to be run in colleges, but set up by the Training Services Agency. The erosion of teaching standards and of teachers wages and conditions, which is being steadily introduced by these schemes, is disguised by the fact that jobs are being provided for the unemployed. The fact that the educational element in these courses is decreased, while the industrial training' element is increased, goes almost unremarked.



Few parents, teachers or students are aware of the implications of these charges.

Many are willing to "fight the cuts", but few understand why the cuts are taking place or what the underlying process is. If we are clear about the fact that the crisis in education is caused by the need for education to be re-structured to meet the need of a proletarianised and de-skilled labour force, then we will be in a better position to develop our own strategies.

#### THE CUTS: ADDING INSULT TO INJURY

To our visitors

Please remember that you are entering: —

a) an infant classroom

which is also

b) the dining area

and

c) the foyer.

Thank you.

This notice was boldly displayed in the doorway of Gravel Hill County Primary school in Bexleyheath,

The dramatic cuts in educational spending projected over the next few years have not caused the crisis in education. Nor is the demand for 'more education' going to solve it. Spending more money on buildings equipment or teachers would not have any impact on the basic problems that proletarianisation and de-skilling pose for the education system.

But there is no doubt that the cuts in spending make the problems far worse. Many I.e.a.s are not re-filling vacancies, and everywhere money for basic materials is in short supply. This means that teaching classes of kids who are already disillusioned with school can become intolerable for staff and students alike. The effect of the cuts is to bring home to everyone that education can never be separated from the economic state of the country.

In times of relative prosperity, money is spent quietly gearing education to the needs of the economy — for instance the post war reorganisation. In times of economic crisis, like now, the same process goes on — but the effects are more stark. Education for the masses, even the education suitable for a de-skilled labour force, is not a priority when 1½ million are unemployed and school-leavers are adding to that number day by day. Teachers who feel that their work is about enlightening children are themselves enlightened by the fact that the labour market comes first, and education is a luxury we cannot afford.



**THIS'LL TEACH THE LITTLE BRATS HOW TO READ AND WRITE!!**

The government says that cuts in education spending are necessary to divert resources from 'unproductive' social and welfare institutions to the 'productive' industries. It is right that teachers, students, pupils and parents resist these cuts, in varying degrees, because their futures are threatened. But it is essential to understand that our futures were already catastrophically threatened by the economic processes we have described above. So the fight against the cuts must be more than a demand to preserve the status quo. We have to argue that the economic crisis must not be solved at the expense of our livelihoods as teachers and at the expense of our children's future. And we must argue that, if we are to have education rather than training, we must eliminate the economy which relies on de-skilled labour, and we must eliminate the gearing of education to that economy.

So, proletarianisation and de-skilling are the basic processes, which are causing the crisis in education and the cuts in education spending makes the effects of the crisis far worse. What is the fate of radical teachers and parents who argue for progressive education during this crisis? A glance at the education stories in the newspapers shows how vulnerable is the progressive movement.

#### PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION AND THE CRISIS

One of the reasons why radical teachers and parents are on the defensive during this education crisis is that the ideas of progressive education cannot comprehend the real nature of the crisis. What do we mean by 'progressive education'? It includes, amongst other things, the move towards education being centred round the child's needs, more flexible teaching and learning methods, trying to make the curriculum more relevant to life, overlapping subjects, less authoritarian discipline, less streaming and exams, comprehensive schools etc.



The method has been best developed in Primary Schools, where progressive teachers attempt to influence the child's development in all areas: intellectually, emotionally, personally, socially, physically and aesthetically. Progressive teachers' overt interest in developing all these qualities in children contrasts with the traditional teacher who is most concerned with imparting knowledge - though he or she often does have an effect on the child's social development as well.

It should be said that many of these changes can have hardly begun, or have been introduced in a diluted form, and have made little impact beyond the primary schools.

There is no doubt that some comprehensive schools have adopted methods which are progressive in origin and intent, but these schools are in a small minority. The streamed or banded class is a much more common and insidious characteristic of modern comprehensive than the practice of progressive educational methods. But because progressive ideas have so completely dominated educational theory, until recently, it has **seemed** as though everything had changed - especially in the minds of those who want to blame the crisis on 'modern' ideas.

The origin of progressivism does not have particularly radical source. In the 1950s, many far sighted educationists and politicians grew very concerned at the wastage of working class talent inherent in traditional education. The Newsom Report, commissioned by the government, stressed the educational needs of the section of the population it called 'Half our Future'. As one official research project put it, progressive education was aimed at "making school more agreeable to all its members" while attempting "to meet the functional needs of society more effectively".

Despite this desire to preserve the status quo some teachers have used progressive education to create conditions in the classroom which were freed from the stifling demands of regimentation and exam syllabuses, seeking, where they could, create a better school experience for themselves and their pupils. Undoubtedly this was a great step forward for the teachers and pupils involved - more relevant topics got discussed, and often the work was directed by teachers and pupils themselves. Progressive methods have been particularly successful in primary schools, where most children do appear to enjoy school, and become increasingly aware, critical and independent. But a combination of circumstances makes life difficult even for the progressive teacher in primary schools: children acquire the authoritarian and competitive ideas progressive teachers try to counter from their lives outside school; cuts in materials and large class sizes inhibit their teaching style; and the furore over "standards" brings anxious parents and head-teachers down on their necks.

In secondary schools the progressive reforms highlight the conflict between education and the demands of the labour market. Mode 3 GCE/CSE, and the 16+ scheme give a fair amount of control over assessment and syllabus to teachers, who often use this freedom to gear their work to the pupils' interest. When they deal with matters relating to jobs and life after school, these teachers sometimes encourage critical attitudes in the pupils.

Occasionally, teachers have developed an overtly socialist curriculum - and the furore over Chris Searle, and the emphasis given to the 'socialist ideology' at William Tyndale school, show how alarmed certain sections of the establishment have become. Even the ROSLA curriculum appears to have been used to raise kids' expectations and to develop questioning attitudes.

So it's no surprise that employers, education traditionalists and politicians are combining to attack progressive education and blame it for the crisis in education. They are helped by the fact that progressivism is an easy target. While it does pose important questions, and therefore engenders controversy, it does not get to the root of the problem of education, so its critique of traditional methods is not watertight.

Progressivism put into question what school is for, but it could not bridge the chasm between school and society. For running counter to progressive reforms was the material changes in the class structure and labour market we have previously described. The more the internal school experience was made 'relevant', the less relevant that became to changes outside the school gate. It is precisely this weak point which the traditionalists have exploited. For they have a simple answer: functional education. Implicit in their argument is that all the modern labour force needs is the 3 Rs, and this is what they should get from school. For them, such education **would** be 'functional' - it would help preserve the existing order.

This demand for a 'return to order' has an obvious appeal at a time when the social, economic and political crisis is becoming more obvious. It is a particularly potent demand when directed at the educational process, because the crisis hits youth especially hard. School-leavers are finding it impossible to get jobs, and there is general alarm at the seeming aimlessness of young people, expressed by 'dropping out', soccer 'hooliganism', 'Hell's Angels', rebellious black youth, punk rock and the like.

Progressivism appears to challenge the very things that could, according to the traditionalists, help us out: traditional skills, qualifications, and a sense of one's place in society. So they are able to generate enormous controversy over, for example, William Tyndale and the Thameside comprehensive plans.

At Tyndale, one of the charges was that children were not learning the basic skills necessary for their future employment. There is no evidence to suppose that progressive methods are less effective at transmitting the 3 Rs, but a ready audience could be found for the allegations against Tyndale. At Thameside, according to the Sunday Times, Norman St John Stevas had been planning the attack on Labour's comprehensive plans for six months before the council election. Clearly, conservative politicians knew that the time was ripe to re-open old educational battles.

The trouble with progressivism is that it is wide open to these charges. Apart from its arguments about teaching methods, progressives have made an incomplete analysis of the relationship between school and society. It is just this relationship which the traditionalists are so strong on. They make no bones about wanting to preserve the status quo. Progressives, however, argue for change, but their changes (when they get them) are ineffectual.

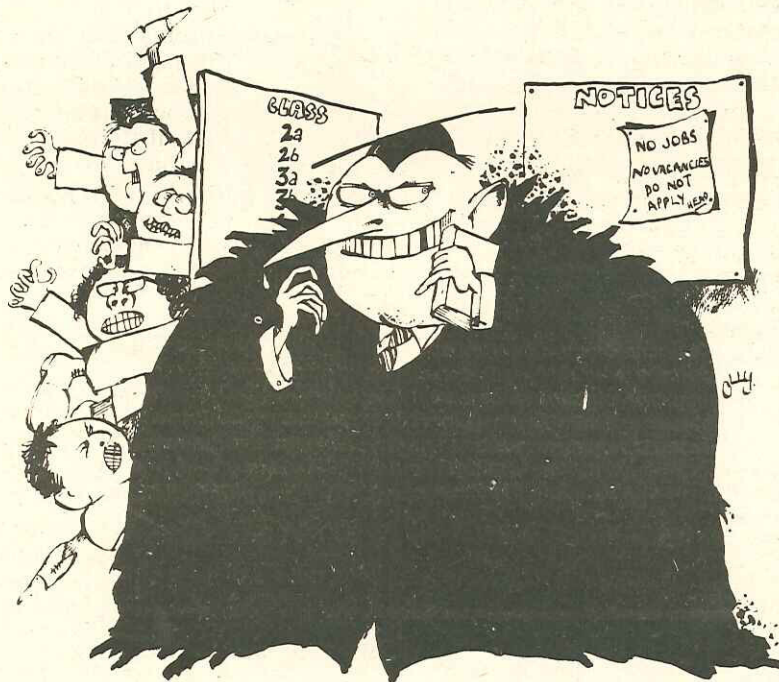
Progressives have pointed out that schools are biased against working class children. But instead of arguing as we do, that this bias is the result of gearing education to a capitalist economy, progressives say the problem lies in conflicting values and expectations. They emphasise such issues as the conflict of values between middle class teachers and working class kids, and the lower expectations of educational success working class parents have for their children compared to middle class parents. Progressives go on to emphasise the links between parent and teacher expectations and educational attainment.

All these facts are important but they lead to incomplete 'solutions', because they imply that all would be well if the internal regime of the school is reformed. This is the purpose of the abolition of the 11+ and the introduction of comprehensives. When they do look outside the school environment, they either disparage the working class family and say that school must compensate for its 'deficiencies', or they say that their ideas do not imply

any change in the division of labour (which they usually regard as unchangeable anyway):

Traditionalists are therefore right when they say that progressive methods widen the gap between school and society. But instead of saying that society must be changed in order to fit the human needs of young people, progressives throw in the sponge. So the field is open to traditionalists to argue that schools must be changed to fit society, the class divided society they know and love.

As socialist teachers, we often use progressive teaching methods. But in arguing about the politics of education we meet the traditionalists head on. We argue that the **real** problem in education lies in the fact that it is increasingly being forced to conform to the economic need for a deskilled, proletarianised work force. Naturally, we want significant changes within the schools and colleges, and the section of the pamphlet on Socialist Education gives some idea of our thoughts on this matter. But, unlike the progressives, we have a clear picture of the relationship between education and society, and we know that, unless there are fundamental changes on the nature of that society, 'the crisis in education' will go on wreaking havoc in the lives of teachers, pupils and parents.



# SECTION 2: THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

## On teachers

In different sectors of education, the detailed effects of the crisis will be different. But all teachers face common problems: the attitude of their pupils, their job situation, their salary structure and whether or not teaching seems like a worthwhile experience.

While the cuts make all these problems worse, we again from the way the teaching profession is being re-structured. The first point to note is that the job is being de-skilled, with teachers being cut off from any administrative control over the profession, with job demarcation coming before education and with pastoral care being taken out of form teachers hands.

Just teaching has not escaped the processes of de-skilling and proletarianisation. This becomes clearer if we consider how over the years a great split has emerged between those who teach in the classroom and those who administrate. A whole stratum of senior staff and deputy heads are running curriculum and it is impossible to get into these positions of control, where most of the scales are located, unless endless managerial courses which treat children in terms of numbers linked to curriculum units have been attended: Actual classroom teachers have very few chances of criticising this development and are often blinded by figures and made to feel ignorant if they challenge the assumptions on which this is based. Ask any deputy head what a curriculum unit actually means and you will sure to be given an answer which is just a mathematical fraction or else sounds impressive but means nothing.

Often great possessiveness has arisen over subject areas.

In one school a teacher wanted to show children a map of the world so that she could point out where Sri Lanka actually was, as part of a social studies course on comparative cultures. A complaint was registered by the head of geography who maintained that she was trying to do his job. This runs contrary to the suggestions of the "Bullock Report", which although creating a day of discussion in every Liverpool school, led to precious little else.



YOU, THIRTY BOYS AT THE BACK,  
STOP TALKING...

Although most teachers are also expected to be form teachers, supposedly concerned with the pastoral care of pupils, a whole pastoral network has been set up which takes any real control out of the teachers hands. In some schools it is quite common to open sealed letters written by teachers for parents of the children they teach, and use the excuse of high postal charges to do so.

Scaled posts are now being given for anything but teaching, limiting this to the level of menial work.

Secondly as to pay and conditions, many teachers believed that the 'Houghton' award of 1975 was the best thing since sliced bread. It was introduced in response to a call by teachers to provide an adequate career structure within teaching. The 25% pay rise was the carrot suspended in front of them, but it did not take long to appreciate what this award meant in real terms.

The amalgamation of scales one and two meant that those on the former scale and new teachers had a huge gap to jump in order to get promotion. This ultimately caused a lack of job mobility as scale two jobs became more scarce. The 'Burnham' scale two was expected automatically after one or at most two years teaching. Now head teachers are stressing the need for a teacher to take on some extra responsibility as a condition of moving up to scale two..

"The schools unaided cannot provide all the opportunities their pupils deserve, or create the labour force the country needs. Industry, and the authorities responsible for housing, planning, employment and other services must also play their part. But, from the earliest stages of education, the schools enlarge or restrict the contribution these pupils can make to the life of the nation. "Money spent on education is an investment which helps to determine the scope for future economic and social development."

Plowden 1967 p.3.

"Scale one is for teaching regardless of whether it is good or bad, you must remember scale two is a lot of money you know".

The new system also meant a change in the 'points' system which determines how many scale posts a school is eligible for. Now, the way points are allocated, is weighted in favour of primary rather than secondary schools. This meant that there were fewer 'scaled' i.e. higher paid posts available in secondary schools. As for the carrot that was originally dangled to ensure teacher acceptance, this has been nibbled away by inflation and tax. The relative decline in teachers' pay has been intensified with the £6 award of '76.

Like every other worker, teachers have been called upon to make sacrifices in order to reduce inflation and unemployment. However, between November '74 and the following November there has been a reduction of teachers' take home pay of 7% in real terms. In the same period unemployment soared from 600,000 to 1¼ million. And the number of unemployed teachers in September 1976 is around 20,000. Healey's deal of 4½% tied to tax concessions represents a further pay cut of 7% with inflation running at 10%.

The continuing cuts in spending on education means that there is no way unemployed teachers can be brought from the dole to reduce class sizes. Those with a teaching job will have to face cuts in their marking and preparation time, and increased 'substitutions' for absent teachers, as fewer and fewer teachers have to take on an increasing work load. Supply teachers who are supposed to fill the gaps which occur through absences etc., will be the first to get the chop, along with part-time teachers.

Teaching is moving from being a 'profession' to more like other jobs. It is increasingly dominated by the phenomenon of 'casual labour'. Temporary posts are offered yearly or even termly. Teachers taking up such posts in Further Education now often have to sign a document stating that they will abdicate their right to claim redundancy pay after working 26 weeks. This means that they also lose out on pension rights.

As the link between schools and the labour market becomes more obvious, it becomes more difficult for the teacher to believe in the idea that if kids work hard enough they can make it. Therefore the belief in the professional nature of their own tasks is gradually being eroded. In the decaying schools the ideology that it is only the 'inadequate' teacher that cannot cope is crumbling. However despite the worsening of conditions, it would be wrong to see teachers simply as workers, automatically on the same side as pupils. The traditional ideas of the social superiority of teachers, and their social background makes this unlikely. Even if traditional professionalism is declining, teachers may find alternative ways of thinking in the arguments put forward by reactionaries like the writers of the 'Black Papers'. Also we can never underestimate the substantial rewards (promotion prospects, automatic pay increments, long holidays etc.) which separate teachers both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the rest of society, from other workers. Finally the teacher plays a partly repressive role in passing on the ideology which binds this class divided society together, and in terms of their authoritarian role in the class room.

Most Education authorities have increased the compulsory transfers of probationary teachers. In some areas such as Liverpool this is being extended to permanent

staff appointed to specific schools. Volunteers are requested, but if this fails then teachers will be nominated by the Head. It will be those teachers who speak out against what is happening who will be transferred. We can expect little support by the unions who see the only alternative as redundancies . . . .

So for every teacher transferred, a job is lost. This is justified in terms of rationalising 'pupil-teacher ratios' in the light of the falling birth rate. But we are not 'over-staffed' and never have been. There have always been oversized classes. And instead of using a falling birth rate as an excuse for sackings, it should be used as an opportunity to improve the conditions of teachers and pupils.

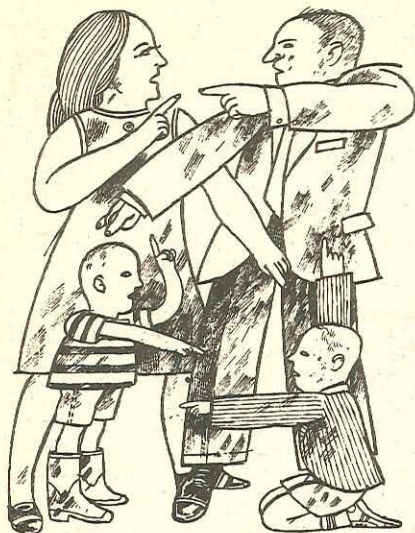
So unless the present cuts are reversed, teachers face increased **casual labour** and **mobility of labour**, enforced on them. The other side of this coin is the increase in confrontation between teachers and pupils, who are realising the futile nature of much of their education. Faced on the one side by rebellious pupils and on the other by Heads and administrators demanding miracles, teachers are being forced into a range of responses.

## THE TEACHERS RESPONSE

Many teachers have become disillusioned with the Comprehensive ideal, and with 'progressive education' generally. They see that it has failed as a means of creating equality of opportunity or a worthwhile educational experience. So some have fallen back into old reactionary rationalisations - defence of 'academic standards', isolating the education system from the society that is responsible for the crisis. But the education system has never been all that was claimed for it. Much of the criticisms of Comprehensives is based on botched examples, mish-mashes of old grammar and secondary modern schools on split sites, permanently starved of money, resources and staff. Even the purpose built comprehensives often bear little relationship to the ideal. They contain the old tripartite system within one set of walls. Often with streaming and competition as bad as under the old system. Given these limitations, those teachers arguing for a return to the 'good old days' of the tripartite system and open streaming have an easy time arguing against the straw-men of the existing comprehensive set-up.

The expectations of new teachers from training colleges are in particular being quickly disillusioned by the growing unsatisfactory nature of teaching. The teacher was once held up as the living proof of the ability to rise up the social ladder. But the rewards are hardly there any more and the kids know it as well. One result is increasing unionisation, although this does not necessarily indicate increasing militancy, at least at the 'official' union level. Student teachers are realising the hard realities even before they start work. The recent wave of occupations in training colleges marks a crucial break with previous passivity and illusions in the 'professional' nature of teaching. The question is whether this will be followed by a re-assessment **within** the schools of the causes of the teachers predicament. Instead of the constant oscillation between blaming school or the background of the pupils for their 'failure', there is a need to put the blame where it belongs - on those who rule our society and create an educational system to meet their needs, while frustrating the majority.

# On parents



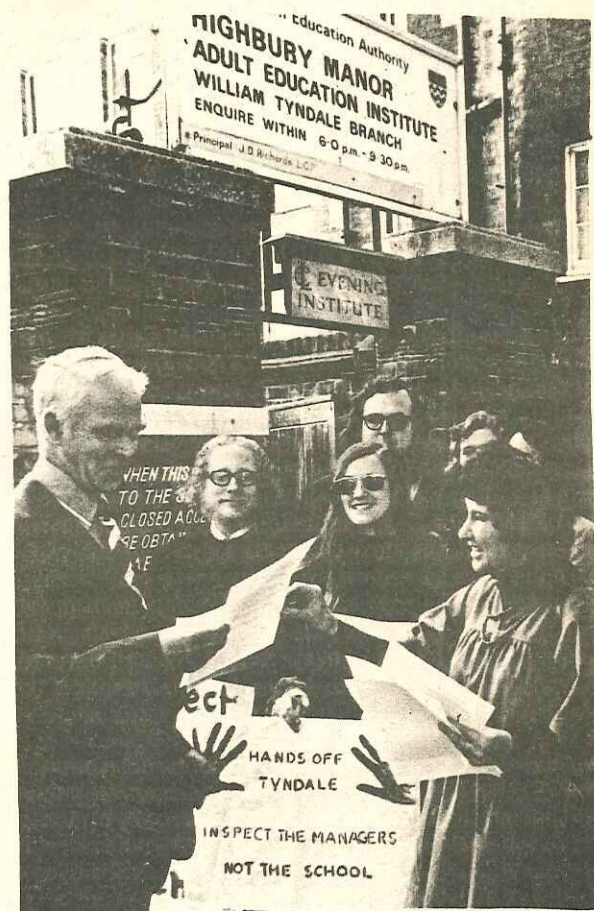
We have already mentioned some of the effects of the crisis on parents. The increasing unreality of quality of opportunity given changes in the labour market, has led to at minimum confusion, at maximum scepticism and a more questioning attitude to education. Any move which undercuts the previous degree of non-involvement must be welcomed. Unfortunately, however, parents' responses are likely to be more confused than teachers and pupils because they are more distanced from the actual processes that are happening. They are more vulnerable to scapegoat solutions, which blame progressive education and new ideas. This is why right wing 'educationalists', writers and politicians aim their vituperative attacks on progressivism directly at parents. It is why the Tories and their cohorts push so strongly for 'parent power'. In practice the right of the privileged to buy and reproduce those privileges through education.

Radical teachers have to be able to deal with this confusion among parents. To do so, we have to be able to differentiate among the various attitudes they have towards education. Some are using the crisis and the "great debate" as a vehicle for their demand for a return to an openly elitist educational system. Others are less clear about what they want. Some believe that there really is equality of opportunity, but the modern schools have failed. These parents are being lured by the reactionaries. Other parents never had illusions about their kids getting to the top. It is our role to draw these parents towards socialist ideas. A more difficult problem is posed by black parents, since they have been among the most militant in struggles around education, yet their underlying attitudes have often been either conservative or mystified.

This mixture of attitudes was clearly shown in the struggle to remove a racist headmaster and to improve facilities at Earl Cowper Middle School in Leeds (see Chapeltown News, June and July, 1973). Due to their militant organisation, the parents won their demands, forcibly expressing their disgust at the way a racist social system mis-educates their children. At the same time, many parents said they wanted schools which would make their children into doctors and lawyers - clearly assuming that, if schools in black areas were improved, equality of opportunity would prevail.

Similarly, many black parents are hostile to progressive education, believing that they benefited from the neo-Victorian education they received at home and that the absence of this method in British schools is the cause of their children's lack of "success". We have to be clear about our role if we are to play any useful part in countering these ideas. As we point out in the "Ways Forward" section, black militants have recently been active in the Black Parents Movement which has focused its attention on schools. The role of white socialist teachers in black areas must be co-operative with such autonomous organisations, to help them counter the conservative educational tendencies among black parents and not take it upon themselves alone to change black parents attitudes.

The example of William Tyndale School illustrates how the pressures created around education have found their most forcible outlet in parent action. It shows how essential it is that socialists in education understand and work out how to deal with the various forces among parents. The first target of the anti-progressives was the parents, through a petition. Scare stories induced many to sign. As the battle commenced petitions and counter petitions in favour and against the school and the teachers circulated, parents' loyalties being pulled in all



directions. Different groups of parents of course responded differently according to the kinds of expectations described earlier. Parents who believed in the possibility of equal opportunity and individual advancement are the most vulnerable to attacks on progressivism. They will often see the discontinuity of expectations and achievements arising from some, often quite mythical, changes in the school or education generally: whereas the source of discontinuity is in the reinforcement of changes in the structure of society itself. A common complaint is that while they are not opposed to changes, their children are being used as 'guinea-pigs'. The tragedy is that where these fears are real, they often arise from the totally inadequate and botched comprehensivisation plans that arise where local authorities try to create phoney schools, that are the old ones with new labels attached.