

Other parents who had less expectations are often more prone to supporting changes, as any movement can be seen to be better for the kids and often real improvements in ability and enjoyment are noted by the parents. But with the run-down nature of many schools, made far worse by the ever-growing cuts and the increasing sense of hopelessness felt by many of the kids and teachers, these parents also feel the impact of the crisis. Some find, or feel that their children are not even learning the basic survival skills they need, and expect from school. Many of the children will seem to be 'getting into trouble' more often as the disillusionment and decay turns to truancy and violence. So confrontations between staff and parents are on the increase, often because parents put the blame on an individual school or even staff member.

Overall we can expect a volatile situation over the coming years, with parents' loyalties splitting different ways. Many parents will be swung behind reactionary campaigns and solutions, either against progressivism or comprehensivisation. As we said earlier this is not only because they are more distanced from the process, but because progressivism's failure to pinpoint the real origins of the crisis has made progressivism and parents vulnerable to such attacks. The chickens, of the 'revolution of rising expectations' that develops from separating school and society, are coming home to roost. For these reasons it is vital that radical teachers and activists in education aim their propaganda and organizing at parents far more than they do at present - more of that later.



In secondary schools, however, the ugly effects of sex, race, and class divisions become more apparent. In the inner city areas, special allowances for teachers have made little impact on the decaying Victorian Board Schools which now enclose the wars of black and white working class youth. In these areas, belly laughs echo in the crumbling school halls as labour councillors talk of equality of opportunity. In the schools where the majority of pupils are black, racial divisions are nurtured, but are rarely as hostile and deeply rooted as the divisions which are apparent when football teams from these schools meet those from white working class schools.

## On school students



School students are even less of a homogenous group than parents. While parents are differentiated by age, sex, race and class, these divisions have an even greater effect among pupils inside the school and between schools.

Primary school children will probably be least conscious of the crisis, though they will undoubtedly suffer its effects (less materials, overcrowding etc) as much as other pupils. These effects may be mitigated by the fact that progressive methods have been best developed in primary schools and for many young children school is a genuinely satisfying experience.

As the crisis deepens the racist pedlars' of I.Q. tests, stoked up by "the great debate", get greater prominence and these divisions become worse.

In schools, with catchment areas in both middle and working class areas, class divisions among pupils mediate the effects of the crisis. The pupils from better off families are less physically affected by the smaller and more expensive school meals. Their parents make up for the declining availability of books and materials. And since the educational system generally works in their favour, they are less disillusioned and hostile to school, so they receive extra attention from the hard-pressed teachers. Class divisions are obvious in all such schools and sometimes they come to the fore when working class pupils protest against the treatment received by the middle class pupils in the same school. Very convenient for the powers that be that the conflict is within the school, and not against them.

The educational crisis is bound to increase divisions between boys and girls at school. Any efforts to provide for girls to receive technical and scientific education will be cut short by conservative educationalists arguing that, with high unemployment, people should be trained for the jobs they are most likely to get. Cuts in building programmes will hit those single sex schools which are trying to acknowledge the trend towards sex equality - for example, where extra science labs. are needed for girls schools. The attack on radical ideas in education makes it even harder for those teachers who are trying to broaden pupils' horizons by for example emphasising the role of women in history and literature, or bringing sex education and women's health into biology classes.

While this has to be the general context for a discussion of the effects of the crisis on school students, it is undeniable that, in secondary schools, there is one overriding effect which almost all working class pupils feel, whatever their sex and race. As unemployment rises, as the physical conditions of school buildings get worse, as teachers' morale drops, as scope for the more pleasurable methods of teaching gets more limited, and kids get more pissed off.



Knowing what will exist on the other side of the school gate, they are getting increasingly sceptical of the usefulness of education (or what passes for it in our schools and colleges.) The resulting alienation especially in the inner-city schools with least to lose, turns increasingly to rebellion and indiscipline. Whether this is constructive or chaotic, it is with various degrees of intensity a fact. The final insult for many kids is ROSLA. They are not stupid, they know it is postponing the dead-end job or dole queue. A postponement which involves the teacher performing a multitude of tricks to entertain unwilling troops, with very few resources to draw on. Education is devalued in the kids' eyes if it has no use-value in its widest sense. It doesn't matter how enjoyable a diversion it is, its sham meaning in a society like ours is clear.

Kids know that certain types of 'academic' education are linked to job success, that the job market requires qualifications, no matter how ludicrous they are; that the exam is the mediating link between school and society. While some may opt out of this process, others will want to keep their options open. Again the limits of progressivism show themselves, this time in the kids' eyes. While there is no doubt that kids support progressive reforms and in fact want to take them further (if in doubt see "The school I'd Like", edited by Ed. Blisshen): there is an ambivalence there. While progressivism does not challenge the division of labour outside and concentrates instead on providing an alternative school experience - kids are going to be suspicious that this alternative education is in some senses second-rate, a cop-out to solving their real problems. A feeling which has some basis in reality, especially when the beliefs of some progressives lead to under-stressing necessary skills like reading, writing and the acquisition structured knowledge. It's a bit ironic when you read articles by university graduates calling reading an unnecessary bourgeois conspiracy. Like all skills reading depends on its content, how it's used and who uses it.

That's why progressive education has its strongest support among 'middle' class parents and pupils, because their greater adaptability to the academic rat-race means that the added flexibility will not jeopardise their school success. However for those who do participate in schooling, rather than simply rebel, the processes we have described and others still mean an unsatisfactory experience. Not simply because of what's outside the school gates, but because of its effects inside. Knowledge parcelled up into lessons, subjects and exams, is presented as a commodity. The process of producing 'specialised idiots' which ends in our universities has its echoes in schools in the narrowness and lack of generalised links between specialised and insular subject matter. On top of this, the qualifications are becoming increasingly de-valued as the job market demands ever more. So people leave school with little sense of the point of knowing things. One of the results is the natural growth of instrumental attitudes towards knowledge and understanding. Cynical teachers confront cynical pupils across the classroom floor.

All this is made worse by the impact of the cut backs. Less attention can be given to the kids, especially to their individual needs. Embarrassment and frustration about not understanding particular topics increases and cannot be remedied by the harrassed teacher. Lesson material that needs aids and resources has to be presented without them. Even without simple necessities of handouts, books and writing material, the kids find it difficult to believe in the educational value of the lessons. They start to turn to their own, more interesting means of passing the time - talking, messing about and general confrontations brighten up the school day.

My scheme would need many more teachers than than the present one, but this would be possible, I hope, because teaching would become a more attractive profession. The emphasis would shift from feeding with facts to developing the individual mind. It would be impossible any longer to think of a pupil as an 'A' or 'D' stream type because everyone would be recognized as a personality with good qualities to cherish. Although no teacher would churn out the same notes year after year, he would find his job more stimulating and would also have opportunities for his own research.

Our schools have become unfriendly, boring slums; our 'teachers' uninterested adults fighting a losing battle. . . . This cannot be the fault of the pupils. Even though the older generation frequently attacks the youth of today as being 'untidy, rude and lazy', it seems evident from such philosophies as that of the flower children that the younger generation is attempting to formulate its own ideas. It is the conditions in schools today that help greatly to create the impression that we are 'untidy, rude and lazy.' Nobody can be greatly inspired (and this is speaking from personal experience) by . . . the boring, antique, blackboard and book methods.

By teaching with books - textbooks being the heart and soul of teaching today - no practical experience of any subject is gained. Everything learnt is second hand if it comes from the teachers, and very often out of date and misleading if it comes from the books - these could just as easily be read at home, with greater concentration and better results. I would suggest discarding book-teaching and, with the money saved, running practical courses. . . . Of course books cannot be forgotten. Indeed, the reading of books should be encouraged; but it must be private reading, done at home, whilst the day at school will magnify practically what we have read. The reading will be in place of homework - that archaic system whereby a lot of important work is rushed through or just ignored. After all, why should we continue our studies when school has finished for the day? In the evening we, the school-children, want to enjoy ourselves or just relax, and if a lot of homework stands in our way then we will leave it until later, which means late nights and a bad morning to follow, to spoil it by hurrying. A book will provide the relaxation for many, but no matter how the time is spent, relaxation is essential.

Richard, 17

The girls would do heavy craft, cricket, football and rugby and they would also do their own sports. Girls love the things boys do, and I think that girls can do anything boys can do. Also the boys would do cookery because when they get married and have children it will come in very useful.

Angela, 13

I know one thing that I would make a rule, it's to have all the teachers meet our mothers at school, only if it's once a term it would be the best thing which ever happened.

K.(boy), 13

From: "The School I'd Like"

Prayer. Thank you, Lord, thankyou for giving me the leadership of Hawthorn House; thankyou for my privileges and my prefect's tie; for the house cup that we so closely won and for the trust of the boys in my house, thankyou, Lord Lord, thankyou.

Boy at prep school Age 12 Family and School



This general antagonism to school, expressed at its strongest by refusing to attend at all, is one of the ways pupils express their reaction to an increasingly irrelevant and decaying educational process.

We look at the more constructive reactions – political organisation – in the "Ways Forward" section at the end of the pamphlet.

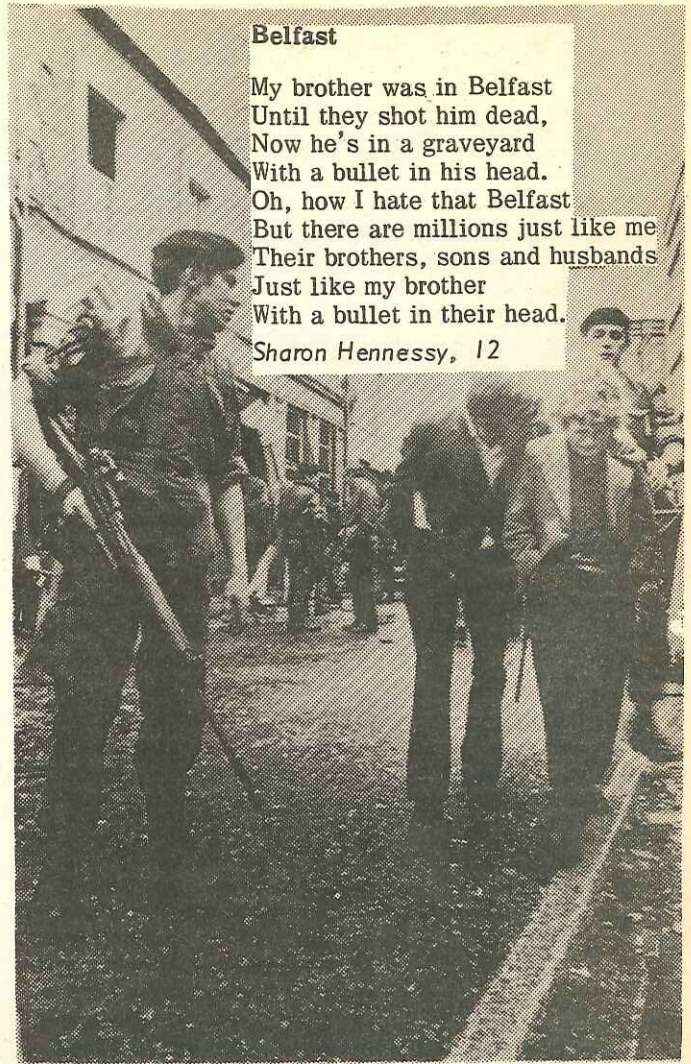
But one further result of the crisis in pupils has to be noted: the increasing recruitment of working class school leavers by the army.

With rising unemployment and the breakdown of traditional forms of discipline in schools, many young school leavers increasingly seek jobs in the Army. They are conned by promises of adventure and apprenticeships (neither of which seem available to them otherwise). They are often conned by conservatives to believe that they have failed at school because the teachers have no authority and there is not enough discipline. They seek this experience in the army. Reactionary sex stereotyping encourages them to see the Army as some sort of masculinity symbol. It is important to campaign against recruitment not just because the army is nasty, but it is an important expression of state power and control, (for example in Northern Ireland).

### Belfast

My brother was in Belfast  
Until they shot him dead,  
Now he's in a graveyard  
With a bullet in his head.  
Oh, how I hate that Belfast  
But there are millions just like me  
Their brothers, sons and husbands  
Just like my brother  
With a bullet in their head.

Sharon Hennessy, 12





# SECTION 3: SOCIALIST EDUCATION— OUR GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Faced with the greatest ever challenge to education in terms of cut backs and attacks on progressive education and teachers, we have to be clear about what our goals and strategies are. We want to look at 3 aspects:—

- \*\*\* Our concept of socialist education.
- \*\*\* Existing ways of organising.
- \*\*\* Possible alternatives.

A useful strategical direction has been confused by responses to the cutbacks in education. Many teachers and others who want to fight the cuts have been forced back onto or chosen a defensive terrain. The talk has been of "the right to learn" or "defend education". Solutions implying that restoring the cuts and employing more teachers would in themselves solve the educational crisis.

There are two reasons why this is bad strategy. The first is that it implies that restoring what has been lost through cuts and employing more teachers would in themselves solve the educational crisis. It implies that the process of education is neutral, and it does not give any clear direction to changing this process. We would ask — the right to learn what? What kind of education and for what purposes? These are questions asked daily in words and actions of thousands of teachers and pupils. This is another reason it is a bad strategy. People will not seriously fight to defend something they find inadequate and boring. We should not find it strange that most teachers, let alone pupils and parents have not been involved in the fight against the cuts. To mobilise all our potential forces we must link necessary defence against the cuts to the struggle to transform education. It means we must link educational and material demands. This is necessary to not only mobilise those inside education, but to win broad support in the working class as a whole.

In this section we are attempting to define what we mean by a socialist education system. Not for a minute do we believe that socialist education can come to fruition in a capitalist society. Nor do we think we can give a blueprint for the nature of education in a socialist Britain. But we do not use these two reservations as an excuse for not thinking creatively about our role as teachers and socialists. There are a number of reasons why this kind of debate must go on now. One reason is that the establishment has given us an unparalleled opportunity to engage in public debate about socialist education. Yet, because of the blinkered trade unionist attitude of left teachers, we have been unprepared for the "Great Debate" stirred up by the unholy alliance between Williams, Callaghan and the Black Paper gang. This Debate in which everyone apart from teachers, is having their (reactionary) say, will not disappear. Education is always a key question in times of crisis and thousands of teachers, parents and pupils are looking for direction. Socialist teachers should not be silent, we must provide our answers to the questions of the curriculum and control of schools, assessment and the relationship between education and the economy.

## EDUCATION DEBATE REGIONAL CONFERENCE in BRADFORD

Those quoted in the press, Times Educational Supplement, as being present.

- Mr. Gordon Oakes — Minister of State for Education
- Mr. Donald Frith — Headmaster, member of School Council Representative of the A. M. A.
- Mr. Arnold Yenning — President of the Headmaster Association Representative of the Campaign for the advancement of State Education.
- Mr. Anthony Booth — N. U. T.
- Miss Betty Lockwood — Chairman of the Equal Opportunities Commission.
- Mr. Clifford Morris — Headmaster
- Mr. W. A. Hill — Headmaster
- Mr. E. L. Owen — education officer for North Yorkshire An official of Humberside Education Authority
- Mr. John Gunnel — Leeds University
- Eric Robinson — Director of Bradford College
- Sir Alec Smith — Chairman of Schools Council and director of Manchester Polytechnic.

### A few parents.

But surely as we all know Bradford has a very high immigrant population — where are they?

There was of course one person of 'West Indian origin'.

It was reported that it was realised the night before the conference that no immigrant representatives had been invited so token invitations were issued at the last moment. When Oakes was questioned about this however, the person next to him came to his aid.

'There are two at the back'.

Another reason for thinking about socialist education is that, for many of us, our attempts to put over socialist ideas in the classroom and staffroom is what makes the job meaningful and worthwhile. Our trade union work is only part of our political role. We do not want to separate our roles as teachers and as trade unionists — we want to unite our educational and material demands. Nor do we want to be soapbox socialists in the schools and colleges. We need a socialist educational practice which covers both the content of what we teach, and the way we teach it. A lecture on the advantages of co-operative learning in China is no use if it is a lecture, in the competitive framework of the conventional classroom. So we are concerned to generate some of the principles on which socialist educational practice should be based. To start with this discussion, we look at examples of educational systems which claim to be socialist — Russia and China.



## RUSSIAN EDUCATION

The concern for mutual transformation of education and society, mirrored in the experience of the pupil, has been a traditional concern of the Marxist philosophy of education. This has stressed the centrality of polytechnic education. Today this idea has been distorted to mean narrow, technically directed education on the cheap. Its real meaning stresses all round education to meet the needs of a society aiming at classlessness.

A conference of revolutionary teachers in Russia in 1918 defined this as:

“The main aim of the new school should be the bringing up of a creative personality developed on many sides. The Conference considers it necessary to give to education a Polytechnic direction and transform the school into a working commune, based on self activity, on productive labour for common use and adapted to local conditions. The school should not be opposed to life, but coinciding with it, it should endeavour to create a harmoniously developed human being.”

Indeed this concept was built into the first Soviet constitution:

“The unified school . . . places the labour of the people at the centre of attention. The approach to labour is that of a builder of new life, who regardless of his profession must have a clear comprehension of the relations and inter-dependance of the various forms of labour. This we call general education.”

This was backed up by the firm belief in the ‘general educability’ of all pupils and attempting to introduce new methods of teaching incorporating pupil self-activity. Schools were run by Councils of teachers, pupils, local workers and the Department of Education.(1) Unfortunately the polytechnic experience did not survive economic development under Stalin. The Russian notion of development did not challenge the so-called ‘need’ for a hierarchy in production. Hence, education became narrowly geared to the production of specialists. The rolling back of polytechnic education and ending of the link between school and labour was aided by the hostility of many teachers who found it too challenging to their concepts of academic merit.

Russian education today is fiercely competitive at every level, fitted to its own very hierarchical society. Western commentators have noted that despite certain differences it shares many characteristics with the West. One described Russian education as :

“a conveyor belt system designed to deploy into Soviet technological enterprises the skilled personnel they require.” (2)

And in the same study:

“I was struck again and again by the fact that they seemed as much ‘European’ as ‘Communist’. . . the attitude to work, the concept of what is academically respectable, the use of well-hallowed academic terminology. . . the entrance examinations to higher education are fiercely competitive, up to one third eligible do not get places” (3)

For an interesting account of this period see ‘Education and Revolution’ – a Rank and File pamphlet, from which we took the first 2 quotes. (2) & (3) quotes from ‘Communist Education’, edited by E.J. King.

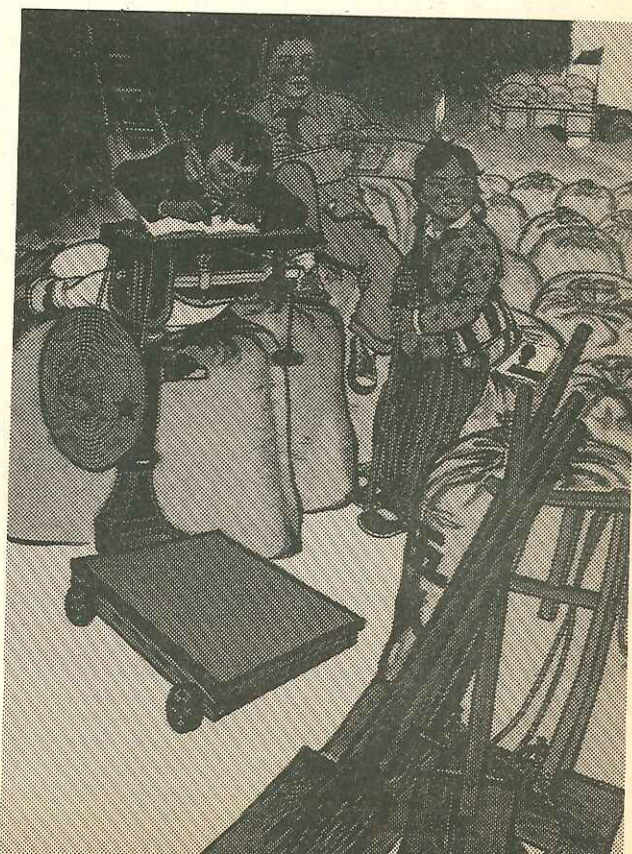
There will be many who will point to these developments as evidence of the inevitability of a competitive hierarchy in society and education. But this so-called inevitability has been disproved by the Chinese experience. We don’t

regard China as a model or any kind of perfect society; especially as it is struggling against material backwardness. But their achievements show how much more we could achieve in a society with greater resources.

## THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE

There was great pressure on the Chinese after the revolution to adopt hierarchical education based on classical Mandarin, Western and Russian models. The Russians in particular were influential through the vast amount of aid, trained teachers, translated text books etc. They encouraged authoritarian methods, parrot-fashion learning and a rigid distinction between manual and intellectual work. These influences meant that Chinese education was geared to reproducing the old elites and creating new ones based on the off-spring of the Party Officials. Those children of workers and peasants who did make it through to higher education had to go through a process of adaptation to the academic and social ideals of the higher classes. As in the West they were forced to choose between home and school. Their own village grew to see them as intellectuals, alien to their own experiences.

In the mid-sixties a campaign was launched throughout China culminating in the Cultural Revolution – aimed at stopping the formation of elites and hierarchies in all institutions. In industry this meant combatting the power of managers, wide wage differentials, material incentives and over-reliance on experts. In the army attacking professionalism and differentiation through ranking, insignia and other privileges. Education was regarded as a great weapon of change in this respect. And this meant what was in effect a campaign against ‘equality of educational opportunity’. Because in a class-divided society equal competition is impossible. Therefore the educational experience had to be reconstructed to positively encourage both entrance and participation by the sons and daughters of peasants and workers and the transformation of the attitudes and lives of students from higher class backgrounds. This meant a return to the principles of marxist polytechnic education and a particular stress on combining education with work experience to counter over-specialization and elitism.





By insisting on the organic interdependence of all forms of labour, combined with an element of compulsory job-rotation, (students and intellectuals working in the factories and fields: workers and peasants teaching and participating in the running of education) they aim at two things. First a concrete strategy to encourage a positive attitude and high motivation to learn amongst the mass of children and avoiding the strict reproduction of the division of labour, which lies at the root of educational and social divisions.

In the West educational reform is not linked to changes in society like job rotation. It is no use developing 'alternative curricula' non-vocational education or even 'free schools' if we are sending kids out into the same old hierarchy. The kids will sense how phoney the process is and their alienation will remain. The Chinese experience can teach many things about the basis of de-schooling and community schools. In particular that it is a question of the content of education not the form of institution. One visitor to China noted;

"The workers are in everyday contact with teachers and students, giving advice on the content of lessons, text-books and examinations. Workers take classes in certain subjects such as physics, mechanics or the foundations of agriculture".

In the West it is often difficult to involve parents in the running of schools - they are at best aids, powerless auxiliaries in a situation that is often alien and working against them. In China they are given motive-power, the responsibility of control and the knowledge that they are shaping the process in their own class interests. Lesson content is also directly linked to life experience. Literature students do courses of creative writing structured around studying the lives of workers and peasants they work with. Questions in arithmetic are set to problems related to the work of the commune or the practices of moneylenders..

It is in the area of selection, exams and competition that the Chinese have taken the most radical measures. Places available in higher education are awarded on a quota basis to communes and factories. There is no exam-based competition. Candidates must have completed two years work in a factory or agricultural commune and their application be supported by their workmates and local people. A reasonable academic standard based on completion of middle schooling is of course expected. In Russia the top 20% are exempt from the 2 year work gap and in Britain at the moment such a stipulation would be meaningless as it would be nothing more than a temporary disjuncture in academic life: selection and permanent job hierarchy would continue on the same basis. Obviously some form of selection is necessary, and exams are held each term. They aim to measure both teaching and learning. But they include many 'open book' forms and are deliberately local based. They do not believe in any centralised system as this would imply that the curriculum was remote from the environment. Exams are non-competitive, there are no rankings. Results are put in end of term reports which includes self-criticisms, classmates as well as teacher's comments. They serve as a guide not the determinant of selection. Slow pupils are not held back for a year or 'streamed'; a common practice being 'red pairs'. Here a slow student is linked to a more advanced classmate so both can develop in a process of mutual transformation.

The Chinese educational experience is specific to their way of developing their economy and to their principles of breaking down the division between mental and manual labour and of rotating jobs. But there is a lot we can learn from their principles and we have to start thinking of how they can be applied in a technological society like Britain's.

If socialists are to make any impression in the "Great Debate" about education, we have to be clear about where we stand on the educational issues being debated. The establishment's strategy has to be understood. Polemically, it is debating "standards", the relations between education and the economy and who is to control the schools. Their views are clearly summarised in the D.E.S. report to Mr. Callaghan.

Its underlying purpose is to win support for the idea that education must be re-structured to gear it closer to a re-structured economy. Our response must be directed at two questions

\* What is education for?

\* Who is to control education?

Briefly, our answer is that education is for the emancipation of the working class from capitalism and that the working class must begin to assert its control over the educational system. How do we argue this in detail?

## Our principles

Our goal as teachers is to increase the critical awareness of the people we teach, to help them gather the skills they need for changing society, and to learn from them how we can perform this role more effectively. We need to spell out the principles upon which this practice should be based.

### Collective not Competitive

Capitalist society is founded on the myth that human nature is basically competitive and selfish, and that individuals must compete so that the "most able" gain power to run society. As marxists we do not believe that changing the power relations in schools or in personal life will transform society as a whole. But we do emphasise the need to establish co-operative, unselfish attitudes in young people, because co-operation is the basis of socialist society, and because the educational experience is more enjoyable and effective if it is done with the minimum of competition.

The Chinese example of "red pairs", where the child with more skill in one area helps a child with less skill should be applied. Both children benefit - the less skilled learns at his or her own pace and the more skilled learns more by subjecting him or herself to the demand of clear explanation.

Group project work also provides a way of encouraging collectivity and the whole learning experience should be stripped of merit marks, humiliating remarks and team competition wherever possible. The teacher should be a guide and stimulus, rather than a figure of authority and pre-packaged knowledge.

Central School dunces  
Sitting on the wall;  
Grammar School scholars  
Laughing at them all.

Modern School hams  
Cannot pass exams,  
Makers of mascots  
Pushers of prams.

"I. & P. Opie.

### Fusing of mental and manual.

The educational system has been designed to reflect the spurious distinction between the "thinkers" and the "doers". Selective, streamed education still rewards the academically able and penalises those with mechanical ability. We argue for genuinely comprehensive education where all pupils gain both intellectual and manual skills. While we oppose the use of school children as cheap labour, we are in favour of projects which take all children into practical work in the community. We oppose the present use of schemes as ways of keeping "slow learners" or school leavers quiet. All children can benefit from practical work - whether it be growing vegetables or making toys for young children.



## Education for the Whole Person

We are against the excessive specialisation practised in most schools, which makes it extremely difficult to make major changes in career. Specialisation is the lynch pin to a hierarchical society, trapping people in a particular job and minimising their chances of finding a more satisfying one.

A socialist society would be based on job rotation, which requires people being educated in a more rounded and general way, so that they have a basic knowledge which can be enlarged upon in each job they get. This way all people would do their share of less satisfying work, and the emergence of elites would be countered.

For the present, we require people to learn a wide range of skills and learn about everything relevant to their lives. This applies both to schoolchildren and to workers in W. E. A. or trade union courses. We oppose the segmentation of knowledge – for example, the separation of science from its political and social context (e.g. the Seveso disaster, the use of defoliants in Vietnam). As the French students of 1968 said, their education made them into “specialised idiots”.

### For Sexual Equality.

Several stereotypes, learnt at home, are usually reinforced at schools. Since the liberation of women is essential to the socialist movement, we have to oppose any discrimination against girls at school, and we have to assert the need for boys to learn what is traditionally regarded as “women’s work”. Sexist attitudes in teaching materials have to be examined and special feminist courses should be designed. Careers advice must maximise the opportunities for women to fulfill their real potential.

### For Racial Equality

Similarly, all racial discrimination must be removed from schools. Almost all school books contain derogatory references to some aspect of Black Culture, and spoken English employs the word “black” as a term of abuse (e.g. blackmail, blacklist). This taken for granted racism has to be stopped, and history, literature and geography and general studies courses must explain the real roots of racism and give a true picture of Third World societies. The use of schools by fascist organisations, and the employment of fascist or racist teachers must be strongly opposed.

### Skills

It is essential that children acquire, at an early age, the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. We do not share the right wing arguments that standards have declined (they haven’t) and that industry needs literate and numerate workers (for the most part it doesn’t). Children need these skills so that they can begin to understand and change the world. The same goes for workers, many of whom are condemned to passivity in the face of their intellectual “leaders”. We all need to know how to find out what’s happening in our workplace or community, and we need a general understanding of how capitalism operates. We need to be able to write leaflets, newspapers and posters, and learn how to produce them. Learning all this requires some self-discipline – which comes easy when the motivation is high.

## Black and White.

I’m white, he’s black –  
is it so bad?  
Or is it what people say?  
They can say some  
nasty things  
I know  
I’ve heard them.  
Why can’t they leave us alone?  
It’s our lives, we’ll do what we want.  
But if he was white,  
well . . .  
that would be different  
‘He’s one of us,  
not them,  
Why can’t they just  
try  
and see it our way?  
We can’t help it,  
It’s not that bad,  
It’s not his fault  
he’s black.  
Nor is it our fault  
we’re white.

\*

A teacher read,  
He read on and on  
About colour,  
I just glared  
The period ended  
He demanded to know what I was  
glaring at,  
I told him  
I was admiring his artie colour.  
He glared more,  
And shouted me down to the head.  
The head quietly asked what happened.  
I told everything, the teacher’s  
part and mine.  
He replied,  
Saying it was his job  
That I had a point too.  
He said again he’ll just give me one.  
I told him there was small justice,  
For saying that I got two.

Fourteen-year-old boy

My mum was in the Labour  
party when she had me born  
in hospital

Catherine aged 8

My Granny was a sufferer  
jet I think she flew a lot

Robert aged 7





# « The Great Debate »

In the current debate about education we oppose the view that education is a preparation for work in a capitalist society with the view that education is a tool of liberation from that society. We must answer the other points raised by the establishment.

## CURRICULA

Their argument is that curricula have to be more "profitable", more closely geared to the "skills" required at work. It follows from the principles we have outlined that we totally disagree with this position. Insead we want to see a development of the radical work of the classroom teacher in every discipline:

**English:** the scope for creative, sympathetic class based analysis of the real world is vast, and many teachers have done the kind of work for which Chris. Searle is justifiably famous. Every subject (race, sexuality, work, law etc) can be used as a basis for developing children's powers of verbal, written and dramatic expression.

**Sciences:** science should be related to the political, social and economic decisions which surround its practice. Children, especially girls, need to know how their bodies work and to learn about childbirth and contraception and abortion.

**Languages:** learning languages should be a way of learning about and respecting the history and culture of other societies, a means of developing international bonds.

**Social Sciences:** law, economics, politics, psychology and sociology should all be directed to the problems of understanding how individuals and groups develop and interact, how capitalism works and how it can be changed.

The degree to which these sketchy ideas can be put into practice will vary tremendously between and within schools. But they must be born in mind and developed by all left teachers; and used as a serious counter-argument to the "core curriculum" being proposed by some "great debaters". We must demonstrate that the core curriculum will not only stifle the creativity of the pupils, it will also remove teachers' autonomy - as it has effectively done in France, Germany and Canada.

## STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENT

The establishment is concerned about standards. The latest Black Paper, finally providing some figures, maintains that comprehensives get slightly fewer 'A' level passes than selective schools and that in maintained schools standards in maths, modern languages and science dropped between 1974 & 1976. But even Shirley Williams admits that standards have steadily increased during this century and the illiteracy figures, though high, are far lower than 30 years ago. Neither did Bullock say that literacy standards had fallen overall.

So we have to cut through the pseudo-scientific arguments and see what the "debate" about standards really means. It is really about what goes on inside schools. Everyone knows that, especially in working class areas, a lot of teachers are finding it harder to teach. Another way of putting this is that young people are getting more and more fed up with school and are expressing their hostility more and more openly. Coupled with this is the difficulty posed by the cuts: too few teachers with too few resources. It is no surprise, therefore, that Inspectors are con-

demning "ill-read (sixth form) students with limited initiative, reading only poor to mediocre standards" (D. E. S. report on modern language teaching, March 1977) The establishment uses this argument as a stick to beat the teachers.

Our reply is that we are concerned with students reaching their maximum potential and we do want learning and teaching standards to go on improving. But we cannot do this alone. For young people to learn, they have to be motivated. Many of them reject the argument that they need to learn and pass exams to get a decent job. They know they will either be on the dole or that exams are irrelevant to the kind of job they are likely to get. Others who want to pass exams are frustrated by authoritarian teachers and rules, by the overcrowded classes and lack of facilities. (Even the latest Black Paper admits that comprehensives are not comprehensive. Robert Vigors found that of 123 ILEA comprehensives, less than a quarter can offer an 'A' level in one technical subject). Standards will not improve until education is made worthwhile and meaningful, until pupils want to learn. That requires better facilities, interesting and relevant curricula, non-authoritarian structures - and the prospect of a decent job which fulfills the pupils' real potential. And all that requires wholesale social, political and economic change.

'Comprehensive education is still no better. Our school turned comprehensive. . . well, myself I don't know any difference between comprehensive and secondary, they're the same, that's what I thought it was, there's only a difference between comprehensive and a grammar. They still have grades in a comprehensive and a grammar school. You 'ad A1 and A2, you 'ad the top-notch right, they were the clever and the not so clever, then you had the Bs and Cs. Because they put on a board "Robinson Montefiore Comprehensive" it doesn't mean it is a comprehensive does it? That's theory, isn't it, while in practice it ain't.

The Paint House

While this must be our general argument, there are several immediate threats posed by the "standards" furore which all teachers are beginning to recognise. They are being blamed for the supposed "underachievement" which they know very well is not their fault. Then they are being told to get extra in-service training - but since money is being cut from the colleges of education these courses are rarely available. Another contradiction is local authorities' insistence on redeployment of teachers, accepted by the union as a lesser evil than redundancies. This leads to less teaching continuity which may well lead to the falling standards they say they are trying to avoid. Furthermore the insistence on standards means more and more interference by the Inspectorate, who themselves are being influenced by the C. B. I. and even less teacher autonomy than we have at present.

Similar considerations apply to the question of exams and assessment. We recognise that, for some pupils, exams are a passport to a better life. We want all young people to maximise their opportunities; we do not ask them to reject school and wait for the revolution. Further and higher education can make us into specialised idiots, but it can also provide us with opportunities to criticise and subvert the system. If gaining this opportunity means passing exams, we shall do all we can to help.

The problem is that since school and work are such alienating experiences for working class youth, few of them want to pass exams. So alongside our previous arguments we must organise for exam reform: giving the teacher and pupil far more say in how successful the pupil has been at a particular course, making use of continuous assessment and extending the ideas of team teaching so that other opinions can be sought relating to the pupil's performance. The 16+ course appears to provide a good example of the advantages of both flexible, relevant curricula and fair assessment methods.



## ACCOUNTABILITY: WHO CONTROLS?

So far we have argued what we, as socialist teachers, think education is for, and we have outlined a version of what and how socialists might teach in the classroom today.

The other main problem is who should control education. "Accountability" is the "Great Debaters" word. Their position is extremely confused. Some forces argue for increased control by administrators who will respond to the need of industry. The more clear sighted conservatives support extra parental influence because they know that, traditionally, middle class parents, who are concerned that education links with the job market, are the ones who make their views felt strongest.

Our position is that the working class should control education and Educational Institutions should be run by elected committees of parents, pupils, teachers and representatives of trade unions and tenants committees. There are several moves we can make in this direction, indicated in more detail in the next section "How do we organise?". We have to admit from the beginning that this is no easy task. There are infinite contradictions at present between pupils, teachers and parents and broad committees containing all these groups will be ridden with political and practical disagreements. But they can be united on two issues: opposition to the cuts in education spending, and demanding interesting and useful education programmes. Socialist teachers should take an active role in promoting these committees and arguing against the reactionary demands for "more discipline", "more exams", cut so-and-so, but not our school" which are bound to come up. The prospect of such committees being enlarged to represent the whole community and their taking control of education cannot be envisaged short of socialist revolution. But no other argument will do. Teachers cannot demand the right to control education: they cannot have the right to teach anything they like. Nor can parents, pupils, politicians or industry have the exclusive right of control. We have to work in all available ways for the acceptance of socialist principles both in the content and management of education.

The National Front recently gave vent to its ideas on education . . . or what would pass for it in the authoritarian state its members dream about.

In a 13-page document, The Front announces that it would end social work by children, set up a cadet force in every secondary school and insist upon the use of 'unbiased' books in history lessons.

According to The Front, there would be greater emphasis on health education, physical fitness and initiative training. This set of ideas is, of course, a hardy perennial of fascist ideology. The founding programme of Hitler's Nazi party contained similar ideas when it stated; "The State must apply itself to raising the standard of health . . . and increasing bodily efficiency by legally obligatory gymnastics and sports, and by extensive support of clubs engaged in the physical training of the young".

The NF would have compulsory lessons on 'patriotism' and would 'Neutralise' 'Red' teachers . . . exactly how is not specified.

As regards overall educational policy, the document proposes a national syllabus issued by the Education Department, under the supervision of an advisory board, thereby depriving teachers of all voice in formulating policy and shaping curriculum. The teacher's role would be confined to obedience and the implementation of the NF's policies.

As for Blacks, well, the document proposes separate education for them, pending 'repatriation' . . .

"Searchlight" No.19.





# How do we organise?

We have tried to specify the arguments that socialist teachers should be putting forward in the present educational crisis. The question now is, where and how do we organise to put these ideas into practice. We are not at all satisfied with the present teachers organisations, either the trade unions or the socialist groupings within the unions. Our analysis contains two prescriptions for organisation, neither of which are fulfilled at present. One is that our activity has to go beyond trade unionism's insistence on material demands. We have to take up educational demands and relate these to the re-structuring of the economy and of education. The other is that the struggle for a socialist education has to include all education workers plus parents pupils and the community as a whole.

There are a number of pointers which make us confident that these ideas can be put into operation. Magazines like *Radical Education*, *Teaching London Kids* and *Teachers Action* deal with similar issues, from differing points of view. Various small groups of teachers are meeting all over the country to try and work out more relevant and effective curricula. (For example, the Leeds Coalition Against Racism and Fascism has a teachers group; the Sheffield Radical Education group also has a sub-group working on anti-racist teaching). Parents, notably the Black Parents Movement, have effectively organised for change in school practice.

This work needs coherence, co-ordination and strategy. No single organisation is, at present, capable of providing this, but it is worth examining the potential organisations that exist and suggesting how they can develop.

## WITH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The NUSS has 15,000 members, the vast majority of whom are in London. Only a small proportion are politically active, but this organisation clearly represents the most effective potential vehicle for pupils to give weight to their demands for interesting and relevant curricula, against authoritarianism in schools, against the cuts and for unity with parents and teachers.

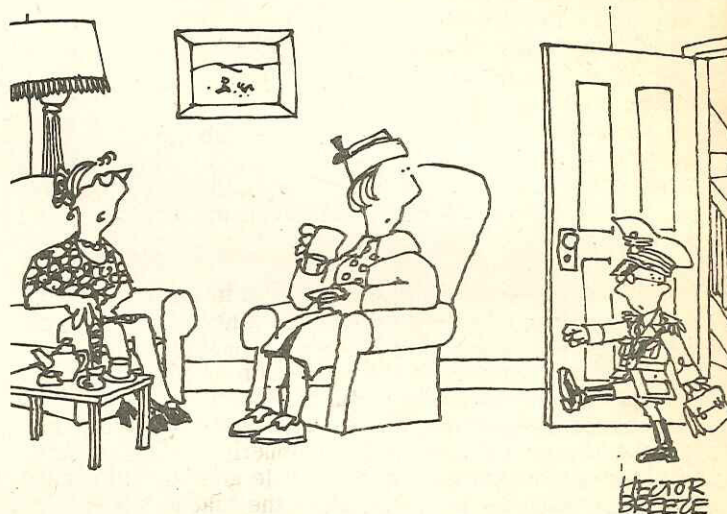
Socialist teachers have to make a clear stand in favour of pupils organising to change education. It is not our role to organise for them. We must never seek to take over or direct their struggles. But we can give committed support, without impeding their autonomy.



Black parents have organised alternatives to the state system (Chapeltown Supplementary School, Leeds 1974)

The situation in schools is extremely complicated when it comes to pupil organisation. In the absence of a mass socialist youth organisation, many actions by pupils can be dismissed by staff as vandalism, senseless aggression or truancy. We can see that, often, these actions are a form of rebellion against the useless and oppressive nature of education. We also see that teachers' reactions to this rebellion are often merely attempts to maintain their power over the pupils, regardless of the pupils' real needs.

Protests sometimes take a more obviously political form – for example when a strike is organised against a particular teacher or against a rule about, say, school uniform, or when working class pupils protest against the favouritism expressed for middle class pupils in the same school. On these occasions we see how the 'soft cop' "We understand how you feel" approach diverts and confuses the pupils.



As socialist teachers on the side of the youth we have to openly argue for our position in these struggles. We need to expose the manoeuvring of other staff. We should support the development of alternative institutions, with qualified workers paid by the L. E. A., for school refusers, recognising that school is oppressive and that, while socialism is the long term solution, in the meantime some pupils have immediate needs which are best catered for in learning situations outside the school. We have to clearly support those school students who are organising, whether it is simply in one school, or nationally through the NUSS. We welcome the fact that those students, when organised, will demand that we, as teachers, give up our power to them.

There are concrete ways we can support the development of the power of youth, without restricting their autonomy. We can open the pages of our magazines and newspapers to them; we can bring together like minded pupils from different schools; we can involve them in the development of a socialist curriculum; we can encourage them to work in cuts committees; we expose ourselves to their criticisms of our teaching methods and our politics. In short, we can, and we must, learn from them.

'Schools, you 'ave to go, doncha? The teachers and 'eadmaster, they're the authority, ain't they? They're telling you what to do and you're glad to get out and leave'n that, aren't ya? But work's different, ya got the bosses there, ain't ya? They think cause you're young and they pay you and that, that they can treat you how they like and say what they want. They think they're superior'.



## WITH PARENTS

There are two approaches to be taken up in motivating parents in the struggle for socialist education. One is in the already existing Cuts Committees. Wherever possible these committees should be open to the widest sections of the working class, including cleaners, housewives and unemployed. The joint union committees against the cuts must also be opened up. When the question of education cuts arises in these committees, we must add to the "No Cuts" position arguments against the re-structuring of education and for a socialist educational practice.

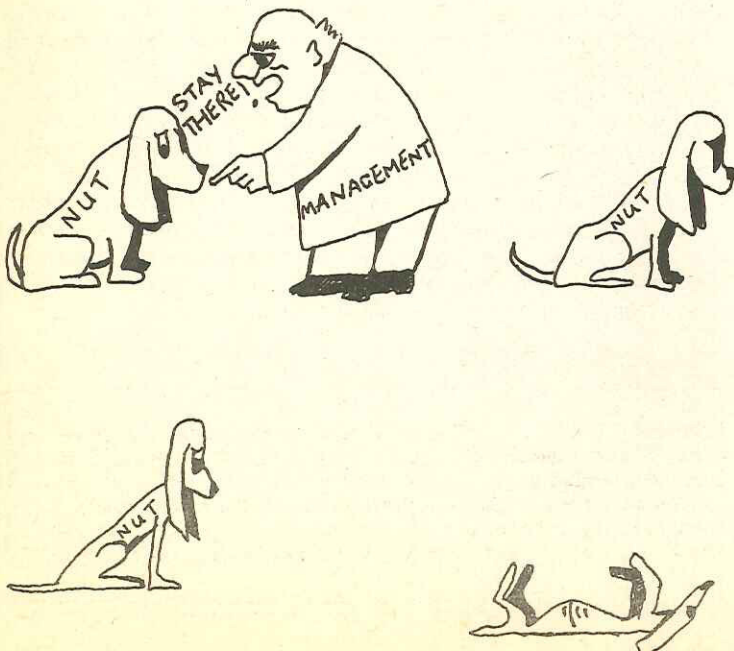
The other approach is allied to this. Teachers are in an ideal position to stimulate the formation of committees of parents, pupils and staff in their college or school to fight the cuts. It may be that middle class parents will attempt to dominate these committees, and some arguments may be reactionary. But the struggle cannot be avoided if we are to have any hope of realising our demands.

## WITH TEACHERS

All socialist teachers are members of their unions, usually the National Union of Teachers or National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education.

None of us have any faith in the leadership of these unions, even on the straight forward trade union issues, they are supposed to pursue. In the struggle against the cuts, our unions have been lukewarm, overshadowed by N. U. P. E. and A. S. T. M. S.

The conventional reaction of socialists in the N. U. T. or N. A. T. F. H. E. has been to organise ginger groups within the unions. The Rank and File groups in N. U. T. and N. A. T. F. H. E. have attracted a certain amount of support though this appears to be declining. There are several reasons for this loss in support. One is the sectarian way that the Socialist Workers Party (formerly the International Socialists) have run the Rank and File groups. This is the main reason for the break-off of the teachers who have now formed the Socialist Teachers Alliance (which is strongly backed by the International Marxist Group). Another reason is the limited perspectives of Rank and File. In its early days Rank and File was concerned with the educational process as a whole, but now it concentrates almost exclusively on issues like wages, conditions and the cuts. Its perspective seems increasingly orientated to capturing trade union posts and pressurising the union leadership. Many teachers have left Rank and File because of its irrelevance to their concerns as classroom teachers, failing to provide any stimulus for discussion of topics like discipline, curriculum, teaching methods etc.



While the S. T. A. rightly criticises Rank and File for its neglect of ideological issues and its failure to contribute to the "great debate", the S. T. A. also seems to be too closely wedded to trade union issues. In an editorial in the first issue of its journal "Socialist Teacher", they write:

"The S. T. A. has set itself two main objectives. Firstly we seek to establish units in action among the mass of teachers around a programme of basic demands, and secondly we hope to develop a coherent analysis of current educational practice and the roles and position of teachers and the educational system within the present social framework".

As a statement of intent, this is a clear advance on Rank and File. But the bulk of the first journal is devoted to struggles against the N. U. T. and esoteric articles on the political economy of education and language and racialism. Nevertheless, the S. T. A. is the best forum for socialist teachers organising within their unions. We would argue that S. T. A. groups should seek links with parents, youth and other workers involved in education (W. E. A. teachers, youth workers, caretakers etc); and that they should enlarge their discussions to cover educational issues such as the socialist curriculum and teaching methods, as well as making a clear contribution to the "great debate".

## Conclusion.

This pamphlet has attempted to show that the roots of the crisis in education lie in the long-term process by which capitalism attempts to re-structure the economy to maintain its profitability. Since this re-structuring entails de-skilling and proletarianising the workforce, the content of the educational process also has to be changed. The cuts in educational spending are necessitated by capital's need to restore its profit, and they are being used as a method of re-structuring the educational system.

The political response of socialists in education has to be many-sided. We have to make it clear what education is for. It is not to make young people passive cogs in capital's wheel. It is to "develop" . . . the generous, empathetic and fraternal instincts of these children" so as to "create within education a branch of the apparatus of liberation for the oppressed of the world" (Chris.Searle 'Classrooms of Resistance'). We have to work out the principles and practices of socialist education. Above all, we have to organise with parents, young people and all workers involved in education to put these ideas into practice. This means fighting the cuts, demanding decent wages, conditions and resources and helping to provide as interesting and useful educational experience for ourselves and for those we teach

This pamphlet hopes to contribute to that struggle.



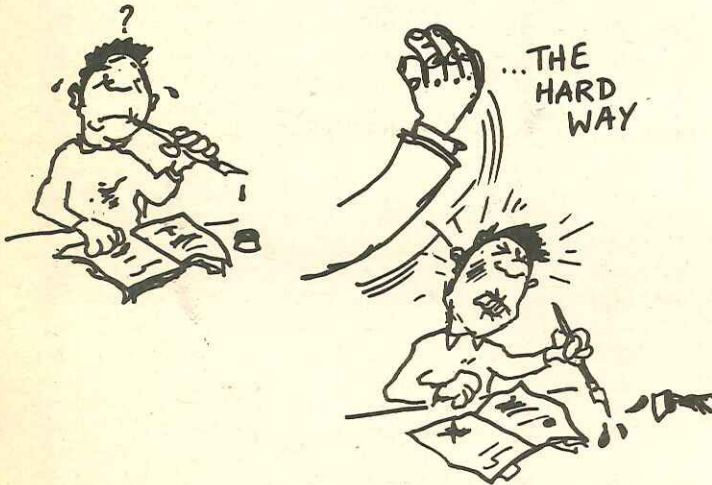
**Acknowledgements** for cartoons, pictures and quotes:

Classrooms of Resistance – Chris Searle (Writers and Readers Publishing Co-op. 1976), Peasant Paintings from Huhsien County (Peking '74), The School I'd Like – Ed. Edward Blishen (Penguin Education Specials '69), The Forsaken Lover. White Words and Black People – Chris Searle (Penguin), Education and the Working Class – Jackson and Marsden (Penguin), The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren – I. & P. Opie (O.U.P.), The Paint House – Words from an East End Gang (Penguin), Searchlight, Socialist Worker, Rank and File, Socialist Teacher, Teaching London Kids, The Beano, Times Educational Supplement, Family and School – Edited by D. Jackson, (Penguin). Race Today

Typeset by Leeds Other Paper  
Printed by Prestergate Press Ltd., Reading.

This pamphlet has been produced by the Big Flame Teachers Commission, with the helpful criticism of a number of people outside Big Flame who discussed the first draft circulated in November 1976. While Section I has received relatively minor modification, Sections II and III have been substantially re-written, and we are very grateful to the many people who took the trouble to attend meetings or send their criticisms to us.

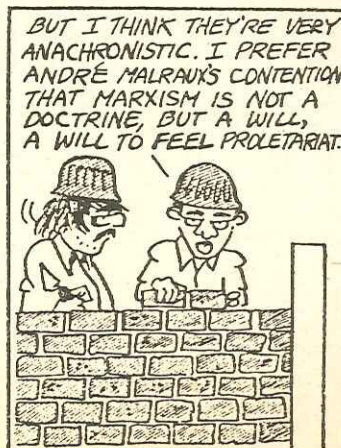
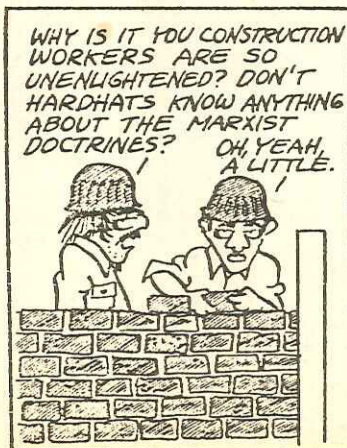
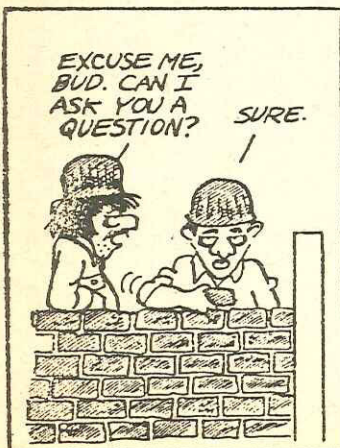
WHEN I WAS AT  
SCHOOL I WAS  
TAUGHT TO READ  
AND WRITE...



AND IT NEVER -



- DID ME ANY HARM!





## EXTRACTS FROM SOME REVIEWS OF THE FIRST DRAFT OF THIS PAMPHLET

The pamphlet has a useful section on parents. Historically working class parents did not intervene in their child's education: "In many cases it is not a lack of aspirations 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".

There is a useful analysis of parent reaction – the fact that parents are distanced from the educational process and often do not understand what is being done.

Big Flame analysis of progressivism is one of the best sections of the pamphlet. Progressivism highlights the conflict between education and the demands of the labour market. Right wings attacks on progressivism 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".

The fight back, as Big Flame points out, must not concentrate merely on one aspect of present oppression – teachers should not just limit their opposition to education cuts but unite with the wider cuts campaign. Equally, to concentrate solely on wage demands does nothing to solve the crisis. All the issues must be linked if the fight is to be won.

Dorothy Jones, *The Leveller* April 1977

The pamphlet is well worth reading and using as a basis for discussion as it places the debate firmly in a Socialist framework.

The document states "we must restore the concept of education as a means of emancipation of the whole of the working class, rather than individual and often illusory attempts to climb the social scale". And with that we wholeheartedly agree.

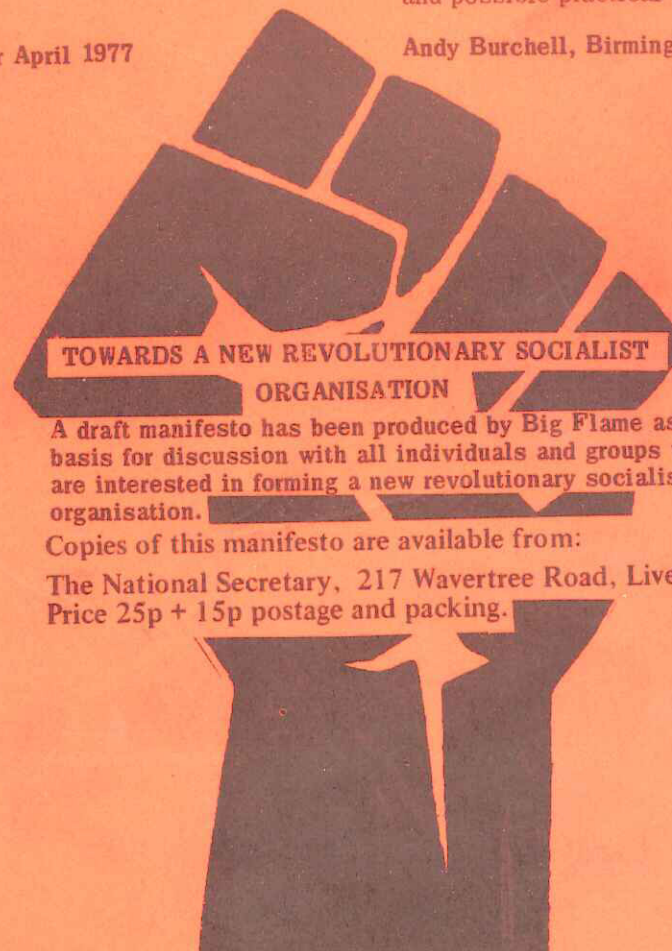
Labour Leader (ILP) March 1977

Their analysis is Marxist, concentrating on capitalism's use of "education" to meet its labour needs, and hardly mentioning power/personal relations in schools. They want to see a campaign that goes beyond the Cuts to question what education is for.

Peace News 11 February 1977

All in all a provocative draft pamphlet, but not hateful as suggested by the Mail, ideal for any interested pupil, parent or teacher and a fertile base for further development and possible practical action.

Andy Burchell, *Birmingham Broadside* April 1977



### TOWARDS A NEW REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST ORGANISATION

A draft manifesto has been produced by Big Flame as a basis for discussion with all individuals and groups who are interested in forming a new revolutionary socialist organisation.

Copies of this manifesto are available from:

The National Secretary, 217 Wavertree Road, Liverpool 7  
Price 25p + 15p postage and packing.

### READ BIG FLAME'S MONTHLY NEWSPAPER

For news and analysis of the struggles at work, in the community and in personal life.

£2.00 per year Britain and Ireland  
£2.50 per year Overseas.