

EDUCATION



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PREFACE

Over 500 years ago there was a Renaissance in Europe, a rebirth and rapid growth of intellectual and cultural achievement. This was the age of infant capitalism, and capitalism was driven by competition in pursuit of new methods of economic production. Just as the old mode of production was insufficient, so too was the old mode of thought.

No longer were the pronouncements of the medieval philosopher adequate. Leonardo da Vinci saw practical experience as his 'mistress'. This was the beginning of modern science, sponsored by capitalism, for then capitalism sought the truth. Its star was rising and there were no limits to intellectual progress. Bacon spoke of a light that should "touch and illuminate all the border regions which confine upon the circle of our present knowledge".

Bacon wrote 400 years ago. The capitalist sun has since burnt its brightest and is today in swift decline. Capitalism cannot give peace so it generates war, it cannot find profit so it generates stagnation, it cannot find work for those it would exploit, the parasite can only be antagonistic to its working class host. Capitalism today must sponsor ignorance for the truth today illuminates the corruption of its system and points the way to its destruction.

Education for the mass has always provided the ruling class with impossible contradiction. Capitalism must give to the working class the intellectual tools required to produce and wield a modern technology, but it cannot prevent the working class from using those tools to fashion its own emancipation.

The working class has been proud and jealous of its skills and has incessantly demanded more besides. It has emerged as the sole custodian of literature, art, music, science and all that is valuable from the past. Having carried the candles of learning through its Dark Age it will usher in a new Renaissance, a new leap in education.

THE GOVERNMENT ATTACK

The Albanians tell us that before their liberation from the foreigner, their classrooms carried the stench of gunpowder and the walls were splattered with blood. Such was the enemy's fear of the Albanian with learning that bayonets and bullets were used to prolong ignorance and illiteracy.

A similar struggle operates in Britain even if it takes a different form. Today, the ruling class has decided that education is too expensive. It is not prepared to pay teachers a living salary, it launches big cuts in the training of new teachers despite oversize classes and an increasing workload on teachers, it allows old buildings to crumble and makes impossible the building of new.

Paltry Salaries

Teachers have long been familiar with the law that wages are never more than enough to live on and that a perpetual struggle is required to protect a standard of living. But today, as was highlighted by the London Allowance struggle, teachers are not given enough to survive. They are forced to leave London and their former schools unsettled.

Between 1970 and 1972 house prices in London rose by roughly 60% (35% in the provinces). Houses were now hard to come by for less than £11,000. Meanwhile, in this period the London Allowance remained static at £118. Teachers, traditional house buyers, were left gaping at peanuts.

The London situation only dramatises the difficult situation that exists throughout Britain. From Brighton to Glasgow a salary of £1,000 to £2,000 provides the most meagre living and the response of teachers outside London must be, "What shall we demand for our allowance?"

Oversize Classes

For the Government teachers are expensive and so there must be as few of them as possible. This gives rise to oversize classes and no problem is closer to a teacher's heart. No conditions harbour slow learning more than overcrowded classrooms.

Today there are more than 4000 primary school classes of more than 40 children. Three out of five primary school classes and one out of three secondary have more than 30 pupils. Successive governments have given mere lip service to the reduction of class size. They quote a drop in the overall teacher-pupil ratio but the latter is largely due to a growing proportion of older pupils with their attendant small classes.

Appealing to a "falling school population", Thatcher has made a 40% cut in the number of students who are training to teach. She plans to have 510,000 teachers by 1986, estimated by research to be 60,000 short of the number needed if no class were to have more than 30 pupils.

Intake of trainee teachers at colleges of education will be cut from 38,000 in 1972 to 36,000 in 1973, to 32,000 in 1974. Thatcher plans for 18,000 in 1981. Meanwhile a crisis exists in British schools. Teacher shortage has left many schools without their quota. In order that classes should not become impossibly large courses have been cut and several schools are planning to put their children on a short week. Liverpool, for example, is trying to move primary teachers to secondary schools and leaving its youngest children on half-day schooling. Two comprehensive schools in Essex are putting their younger children on a four day week.

Old Schools Crumble

A decade ago, survey showed that half our primary schools were built in Victorian times. Two out of five had outside lavatories, 17% had no hot water, more than 40% had no staff-room. A later inquiry, in 1971, showed that heating in a third of schools was below the official minimum. The winter temperature in some classrooms would drop as low as 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Further, 40% complained of sanitary provision as being inadequate. Some schools were without toilets for the staff; outside toilets for the pupils still abounded, virtually unusable in bad weather.

Successive governments have appealed to their parlous economy, their improvement plans are thus thwarted, and so the conditions yearly worsen. Old buildings are often poorly lit and do not insulate against noise. Cloakroom facilities and storage space, dining rooms and playing space are often hopelessly inadequate in schools. Passages double as cloakrooms, classrooms double as dining halls. One school might travel a hundred yards to a playground, and dine on a third site in a canteen condemned 80 yrs ago!

In another, under 8's eat dinner in a corridor, only one class has running water, the medical room is used for teaching and the hall is used simultaneously for painting and P. E. . Such schools are not uncommon.

While old schools deteriorate the Government has nonetheless spent £3,300 million since the war on new schools and colleges. The Plowden Report (1967) noted that "the design of British school buildings since the war has deservedly won an international reputation," but regretted that the building was only sufficient to accommodate the increasing numbers. Now a fallen roof at Camden Girls has shown that shoddiness was a close partner to excellence.

New Schools Jerry Built - Projects Cancelled

Because of inflated building costs and tight Government cost limits, the work on new primary schools, promised by Thatcher during the 1970 election campaign, is either substandard or grinding to a halt.

Brand new schools have seen door knobs come away in the hand, partitions have collapsed because of a gust of wind, roofs have sprung leaks only weeks after the school's opening, windows have not closed because the frames do not fit, paint has peeled off only a month after the completion of decorations.

Medical rooms and libraries are regarded as luxuries. Space in the new primary schools is down to 32 square feet per pupil compared with 42 square feet in 1965. Working conditions have reached an all-time low.

Government increases in the cost limit for building schools are ludicrously insufficient. An increase of 22% in 1973 was in response to an increase in tender prices which reached, for example, 36% in London. Work on new schools is subsequently coming to a halt. For the Chingford Hall Infants School in Waltham Forest the cost limit imposed was £109,000, but the lowest tender was £137,000. The project had to be cancelled and temporary classrooms prepared for the children already enrolled as well as proposals for part time education.

So while secondary schools are bearing the brunt of the teacher shortage, primary schools are more acutely deprived of space. In both types of school intolerable conditions and part time schooling are the results.

White Paper

It is the Government's White Paper, ironically called "Education; a Framework for Expansion", that lays out the ruling class's strategy for the next decade. It announces a 30% cutback in the increase in education spending, lopping some £60 million off the education budget compared with that expected if the trend of the last decade were to continue. This is in response to the swelling demand of educational excellence for all.

The range of the attack extends from post graduate students to the under fives. Universities have been instructed to cut back on post graduates and to reduce the cost of education per student. This is to be done by a "more effective use of staff". The much heralded increase in nursery provision is little more than an attempt to curtail the early entry

to school of four year olds. Tremors of the White Paper extend to lecturers in Colleges of Education. The reducing of places in such colleges and the closing of smaller ones will cause 4,000 lecturers to become redundant.

ENEMIES, RIGHT AND LEFT

Access to education or no. This is the question that has historically confronted the working class and this is the question that confronts them today. The class is surrounded by every enemy.

The reactionary Right has gathered under the banner of "more means worse" and has resisted every advance in education for the mass. Education, in public and grammar schools, would be the preserve of an elite. For the remainder the only worthwhile training and pursuits are those that prepare them for wage-slavery. They have opposed the raising of the school leaving age and appealed to violence in the classrooms to back their stand.

The Fleet Street press never misses an opportunity to denigrate schools and those that labour in them. Problems in education are attributed to incompetent teachers and ill-found methods. Teachers are painted as brutal and high-handed, children are wayward and blindly rebellious. Meanwhile the whole of capitalist society fosters a climate in which intellect is despised and pupils are subjected to every pressure inducing them to neglect study. All this complements the physical problems of mere survival under capitalism and the difficult home conditions with which many children have to contend.

The ultra-left, no less reactionary, propose the complete abandonment of formal education, claiming that schools have

no relevance to pupils. The study of Shakespeare and Newton is 'middleclass'. Again the working class is subjected to perpetual wage-slavery.

The working class itself has never fully shared the conviction of the need for education. There are parents today who keep their children at home in order to relieve domestic pressure. Their ancestors of the Industrial Revolution sent their children to earn money in the mines and factories. In struggling only to survive under capitalism the worker alleviates the immediate problem but strengthens the source of his ills.

Education, essential for the dignity and advance of the working class, possesses its own perils. In Britain, state education has existed for over 100 years. The British working class is both literate and numerate and everybody goes to school. The mass media is created and no effort is spared in pouring poison into the minds of a literate working class. "A little learning is a dangerous thing". Without its own ideology, the class is burdened by another yoke.

Poverty of Provision and the Demand for Plenty

Only 30% of all school leavers get some sort of higher education. The rest begin their first job at the age of sixteen. Of these only 22% get further training on a day-release basis at colleges of further education. Since 1964 the number of sixteen to eighteen year olds released by industry has been steadily declining. Young women suffer most. In 1971 only 10% of young women obtained release from employment compared with 40% of young men in the same age group. Young people are not only not encouraged to pursue any form of further education on leaving school, they are positively discouraged. Unemployed school leavers are forced to roam the streets rather than attend a college of FE, for otherwise they would lose their social security benefit.

Wasteful capitalism has, in its education provision, neither the will nor the capacity to harness and advance the talents of its people. In the face of inequality and injustice the demand has risen for comprehensive schools where all will be given full opportunity. Today, the ruling class has seized that demand to camouflage a further attack and practise further economy. Under the pretext of 'comprehensivisation' two schools are merged, perhaps both secondary moderns, thrown onto a split site, and heavier demand is made on accommodation already inadequate. Children travel further to and within their school, teachers are given a heavier load, if not dismissed and demoted. The reorganisation is to be done with existing resources. No extra money is provided.

The grammar schools must join the demand for comprehensives but insist that in the reorganisation there is no decline in facilities or educational standards. It is on such a decline that the Government is hell-bent and their attack has driven all into battle. In the midst of a battle such as the Government has provoked, it is fostering division to squabble about who is the more privileged; grammar or secondary, voluntary aided or county, denominational or non-denominational. The demand must be a worthy education for all and our ranks embrace all in the forthcoming struggle.

How and When

The front-line troops in the struggle for education have been teachers. We have seen the arena in which they are immersed. The question facing teachers today is not whether to fight or not but how and when.

A basic feature of teachers' struggle is its relative weakness compared with the employers. This is true particularly at the beginning of a dispute. The aim in conducting the battle must be to turn this relative weakness into relative strength.

In the short term this means mobilising an ever increasing number of the staff into taking part in struggle for our immediate demands. Taking such action as can be successfully carried out in order to build up our forces to take yet more effective action and so on. It means knowing when to call a halt and retreat without demoralisation in order to start the next battle where the last one ended.

In the long term it means changing the balance of forces in favour of the working class. It is these same everyday battles about wages and conditions that ultimately produces this qualitative change in our favour. This is what guerrilla struggle is all about. Guerrilla action is essential to winning everyday battles as well as ultimately winning the war against capitalism.

Some teachers argue that our action has very little effect on our employers who do not care about any disruption in the education of the pupils anyway. The history of our struggle is proof to the contrary. Many battles have been won through the application of the correct action at the right time. In 1969, the struggle for an interim award was won because of the selected strikes waged by the NUT over a period of time, which forced the employer to give in. Once the mass of teachers is mobilised there is no limit to the ingenuity that can be brought to play to make our action effective.

This defeatist attitude is reinforced by the ultra-left who, starting from this erroneous premise, call for "co-ordinated action" with other sections of the working class. Such "co-ordinated action", not based on grass root strength, ends up in defeat and demoralisation for all.

The fact that teachers are not engaged in direct production does not make their industrial action ineffective. It highlights the fact that we cannot import methods of struggle wholesale. We have to treat our struggle seriously taking into account all its special features.

The Struggle for the London Allowance, 1972 - 1973

The struggle for the London Allowance, which occupied the best part of 1972/73, is the latest large scale action the teachers have been involved in. Although only London teachers were directly involved, the struggle is of tremendous significance to all teachers. It became the focal point in the salary issue and the lessons to be learned from it must not be ignored.

In the last round of the general salary negotiations for 1972/73, the NUT sought an increase in the London Allowance to start from April 1st. The claim eventually went to arbitration. The arbitral body ruled that the London Allowance should remain at £118 until October 31st and that any revision should take effect from November 1st of that year. Both the management panel and the Government accepted this recommendation.

When negotiations for the London Allowance began later in the year, it was widely believed that the management panel was prepared to make a substantial offer. However, with the wage freeze due to come, the Government broke its own pledges and prevented the negotiations from proceeding. It finally instructed the management panel to make a derisory offer of £15 increase. This intervention by the secretary of state was a clear breach of the Remuneration of Teachers Act passed by Parliament in 1965. This complete disregard of teachers by the Government incensed teachers everywhere and the campaign for the London Allowance duly started.

The teachers were suddenly placed in the front line of the fight against Phase I of the wage freeze, introduced by the Government on November 6th, 1972, and they responded with vigour and determination. Throughout, the struggle was characterised by willing troops eager to move but without leadership at the grass roots to give it direction. The response to the selected strikes introduced by the executive was tremendous, but it remained a response. Initiative was lacking and so the fight did not develop into guerrilla struggle.

The selected strikes, instead of developing into guerrilla action with decisions on a strike or other sanctions taken at the base, succeeded only in building up to the final all-London strike and lobby of Parliament on March 21st. This was the end of the campaign. The NUT then agreed to send the London Allowance to the Pay Board. The ATTI, representing college teachers who to some extent also took part in the NUT campaign, preferred to include the money due to the London Allowance within the national salary increase.

Undoubtedly the struggle for the London Allowance was a fertile experience for every teacher in London and elsewhere. The question of the next step in the struggle was on every teacher's lips. The drawback was that it remained a question. The only correct line, that of guerrilla struggle, was put forward by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist -Leninist), but the level was not such that it could be implemented. The social democrats from the right to the ultra-left were exposed and discredited; the first by their incapacity to offer any leadership beyond lobbying MPs and the latter by their arrogance and lack of confidence in teachers, their empty resolutions and mechanical calls for "joint action" with other unions. The conclusion was inescapable. The ultra-left contempt of working class struggle led them to active disruption as was

done openly at the Central Hall meeting. The Right used this to discredit the genuine militancy of teachers.

As things stood, the teachers could not force a breach in the pay freeze. Neither could the civil servants, the hospital workers nor others who were engaged in similar struggles at the time. However, the important thing is how does the struggle end and how does it lead into the next one. And this is what concerns us now. Having fought gallantly the task is to build up our strength at our schools and colleges. There can be no blue print for struggle only general guidelines. The rest must stem out of the experience of the mass of teachers. At the next round, be it about salaries, conditions or whatever, we cannot afford to sit back awaiting instructions. We should take the initiative and issue our own instructions by our example.

Embryonic Struggle

The struggle is incessant but the Government attack is accelerating the pace. Every school and college in Britain is faced with the challenge. The response may begin in a modest way.

Take Hornsea, for example, a seaside town fifteen miles from Hull. In the primary school a shortage of space has meant classes of 42, and three classes of infants occupying the hall simultaneously - "Like a crowd on a football terrace". The teachers approach the authority who immediately hide behind the skirts of the Department of Education and Science - "We'd like to build but the DES won't give us any money".

Meanwhile in the Hornsea secondary school new building has been mismanaged in relation to comprehensivisation and the expansion of Hornsea. The raising of the school leaving age and a much larger number of pupils staying on to the 6th year has forced the issue. The head proposes a staggered

time-table which will involve longer hours and extra duties for each teacher. The teachers respond by returning the full responsibility to the Authority and the DES. The proposals for extra work are scrapped.

St. John's Teacher Training College, York will be reduced gradually from 2,000 to 600 students. All are opposed. The Principal is furious at such amputation of his college. A lecturer recognises, "once dispersed you won't be able to set the college up again simply because more teachers are required."

These struggles, embryonic as they are, must be advanced all over Britain.

Strategy of Revolution

It was the fate of Sisyphus to roll a huge rock up the brow of a hill and topple it down the farther slope. He has never yet succeeded in doing so. As soon as he has almost reached the summit he is forced back by the weight of the rock which bounces to the bottom once more. He wearily retrieves it and begins his struggle all over again, his limbs bathed in sweat and dust in his nostrils.

The question for teachers and the whole working class is whether we accept the plight of Sisyphus. For despite the stones rolled and the sweat shed we still remain on the wrong side of the hill. We fight for more pay but the pay is still low; we fight for smaller classes yet the classes are still large; we fight for less work yet more is given; we fight for better conditions but the conditions get worse.

The history of struggle in education has shown that nothing less than the destruction of capitalism can solve the problems of education. We look to China where the rock is speeding down the farther slope. All energies can be devoted to expanding and deepening education for there education serves the people who labour and those who labour have control of education.

To avoid returning to the bottom of the hill we must claim the revolutionary ideology which is our true inheritance Marxism-Leninism. It is within the strategy of revolution that we see the everyday battle. The rocks merely strengthen our muscles for the final push.

The recapture of its true ideology, the beginning of the Renaissance of the working class, began with the birth of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). It began with the line of guerrilla struggle, and the future of education and the working class is reliant upon the implementation of that line.

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