

FOR EDUCATION



A REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE!

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PREFACE

(The following statement was issued by the CPB(ML) on 7th June, 1975.)

OPPOSE ALL EDUCATION CUTS!

Today we witness an onslaught on education.

For decades, education has been a target for government attack. The attack today, however, is fundamentally different from that of old. Running down education is no longer a short-term expediency: now it has been adopted as a long-term strategy.

Prentice is implementing a policy worked out by his predecessor, Thatcher.

In 1972 a Government White Paper laid out the ruling-class strategy: a 30 per cent cutback in the increase in education spending; a 45 per cent cut in teacher-training places by 1981; a severe cutback in building programmes and reduction in post-graduate places.

A year later, a massive cut of £182 million in education spending was announced. Throughout the country, all aspects of the education service - from staffing and books to meals and school trips were subject to economy.

"More austerity"

In February, 1974, the Labour Government took over. Thatcher was replaced by Prentice.

The Labour budgets have dealt successive blows to education: Prentice has intensified the cuts outlined by Thatcher; all pretence of expansion is dropped; declining standards are openly proclaimed.

Crosland says, "The party's over."

Healey cuts a further £76 million from education.

Prentice says, "Next year will be much more austere. There may not be full employment for all new teachers in 1976 - 77, there may be higher school meal charges, there may be cuts in non-teaching jobs."

Lord Crowther-Hunt, Minister of State for Higher Education, tells university teachers to work harder, do more teaching and less research. Grants to universities to be cut further next year.

A Cabinet Paper on a Joint Approach to Social Policy declares: "The economic situation . . . will mean cutting back on some plans in the social field."

A new response

Never before has education been so attacked. The qualitative change in ruling-class strategy must find a qualitative change in our response.

No longer is the Government prepared to tolerate an educated, a dignified working class. Attacks on education are more pernicious and permanent than those on wages.

Attacks on education, along with attacks on health, housing and employment, will produce a new generation - an illiterate, homeless, unhealthy generation that has grown up and never been in any kind of employment.

The situation is urgent. The whole working class, the trade unions, must respond to meet this new challenge to their future and the future of their children.

Nail Prentice and his Labour Government!

FIGHT ALL CUTS!

Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the ruling class was forced to grant education for the mass of the working class, it has viewed it as a necessary evil and treated it accordingly. Pennypinching attitudes and reductions in spending are nothing new, but in recent years the attack on education has undergone a qualitative change. There has been not merely a halt in progress but a deliberate reduction of existing standards. Capitalism abandons Britain and plans an abandonment of mass education.

British capitalism made its intentions clear when it joined the Common Market. Capital investment has poured out of the country and in the search for jobs workers are invited to emigrate. All social services are being dismantled. Every murmur of dissent would be silenced by an all-embracing corporate state.

The aim of capitalism is to destroy an organised working class. An essential element of such a class is education - literacy, numeracy, knowledge, culture. Central to capitalism's attack, therefore, is the attack on education.

The utter iniquity of their design is confirmed by the knowledge that Britain is on the verge of a falling school population and the opportunity exists for a dramatic improvement in education provision.

THE RULING CLASS ATTACK

The generals of this assault have been successive Secretaries of State, Thatcher, then Prentice, latterly Mulley. The 1972 Tory White Paper, ironically called "Education: a Framework for Expansion", laid out a strategy for the next ten years. It announced a reduction of £60 million off the education budget compared with that expected if the trend of the previous decade was continued. The same document, appealing prematurely to a falling school population, planned for 510,000 teachers by 1981, estimated by research to be 60,000 short of the number needed if no class were to have more than 30 pupils. Thatcher's projection demanded a 40 per cent cut in teacher training places.

Brazen Cuts

In December 1973, the Conservative Government announced massive cuts in government spending. In education this meant cuts totalling £182 million, including £119 million in school buildings in the year 1974-5, and £63 million in goods and services such as furniture, equipment and school maintenance: school improvement projects were delayed and adult education courses were axed.

The Labour Party in opposition attacked these cuts but when a Labour Government took office in March 1974 the cuts were not restored. Indeed, the cuts were subsequently to be increased.

The interim budget of November 1974 provided for a 4 per cent rate of growth for national spending on education in 1975-76, in real terms. The 4 per cent is practically swallowed up by the increased school roll. In fact, this budget meant a drastic slowing down in the expansion and improvement of the education service nationwide and a situation of shortage and cutback in many areas where the 4 per cent growth rate is not enough even to keep existing projects going.

Survey of damage

Early in 1975, the Council for Educational Advance carried out a survey of education cuts in all the areas of England and Wales.

They report:

- "1. The general picture is one of 'zero growth'. This means that plans for improved pupil/teacher ratios, nursery education, school buildings renewal, better training, adult education, youth service work and grants for higher education have been shelved. In many areas the available resources are swallowed up by building projects started before the cut back, leaving nothing for new projects or improvements.
2. In some local authorities the basic elements of education are being damaged:
 - teacher numbers are being cut or 'frozen' while pupil population rises.

- nursery education programmes are being cut or slowed down.
- adult education is being restricted.
- the youth service is being severely cut: youth centres are being closed down, staff are not being replaced, facilities are being discontinued.
- libraries are being closed.
- colleges of education are being closed, or merged with other institutions, with a drastic cut-back in teacher training.
- special education services for the handicapped are being curtailed: special transport and home tuition is no longer available in some areas.
- less and less money is available for ordinary repairs to buildings and equipment. This means a serious deterioration in school conditions.
- new buildings are built to minimum standards in terms of size and finish.
- some school pupils are losing their swimming and music lessons, others are getting school dinners with less protein content, school heating and lighting is being skimped.
- cuts are being made in supplies of books, pencils, paper and art materials."

Labour Duplicity

The Labour Party in opposition pledged itself to not proceeding with the cuts in initial teacher training places until full discussion of projected numbers needed to carry out its educational programme had taken place. Even this shade of a pledge was reneged in office. Prentice proposed around 480,000 teachers in 1981, worse than the inadequate Thatcher plan of 510,000. Thatcher had planned for 18,000 initial training places in 1981 compared with 38,000 in 1972. The latest proposal from the DES is for 12,000 by 1978.

These figures are based on notoriously unreliable forecasts

of school population and as a 1974 DES report said, "the future size of the school population is influenced also, however, not only by the number of births but by the number of pupils who choose to stay on beyond the school leaving age.". It is also admitted quite openly that the figures for teacher training and any revision are arrived at "in the light of changing economic circumstances."

Teacher unemployment

The spectre of teacher unemployment has been raised. It is expected that at least one third of the 20,000 qualified teachers leaving college in 1975 will have no job to go to.

The likelihood of teacher unemployment has discouraged students from beginning training as teachers. It is now difficult to recruit even the reduced intake of students.

Among serving teachers there have been redundancies especially those on part-time and temporary contracts. Authorities have attempted to redeploy teachers leaving the former posts unfilled.

Within twelve months, nationwide teacher shortage resulting in widespread part-time education has been magically transformed into teacher "glut". Capitalism is a veritable Merlin.

Redundancies among teachers have been complemented by redundancies of non-teaching staff.

Return to Savagery

The appalling bourgeois philosophy peddled by the Labour Government and other enemies of education is that education, along with any other advance of the working class, causes inflation. As the retiring General Secretary of the NUT said when reporting on a protest delegation to a local authority, "And then they go on to say that in order to save England and France and Germany and the US and Japan, and indeed the whole of the civilized world, children must be given fewer books to read, less paper to write on, less paint to paint with, and only those children who can

afford to pay to go to the baths shall be allowed to swim."

Prentice, MP for a constituency with the lowest educational standards in Britain, relished his role as axe-man. He said the "education service has to face up to the country's economic situation like everyone else". Children must play their part in the social contract. While Education Secretary, it was he who firmly promised teachers unemployment, who told them that unless they can persuade other workers and their colleagues not to ask for more wages than public services including education would be cut again; and who lectured teachers in struggle for the London Allowance that he would not be moved by their "damn silly actions." Despite all he did, Prentice escaped virtually unscathed to another ministerial department without there having been a universal outcry of rage from workers at what had happened to the education service under his management. Mulley has now taken over. His first pronouncement on taking office was, "You have to remember that against the background of the economic situation there is no growth anywhere."

A new face, but the same old tale.

We must learn that whichever the Secretary of State, whichever the party - Labour or Tory - presiding, the strategy towards education is constant, and there is no distinction whatsoever when it comes to the application of the policy of cut-back and dismantlement. What is discernible, however, is that as each government, as each Education Secretary comes and goes there is a cumulative attack on education and the cuts increase. We can have no faith in personalities or lesser evils, it is up to us the working class, to arrest the trend and come to the defence of education.

Covert Attacks

The Government has found sources of economy disguised in progressive garb.

Under the guise of introducing "comprehensive" schools where all can learn and have greater opportunity the Government is conducting a major reorganisation of secondary schools. It aims

for bigger classes and fewer buildings and by its own admission there will be no money to do the job properly. If the Government was really concerned about comprehensive education it would have made comprehensive schools so attractive in staff-pupil ratios, opportunities and facilities that parents would be demanding that their children must go to one.

The reason for the merger of many colleges of education stemmed from the recommendations of the James Report and the subsequent White Paper. These recommended that colleges should be reorganised in order to have professional courses leading to teacher qualifications alongside non-professional courses. There should be a degree of interchangeability between the two. Though the reorganisation was accepted by some as "progressive", it became increasingly clear that these plans were being used as a smokescreen to implement a savage cut-back in teacher supply. In Inner London, two colleges, Philippa Fawcett and Furzedown had been planning to amalgamate as one such 'Liberal Arts' college when the DES announced a reduction by 60 per cent in teacher training places to be available in one college the other to be closed completely. So much for progress.

No less deceptive is the theory of "positive discrimination", widely hailed on the left. "Positive discrimination" has inspired nearly all official policies over the last decade. It purports to favour those schools in the poorest, "deprived" areas in order to "compensate" for an impoverished home-life. Apart from its patronising character it has proved in reality to be a device to deprive everyone on the pretext that there is always someone else worse off.

The divisiveness of "positive discrimination" was shown in 1974 when, faced with national discontent over teachers salaries, Prentice released £10.8 million for teachers who worked in schools of "social priority". The teachers were not bold enough to reject the money and the resultant scramble for a share has created a furore in the profession.

The idea of "priority" presupposes limited resources. It has now been elevated to a plan for the whole social services whereby Ministers will agree amongst themselves whether to spend on

health or education though in truth they would spend on neither.

A current ruling class gamble, by which they appear to place great store, is "worker participation". This purports to give those who work in education a bigger say in it. In reality the only questions those on managing bodies will be required to answer will be, "Who is to be sacked and which area of spending is to be cut?" Prentice has said to teachers: "They can't ask to be consulted and then say if they are they won't come up with any alternative ideas." Moves in the direction of 'participation' are being met by a refusal to guide the hand that cuts.

Government Allies

In its search for allies the Government looks to ratepayers. It is said that education and those the labour in it are so expensive that the rates will have to go up. As if there was not enough money to pay teachers without depriving others of their wages! The Government would foster public antagonism towards teachers and we should know of their intent.

The reactionary Right has gathered under the banner of "more means worse" and has resisted every advance in education for the mass. Education would be the preserve of an elite. For the remainder the only worthwhile training and pursuits are those that prepare them for wage slavery. The Right has opposed the raising of the school leaving age and appealed to truancy and classroom violence to back their stand. Problems in education are attributed to incompetent teachers and ill-found methods.

The Fleet Street press never misses an opportunity to denigrate schools and those who labour in them. Teachers are "irresponsible" and pupils "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.

An idea much fashionable in colleges of education, is that

teachers are "middle class" and that traditional education content has little relevance to pupils. The study of history and science of geography and literature is supposedly "bourgeois". Such an outlook would consign knowledge to a preserve of the rulers and condemn the working class through a lowering of sights to a posture of perpetual wage slavery. What a moronic idea! Rather we should remember the words of Bertold Brecht - "Learn your ABC. It is not enough, but learn it." In fact, the working class has been proud and jealous of acquiring both knowledge and skills and has incessantly demanded them and more besides. It has emerged as the sole custodian of literature, art, music, science and all that is valuable from the past.

But 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.

There is confusion in the working class but there is clarity too. We are not unaware of the rundown of education yet our protest is muted. The greatest ally of the Government is our own indolence.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EDUCATION

State education has existed since 1870 and the provision that exists today is the fruit of over a century of struggle.

Teachers' salaries are a key element of that provision. In 1969,

faced with salaries as low as £13 a week, teachers took national strike action for the first time ever. A new spirit swept the profession and the demand for an interim pay award ended in victory.

In 1974, after a two year battle, London teachers scored a magnificent victory in their pursuit of an increased area allowance. They defied a wage freeze and drove their way through subsequent Government incomes legislation. The victory over two successive Governments was achieved by applying sanctions, holding massive demonstrations and strikes of up to 3 days.

During the London Allowance campaign the Government had, on several occasions, drawn attention to a "global sum" of money available and said in effect, "Here is a kitty. Now squabble for it amongst yourselves if you want." Later with the Houghton Report there was a similar inducement to "redistribute" a global sum.

The battle over the London Allowance was not, moreover, solely a matter of money, it was also consciously conducted to avert a possible destruction of educational standards in London through shortage of teachers, and should be seen as one of the opening shots by workers against the de-industrialisation of that metropolis - containing lessons for all the nation.

Also, the London Allowance campaign saw a move towards a clearer definition of a teacher's duties and conditions of service. The sanctions of "no cover" for vacancies and absences employed during the course of the dispute focussed the attention of teachers on a long-standing question. Just what duties should they be prepared to perform? Lack of definition has led to an abuse of their skill and their good will.

In the course of the struggle parents and pupils had fought in support. In Brent, several hundred pupils walked out of school and marched to the Town Hall to demand more teachers and an end to part-time education. A mature response and a foretaste of things to come.

The basic integrity and sound tactics of this struggle by London teachers was a warning light to the Government and paved the way for Houghton.

The Houghton Report

The stirrings in London had threatened to find a national response. Alarmed by this the Government in May 1974 set up a review body under Lord Houghton to enquire into the salaries of teachers and college lecturers.

The report arrogantly and artificially separated education from teachers' salaries - which is quite unacceptable as the two are obviously indissolubly linked, the well-being of one is dependent on the other.

Further, the report was to be based on the idea of "comparability", that over the last seven years teachers' salaries had fallen behind those of others. It was on this basis that teachers should have ignored the review entirely and proceeded with their own claim. If all who labour were merely to aspire to the level of their fellow workers then there would be no advance, and with such a passive philosophy we would soon return to the miserable days of Dickens.

In Scotland a campaign of selected strikes was launched in advance of the Houghton findings. The Scots were determined and ingenious in their struggle but they were not joined by teachers south of the border. With the exception of Scotland, teachers fell for the Houghton philosophy and sat back to await the report.

The report emerged finally in the Christmas holidays 1974. The increases, so pompously proclaimed, were in fact quite inadequate. The largest increase in schools, 32 per cent, was only sufficient to tread water in inflationary times. For the mass of teachers the increases were substantially lower. The lowest increase of 16 per cent was given to the starting salary. The idea of this was to discourage entrants to the profession. Meanwhile the emphasised career structure was divisive and promised pie in the sky.

Teachers, lamentably, had no wish to fight and the report was accepted. It was this acquiescence that gave a green light to the Government to proceed with its massive cuts in education.

Beginning of Resistance

The struggle against the cuts is gathering momentum. In July 1974 Leeds teachers walked out of their schools in a half-day protest action against the city council's proposed cut-back in expenditure. In Leicestershire faced with cutbacks approaching £4 million, teachers and parents demonstrated their opposition. In February 1975 teachers in Buckinghamshire stopped work and parents supported them in a lobby of protest against cuts of £3½ million. Similar actions were taken in Richmond on Thames and Ealing.

Parents and teachers have taken action in Avon County, Manchester, Liverpool, London and other areas. The trade union movement has been involved in all of these actions. Throughout the country there have been pickets, lobbies, conferences, demonstrations, "weeks of action".

Teachers have resisted transfer. Colleges of education have hotly fought their closure. The struggle to retain the colleges has involved not only students, staff and principals, but also local authorities and even business communities in the locality.

When the shortening of the final school year was proposed by the Government, the TUC immediately denounced this as a "serious erosion" of the reform achieved in raising the school leaving age.

A spirited defence of the universities has been conducted by lecturers through their union, the AUT. Students have long fought for more money and against cuts. Now the dons have joined them. In pursuit of a salary increase they have stopped work and threatened sanctions. Lord Crowther-Hunt, Minister for Higher Education, has warned dons that targets for 1981 cannot be met "without creating conditions unacceptable to all concerned". He has denigrated research and called for larger teaching groups. This must be recognised as a change in the direction of official policy for higher education. Gone is the philosophy of the Robbins Report of 1963 of expansion combined with a commitment to excellence. Instead Higher Education adopts the policy of contraction and the ethos of mass production and its conveyor belt to the detriment of future generations.

The strides taken in recent years by students have been giant ones. They have transformed their student unions from social clubs into true defensive organisations and have resisted several government incursions. For several years now they have conducted an on-going battle for a satisfactory grant for all, and have clearly defined education as a right not a privilege. Besides which there have been fights against college closures, and worsening standards, and protests against deteriorating staff/student ratios and reductions in student numbers.

Response - Too restrained

But the response of the working class has been far too modest and far too restrained.

There is a feeling that "it doesn't concern us" and that it can be left to those "directly involved".

There is a willingness to accept some cuts so long as certain areas remain intact. The most vociferous protest has only come when jobs are threatened.

Some argue that certain cuts are warranted. They would have the various sections of education arguing between themselves for a share of "limited resources".

Some would wait until the cuts take effect then think it premature to act as soon as they are announced.

Some say that to oppose all cuts is "divisive" and opposition should be confined to the most outlandish. They are like those who peel an onion layer by layer whilst claiming to protect its essential core - soon there will be none left!

Some declare "there have to be cuts, there is no money" and drift perilously close to becoming unpaid apologists of the deteriorating situation.

These are but some of the confusions and errors in our midst which help fashion our restrained response.

The Strategy of Capitalism

Most frequent of the explanations cited to justify cuts is the financial one of "no money" which is spurious. For, in reality, the determining motive comes from the realm of politics, not economics. The ruling class in Britain has quite consciously decided that it will no longer tolerate an education system geared for the mass. Such a decision logically flows out of its present strategy which is the destruction of the organised working class by means of the destruction of all that has been fought for by our class through centuries of struggle - the trade unions, the education system, the health service, living standards, full employment. A strategy conceived to take away, by stealth or by force, everything we as a class stand for and have achieved, a standard senile capitalism can no longer allow. The capitalist class is no longer going to rule in the old way, is no longer going to tolerate our organisation and the reforms we have extorted, but is embarking on an attempt to destroy all we have laboured on to build. The assault is comprehensive and in all areas, and can only be correctly understood when this is grasped.

Today capitalism stalks our land in the form of growing Counter-Revolution sponsoring and espousing ignorance, destroying education, just as it sponsors the de-industrialisation of Britain. It hopes to demoralise our class and turn us into subservient slaves with no ability to oppose their rule by imposing on us unemployment declining standards of health and living, illiteracy. Capitalism has realised that a person who has had access to education is more capable of being independent, and likewise a class. A first requirement, therefore, for a decadent capitalism heading towards corporatism is to deprive our class of education. This they are now remorselessly bent on doing.

Defend education with a revolutionary offensive

In this new historic situation, workers are faced with stark alternatives - either accept the cuts and allow the destruction of education, or oppose the cuts completely, defend education and take the

offensive against capitalism. To choose the first would be to go against our traditions as a class, ultimately deprive us of our skills and culture and invite enslavement, which is, of course, unthinkable. The second is the only road of progress.

We must as a class defend the reforms that capitalism is so eagerly attempting to destroy - education included - and learn in the process that true defence against such an attack is also offence, revolutionary struggle.

The struggle must be broadened.

The local action must be intensified and elevated to a national level, and the opposition must be to every single cut.

No longer is it permissible for those workers most immediate in the education industry itself to continue to wage their battles over wages and conditions as if they are separate from the whole - they must become part and parcel of the fight against cuts.

No longer can workers say the struggle for education is the preserve of those in proximity to the educational arena - lecturers teachers, students and such. Everyone is involved, the whole working class must be concerned. The communities and trade unions the length and breadth of Britain must exert themselves for inactivity spells failure.

In their eagerness to destroy all, the ruling class is making enemies of all. The bourgeoisie stands isolated and inept against a working class. Out of hatred and fear of us, the ruling class attack our very life-blood as a class. But their best-laid plans shall come to naught. The British working class are not automatons to be used and discarded and not reckoned with. We value education. The whisperings of discontent heard among us will be transformed by our anger into a thunderous battle ...

A REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE FOR EDUCATION

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