

## Comments Following Fifteen Years of Teaching

Bill Dufton  
Officer, Devon National  
Union of Teachers, Former  
Head of Environmental  
Science, Southway School  
and School Governor

There is trouble in the schools, once again. The two largest of the teachers' unions, while remaining mutually aloof, are taking strike action in order to influence the annual circus of salary negotiations. Why do dedicated, intelligent, well-educated men and women do this? They know and care about the effect of their actions on their pupils. I set out below some of the factors involved.

1. Their salary is too low for what they do, the responsibility they bear and the training they have. In spite of ministerial misinformation their salary has not kept pace with inflation. (Watch for the year any government spokesperson chooses as a basis for their comparison. It will be a year of a low salary award so that increases since then look larger - this is a process called "massaging the statistics." Our government is very good at this.)
2. Their salary has dropped behind similar groups with whom they were promised compatibility. The Houghton and Clegg reports, which set levels for teachers' salaries, have been unilaterally repudiated by the government.
3. Teachers are undervalued. Rather than spend money on positive efforts to educate the young we now put our priorities on the police and the military and give to them the roles of containing and punishing non-conformity in the community. This is called "The Law and Order" approach.
4. Authorities are envious of the long holidays and the apparently short working week. Evidence of the actual hours worked is ignored. No thought is given to the problem of maintaining creativity, liveliness of mind and a good flow of ideas in the face of stress and exhaustion. How can discipline by personal example, force of character and interesting teaching be maintained when the mind is fatigued and stale from continual and unremitting effort? "Black Paperites" and certain Tory politicians (notably some of the women) think that education consists of the 3 'R's drilled into large classes of conforming children. How little they know.
5. In the schools the bureaucratic style of management, borrowed from industry and encouraged by the local education authorities, does not suit the education scene. Each level of the organisation has its responsibilities and these are tending to be more narrowly defined. At the tip many schools now have a body called "The Management". These are the prestigious teachers, usually on senior teacher pay, who direct the policy of the school, or rubber stamp the ideas of the headmaster. In their personal roles they direct activities or direct staff who are directing these activities. They also make lists (usually of pupils' names). These lists may be pinned on the overcrowded section of the noticeboard labelled 'TODAY', where they will stay for a week or so. If the school possesses a photocopier every member of staff will tend to get a copy of every list, whether relevant or not. This forces the staff member to create a personal filing system and to negotiate with his head of department for a filing cabinet. This will add greatly to his status but may not prevent the important lists being mislaid so the teacher will never have time to catch up with his personal filing. So a system, based on a hierarchy, and which is inefficient treats well-qualified, grown up (yes, really) men and women as rather "long in the tooth" kids. Working under this ethos teachers are expected to guide the mental, social, physical, spiritual, aesthetic, etc., etc., development of the young generation. In a bureaucracy consultation is a charade and their influence on the "management" is little. Does all this do anything but destroy the dedication to their jobs teachers are supposed to have and surprisingly do retain?
6. Most young teachers believe in an egalitarian society in which the pupils, as they grow older, can express their feelings, criticisms and beliefs. They believe that schools should aim to equip pupils to do this and to recognise that they have the right to be sceptical, to have independent judgement and to fight for their beliefs. Tory thinking now, sadly, seems to be more concerned with social control. Industry, conveniently aided by the Manpower Services Commission, looks for a docile work force which will do what it is told, while it creates the wealth from whence the profits and power of the employers come. Education is being replaced by training (how well computers fit in here!).

7. Teachers have NEVER been given the time or the resources to do their job properly. No industry would multiply objectives and tasks and still expect to get meaningful results if, at the same time, it did not supply the input of manhours and material necessary. The education system seems to think that this necessary organisation does not apply to them. Consequently teachers dash frantically around more crowded schools accomplishing less and less.
8. The Tories, with their simplistic belief in the supreme value of profit, wonder how to apply this to education. So we get the idea of teachers giving "value for money". How do you measure the education process? How do you know a good teacher? (Many think this means a quiet class what about "busy noise" or "the hum of activity"?) Some would tabulate examination success, conveniently forgetting the variability of the intake. No one has yet managed to define what is a good teacher or even what actually constitutes learning. More cynical is the diversion of state funds to centres of privilege located in the private schools. These schools divide society and hold themselves aloof from ideas of community building.
9. As teachers now lack the time and resources to do their job properly they are unlikely to support negotiations which will increase their workload, making much of what they now do voluntarily into part of their contractual obligations. Offers of salary increases (since withdrawn) appear good in the year they are made. However the salary level erodes more and more as the years progress but the work load never gets less. In the end you have the extra work and the salary is back where it was. Many groups which have unwisely negotiated "productively" deals must now regret it. It is no good ministers saying that this will not happen. We have seen them lie too often in the past to trust them in the future.

The salary negotiations bring to a head all the grievances against this society. As the "police state" becomes more of a reality as peoples' liberty is threatened by the secret service, as our society is devalued by monetarism and consumerism, so groups find themselves in confrontation, sometimes violent, with the government. Government never was synonymous with the state, as a politically biased judge recently stated. A government is awarded temporary stewardship of the state but the state goes beyond and around the government. In our time the monarch represents the continuity of the state, not the government of the day.

Just as consensus policing has disappeared so has consensus government. No party which merely has a majority of seats in parliament has the right to totally ignore sizeable groups of people, sometimes the majority of the people, in its governance. Against this moral collapse of government teachers have to inspire their pupils with a faith and hope for their future. For many this is a future in which they will be denied work, or will be forced into deskilled work tending machines, or forced into entrepreneurial activities, making a profit, at any cost, out of their fellows. A pathetic belief lingers in most politicians, that in a world of finite resources and starving populations, when the rich nations continue to exploit the poor nations, that economic growth is possible or desirable for us.

When a government refuses to remove the tax on a pop record's profits, which was to help the starving in Ethiopia, while itself giving a lesser sum in aid, and that money was diverted from other needy projects, then can one wonder at the collapse of trust and a retreat into self-interest?

What about the Plymouth scene? Only "Shire Tories" are capable of claiming that they have an education system suitable for each individual child but which actually reflects the rejected ideas of generations past and is the laughing stock of informed educational opinion. Here we have backwoods politicians fighting for privilege as perpetuated in the grammar schools and the county-supported direct grant schools. The gullible electorate is taken in by the smooth talk of the neatly besuited politicians that this distribution of resources is for their good and is of the nature of things. BUT a divided school system produces a divided society. This division is being opened up now by those protecting their advantage and by those who believe that the pursuit of material wealth is a noble priority for themselves.

A fully comprehensive school system taking ALL pupils between the ages of eleven and sixteen, based on its feeder primary schools and serving its community is the ideal. For many the comprehensive school will offer no freedom of choice, especially in the rural areas. This is too bad but there are several other areas where parents have no choice. What can the parents do about this? They can seek to influence their school to the utmost by getting deeply involved in it, understanding it, helping it. After all it will be a community school. They could well be using its facilities for themselves. Why are there no pupils of seventeen and eighteen? Because they are in an open access sixth form college which has strong links with academic, vocational and community education. The comprehensive schools will be run by their fifth forms who will be, in addition, making contacts everywhere in the community and in the world of work. As there is no sixth form the schools can be much smaller and therefore more suited to human values. In cities this may provide some parental choice while still retaining the community links originated in the primary schools. Out of the window will go the inaccurate charade of selecting pupils in the 11+ examination and the manipulation of scores, which goes on in Plymouth, in order to get enough under-achieving boys into the grammar schools. Meanwhile the comprehensive schools should be helped to continue the many initiatives they are already undertaking (education for work, or unemployment, aesthetic education, pupil assessment, social and world studies, dare I mention peace studies?, and many more too numerous to list here). Staff should have their loyal service recognised and by guided career development be able to extend their career possibilities, keep up to date, continue to extend their personal philosophy and adjust to this rapidly adjusting and very confused world.

The organisation within schools needs radical change. All posts of responsibility should be abolished. Teachers should move up a common pay scale, which was indexed against inflation. Each department can act as a team, opening co-operating with each other and taking on all the tasks needed to be done in school, to which

they are able to contribute. Strengths and weaknesses will be shared. Assessment will be unnecessary, everybody will know how each person operates, progress and practice will be openly discussed anyway. Headmasters will be abolished or their powers drastically curtailed. Though a very few have some power for good their authoritarian power too often turns out destructive of teacher dedication and initiative. Local authorities still have to be content with responsibility resting in a committee. Staff delegates can serve in rotation on this body and must be broadly representative of the school. Co-operation towards the common good will be the aim. Forget all this head's talk about "my school"; it belongs to the community who will watch closely that it works and make their views known through their representatives.

Equality, peace without violence and co-operation (as well as the many other desirable qualities) will never grow in society if they are not enthusiastically and effectively pursued in the schools. Democracy and the political awareness which makes it work must be held up for critical evaluation by our pupils. The roles of the schools are many and never get less. To cope with this growing task we need to conserve the most valuable resource available to the education service and that is the dedicated service of its teachers. This priceless resource has been squandered, like so much else on this planet of ours.

So much of what has been written here suggests that education and schooling necessarily go together. This is not so on several counts, though dedicated effort by teachers does help many pupils to cope with some of their problems and decisions. Education is still mainly academic and based on separate subject disciplines. Knowledge is a whole and in our progress through life we extract from that entity of knowledge those parts which we need for our perceived purpose. Be clear that these parts utilised by us are not the subjects of the school curriculum, but relevant pieces of knowledge which we need at that moment. Except for those who can respond to "education for education's sake" the bulk of the school curriculum has no relevance. Thus we get a majority of unmotivated pupils who become increasingly alienated from the ethos of the school. How well are schools preparing pupils for their future life? Their world will be increasingly polluted with man-made chemicals and radioactivity. Third World starvation will be a continuous moral concern. Their personal freedom will become less and less as the nuclear state sees it to be vital for its own security, in the "plutonium economy", and for the protection of the privilege of the minority to increase surveillance and control and to reduce the freedom to protest. Their quality of life (its human-ness) will suffer as they become increasingly linked to machines and computers. Thought control, developing rapidly now, will ensure that they like what they get and come to believe that it is in the natural way of things. Unemployment will continue to be regarded as a sin in order to protect the work ethic and because the private capitalist system will be unwilling to share out the extra wealth their investment in technology and automation will bring. Educational authorities and schools will not dare to admit that full employment is a thing of the past as a private capitalist state is quite unable, for ideological reasons, to nationally plan a fair distribution of resources.

In Plymouth, and elsewhere, many (including teachers) do not believe that they have the right to question what the government or their "betters" (at all levels of the bureaucracies) organise for them. Good, loyal, dedicated, misguided teachers worked long hours in lousy schools to make the local education system work for their pupils. They worked on in meagre secondary modern sheds (called schools) for fewer resources and more pupils than the grammar schools or the new comprehensives. Now as the secondary moderns close the new heads of the comprehensives don't want these Plymouth teachers, loyal and dedicated as they are. Nothing is more destructive of teacher morale than unfairness and mismanagement. Every time politicians, both national and local, and members of the country administration insult the teaching force, as they do in many ways, the more the teachers withdraw into a "minimum commitment" and look for ways to get out. Luckily the opposite is still true. Due respect and understanding draws forth a deluge of good will which is then manifested in care for the pupils way beyond the demands of the "contract".

#### The Government's White Paper

This is another noble non-event from the minister which tells us all the things we ought to be doing. What it ignores, in common with most of this type of communication, is that thinking teachers throughout the country have been working at these initiatives for a long time. Results would be better if governments supported this work with adequate resources. It always wants something for nothing and then pretends, for obvious political reasons, that it is the dilatoriness of the schools, with their long holidays, which is to blame. What a cowardly stance this is. A similar situation exists in the teaching of mathematics. For years teachers have been thinking up schemes which would make the subject more bearable for the lower ability. The others are expected by the employers and pushy parents to beaver away at exam syllabi. However there are two parts to the maths situation. To a small extent the subject is taught for its usefulness but to a far greater extent it is taught for intellectual reasons, as mathematical concepts are important in our understanding of all aspects of our life.

#### Indoctrination

Why are the Tories so frightened of CND?

Why don't they discuss the issues instead of attacking teachers? One can only believe that they are so worried at the wide appeal of CND's message of peace. It represents the views of the many who feel a deep moral outrage at the intention to use nuclear weapons in retaliation in a conventional war or even to threaten to use them at all. Teachers have worked at the problem of indoctrination in teaching for more years than Ted Pinney has been a councillor. The idea of a neutral chairman has been shown to be good in theory, but in practice, it has proved to be fairer and more honest to admit to one's personal beliefs and then to be as neutral as possible, with one's background known.

The wearing of badges or other signs and insignia is widespread. Never has this been regarded as indoctrination. The county's pathetic attempt to stifle free expression has not been to proscribe such insignia (this would be impractical anyway - no regimental ties, Rotary badges, etc.). This would undoubtedly have infringed

basic civil liberties. No, teachers have been asked not to wear them. People who do will be investigated. What an underhand threat. Will secret files be updated with the evidence (?) of this heinous crime? Will promotion be mysteriously denied? This is what most of us believe. Note that this is one more insult offered to teachers. They can't do their job, they are unprofessional, they indoctrinate children. All this stems from the fear of the message of peace. The Russians want peace, and support peace movements, therefore (ideologically) it must be suspect. CND is one of the best, well balanced and informed sources of peace education material. All these sources are attacked with misinformation and character assassination of those who research and use them. The most dishonest, indoctrinating material comes from the government itself. In no way has it kept its word, given at the UN Special Disarmament session, to promote the cause of peace by all means including education. To label peace education as political and then on the justification of this distortion to endeavour to ban it is evidence of intellectual aridity. Some would call it criminal behaviour, as it is an attempt to prevent us seeking alternatives to war as a means of solving international disputes. On a slightly optimistic note, perhaps the loss of control by the Tories in so many councils may allow better sense to prevail.