workers power

A Socialist Education Action Programme

For militant teachers, parents and school students

Published April 1998

Price 30p

Workers Power

Education for the many, not the few!

New Labour is dangerously undermining comprehensive education in Britain. If we don't stop them they will end up destroying it altogether. Forget their promises - they want education on the cheap and education to meet the needs of the bosses.

Labour is attacking on three fronts.

How schools are organised
How children are taught

New Labour is opposed to mixed ability teaching. Instead they want setting. They want to keep testing to select the more able for the top sets. All children may attend the same school, but they will receive a very different type of education. The school may have the word comprehensive on its gates, but it will be a selective school.

Properly funded and resourced mixed ability teaching has been proven to be one of the most successful forms of teaching across the ability range. So why are they opposed to it? Because it requires smaller class and more teachers - and that costs money. But they want education on the cheap.

Who runs schools?

New Labour wants businesses, not local authorities, to run schools. The Private Finance Initiative (PFI) will be expanded giving private consortia control over the maintenance, running and even potential ownership of school buildings and assets like computers, sports' facilities etc.

Through the establishment of specialist schools/colleges and Education Action Zones (EAZs) they are trying to increase the influence of business in schools. These new EAZs will hand over to private business complete control of groups of schools, including the right to establish new pay rates and conditions for education workers and even to modify the national curriculum, presumably to suit the needs of local businesses better. This will lead to a three tier education system, where certain students will be ear-marked for a life of menial jobs, punctuated by long periods on the dole, and taught the "appropriate skills" of numeracy, literacy and obedience.

Business will even decide who can teach. Why? Because business wants the education system to supply their needs in the future workforce. And in Blair's Brave New Labour World that is exactly the kind of education system they hope to get.

Teachers' pay and conditions

The majority of teachers voted for New Labour. We have been rewarded by a pay cut in real terms, promises of fast track sackings and no return to collective bargaining. In the future we can - again through EAZs and specialist schools - look forward to the imposition of individual contracts. By the time of the next election we could have witnessed the smashing of teachers' national pay and conditions.

To stop New Labour we must fight them.

No to private education!
Nationalise all private schools!

The Tories sought to undermine local authority control of schools for years. Now Labour are continuing the job. They will not return Grant Maintained (GM) schools to LEA control, instead they plan to simply rename them Foundation Schools. They are allowing GM schools to continue to select and encouraging new specialist schools to introduce selection.

GM schools and private schools mean we don't just have a two-tier education system but a three-tier one. We have a selective system, selection on the basis of social class. If you're rich your kids go to Eton and the like, if you're middle class you move and get your child into a GM school, if you're working class you are welcome to the scraps of funding that are left.

We want to abolish all forms of private education. We demand the end of any state funding and tax breaks for private education. Private schools should be nationalised and brought under local

control.

No to Grant maintained schools and foundation schools. Schools which have opted out of the state education system should be immediately be brought back under local control.

Abolish PFI without compensation. For state funding for all existing PFI projects under trade union and, where relevant, students' control. For a massive programme of repairs and structural improvements funded by central government and under trade union control.

No to EAZs. Defend national pay and conditions. No to business funding of schools, no industry presence on boards of governors. Big business - hands off the education system.

For comprehensive education

The white paper, *Excellence in Schools*, spells out the government's contempt for mixed ability teaching. It simply asserts that mixed ability teaching has failed. Labour intend to continue the Tories attacks on education by using tests and league tables to create competition between schools. We must fight to defend the ethos of comprehensive education. We fight for:

Class sizes of less than 20 in primary and secondary education.

Abolish SATs and replace them with school based assessment.

End school league tables.

No to streaming. No to government imposed target setting.

No reduction in section 11 funding. For the integration of such funding within the schools' general budget and for the expansion of resources for students with ESOL/EFL educational needs.

Abolish single sex education. For the fullest possible integration of male and female students in all curriculum classes.

End "special schools". For the fullest possible integration of all students. Schools must provide specialist teachers, medical support services and educational psychologists to support the needs of students with special needs.

The rapid rise in the number of exclusions of students in the past period is a direct result of cuts and underfunding. The high proportion of black school students excluded demonstrates the racism that is prevalent in society is also at large in education.

It is cuts that produce a greater incidence of disruptive behaviour. The answer does not lie in exclusions, through which LEAs and local management place the blame on children, primarily black children, and their teachers, but in the fight for greater resources.

However, not all strikes by teachers which call for exclusions are reactionary. Where we support such strikes we combine that support with a call for the basis of the strike to be a fight for the resources to meet the needs of all children involved and for disruptive children to receive an education in an appropriate context, decided by teachers, other educational and social workers, representatives of workers' organisations, school students and parents.

For democratic control of the curriculum

Labour have made a commitment to review the National Curriculum. We are not opposed to a curriculum which is available nationally to every child. But a curriculum drawn up by unaccountable right-wing policy makers in Whitehall serves the purpose of "educating" the workforce according to the bosses' needs and ensuring that millions of school children are indoctrinated in bourgeois ideology.

In an attempt to deal with disaffected working class school students, Labour intend to develop a curriculum of 'work related learning'. In other words, a broad educational curriculum isn't "appropriate" for working class students.

While we campaign for parents', teachers' and students' control of the curriculum, within that we fight for the broadest range of subjects and disciplines to be available and for a materialist approach in all courses. This can help combat the ignorance and prejudice that underline so many reactionary ideas and remove the veil of mysticism from "taboo" subjects such as sex, drugs and politics, without erecting a set of absolute values.

In particular, we fight for the right of teachers to be political in the classroom - and for the right of teachers, parents and students to kick fascist and racist teachers out of the classroom.

We fight for:

Local meetings and conferences of parents, teachers unions and students to

discuss which education is most relevant and appropriate to our students. For a national conference of delegates from the localities to decide on a national curriculum. All experts to be taken on under the control of the local and national delegate conferences.

For an entitlement curriculum not a restrictive curriculum. For the curriculum to be supported with resources. We need more books, IT technology, foreign student exchanges, school trips etc. Without funding, the most inventive curriculum cannot be realised.

No to the drive for "work related learning". All students should have access to both academic and vocational education. Specific work skills to be learnt "on the job" using fully funded apprenticeships on trade union rates of pay.

Challenge bigotry in schools. For a campaign against racism, chauvinism, sexism, and homophobia in schools. Abolish the anti-gay law, Section 28. Police out of education, they are not friends of the youth but their oppressors.

Religion out of schools!

We are for a secular education system. We are opposed to separate religious schools. Every child has the right to choose their religion or to choose none.

No to compulsory religious assemblies, festivals or subjects in schools.

No to state funding for any religious schools. The education system should not be used to impose Christianity on children. But the solution to religious discrimination in the education system is to end state funding for the C of E and Roman Catholic schools not extend such funding to other religions. Consequently we are also against state funding for any Muslim, Jewish or any other religious schools.

No to discrimination against students of religious faith. Provision should be made for the dietary and clothing requirements of different religions.

No to performance related pay!
No to fast track sackings!

Like the Tories before, Labour is determined to find a scapegoat for the crisis in education. The major thrust of Blunkett's attack has been to blame poor teaching for the problems facing schools in Britain.

Blunkett wants to be able to deal with 'incompetent' teachers quickly without having to go through employment law procedures that currently protect teachers from redundancy. At the same time, Labour intend to use market pressures (league tables etc.) to put pressure on LMS to increase the productivity of their workforce.

For the restoration of collective bargaining rights. Scrap the Pay Review Body. For flat rate pay increases, with pay to be indexed to inflation.

For a campaign of strikes and occupations against redundancies and school closures.

For a massive programme of training and staff development.

For the right of teachers' unions not Heads (Heads are now primarily managers and have no place in the union) to control selection and recruitment in schools. However, where teachers, even after training programmes, remain incompetent or are found to be bullies, we are in favour of education workers, parents and students - not bureaucrats and employers - removing such teachers from the classroom.

Fight discrimination against women, black and gay teachers.

No to Hit Squads!
For workers' and students' democratic control of the running of schools!

The Tories used the right-wing inspection body Ofsted to conduct inspections into schools and earmark "failing schools" for closure. Labour continues these attacks on schools through their "name and shame" policy. Labour's retention of Ofsted will prove an invaluable weapon in attacking LEAs, teachers and progressive education.

Blunkett and Blair intend to set up Education Action Zones (EAZs), take Schools out of LEA control and place the running of these schools into the hands of the Department of Education and Employment (DfEE) or big business consortia. These EAZs will undermine the limited checks working class communities can exert on their LEAs through elected local councils and replace the running of schools with unaccountable 'hit squads'.

Defend LEAs from Central Government hit squads. No to Education Action Zones! Abolish OFSTED.

For parents, teachers and student inspections. The working class should establish it's own inspection teams to investigate the real reasons behind "under performance."

For an accountable regional and national education councils made up of delegates from trade unions, parents groups, community groups and students.

For the right of students to have union representation. For a National Union of School Students.

Funding according to need! Tax the Rich!

We already know that after years of Tory mis-rule, we need a massive injection of funds into education. We need a massive programme of works to restore and rebuild schools. to make them safe for those who work and learn within them. A huge increase in funding for education will be needed simply to undo the damage done by the Tories.

Labour ran their election campaign with the slogan "education, education, education". And yet there is only one financial commitment in their white paper - to reduce class sizes to 30 for all 5-7 year olds. The promised £2 billion for capital repairs is based on the hope that the private sector will foot the bill. PFI ensures that schools will be squeezed for profits by these "socially aware" capitalists for generations to come.

Labour are desperate to avoid the real explanation for "failing schools" because it puts the responsibility squarely on their government - schools need funds and the government needs to find the money to fund education.

All schools should be fully funded to meet the needs of all the students. Teachers, students and parents, alongside representatives of the local working class, should decide the level of funding required.

Once the level of funding has been agreed the cost should be met by taxation on the rich and the massive profits of big business.

Education and Revolution

Education plays an essential role in all societies. Under capitalism the ruling class wants a tiny handful of its sons and daughters to be taught how to run society, a few well educated professionals and workers to carry out skilled and complicated tasks and a mass of minimally "educated" workers to exploit. This is why the bosses - and the New Labour government that defends their system - want to attack the limited gains that the working class won through comprehensive education in the 1960s and 1970s.

Socialists are for a society based on the maxim, "From each according to their ability, to each according to their need". We, therefore, favour an education system which brings out the best in everybody, something which capitalism cannot, by its very nature as an exploitative and oppressive class society, deliver. That is why the fight for a free and liberating education system must also be a fight against the capitalist system as a whole.

When we link struggles for a better education system to the battle for socialism, we are not "outside agitators" with "ulterior motives" as the Doug McAvoys and Nigel de Gruchys suggest. We are fighting for an end to the constant attacks on teachers jobs and conditions and the education of working class children.

Teachers have an important role to play in this fight, but only as part of the wider working class. In every struggle - for smaller classes, against closures, for control of the curriculum, etc. - we argue for the right of school students to organise their own student unions and for parents and other unions to unite with teachers and students in councils of action to fight for our demands through strikes, demonstrations and occupations.

These councils of action also show how society can be run, without bureaucrats or bosses, by democratically taking decisions and carrying them out at the same time. The Labour Party reveals through its education policies as in other areas that it would rather have the rule of the bosses and the bureaucrats.

We need a new party, a revolutionary party which will fight for a society based on need, not profit, that will educate children to realise their full potential, not just to realise some fat cat's profits. In short, we need a party that is prepared to overthrow capitalism, establish the rule of workers' councils and build socialism. Workers Power wants to build that party - join us!

Transform The NUT!

We need a union that it is run by the rank and file, not by the bureaucrats. We want a union where we control what the officials do, to ensure that they are accountable to us, rather than them telling us when we can or cannot fight. But the bureaucrats will not give up their power, and the fat salaries and expense accounts, easily. We will have to force them to change and to do that we will have to get organised.

Build a rank and file movement!

If we are to change the union we must build a rank and file organisation. This organisation would ensure that the rank and file of the union came together to fight not just against New Labour's attacks, but also against the sabotage of our own leaders.

A rank and file movement will not be built just by agreeing a good set of ideas. It will be built through action. It will be built in the struggle to defend jobs and conditions, in the struggle to defend state education. It will arise from the need to co-ordinate and build action across the country.

But such an organisation will not arise spontaneously. If it is to grow and to be successful, it must be consciously built. It must be argued for amongst those militants who wish to fight but recognise the difficulties we face.

Workers Power is committed to fighting for a rank and file organisation. Within such an organisation we would argue for the following as the basis for defending teachers and state education in general:

Democratise the union!

The union must serve the interests of the members as identified at local and national level. National Conference should be sovereign, its decisions should not be ignored when they do not suit the interests of the officials. We oppose the bureaucratic use of plebiscites to overturn conference decisions. The referendums are only ever used to stop action, never to initiate a fight. All delegates to conference should be elected by mass meetings of teachers, where - unlike referendums - informed debate can take place. Local association and school groups should have the right to call their own action. All decisions should be made at mass meetings, not by secret ballots which divide and isolate members.

For rank and file control!

To ensure that all the elected officials of the union are accountable to the membership, they must be elected regularly and be recallable. Whether they are school reps, local secretaries or the General Secretary, they must be answerable for their actions. No paid official of the union should earn more than the average teacher's salary.

For self-organisation!

The union must take action to oppose any form of discrimination against individual members. It must be committed to active anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-homophobia. We must recognise that the participation of some members in the union is affected by their oppression. In order to encourage full participation of all members, we are in favour of the right to caucus for all oppressed groups. We must take positive steps to ensure that all members can participate in the union. This means fighting for workplace meetings during work time. As an interim measure, all union meetings should provide crèches. All meetings should be accessible to all members.

For direct action!

The past two decades have proved that the employers and the government only listen to workers who are prepared to take action to defend their conditions and their service. We need to organise boycotts to smash the SATs, strikes to win battles over pay, occupations to stop school closures. Whilst one-day strikes and other protests are useful ways of preparing for confrontation, we believe that all out strikes are the quickest and surest way of achieving victory. In all disputes, we are in favour of joint action with school students, parents and other trade unions - inside and outside the education sector. Strike committees - and, where appropriate, councils of action - should be regularly elected by mass meetings to run all disputes.

No secret deals. For open negotiations!

We have to ensure that all negotiations with management can be controlled by the union

membership. Negotiations should not take place in secret, allowing the bureaucrats to make deals which protect their privileges, not our interests. All negotiations must be subject to agreement at mass meetings of the membership.

Managers out of the union!

The union must fight for the interests of classroom teachers. A head's primary responsibility in school is not to teach but to manage, to police us on behalf of the employers. They are the ones who ensure that the government and LEA cutbacks are implemented. With LMS the powers of the Head have increased still further. Their role in schools' governing bodies gives them real control over the budget and the hiring and firing of staff. Since their interests do not lie with those of classroom teachers, we believe that heads have no place in the union.

For a single education union!

We need unity to build strength not division. Currently, the leaders of the NUT and NAS/UWT use divisions as an excuse not to organise a national fightback. We are in favour of a single education union, a union based on the workplaces; schools and colleges. As a step towards the creation of such a union we are in favour of a single teachers' union. But this must be a union not based on a bureaucratic merger, but one which brings together the rank and file membership at local and national levels.

Smash the anti-union laws!

When we try to fight back, when we take strike action to defend our jobs, pay and conditions we immediately face the anti-trade union laws which have been strengthened again and again since Thatcher election victory in 1979. These laws make unofficial and secondary action illegal. They restrict democracy by enforcing postal ballots, isolating the membership and discouraging workplace discussion and decisions. These laws seek to criminalise trade unionists and seize our funds. They must be fought. We must be prepared to confront these laws.

Labour, far from rescinding these Tory laws, has even threatened to extend them. At the TUC Congress in 1996, David Blunkett (now Secretary of State for Education) said that Labour would outlaw public sector strikes rather than see Labour's programme threatened. If this threat materialises, or the anti-union laws are used to break a strike, we will fight for a general strike to break the laws. We demand that the Labour government scraps all the anti-trade union laws now, and legislates the positive right to strike for all!

Solidarity with all workers in struggle!

The capitalists organise across sectors and across borders. The attacks on the education system are mirrored in the health service, the fire brigade and elsewhere. The attacks on our wages and conditions are of a piece with those in private industry. The attacks on the welfare state are copied from France, Germany, New Zealand and the USA. That is why we are for solidarity with all workers and oppressed people in struggle with the bosses and their imperialist system. In particular, we believe the Irish people have the right to determine their own future and we fight for British troops to get out of Ireland now. As the heroic Liverpool dockers showed, workers all over the world have a common interest in fighting international capitalism.

Build revolutionary cells in the union!

The next few years are vital for teachers. New Labour's vision of the education system for the new millennium sees no role for an independent teachers' union. Rank and file militants must be won to an action programme to transform the NUT, to unite the teachers and to defend and extend school education for all.

We do not pretend to have all the answers. To get all the answers, we need to increase our influence. That is why we are building revolutionary cells in the schools and the NUT. The more that militant teachers get organised to transform the NUT into the kind of union we need, the fewer days that the likes of McAvoy and Blunkett will have controlling our union and the education system. You can hasten their downfall, by agreeing to fight around this programme with us.

But more than this, we believe that union struggles are not enough. If we want to do more than simply defend education against cuts, we need to get rid of the system that causes them. As long as educational expenditure is determined by the capitalists it will never be enough, and the same goes for the NHS and every other welfare provision. To make sure that society is run by and for the working class, we must smash capitalism. To do this we need a revolutionary party.

Workers Power is the British Section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI).

We have sister organisations in:
Australia
Austria
France
Germany
Ireland
New Zealand and
Sweden.

For more information about Workers Power or the LRCI phone us on:
0171-357 0388 or
fax us at:
0171-357 0344 or
write to us at:
BCM Box 7750
London
WC1 3XX