

Creating and managing an education crisis: The education reform act 1988

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ABSTRACT

The principal ideological thrust of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) is that market forces can be applied as well to the education system as to any other site of production. The view we take here is that the Bill proposed far reaching and potentially damaging changes both to the educational system and to democracy itself. The ideological and the substantive content of the Bill, and the responses which were hurriedly produced, and the subsequent Act which studiously ignored them, have been subjected to a massive amount of scrutiny in recent months. We want to focus here less on the content of the Act than upon some aspects of the background to its production, particularly on the jockeying for rhetorical dominance by Government 'experts' and the media which has helped create the conditions for it. What we argue is that ERA is merely the culmination of what has been a long and often bitter, battle for control over the labour process of teaching, centrally over who is to define what is to count as valid educational knowledge, and how it is to be taught and assessed, with direct consequences for teachers as workers.

The principal ideological thrust of the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) is that market forces can be applied as well to the education system as to any other site of production. It is assumed, as Wragg nicely puts it, 'that what works for sellers of pots and pans must also be appropriate for and therefore imposed on those charged with one of society's most important assignments, educating the next generation' (1988, p. 5), that competition between schools, teachers and pupils will winnow and weed out the weak and the inefficiently ugly, and that the activation of greater parental consumer choice and control over schools will flourish to ensure that this differentiation happens. ERA constitutes a 'blue print' for the production of consumer identities (Elliot 1988, p. 4 referring to the Bill which subsequently became the Act, in remarkably unchanged form), but the sovereignty of the consumer is not to be confused with that of the citizen. The view we take here is that the Bill proposed far reaching and potentially damaging changes both to the educational system and to democracy itself. It confused mere consumer choice with the proper entitlement of a citizenry. By the undue privileging of the former in an area where, on good grounds, it has long been held to have little business, it effectively sustains the interests of a status quo under the cloak of populism. It guarantees more hierarchy and difference in provision levels, while claiming that the process will provide net increases in 'standards'. It will in fact limit overall choice, ride roughshod over the principles and practices of discussion and debate within a well laid framework of consensus politics, and put power firmly and massively in the hands not of the people, as it proclaims, but of the Government and State.

Of course there is nothing new about Governments using education to sponsor or encourage the development of a particular social and political order, or a certain attitude of mind amongst its citizens. As theorists of the left, right and centre have consistently reminded us, the shaping of individuals through the family and education system is the shaping of a generation (Ranson, 1988). The State and the Church have long known this and have consequently intervened in the process. As Ranson (1988) points out both the 1944 and the 1988 Act are about shaping educational purposes by Government in order to secure the constitution of a particular, ruling social and political order. But whereas the former enshrined a distribution of power and responsibilities amongst relevantly interested and empowered agents (Local Education Authorities, Teachers, Parents) to form a 'partnership' (never so equal, in our view, as Ranson makes out), the latter seeks to impose a 'consumer democracy' that will replace 'the purported weary assumptions of the liberal democratic state which have lasted a generation or more' (Ranson p. 2).

The ideological and the substantive content of the Bill, and the responses which were hurriedly produced, and the subsequent Act which studiously ignored them, have been subjected to a massive amount of scrutiny in recent months (see Davies, 1988; Haviland, 1988; Simon, 1988; Maclure, 1988). We have no great wish to recover this well trodden ground. We want to focus here less on the content of the Act than upon some aspects of the background to its production, particularly on the jockeying for rhetorical dominance by Government 'experts' and the media which has helped create the conditions for it. What we argue is that ERA is merely the culmination of what has been a long and often bitter battle for control over the labour process of teaching, centrally over who is to define what is to count as valid educational knowledge, and how it is to be taught and assessed, with direct consequences for teachers as workers. In our view, this has been largely fought and lost by teachers, though we will go on to say that the Act may well contain the seeds of its own negation/destruction. We accept that 'control of the means of enunciation' is central to the repositioning of the teaching force as subversive by right wing state policy. 'Normalisation' of this charge opens up to unchecked pursuit, the lesser offences of incompetence, inertia, self-seeking and syndicalism. A Foucaultian analysis, complete with corrosive solipsism is of great value here, if handled with sufficiently tough conceptual rubber gloves in bringing hidden issues into focus. Initially, however, we will go back to slightly older and gentler genres of organisational analysis that transact between organisational work, culture and power. We will draw on the work of Gouldner (1955), Selznick (1966) and Crozier (1964). All three, in their case studies, draw out the relationships between social and economic change and organisation/institutional change. All three point to the way in which a 'managerial ideology' helps 'sponsor' organisational change and the underlying instability and fragility of that ideology as a 'solution' to the deep seated conflicts between management and workers.

Let's turn first to ERA's nasty gestation. In June 1987 a Conservative Government was returned for a consecutive third term of office, with a massive majority. 42 percent of the popular vote had secured 60 percent of the seats in the Commons. Consultation documents and discussion papers from the Department of Education and Science (DES) arrived just at the onset of the holiday period. Respondents had until the end of November (some 8-10 weeks), when the Bill was to be introduced to Parliament, to appraise the central National Curriculum document and give it their consideration. The time-scale and mode represented the finalisation of a process of abandonment of the search for broad consensus with respect to educational change. This had begun early in Thatcher's premiership with the abolition of the Central Advisory Committee mechanism from which reports like Early Leaving (1954) and Plowden (1967) and originated, the dissolution of the Schools Council and the shift of power from the DES to the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). Many pointed out (see Haviland, 1988) that it was neither reasonable, realistic nor business-like to believe that the summer of 1988 gave adequate time for the kind of debate and discussion warranted by what in effect was a massive piece of legislation. It is both to the credit of the various interest groups, and some measure of the inadequacies of the Bill, that even in the short time available, the documents provoked a level of response which was (as Haviland points out) unprecedented in any other



consultative exercise conducted by a Secretary of State for Education. Some 18,000 replies were lodged with the Education Secretary, mainly dissenting, but the Bill was introduced in a massively unaltered form. We might ask with Brian Simon, why all the hurry to get the Bill enacted? His view, which we share, is that only the naive believe that educational debate could have effected change in what are overtly political measures. The Bill needed to be enacted quickly because it was seen as a springboard for the return of a Conservative Government at the next election, Thatcher's much sought after 4th term. Its political objectives were to break the power of the Local Education Authorities (LEA) as part of a wider assault on the whole institutional fabric of municipal state socialism, and to wrest from teachers their autonomy with respect to control of the curriculum and forms of assessment. It is simply ignorant about the nature of teaching.

How could the Government so easily implement these measures, and how could it so manifestly by-pass and ignore the multitude of dissenting voices emanating from within and outside the profession? Undoubtedly a huge majority in Parliament and an Opposition as sterile in imagination as it is weak in the lobby helped matters greatly. But Parliamentary power alone is no guarantee of broader popular consent and support on particular issues. It is the achievement of that with respect to ERA which is of interest to us here, including the need for a case to wrest control from teachers and teacher educators (see Barton and Whitty, 1988).

According to Crozier (1964, 1969), players in social and organisational power games are rarely equal, but their strategies share a fundamental objective - 'to gain whatever advantage possible, within the constraining rules of the game, by restricting the choices and alternatives open to others whilst preserving or enhancing their own choices' (quoted in Pugh 1988 p. 127). In the long run 'power is closely related to those uncertainties on which the life of an organisation depends, and the strategies of the groups in the power games are aimed at controlling the ultimate strategic source of uncertainties. Uncertainty explains power' (Ibid). Moreover 'Authoritarian reformer figures wait amidst the bureaucratic routine for that moment of crisis when the system will need them...' (loc. cit. p. 129). Indeed, we know that at the social, as well as organisational level authoritarian reformers are no longer content to sit on the sidelines awaiting a crisis but actively generate a process of social and organisational upheaval by consciously creating a crisis into which they can then intervene to manipulate and implement their own preferred solutions. What ERA witnesses is a State offensive for control over the remaining 'areas of uncertainty', the curriculum and pedagogy of schooling, in the educational system directed at teachers whose status and power has depended upon control of these aspects in the educational process.

In Britain, the educational system has long been managed by LEAs which provide the organisational frameworks and the levels of resource within which teachers have been permitted largely to determine the curriculum and pedagogy of schooling. In Ranson's (1988) terms, 'the constitutive system of the government of education formed a complex polycentred division of power and responsibility appropriate to differentiated tasks. Divided power was designed (in the 1944 Act) to ensure partnership between necessary and equal parties to the Government of education' (Ranson, p. 317). Within this framework teachers could, within limits set in large measure by the examination/assessment systems, exercise control over what was to be taught and how it was to be taught. The organisation contexts of authority within which they worked characteristically exhibited an 'indulgency pattern' (Gouldner, 1985) - a form of organisational life which relied on 'a flexible interpretation of rules at the discretion of individual managers and on an implied consensus between managers and workers' (Reed, 1988, p. 55). In such contexts progressive curriculum initiatives could flourish and develop. The curriculum reform movement of the 60's could, amongst other things, challenge the merits of subject centred teaching and develop forms of curriculum and teaching which emphasised learning processes and a content sensitive to the cultural differences of children (Elliot, 1988 p. 20/1). It was in these 'areas of uncertainty' that LEAs like the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) could attempt to develop curricula which addressed issues of racism, sexism, and equal opportunities, in which courses on Peace Studies, Sex Education and Health Education could flourish, all implicitly or explicitly challenging the 'natural' dominance of crucial

social categories: and cultural fields. The power of the Unions throughout the 60's and 70's made teachers not easily amenable to detailed formal state control. Their rights to mutate systems in the interests of producing citizens appeared legitimated by the 1944 Act and were deeply embedded in the professional and public psyche.

However, this relatively decentralised system of educational government and practice was coming under increasing pressure during the 60's and 70's. As many others have- pointed out (e.g. Ranson, 1988; CCCS, 1981) the liberal democratic state was badly shaken by oil crisis and a fiscal crisis in the 1970's and by a massive increase in the level of unemployment, particularly amongst its youth. The established pattern of British Government and bureaucracy (like the French sort of the 50's to which Crozier refers) could not easily cope with the problems which the accelerating process of socio-economic change was producing. Certainly in education Government found itself at the apex of a 'de-centralized system' which maximised the ability of the primary producers (teachers, LEAs) to produce and resist innovation and minimized the capacity of managerial practitioners (DES, etc.) to restructure existing arrangements except through crisis management (Reed, 1988).

So let the crisis begin

Attack on the teaching profession began most noisily in Britain in the sixties and was far from confined to politician educationists of the Right, such as Phodes Boyson and Caroline Cox. This theme of school failure was given its most serious impetus by James Callaghan, the Labour Prime Minister, in his Ruskin Speech in which he chided the education system for its irrelevance to working life. Callaghan emphasised the need to prepare future generations for life, arguing that 'new recruits from the schools sometimes do not have the basic tools to do the job that is required, that there is an anti-industrial spirit especially amongst the most able; that students were ill equipped technologically in a society dominated by new technologies and, lastly, that they were not developing those qualities that equip them for making a living' (Pring, 1987 p 133). Ranson (1988) views these attacks on the profession as having moved through three phases, from a focus on quality and standards (60's and 70's Black Paper critiques), through a theory that tied education equality to consumer accountability, into the current phase which celebrates the need for a revolution in parental power. The whole purpose of schooling, it is now claimed, is being distorted by its pre-occupation with equality: 'failures derive from professionals and local politicians appropriating control of the service from its proper source - parents ... ' (Ranson, p.8). There is little doubt that both political parties paved the way for the most radical right wing Government since the war to exploit expertly and ruthlessly the alleged 'failings' of the comprehensive school system to provide not only a curriculum for a modern technological society, but forms of practice sensitive to the needs of working class children.

There is, as Davies (1988) has elsewhere stated, 'something perennially thrilling about the sight of a judgement untrammelled by fact or possible consequence'. Yet we contend this is what the critique of teachers has been founded on. Here, for example we find Kenneth Baker - Secretary of State for Education, in a relaxed mood, stating (during a Party Political Broadcast),

... there is a lot to be got right first. If 4 buns cost 32p what will 5 cost? That's not a very difficult question. But when the National Foundation for Educational Research put it to 12 and 13 year olds, 1 in every 4 children couldn't get the answer right. They asked 30 questions like this. In some schools nearly all the pupils got nearly all the answers wrong. And in others nearly all the pupils got nearly all the answers right. The good results show we've got some excellent schools and teachers but they're very unevenly spread. That's why we want to test, to assess how schools are doing. We will do so with national tests and assessments at around the age of 7 and again at the ages of 11, 14 and 16. This is not pass-or-fail testing. It is testing to diagnose where things are going wrong so that parents and teachers can do something about it.

To make sure more children get a good education, good schools will be allowed to take as many pupils as they can fit in. We'll remove artificial limits some local authorities currently place on some

good schools. We're going to give Head Teachers and school governors the freedom to manage their own budgets. And to all our parents to have much more to say. We are also going to take away the monopoly local authorities currently have on free education.

Schools can opt out of local authority control if that is what parents wish. If a local authority wants to keep its schools, it will now have an incentive to listen to what parents want for their children. That's the benefit of having to compete (Quoted in Davies, 1988).

This text repays very close examination (see Davies, 1988). Its absences are even more intriguing than its presences. Note what we are led to infer about 'some schools' where 'nearly all the pupils got nearly all the answers wrong'. These are bad schools with bad teachers that cannot be mended. You had better believe you can shift your child to a good-one. The artificial behaviour of monopolistic local authorities with respect to free education will be ended. Diagnostic pupil testing will give parents the consumer information to force schools to improve. They may take over their schools to make sure this happens. It is really up to them. No one has to do these good things. No one will deserve much sympathy if they do not. Baker here of course is referring to ERB proposals for target testing, reverting school size limits to those administratively agreed at the last demographic peak (if justified by parental preference and regardless of subsequent shift or planning). Local school budgetary control, an end to LEA governing body majorities in those schools which stay in the local system, and the prospect of 'opting out' into direct financial relation with central government of schools by simple current parent majority if they no longer 'want' their LEA.

In his case for freedom in British schooling, taking for granted the inalienable right to pay fees, Baker focuses centrally upon their control and ownership. The tradition of the last century of local authority control of provision, with the variety entailed, is to be fundamentally altered. Some have gone much too far for new Right tastes with policies which tamper with the natural orders of class, gender and race differences.



Figure 1: 'Barmy Britain', from *Today*, 11 July 1986

The attack has centred not just on the organisation and quality of state comprehensive schooling, its target is also 'new and artificial subjects with neither methods nor results nor real validity to the child, (health education, careers education, sociology, peace studies), and 'the swamping of the educational system by egalitarian subjects' (Hillgate group, p5-6; see Davies, 1988). Not even the low status and marginal subjects have escaped the critical gaze of Tory ministers. In this case Physical Education, always a target of conservatism, is scrutinised and vilified with the aid of the popular press for its putative left wing political intent (see Figure 1: 'Barmy Britain').

At the same time, even gorier standards of attack have been served on the more irredeemable objects like ILEA, through a focus, quite disgraceful but apparent!) 'unashamed, on individual teachers (see Figure 2: 'Tebbit Flings Mudd'). There is not enough space here to detail the full variety and persistence of the attacks on schools and teachers and the way in which the media have been used to both destabilise and gain control over LEAs and the curriculum of schooling. And there is little doubt that this has been the motivation behind such attacks. Thatcher, for example, publicly claimed that children 'particularly in inner cities' had a true education 'all too often snatched from them by hard left education authorities and extremist teachers' (quoted in Simon, 1988, p.18). Her aim has been to 'get some of these schools out of the local authorities and have direct grants from the Department of Education' (Ibid p.17).

With the aid of the press she has mounted a populist attack on local government as a whole, the destabilisation of which is the central concern of current legislation. Elsewhere Oakley (1988) has shown how the concept of the 'loony left' has been exploited to insist that schools are in a state of crisis, that children are at risk (the Barmy Britain extract is a good example of this). He points out, for example, that in November 1986 Tebbit circulated a dossier of 'crazy campaigns' by fourteen Labour councils, including nine from London, covering such issues as help for homosexual organisations, staff increases, town twinning and tributes to Nelson Mandela. At the same time the then Environment Minister, Dr Rhodes Boyson, claimed that almost six million lived under the bullying rule of these socialist soviets (see, Oakley, 1988). Others claimed that children's nursery rhymes had been banned as racist, a ban variously attributed to some of the London Labour councils - which turned out to be unfounded.

Tebbit flings Mudd at a critic of Ilea's abolition

Alan Rusbridger

MR NORMAN Tebbit's reply to an educational psychologist, concerned about the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority was characteristically blunt: he sent a picture of a bare-breasted, 20-stone Ilea teacher, in her days as a strippogram girl.

The picture — taken from the Sun newspaper — showed Miss Mandy Mudd in the middle of her act four years ago, before she became an English teacher in north London.

Mr Tebbit's covering letter to Mrs Marianne Whitaker, from Richmond, North Yorkshire, complained of falling standards within Ilea and added: "You may not read

the Sun, but, of course, many people in inner London do. The enclosed cutting with a photograph of an Ilea teacher may give you some clue as to why the results are not quite as good as they should be."

Mrs Whitaker, a recently-retired psychologist with Cleveland county council, said yesterday she was astonished and disgusted to have been sent the picture, which she said was "close to unsolicited mail of a vile nature meant to shock and abuse".

She said it had no relevance to her inquiry about the educational justification for the closure of Ilea.

The Sun report said Miss Mudd, a Labour Party activist, had earned as much as £300 a day exposing her "62-inch boobs".

The sub-heading read: "She tap danced like an elephant with its big ears flapping."

Mr Tebbit last night defended sending the picture. "I wouldn't say Miss Mudd is symbolic of Ilea, but I think it's fairly clear that it's at least open to doubt whether a lady who gets her name in the papers that way is going to be able to keep good discipline and teach well in her school."

The education authority said last night: "Firstly, Miss Mudd's teaching abilities have never been questioned. Secondly, it is just an insult to treat the education of a quarter of a million children as some sort of joke."

"To judge Ilea on the basis of the actions of one person before she even became a teacher is ludicrous."

Figure 2: From *The Guardian*, 4 March, 1988

But all this has paved the way for intervention in the nature and content of state educational provision which makes the comprehensive experiment of earlier years by contrast pale into insignificance. The 'radical' Right in Britain, having first created the crisis, now go to the heartlands of schooling, to the curriculum, modes of evaluation, assessment and resources, and they are travelling confidently taking the ideology of free market capitalism, searching for control.

Managing The Crisis

Having created in the public mind the idea that a crisis abounds in the educational world - that teachers are 'know nothing, self interested, radical experts, preventing sovereign parent consumers getting at the education goods' (Davies, 1988) - the cry is to give power to parents, make schools responsive to the market, build in 'mechanisms to raise standards and change form and type of education in accordance with that of market demand' (Ranson, 1988, p. 8). The Act as Ranson points out, is a culmination of a decade's 'campaigning' to strengthen the rights of the parents in the government of education. Given the nature and size of the putative crisis and the alleged threats to the social, economic and moral order posed by the education system, the consumer could be forgiven for thinking that it is not only the right but the duty of the Government to intervene.

The Act aims to 'solve' our economic crisis (as the Germans and French have been able to do) by presenting a National Curriculum, 5-16. Everyone regardless of social category except those 'statemented' or lacking in English as a mother tongue is to get the same key content, skills and processes from core subjects (Maths, English, Science, Technology) and foundation studies. Ad hoc subject working parties/groups will however recommend targets and programmes of work in some detail for the core subjects and the seven foundation subjects (Language, Technology, History/Geography or History or Geography, Art/Music/Drama, R. E. and P.E.). The core will dominate Primary School work. The foundations will leave 10 per cent of time to additional subjects in secondary schools. The curriculum thus constitutes a set of discrete and desirable contents and a structure 'given' to teachers, within which 'The imaginative application of professional skill at all levels of the education scene within statutory framework which sets clear objectives will raise standards' (DES/Welsh Office, 1987 paragraph 10, p. 5, original italics). Attainment targets will be set around 7,11,14 and 16. Against all the evidence to the contrary it is stated, 'This is a proven way toward raising standards of achievement'. So, such assessment will be part of classroom routine. But at the heart of the assessment process there will be nationally prescribed tests (Standard Assessment Tasks) done by all pupils to supplement the individual teachers' assessments, externally moderated. At the point of writing (April 1989), the likely character and impact of national testing upon pedagogy is quite unclear.

The opportunism of public policy has quite outrun our means of understanding, let alone 'solving' problems. There are three contracts out for the development of such tests at 'Key Phase One'. One with the National Foundation for Educational research, the others based at the University of Manchester and the University of London. Each has offered a different balance over national tests and teacher assessment in the process, and each is predicated on a different model of teacher control of test content. Meanwhile, the chairman of the National Curriculum Council advises the Secretary of State that the pedagogical effects of the National Curriculum will be nil. It is difficult to know whether this represents ignorance or deceit. It certainly stems from panic in the face of change which pushes to the verge of directing teachers as to how to compose their classroom behaviours. There is an all-time historically fascinating space to watch. It goes without saying that these tests have little to do with raising educational standards.

The Act aims for a system of 'open enrolment'. County and Voluntary schools are to be required to admit pupils to the limit of what is said to be 'their available capacity' ensuring that good schools will flourish. All or any except the small Primary Schools will be allowed upon a simple majority vote of parents to 'opt out' of LEA control and funding into Grant Maintained status. In this newly re-

constructed system variety and competition will be ensured between three types of school - Public/Private, Direct Grant Maintained Schools and LEA controlled. The Act thus institutes as its central principles consumerism and market values. There is a virtual guarantee of less and worse as the counterpoint to more and better. It celebrates the values of a new social order.

Comment

There is little space here to provide further detail on the content of the Act. Enough has been said, we feel, to illustrate our argument that the battle for control over the labour process v over the last 'areas of uncertainty' in the education system, over the curriculum and pedagogy of schooling is being fought and maybe lost by teachers.

We have tried to point out that the Act effectively strips LEAs of a great many powers and teachers of their control over the process of education. It has been calculated that the Secretary of State will acquire 175 new powers while other powers will be devolved to parents and governors. Teachers and other educationalists are disempowered and maybe deskilled. The power of the parents and the individual is celebrated at the same time that the State increases its control over the educational process. LEA responsibilities are largely dissolved, while the role of the governors and parents is massively enlarged. Now, like Ranson, we would argue that

a system which allows only one tier of representative democracy possesses a disturbing monopoly of powers that is ill suited to its public purpose. And a system which acclaims rights in the market against the values of justice is a system committed to inequality that is unlikely to require the consent of the public as a whole. In its misuse of public power and its implicit valuing of unfairness and inequality, this Bill seems unlikely to emulate its revered 1944 predecessor. (1988, p. 18)

But this in our view is an optimistic note and it is one that underestimates both the level of consent that the Bill has achieved (through the measures described above) amongst the public at large, and the subtlety of the Government's method of control over the education process. The public eye is not likely to immediately see the level and extent of central control which it is possible to identify. ERA involves the cultivation of a process of political and administrative manipulation through the agencies or/and including the Governing bodies which will manage the systems. This is the politicisation of bureaucracy to which Reed (1988) refers. It is control achieved through co-optation (Selznick, 1966) - a process in which firstly what was previously a radical or liberal philosophy of 'grass root' control over policy implementation and professional practice has been 'captured' and re-interpreted so as to ensure policy outcomes of a much more conservative nature (Reed, p. 148). 'Opting out', 'Open enrolment', 'parental say on governing bodies', is the language of opportunity not of constraint, it celebrates the spirit of the free market, of individual possession, improvement and control. As a good many others have pointed out, all this is likely to result in less choice, more differentiation, selection by ability, and a return to a socially and educationally divided school (and wider social system). But this is not obvious. The rhetoric of popular choice and higher standards for all through choice and competition will obscure the more sinister reality of a divided/unequal and rigged market (Wragg, 1988). Secondly, the process of co-option involves a process of absorbing potentially dissenting elements (teachers and parents) into the leadership and policy determining structures of the school (Reed, 1988 p.148). The Bill gives governing bodies greater responsibilities for school budget and the appointment and dismissal of staff, as well as the capacity to overrule a LEA on the redeployment of staff and they can acquire control of schools. Effectively government control (and the arrival of a particular social and school organisational order) is achieved through this greatly empowered strategic administrative agency' - an administrative body which may well be dominated by local interest groups, the noisier more powerful middle class parents, overseen by officials (Head Teachers) whose careers are inevitably bound up with the future of their school - who will have no choice but to make realistic adjustments to the demands and prejudices of their school localities.

The Seeds of Dissent?

There may well be, in the long term, a political price to be paid for this form of control. Firstly, as Selznick found in his study of social and organisational change and the process of co-optation, there emerged an increasingly visible tension between the official doctrine of 'grass roots' control and the operation of that doctrine through an organizational strategy and structure which enhanced powerful local interests at the expense of disadvantaged groups. As a result managerial elites were increasingly forced to provide a public defence of their policy as it became evident that it inhibited the direct participation of local citizenry by forging commitments to sectional interests which were concerned to preserve the status quo (Reed, 1988 p. 153). Wragg (1988) puts it nicely in his criticism of 'Opting Out' and the semi-privatised sector when he states,

The outcome of the rigged market in a few years time will then show, to no one's surprise, that the best scores in the first semi-privatised schools with their higher socio-economic intake, their enhanced income and their massive publicity from the Government's own well-oiled publicity machine, are indeed higher than those of local authority schools. It will be hailed as a triumph for the free market and the 1988 Act. It will in reality be nothing more than the victory of the athlete in the government-provided sports car over the runner whose ankles have been tied at the starting gate (p13).

Secondly, ERA and the critical 'debates' which foreran it have had a profound effect not only on the way in which outside publics (parents, employers) think about school, and teachers, but also on the way teachers and pupils think about themselves, how they experience their jobs and schools as places of work. In effect ERA and the intensification of monitoring supervision and control which it heralds, substantially reduces the flexibility and discretion enjoyed by teachers under the 'old system' where an indulgency pattern of control operated. The social and political consequences of this were clearly noted by Gouldner and are here neatly summarised by Reed (1988):

underlying stability facilitated by the indulgency pattern had been virtually destroyed and replaced by a more transient and fragile set of understandings and relations which proved to be extremely brittle when new waves of organisational rationalisation become necessary. The shift to punishment centred bureaucracy as a mode of organisational assembly provided the mechanisms whereby an outbreak of industrial conflict could be temporarily settled without doing anything about the underlying causes of the conflict. Management would find it increasingly difficult if not impossible, under these circumstances to make further demands for moral commitment on the part of the workforce when it had initiated those very structural changes whereby the moral foundations of that normative involvement had been undermined (Reed, p. 159).

In short, an increased level of control is accompanied by a diminished authority and legitimacy on the part of its perpetrators. Asking teachers to work harder (for the good of the children) may be very difficult to do in future years. Thirdly, we'd point out once again with Gouldner that the institutionalisation of more formal rules governing practice (through testing and the National curriculum) may well enable Government to take control at a distance, but they will also constitute a definition of expectations and a definition of the minimal standards allowing individuals to work at low levels of commitment (Pugh, et al, 1984, p23).

Together these contradictions in the Act may well, in the long term, herald its demise as well as that of a Government which has dangerously transformed the notion of an informed and competent citizenry into that of a flexible and self-regarding set of consumers and work forces. In the meantime, in our view, all is not well for those currently entrapped in the reconstruction of our education system.

Note

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