

Coalition Education Policy Fracks Society

With the help of a few other policies

While politicians get away with it at a price paid by all

(Sixth version. This one comes with added social welfare. See Latest Stop Press below. And by clicking here for Page 13 you can read the latest on Anti Social Politicians)

This is about a forthcoming piece of much longer writing with, possibly, the same title.

Here are some notes and comments plus a draft of the Preface for what I hope will become a substantial essay that looks at how Coalition policies for education contribute to the further fracturing of society. For the moment at least I am making use of the terms 'frack' and 'fracking' because it seems to me that what is proposed for parts of Britain in the form of pressurising shale deep below the Earth's surface in order to bring up oil and gas, thereby risking earthquakes and pollution, is very similar to what will happen to society as a result of education policy, especially in England.

For the second version I added The charge sheet against Michael Gove. I was prompted to do this because of his regressive examination proposals. John Major attacked GCSE because he did not like coursework and wanted complex tiered papers. By doing so he altered the examination from a vehicle for learning to a means of measuring. Now Gove wishes to turn back the clock to an even more segregated system. Recently someone reminded me that before he joined the government Michael Gove had said that ministers have to be accountable for the duties that fall upon them and the offices they hold. Could he be an exception to his own rule?

For the third version I added another first draft extract: Stratification: that's the name of the game and each generation plays the same. It begins with a quotation of a famous comedy sketch on social class from The Frost report of 1966. It involved a very tall John Cleese, a medium sized Ronnie Barker and a diminutive Ronnie Corbett. I wonder who knows or remembers it. Yes, even in 1966 it was a simplification but I use it as a kind of icebreaker for the essay. We can guess the different types of school to which each of them went.

From time to time I shall publish more first draft extracts, hoping to obtain feedback before putting it all together and typing the last full

stop. So far the sections and sub-headings of the essay are as listed below together with notes and comments

Some of the comments below may not make it into the final version but will, I hope, give some indication of my preliminary thinking. You might think I am talking to myself but if I am I hope you can overhear me and will interject by getting in touch from time to time. Normally I try to obtain feedback on drafts from a variety of friends and colleagues before I publish on my website. This time I want to provide opportunity for all readers of the website to take part in that process. The fourth version starts below.

Stop Press: a discourse of humanity is discovered and a wonderful former tutor is recollected in tranquillity (scroll down for the latest on this: a whole new section).

I recently acquired second hand a copy of William Beveridge's 'Full Employment in a free society' (1944), his sequel to the famous Beveridge Report that led to the National Health Service and the Welfare State. Details must wait but for now I want to say that I do not believe that there is even one member of our Coalition Government who could write such a discourse of humanity or who would be prepared to add as text beneath the title of such a report,

'Misery generates hate'.

I also found myself thinking back to my time as an undergraduate in Liverpool in the 1960s studying Political Theory and institutions. For a while my tutor was Olive Banks who, with her husband Joe, contributed so much to how we look at society. As you might guess, as an undergraduate, I vastly underestimated the privilege of having Olive as my tutor. My chief memories are that she was very encouraging of my efforts and also a picture of her and Joe coming to a thrash organised by the Sociology Society and, while most of us were doing The Shake or The Cavern Stomp to the latest outpourings of Merseybeat, calmly slow fox trotting their way across the floor.

To my shame I had absolutely no idea how much she contributed to feminism or that her first book (based upon her PhD) was 'Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education' (1955). I have now read up on it and ordered a copy. Olive and Joe are both now dead. It is extremely unlikely that they would have remembered me. What I can do, however, is to belatedly remember them and finally get round to taking their work seriously as others, possessing better insights and more respect than me, have done. I recommend searching them both.

And now, in draft form, the latest addition to this developing work.

Counterpoint to the current Coalition Government: a discourse of humanity from our previous Coalition Government

Abstract

Yet to be drafted.

Main text

I recently acquired a second hand copy of *Full Employment in a Free Society* (1944) by Sir William Beveridge who, two years earlier had given us the more famous Beveridge Report that became the basis for the post war welfare state. It took me back to old Dr. Sytner who practised on Boundary Street in the Scotland Road area of Liverpool. The bombsite opposite his surgery (long since pulled down) remains unrestored. The school I taught in during the 70s was almost opposite. Helen Jones who was in my class was doing a CSE project on poverty. The project, like so many carried out in our school, was also designed to contribute to a set of programmes to be broadcast on Radio Merseyside, which meant that, once it became technical, I could get more involved.

So we went to see Dr. Sytner because he had worked in the area for so long. What, we wanted to know, could he tell us about pre-war community spirit? He was having none of that bromide. 'It was', he said, 'a community of poverty'. He recalled a time and place of 'want', 'squalor', 'disease', 'ignorance', 'distress' and 'inequality': the 'giant evils' of Beveridge's book. A time when people without the money to visit a doctor or buy medication would treat a child's sore throat by wrapping round its neck a sock soaked in urine. A time of horse drawn carts, streets full of manure alive with flies that then alighted on your food. There were no fridges or freezers. It was also a time and place of casual labour and, being close to the docks, subject to extremely heavy bombing. Our school logbook recorded the last severe winter of the war when teachers went round the homes gathering in children because there was heating to be found in the school. Their mothers had sent them out scouring the gutters to see if any coal might have fallen off the coal wagons. Page after page of that logbook was full of the names of children that had left early because of illhealth. In 1948, when the NHS began and those children became entitled to free medication, the next pages were, dramatically so, blank.

Reading Beveridge now is to go back to a time when it was very difficult to construct, articulate and propose values that would prolong or make worse social misery, although Churchill's Conservative Party did their best to oppose the introduction of the NHS and were generally speaking against any redistribution of wealth. The moral momentum of the time was with the Labour Party and the then very small Liberal Party. Beveridge actually became a Liberal MP for a short while. And Beveridge's *free society*, in which he felt we should and could have full employment, was nothing like the free market

economy desired thirty-three years ago by Margaret Thatcher or today by George Osborne. It was the freedom for which tens of millions of people were dying, being bombed, losing their homes and being displaced. It was the freedom to live in a democracy that treated people fairly. To use a word that in those days we were not afraid of using: we wanted to live in a 'civilised' country. Who now asks what it means to live in a civilised country?

I do not intend here to write a review of Beveridge's book, to do that I would have to delve into a lot of detailed economics. The major point to make is that here was a coalition government which, despite including a number of social reactionaries, and despite facing financial, economic and military problems of a magnitude that shrinks into insignificance the problems of our present coalition government, knew that its moral compass had to point towards a more equal, a more fair and a more fulfilling society. The text below the title of the book is

"Misery generates hate".

Questions for critical conversations

1. Would it be possible today to begin a discourse of humanity?
2. What would a humane educational system look like?
3. What would have to change to make it happen?
4. Do enough people want it?
5. In terms of government priorities to what extent do you feel that invading Afghanistan and Iraq, light touch financial regulation, the encouragement of casino banking and special tax concessions for big corporations were more important than maintaining the NHS, Sure Start, Every Child Matters and abolishing tuition fees?

About prefaces

See below. Some years ago I was at a reunion with people I had taught. One came up to me and said 'You taught me the difference between a preface and an introduction' (back in the 70s). She was doing a CSE project at the time. I remembered her question and also my very off-the-cuff response. I said that a preface is where you explain to the reader your reasons for wanting to write on a subject; but an introduction is the last thing you write, when you summarise and explain to the reader what they are about to read. As you might expect, I do not always maintain the distinction but I still like it.

Preface (new draft)

For far too long in my life I subscribed far too much to a naïve but comforting belief that things would get better. In terms of education I assumed most people shared my view that for all of us to be fulfilled we must all be treated fairly and that education had a very significant role to play in creating a more fair society. Very few people would have the nerve to advocate the opposite, I allowed myself to believe. Maybe I mix with others on too narrow a professional basis but I still encounter people who signed up to their teaching

careers with a strong belief in public service and the wish to help every child (yes 'every', not a selected privileged few) become fulfilled. Since May 1979 and the election of a Tory government led by Margaret Thatcher, such people have been working against the grain of government.

The ecstasy of getting rid of the Tory Thatcherites did not last long. They had put into reverse the motor of social equality and placed their foot hard on the pedal. I had my doubts about Tony Blair and the New Labour Thatcherites but surely, I thought in 1997, he and they will wish to narrow social gaps created by Thatcher and make us all at least a bit more equal. His priority was, he loudly proclaimed, *education, education, education*. This did not mean what it seemed to mean. Under his big banner of modernisation flew two smaller banners for competition and choice. Each could be made to appear desirable until it was realised that in social terms they actually meant that stronger dogs must eat weaker dogs. Education in the UK, particularly in England, has always had faultlines. Under Blair, with faith schools, specialist schools, academies, non-stop legislation, more educational initiatives than you could shake a stick at and a focus on the so-called gifted and talented, thereby labelling most children as not gifted and not talented, and also upon league tables, those faultlines began to fracture. So did society with ever widening gaps between the rich and the rest.

Many years ago the tobacco companies were wont to point out that no causal link had been established between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. They had to admit that there was an association between the two: people who smoked tended to be subject to lung cancer but it was not at first possible to demonstrate how one led to the other. It is now. I believe that we are at the same stage with Coalition education and social policy. There is an association between the recent and intended further fracturing of education and the recent and intended further fracturing of society but maybe as yet we lack sufficient testable evidence of a causal link. Gove and his colleagues are going much further and much faster than Blair and will, I believe, provide us with that evidence. They have already prepared their excuses by blaming the poor, the disabled, the unemployed and the sick for being the authors of their own misfortunes and for any low scholastic attainment. Those misfortunes and those attributions of blame are set to multiply because it is now policy to blame the victims of policy for the effects of policy.

I want to explore all this. I have not, however, forgotten that there are other links such as economic and financial policies that have been shown to be causes of social fracture. Gove does not travel alone.

Please think of this essay as an exploration carried out by a keen explorer who tends to the polemical from time to time. Yes, I am angry. I shall, however, try to keep the anger under control in order to make sharper points and one way to gain control over anger is with knowledge gained by exploration. We shall see if knowledge tempers anger or if anger distorts knowledge.

My concept of social fracking opposes what I see as the comforting assumption that in a kind of Gaia fashion all will normalise at some point: that we ought not to become over anxious about the bad effects of government education and associated policies because very soon they will be reversed as we move from the political swing to the political roundabout. Possibly that is the case and we can rely upon a long-term tendency to achieve policy equilibrium but I do not believe it. Especially, I do not believe it while the parliamentary opposition to the government on education and related policies continues to be dominated by adherents to Tony Blair's agenda. If, after the next general election when Michael Gove and company are sent packing, we intend to build a more equal society with, as a foundation for it, a fair and fulfilling education system we shall, as a result of the behaviour of Gove and co., discover that we are working on a bombsite. And when Ed Miliband sends in the architects, quantity surveyors and skilled workers to build his New Educational Jerusalem it will not help if he hires them from the New Labour Recruitment Agency (prop. T. Blair). Having swung so far towards inequality we now need a swing so far towards equality that it will probably exceed the ability of the Labour Party to accomplish it.

From 1945 to 1979 it was often the case that there was sufficient commonality between parties for policy changes at election time to cause relatively little disturbance to a general social democratic consensus. In 1979 the consensus changed and became about rationalising greed, laying waste whole communities and lowering the incomes of wage earners while encouraging debt. It caused big social gaps and severely damaged the lives of far too many people: the kinds of people who over the years have been called upon to sacrifice their lives in patriotic war after patriotic war and sacrifice their jobs in recession after recession. The post 1979 economic model was based upon the belief that rich people could only be motivated to work harder by offering them even more riches. The poor, by contrast, would be motivated to work harder by being threatened with more poverty. This, in two sentences, sums up Thatcherism.

From the formation of the present coalition government by two political parties who failed to win the last general election that consensus has come to include even more serious attacks upon the political process, democracy, intellect, education and society. Restoring society even to pre-Thatcher values, let alone introducing values such as equality, will require a sharp reversal of a lot of damaging policies. I doubt that we have politicians that are up for it, let alone up to it. Possibly the deliberate damage caused by Gove and his companions in crime will create the conditions for radical policy reversal, including public acceptance of the need for it. Even if so I doubt there is the political will to engage in radical policy reversal because not only are the frackers of society well entrenched but the Labour Party remains far too much in thrall to Blairism, having forgotten and discarded most of what it used to believe. Those that retain socialist values also seem to have lost the confidence to express them.

Possibly it is my age (born 1942) and intimations of mortality that drive my need to speak against what I see as a betrayal of humanity and I simply

cannot understand how any professional schoolteacher can work in one of our so-called 'public schools', which are anything but public, and continue to claim to be committed to education, let alone socialism. I understand the need to compromise principle for a job and the desire to engage with bad policy in order to mitigate its worst effects but I guess that some people have an unlimited capacity to rationalise away their exchange of old values for new. I began by referring to my naivety so I guess that I must also come to terms with the fact that there really are people in the education business that can persuade themselves that when unfairness and inequality are presented to us in the guise of choice and excellence they can be thought to represent a social good. They do not and we must fight against those that propound such beliefs.

Now for the rest of the sections and sub-headings with some notes and comments

Introduction

To be written last.

Stratification: that's the name of the game and each generation they play the same

'I look down on him because I am upper-class.'

'I look up to him because he is upper-class; but I look down on him because he is lower-class. I am middle-class.'

'I know my place. I look up to them both. But I don't look up to him as much as I look up to him, because he has got innate breeding.'

'I have got innate breeding but I have not got any money. So sometimes I look up to him.'

'I still look up to him because, although I have money, I am vulgar. But I am not as vulgar as him so I still look down on him.'

'I know my place. I look up to them both; but while I am poor I am honest, industrious and trustworthy. Had I the inclination I could look down on them. But I don't.'

'We all know our place but what do we get out of it?'

'I get a feeling of superiority over them'.

'I get a feeling of inferiority from him but a feeling of superiority over him'.

'I get a pain in the back of my neck'.

This was how social classes were portrayed in a famous comedy sketch of 1966 (The Frost Report). Even then social stratification was more complicated than it was popularly portrayed, though we can easily picture the three different kinds of schools to which people of these classes went. Today we are getting closer to a break up and re-ordering of society that will at first appear to benefit the already privileged but actually do widespread and long-term damage even, I believe, to the super rich and privileged. Education policy, particularly in England, will contribute to this.

There have been attempts to reduce the number of strata, narrow the gaps between them or even eliminate them completely. Politicians attempting to do this have, in the past, been called progressive and the word 'reform' applied to their policies. We only have to recall the abolition of slavery, the factory acts, the introduction of compulsory schooling, the extension of the franchise, the introduction of National Insurance and old age pensions, the establishment of the National Health Service, the introduction of the Open University and, to the credit of Margaret Thatcher who would rather like it to be forgotten, the comprehensivisation of secondary schools: all progressive and reforming policies that emerged and were introduced and implemented after much proper political activity generating general consent.

The champions of such policies are celebrated as having reduced inequality and increased social fairness. The opponents of such policies have, except when they have somehow managed to capture and distort the discourse as first New Labour and then the Coalition have done, been regarded as defenders of privilege, rather like those members of the House of Lords called 'the last ditchers' who fought to the end to prevent the passing of the Parliament Act of 1911 and the curtailment of the power of the unelected over the elected. And it is worth reminding ourselves that the 1911 Parliament Act was in response to Tory aristocratic unwillingness to accept Liberal Party sponsored progress towards increased social equality, even towards mere social justice.

The present Coalition government would, I am sure, hate to be shown to be advocates for the reversal of progressive, reforming policies, introducing yet further social stratification and reinforcing a class system preserving, even promoting, privilege for some at the expense of others. They would hate even more to be perceived as socially destructive. After all, the name of the Conservative Party implies the maintenance of a kind of structural stability, albeit one that favours the favoured. But, despite the theft and misuse of words such as *reform*, *modernisation* and *progress* to present their policies, that is exactly what I believe they are doing and what they are. Slowing down, perverting and, when possible, reversing progress towards equality is the entire purpose of Conservatism. The difference from the Frost Report of 1966 is that an analysis of social structure could no longer use just three main, clear-cut categories of people who are sure of their place. Indeed, knowing or wanting to know your place in society by reference to old class certainties seems so strange in these days of instant celebrity culture: of people who, in

the words of Kitty Muggerage, rose without trace. Interestingly, it was David (now Sir David) Frost of the Frost Report to whom she was referring.

Equalisers, stabilisers and a contrived social collapse

In this section I shall argue that the Welfare State and state education were not generous gifts from the haves to the have-nots but foundations for a relatively calm and cohesive society and progression to greater fairness. They are now under attack. I also address the issue of how very similar policies can be viewed both as leading to equality and also as damping down progress in order to preserve inequality.

Endangering the super rich and privileged

Here I shall write about finding it difficult to understand why right wing politicians pursue policies that will isolate, disconnect and endanger the super rich and privileged. The richer and more privileged you become the smaller becomes the bubble in which you live and interact with others. Their formal education will take place behind walls that the vast majority cannot penetrate. Can that be good, even for them?

The naming of parts

This will be my attempt to clarify some relevant concepts and to get to grips with what I hope is appropriate literature. There is always too much to read and more being written as you write. I have recently read (for the third time in about forty five years) *To The Finland Station* by Edmund Wilson. I cannot recommend it highly enough for making critical sense of the history and significance of socialist thought from before the French Revolution, even before it could be identified as socialist thought, to that crucial arrival of Lenin at the Finland station prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. All very relevant to the policies of Cameron and Gove et al. Well, I hope to convince you.

I shall also try here to get to grips with concepts such as the post war consensus and Thatcherism. They are not as straightforward as they are often presented and in terms of education I sometimes give myself the pleasure of imagining informing a Tory going on about bringing back grammar schools that true Thatcherism means bog standard comprehensives. After all, as secretary of state for education, she created more comprehensives than all other secretaries of state of both parties put together. How about that for Thatcherism?

Social fracking

Here I shall try to justify my use of the terms 'frack' and 'fracking' in a social context. So far I am happy that using them helps to show up what is happening in a slightly different but useful light. And the words sound so good as well.

Malintegration and hegemony

In 1964 Fred Riggs wrote a very interesting small book on *The Prismatic Society*. Structural functionalists can be almost impenetrable to read, particularly when they feel the need to invent an entire new set of terms, even a new language, in order to advance their arguments or to further their insights, so sometimes it feels right to retaliate and, doing your best to make clear the points at which you have used their concepts and terminology to form a language of your own, strike out in a new direction with some of the useful terminology they have provided for you.

'Malintegration' is a really helpful word that I learned from Riggs, especially if you want to think about how a cohesive society can be organised in the service of a few; and the word 'prismatic' helps us to picture the splitting apart of all of those groups that previously preferred and tried to keep together. Students of sociology may, however, be relieved to know that I have not introduced Talcott Parsons into this discourse.

I shall also look at the concept of hegemony because it provides another way of exploring how societies may appear to cohere and yet serve the interests of a minority.

Assembling the components for social fracking

In order to frack society really thoroughly I suggest that you need to put together the following components.

Component one: anti-political politicians

In a number of places on this website I have already put forward my brief definition of politics as the process of consensually arriving at values; a process that should take place before policy making. Put even more briefly: agree values first, construct policies second. The Coalition's star anti-political politician has to be Andrew Lansley but Michael Gove is not far behind in doing policies before doing politics. Part of the problem is that even politicians do not understand proper political behaviour, which is why they often insult people with whom they disagree by accusing them of being politically motivated. They think that all they have to do before throwing policies at us is to obtain power. Michael Gove has no electoral endorsement for his policies; he got his power from a deal with another party, another party that many people voted for in hopes of keeping out the likes of Gove. My major point is, however, that a failure to do proper politics damages society.

Education policy created without politics: six possible professional responses

This is already on the website under this title. It is likely to be incorporated into the final version of the essay. Here are the possible responses.

Reluctantly acquiescing

Avoiding awkward knowledge

Rolling up sleeves to make policy better

Seeking fulfilment elsewhere

Protesting and attempting to change the minds of policy makers

Converting to the current orthodoxy

A question

The question was about the new boss of Ofsted who foolishly said that you could tell what a school was like after thirty minutes. I suggested that it does not take nearly as long as that to tell if a boss of Ofsted or a secretary of state is any good.

Comment since the above was written

I have in mind the flexing of the muscles of the teacher unions during recent conferences. It is not long since I sent off my own responses to the consultations on proposed changes to how Ofsted works. I thought I was a bit blunt until I heard what unions were saying. We shall have to see if Michael Gove turns into what he claims to see himself as: a listener. His recent proposed changes to public examinations suggest plugged ears.

Component two: anti-democratic politicians

Some time after I began writing I discovered John Kean's book *The Life and Death of Democracy*. It is big but enjoyable and extremely thorough. It is presented as a history of democracy, which it is, but it is more than that because it submits for testing and discussion so many versions of and thoughts about democracy. After reading the book I remain confidant that my own definition of politics still has mileage in it. And, accompanying my definition of politics, democracy is, for me, a process of government that allows and enables: dissenting voices to be heard; authority to be challenged; open government; and fair treatment for all.

Even at a very simple level of analysis Gove is not only anti-democratic in terms of the construction and enforcement of education policy but also member of a government that is behaving anti-democratically. Removing schools from local government, which is accountable to the electorate via the ballot box, and handing them over to private, profit-making organisations is anti-democratic in a very big way. Being anti-democratic helps to frack society.

Component three: anti-intellectual politicians

In 'Trahison des clerc' on this website I say something about teachers as intellectuals. I believe that teaching is an intellectual activity but when government regards teachers as instructors and places them under instruction to implement policy without question they are de-intellectualised. And in my review of his book and in other places I take issue with what appears to me Tony Blair's desire to impress us with the brainpower of his acolytes by calling them intellectuals. Target setters and chasers are not intellectuals.

I acknowledge a point made by Antonio Gramsci that engaging with ideology is an intellectual activity; and I know that WH Auden is supposed to have said that a drowning man is an intellectual because he is concerned about his condition (I cannot find a direct reference for this so if anybody can I would be grateful) but for me an intellectual has to be capable of seeing from more than a single perspective. An intellectual politician ought to be able to do this. If they can't then it is likely that they won't do proper politics either because they are fixated upon the implementation of their chosen policy: chosen without obtaining consent. George Osborn is a very good example of an anti-intellectual politician. He refuses to consider for one moment that there might be another way of doing things. He is a Plan A politician whose alphabet goes no further.

Politicians without the intellectual capacity to make use of more than a single perspective are a danger to society.

Component four: anti-educational politicians

I am having to be careful to express myself clearly here because the values I wish to support in education are very close to and interlock with the values I wish to support in society in general; so why two components? For this component I intend to go back to two Latin words: educare, to grow; and educere, to lead out. Together they give us education and I believe that this ought to mean fulfilment.

Politicians often claim that they are in favour of children being fulfilled but I argue that their commitment to fulfilment is partial and exclusive. Their partiality and exclusivity is anti-educational and damaging to society because it intends to prevent the fulfilment of all.

The overuse by politicians of the abstract noun 'improvement' does not help. Neither does their belief that standards ought to be movable and 'driven up'.

Component five: anti-social politicians

Here I will seek to establish that fairness is the fundamental social value and that fulfilment for all children will not happen in an unfair society. Unfairness corrodes the relational foundations of society.

Main text

It is not merely the case that many politicians are now committed to possessive individualism and so this is all that we must deal with. Thatcherised Tories are now a fact of party political life and beginning to resolve into a clear form that, while difficult to dislodge because of their control of the levers of power, are easily reduced to an intellectually bereft, nasty set of defenders of privilege. We must, sadly, also confront the failure of people who claim membership of the Labour Party to connect the two notions of fairness and fulfilment. When Philip Gould and Tony Blair put forward 'aspiration' as the key value of New Labour they failed to make the connection. If we remove fairness from the equation then fulfilment will be for a few at the expense of the rest. This is anti-social.

We now learn from David Cameron's speech at the October 2012 Conservative Party conference that he too has adopted 'aspiration' as a slogan. But because he appears to have thought this one up very quickly in order to grab the headlines I think that to call it a 'value' at this stage is going too far. With Ed Miliband now proudly appropriating Disraeli's 'One Nation' slogan we seem to have entered some sort of party political game called 'swap the slogan'. At what points, I wonder, do slogans turn into values and values turn into policies? And who, I also wonder, is allowed to take part in the process of transformation? Does the process work in that order? Are our politicians content to skip from slogan to policy without bothering with the intervening troublesome business of involving society in the discussion about values?

There are many decent MPs in the Labour Party. If you read, for example, the diaries of (now retired) Chris Mullin you can come away thinking that with just a few more like that in positions just a bit higher than such people usually manage to reach the country might just about edge a little closer to equality and to a set of domestic and foreign policies that could contribute to universal fairness and possibly slow down the headlong drive to frack the entire planet socially as well as physically. Mullin is not misty-eyed about society and the unemployed he encountered in his constituency. His sympathy for misbehaving youths, for example, is well under control. But I think that he can see quite clearly the disastrous consequences of politicians creating and implementing policies that lack an inclusive social dimension. He and his like were not, however, admitted to the ranks of the Blair soferites who made the big decisions. I can see why: he was not a social fracker, just the opposite.

I almost wrote that Blair and New Labour laid the foundations for the coalition government to frack further our society. What they did, of course, was to weaken the foundations so that they could be more easily fracked by the coalition government.

If we think about education and society, particularly for school children: would anyone propose that we design and operate a social system that deliberately prevents fulfilment for large numbers of children? I don't just mean disabling

their chances of getting the highest marks they are capable of, although that is a factor. I include life chances, the quality of those lives and their eventual access to influence and power. These three are connected, sometimes too exclusively connected.

The similarities in educational and social background of so many members of the current cabinet clearly demonstrate what kind of school and university and society will deliver the best chances of obtaining exclusive influence and power. Those chances are, however, only effective chances if they are limited to a few. David Cameron told his conference that he wants to spread privilege, an idea so ludicrous that we can only conclude either that his tongue got the better of his brain or that he thinks the people listening to him were too stupid to notice how meaningless the idea is. The way that we make sure that limits are placed upon life chances, life quality and access to influence and power is to operate a distorted society, one that excludes the majority and only permits a few approved plebs to penetrate the social membrane from time to time. I recall the Assisted Places Scheme as one of those cynical devices or relief valves that reduced pressure from below while, at the same time, converting a handful of selected plebeians to something resembling patricians with the values of privilege. The answer to my question, *would anyone propose that we design and operate a social system that deliberately prevents fulfilment for large numbers of children?* has to be 'yes'.

Big Society is a concept so diminishing and false that it will contribute to social fracking. It has very little substance, which is a reason why its advocates fail to articulate it by means of anything but empty rhetoric but, insofar as we can put words to the idea, it is an anti-social concept because it seeks to replace democratically determined and accountable public service with a combination of do-it-yourself service provided by lots of people working for nothing and profit making private companies keeping down the wages, not bothering with staff training and taking short cuts with quality assurance. Attempts are made to make a DIY plus privatised welfare state sound attractive, especially by a prime minister whose only experience of the world of work was in public relations (a job obtained by family influence) and whose experience of society continues to remain inside a rather comfortable bubble. Big Society chimes in with the exhortation to see ourselves as 'all in this together'. It is intended to bring to mind acts of charity, neighbourliness and community spirit. But, as was the thinking of Tony Blair, it is bogus. We are not all in the same society. We are in a lot of differentiated societies. The extent of what I believe to be deliberate social differentiation is such that it amounts to anti-social behaviour on the part of politicians with power and influence. But, on the other hand, Big Society might be a concept worth capturing! Could Ed Miliband do that? He would, of course, have to do this on a basis of social inclusiveness.

Bill Clinton had a winning slogan: 'It's the economy, stupid'. What you hope for is a politician who says: 'It's society, stupid'. Tony Blair told us that his priority (singular) was 'Education, education, education'. He ought to have said: 'Society, society, society'. We are entitled to know the thinking, the views, the values and the ideas that politicians have about society before we vote for them. The dominant partner in our coalition government was,

however, at great pains before the last general election to present itself as a socially inclusive political party. The toxicity of Thatcherism had, we were led to believe, been expunged. Like a slick seller of health giving detox drinks and supplements David Cameron carefully crafted an image that reassured by telling us, for example, that the NHS would be safe in their hands: the 'Nasty Party' label could no longer be applied to them. Now we know that to be ill, disabled, unemployed, part time working, parents of too many children and living in the wrong part of the country means that you must bear the cost of paying off the deficit created by casino bankers and financial wizards. The worst that can happen to them is a light slap on the wrist.

The deficit certainly required a set of economic, financial and industrial responses in the form of policies. When the coalition government took over the existing policies seemed to be having a modestly positive effect and the economy was growing. George Osborne, however, seems to have taken the opportunity to use the deficit as an excuse to attack all those measures that have previously helped us to believe that we lived in a relatively civilised society. A prime example of an ideologically charged fracker is George.

One of Osborne's most enthusiastic allies is Michael Gove whose education policies have to be seen as opening up another front in the war against a fair, fulfilling and inclusive society. Schools are being bullied away from local democracy. Decisions once taken locally by people accountable to electors they might meet socially will increasingly be taken by someone in London who manages a commercial contract with a business devoted to making a profit or spreading some strange beliefs. National agreements about pay and conditions are under threat. The hiring and firing of teachers will soon come to resemble that old de-humanising social evil condemned by Beveridge and many others over many decades: casual labour. The ties connecting schools to society are being cut and they will float away to be judged by their share price, not their social value. As for the idea that Free Schools are part of or arise out of a society that is in any way inclusive, how far do their sponsors get if they are poor, single parents or out of work?

Questions for critical conversations

1. Can all be fulfilled in an unfair society?
2. Are all schools, teachers, children, parents and politicians 'in it together'?
3. How can educators contribute to the making of a fair society?
4. How can educators sometimes help prevent the making of a fair society?

Component six: politicians getting away with it

Some of this I shall base upon the easily ignored fact that the UK is a monarchy. It's quite simple. French people are citizens. We, no matter what it says on our passports, are subjects. A politician who leads the largest party in the House of Commons exercises the powers of a monarch. Yes there are

constraints upon those powers such as the size and discipline of the majority but, nevertheless, we delude ourselves if we imagine that we are not subjects of the Crown.

Another reason why they get away with behaving so badly towards us is the decline of our news media into an obsession with celebrity and making an insulting assumption that the public is unable to rise above base prejudice.

Yet another is the bare faced cheek of people like Michael Gove who tell us that they are against inequality while doing all they can to make it worse.

Political education in schools or civics and citizenship

From at least 1970 there was a determined effort to replace civics and citizenship in schools with political education. I was very closely involved through my membership of the executive committee of the Politics Association, the working party on Political Literacy and as a chief examiner in Government and Politics for CSE, 16 Plus and GCSE. I intend to say something about what I regard as deliberate policy pressure that squeezed out political education from the curriculum.

Inability to penetrate the force field

I guess that this comes from the frustration of reading books that smash to smithereens the habitual prejudices of politicians and their fellow travellers and then watching authors traduced and their evidence and arguments sidelined or ignored by interests vested in the status quo. I mention here just one such book, *The Spirit Level* by Wilkinson and Pickett. It shows that equality is good for everyone so, as you might expect, it has had no influence on policy. It may, however have had some influence upon rhetoric because Michael Gove seems to want to convince us that his policies are intended to further equality.

Preamble to the charge sheet against Michael Gove

It is easier to list the Secretaries of State for Education of whom I have approved over my professional years than to list the ones of whom I disapprove. The list is much shorter. Nevertheless, a special place must be preserved for Michael Gove as the most socially destructive force in education I have encountered, with the possible exception of Chris Woodhead, the first Ofsted boss.

Incidentally, I once invited Woodhead to talk to heads and deputies in Liverpool. The comment was made that his presentation was less than satisfactory; in a large room he held up an A4 sheet saying 'you can't read this but this is what it says'. That would not have impressed one of his inspectors. But what struck me was that he made the point that we suffered from a 'stubborn statistic'. Over the years, he told us, it has remained the case that between one-quarter and one-third of lessons are unsatisfactory. My

immediate reaction was to think, first, that I would have been very pleased if between three-quarters and two-thirds of my lessons had satisfied me; and, second, that some of my best lessons had started out as some of my worst: I was trying something new. This is apart from the question of who gets to define 'satisfactory'.

I intended to leave this charge sheet for revision when I am nearer finishing the essay because it was likely that there could be much more to say. His recent antics, particularly the anti social proposals regarding GCSE, have prompted me to publish now. We have had *Ofsted the Musical* (to be found on YouTube) and *Leveson the Musical* (Guardian website). Somewhere, surely, someone must be writing *Gove the Tragicomedy*.

The charge sheet against Michael Gove

Michael Gove is on course to help his coalition colleagues frack society. Like so many pretend politicians he wishes to leave a legacy. His wish shall be granted. All must suffer as a result. The charges so far are as follows.

1. You have no electoral endorsement for your policies. Also you have taken no steps at all to include professionals, parents and pupils in discourse that could establish educational values leading to policy. Inclusion, gaining consent and even pausing to reflect does not feature in your way of working. Politics is the inclusive and consensual process of arriving at values prior to policy-making. You do not work like this. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-political**.
2. You are removing schools from democratically accountable local government and handing them over to private and profit making companies, disregarding the electorate's unwillingness to endorse your policies. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-democratic**.
3. You are unwilling to engage with evidence that might bring into question the narrow prejudices with which you began the job of Secretary of State. Ofsted reported that the best way to learn to be a schoolteacher was with a university. You ignored that evidence because it did not fit with your views. You are also de-intellectualising the profession by stifling its ability to undertake masters and doctoral level work. You see schoolteachers as instructors. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-intellectual**.
4. An education system should fulfil all young people. Its purpose is perverted when schools are differentiated by resource, religious beliefs, privilege and advantage. And yet you are creating a rigged free-for-all in which the favours will go to the already favoured while the rest shall be negatively labelled for life. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-educational**.

5. You are part of a government that seeks to dissolve institutions, policies and conventions that, under the banner of the Welfare State, have worked to minimise the damaging effects of privilege and inequality. Your education policies fit into a strategy that unfairly encourages the fulfilment of a few at the expense of the many. You are, therefore, charged with being **anti-social**.
6. You have a boss whose educational, social and professional lives have all taken place in a series of small bubbles in which he mixed with people like himself. Like you he went to an exclusive university that has worked hard over the years to construct exaggerated perceptions of its brand value. He also studied for a degree with the reputation of having been designed for specialists in superficiality. You are, therefore, charged with **exploiting the ignorance and lack of attention to detail of your boss to get away with it**.

After the Children of Thatcher came the Children of Blair. Next (courtesy of Michael Gove) the Children of the Coalition

First, the Coalition: how many people do you know that voted LibDem in order to keep out a Tory government? I can discern not one scintilla of LibDem values in current Coalition education policies. So why are they in this government?

My concern here is that Thatcher did so much to weaken society and hold up as the prime example to follow the individual driven by greed. Blair, with his simple-minded notion of aspiration widened social gaps and allowed Mandelson's 'filthy rich' to become even filthier. These are destructive values. But if the Coalition continues on its way the children of Thatcher and Blair who ascribe value to themselves and each other based upon wealth and privilege will be followed by children whose sense of society: of being able to connect with each other in diverse ways; of believing in fairness; and of natural social empathy will fade away. William Gladstone not only gave us the 1870 Education Act providing compulsory schooling but he recognised that there were social problems that could only be dealt with by the state which had a moral duty to do so.

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