

## **"I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE AND IT SMIRKS."**

**I am pretty sure that the quotation is from John Cole, former Chief Political Correspondent of the BBC.**

**But about who did he say that?**

Another clue,

"EVERYONE WANTS A B-DAY BUT NO-ONE KNOWS WHAT TO DO WITH IT."

Surely by now you must know that we are talking about Kenneth Baker, the Secretary of State who gave the teaching profession Baker Days.

The idea of those days was, at first, to enable schools to become familiar with the National Curriculum.

Back in 1975, in *Class, Culture and the Curriculum*, Denis Lawton who has very recently died suggested a curriculum that would emerge from widespread and inclusive consideration of our social values. I didn't, but ought to have asked Denis if Baker had invited him into the the Department for a chat. We were both involved in the Working Party that produced the Report on Political Education and Political Literacy in 1978.

Although composed by professionals the National Curriculum was handed down to schoolteachers. A member of the Science writing group told me that before attending official group meetings many of them would meet to get their act ready. Once the official meeting was convened they were watched over by government representatives.

About a year later when contracts were being offered to devise the SATs the government would hold bidding conferences. As Local Authority advisors attempting to plan our training sessions for city-wide schoolteachers a colleague and I once pretended to bid just so that we could attend a conference and get a clue about where on earth policy was leading.

Prominent at the conference was a sort of Sergeant Major official who made it clear that no terms such as 'learning experience' could be used. They were 'lessons'. It was also made clear that none of this work could be regarded as research that might be published. I think that was even in the contract.

And so, Baker eventually published a small red booklet summing up what was then a massive National Curriculum and went around the country to tell us all about it. When he visited the University of Manchester Ray Derricott and I got on the front row. We made sure Baker could see us and I asked the first question. He flattered me because he dug deep into his political archive to produce a gold medal response.

My question, paraphrased from memory.

"You have described a uniform curriculum and a uniform system of assessment. It will be the same for all young people. But, on the other hand, you are proposing different kinds of schools for different kinds of young people. How do you hold in your head those two different concepts, uniformity and differentiation?"

His response.

"That is a very interesting question."

If you are ever asked a question you would rather not answer, that is a really good way to reply. He then spoke for a minute or so. Ray and I looked at each other and could make no sense of any of it, but it enabled him to move on to, "Next question?"

The real answer, which he could not admit to a hall full of educationists back in the 80s, was that he was introducing a system of measurement that would enable government to move from a comprehensive system of schooling to a competitive free market one.

Mixed ability teaching was no longer an option. And a stratified society was to be reinforced. Society was to be competitive with a few winners but lots of losers. Remember Corbyn's 2019 Manifesto, FOR THE MANY NOT THE FEW. Our school system, particularly in England, uses all of those words, but in a slightly different order.

**Cliff Jones, 14th. September 2022**

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