

Tory bribes to promote socially divisive 'Free Schools' agenda

James Kerr

Students in England and Wales returned to school this week. If Tory education secretary Michael Gove could give one piece of advice to them what would it be?

He may warn; 'careful what notes you pass in class because you never know where they might end up.' He learnt this lesson when emails from Whitehall were revealed showing the lengths the Tories have gone to, to ensure their 'Free School' agenda has been taken up.

The emails to the 'New Schools Network' - a charity run by a number of former Conservative Party employees who have actively supported the setting up of Free Schools - show Gove's department fast-tracked £500,000 to the charity to allow new Free Schools to open this term.

Dominic Cummings, author of the emails and a Tory strategist at the time, wrote: "MG [Michael Gove] telling the civil servants to find a way to give NSN cash without delay."

Cummings now works for the New Schools Network, making a mockery of the charity's independent status. 24 new Free Schools have opened, they receive state funds but are under the control of unelected and unaccountable faith organisations, groups of parents or entrepreneurs. There are also plans for a Free School entirely staffed by former soldiers.

Gove even wanted these "free" schools to be able to generate profits

image not available

but these Tory plans have been temporarily shelved, as their Lib Dem coalition partners feel the heat.

The opening of these schools is a key milestone in the Tories' drive to take more schools out of local authority control and further erode comprehensive education.

Even a Tory councillor in Birmingham described Free Schools as potentially 'socially divisive' and more details have emerged, including that the 24 don't have to adhere to locally negotiated class sizes.

London's first Free School, the Aldborough E-ACT primary school in Redbride, will have a ten-hour

day boasting that it "will not adhere to national conditions of service for teachers".

There is a critical shortage of primary school places which the government is using as justification for Free Schools. However their policies will just pass the problems on and compound them rather than providing a solution.

Only an education system based on democratic control and accountability can solve the crisis. Additional resources are also needed but schools around the country face massive cuts to their budgets.

The Con-Dems also want to 'de-

skill' the teaching profession, allowing Free Schools to employ unqualified teaching staff while they cut teacher training. Will this really build a modern, dynamic education system for the nation's young or one primed for business to make money from our public services?

What is clear from the leaked emails is we can't trust the government to listen to the concerns of the majority of teachers, their unions, parents or pupils. Instead we must organise to fight for an education system based on students and their communities' needs, not those of the private sector.

NHS reaches a tipping point

The British Medical Association (BMA) doctors' organisation has called for the government's destructive Health and Social Care Bill to be withdrawn or 'significantly amended'. The BMA's head, Hamish Meldrum, says the bill would change the National Health Service (NHS) into "a market-based health system rather like the one we see in the United States".

In particular he criticised the government for forcing all hospitals to become semi-autonomous Foundation Trusts (initiated by the previous Labour government) which, under the pressure of massive government spending cuts, will increase the numbers of paying private patients at the expense of poorer patients.

At present many health trusts are saddled with enormous 'debts' due to a combination of government 'efficiency savings' (ie cuts) and private finance initiative (PFI) schemes.

Managers at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust for example are considering shutting St Mary's Hospital in Paddington, west London, with the loss of 500 beds, and selling off the site to property developers in order to eliminate its £100 million 'debt'.

Privatisation

PFI schemes typically are 20-35 year contracts whereby health trusts get private consortiums to build and refurbish hospitals and

provide maintenance and other services for an enormous fee.

In August 2010 the department of health said NHS organisations will, through PFI schemes, eventually pay over £50 billion for buildings worth £11 billion, with maintenance charges adding a further £15 billion in costs.

The health bill will accelerate privatisation of the NHS. Already Hinchingbrooke NHS Hospital in Cambridgeshire has been effectively privatised and leaked emails between senior health officials show that government ministers are considering privatising 10-20 hospitals to for-profit international private health care companies. Clearly any inherited debt, if not borne by the public purse, will result in job cuts, ward and department closures.

The health bill will also end the health secretary's legal obligation to deliver comprehensive health care to patients. If the local health trust cannot afford to provide health care than patients will either have to go private or simply go without.

Clearly the NHS is at a tipping point. Unless health workers' trade union organisations, along with local communities, launch a major counter-offensive to demand a fully funded, publicly owned and democratically run NHS, then a two-tier health service will emerge with the vast majority of people suffering.

Simon Carter

Miliband to bury Labour Socialist Party contests Coventry ward

Lenny Shail

Ed Miliband plans to re-write the Labour Party's 93 year old founding principles and aims, suggesting that Tony Blair didn't go far enough 17 years ago when he attacked the party's 'clause IV', which had committed Labour to a programme of mass nationalisation.

The changes that will get rid of principles such as "to organise and maintain in parliament and in the country a political Labour party", set out the party's desire to continue to loosen its ties with the trade union movement and to weaken further its pretence to represent working class people. Instead it desires to be a "force for social justice".

In reality Labour has been wholly a party for big business and capitalism for many years. Its 13 years in government were 13 years of job losses, attacks on workers' conditions and privatisation of parts of the NHS and other public services.

Labour's time in opposition under the leadership of Miliband has not altered its big business and capitalist ethics. Labour's leaders, nationally and locally, subscribe to a cuts agenda on jobs and public services and attacks on the trade unions.

Miliband publicly denounced the 750,000 public sector workers who were forced to take strike action on 30 June against the blatant robbery of their pensions by the Con-Dem government.

By-election

In Coventry's Lower Stoke ward, the effects of over 30 years of attacks and neglect by Tory and New Labour governments and councils alike are plain to see. In the ward sits the derelict 'desert' that up until 2008 was one of Coventry's last car factories. Nearby there is an empty building that was a council 'One Stop Shop' service until a few months ago.

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They serve as a warning of a future of even higher unemployment, cuts in services, pay and conditions if the Con-Dems and Coventry's Labour-led council are allowed to continue to carry out their vicious attacks on ordinary people.

This is why Socialist Party member Rob McArdle, a postal worker who lives in the ward, will be standing as a 'Socialist Alternative' candidate in the Lower Stoke council by-election on 6 October.

Rob is the only candidate standing against all cuts to jobs, services and conditions and against privatisation. Instead, he will, if elected, work alongside Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist in demanding more jobs, homes and better services and conditions for workers and the people of Lower Stoke and Coventry itself.

Fast news

Torture Inc.

Unearthed secret correspondence in Tripoli between the Gaddafi regime and western spy networks reveal how US, British and other governments collaborated with the Libyan dictator in the 'rendition' (ie kidnapping) and torture of alleged terrorist suspects.

Ironically, one victim of this process Abdel-Hakim Belhaj, is now the top military organiser for the National Transitional Council, whom the western powers are supporting as part of their strategy for regime change in the country.

The close collaboration between Gaddafi's regime and the west took place during the period of George Bush's presidency and Tony Blair's premiership when the Libyan dictatorship was being rehabilitated internationally by them. This collaboration continued right up to the uprising in Libya in February this year.

Libya after Gaddafi - see page 9

Jesus of Wapping

News that a white-robed Tony Blair participated in a baptism at the exact spot on the river Jordan where Jesus was supposedly baptised further adds to his messianic reputation. Blair once claimed that god wanted him to invade Iraq! The fact that it was Rupert Murdoch's children and he was becoming their godfather shows just how close Blair has come to this mortal enemy of the working class.

Murdoch's son James recently turned down a £6 million bonus from News International, in view of the legal investigation into phone hacking and his role in trying to cover it up. Hang on though, like every lie that's printed in Murdoch's papers this needs closer examination. In fact he said that it may be appropriate for the remuneration committee to consider paying the bonus at a later date! Maybe he should get it in tobacco as the smart money is on James taking the fall for the phone hacking scandal and going to prison.

Ken Douglas

Costly wars

The living standards of workers and the jobless in the USA are being hammered as Congress embarks on savage federal spending cuts to plug the government's multi-trillion dollar deficit. The deficit is the result of bailing out corporations and financial institutions during the recession and giving huge tax breaks and economic stimulus measures to the rich and corporations.

Another source of the debt is waste and fraud by US defence contractors who have made a fortune during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

According to a US government commission an astonishing \$60 billion has been lost in fraud and mismanagement in the last decade by defence companies. At least \$31 billion was lost through mismanagement - the equivalent of \$12 million since the invasion of Afghanistan by US-led forces in 2001.

The biggest contractor KBR earned \$40.8 billion, 'winning' a \$36.3 billion army logistics contract as the sole provider. KBR was a subsidiary of Halliburton whose chief executive was none other than Dick Cheney, US vice-president under George W Bush.