

## **Education, Social Justice and Educational Opportunities – reflections on the role of teachers and their organisations**

When Professor John Morgan wrote and asked me to deliver the Hugh Gaitskell Memorial Lecture saying yes required very little consideration on my part.

Not only was I personally flattered to be in a position to deliver such a prestigious lecture, but being able to say to my Mum that such a request had been made of me I knew was bound to bring out an *ooh* from her; she would be proud of her son.

But very importantly being able to present this lecture gives me the opportunity, in the era of globalisation, to take forward some ideas and issues I have been thinking about and working on with colleagues and friends in this country and across the world. At the same time too it enables me to remind a few people of some old stories and truths.

I have to admit that my first engaged thought on applying my ideas to the tradition of this occasion was the realisation that my knowledge of all but the headlines of the work and contribution of Hugh Gaitskell was inadequate.

I have also to admit that my own bookshelves were not of any great assistance.

I knew that in an anthology of Radical and Socialist writings by, of all people, Tony Benn<sup>1</sup>, which I had bought in 1984, there was a piece by Hugh Gaitskell, but I am sorry to say I had very little else.

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Benn (1984) *Writings on the Wall – A Radical and Socialist Anthology 1215 – 1984*

But the piece selected by Tony Benn did have a vocabulary that in part matched the words used in the themes often selected for these lectures – the words “education” and “the world” were prominent and importantly they appeared in the section of Tony Benn’s book dealing with “Rights and Demands”.

And Hugh Gaitskell, in the piece selected, was speaking about Commonwealth Citizens. Naturally, for me, as the Convenor of the Commonwealth Teachers’ Group of teachers’ unions, I was interested as what might be revealed could turn out to be important signposts.

Hugh Gaitskell, opposing a Bill to restrict the immigration of Commonwealth Citizens said this in November 1961;

*“The whole future of the world will probably depend on whether people of different colours can live in harmony with each other. Therefore, this Measure as now put forward strikes at the very root of this principle.*

*It is no part of our case to pretend that any amount of immigration of people of different colour and social customs and language does not present problems, though I urge that we should be beware of exaggerations here. Do the government deal with it by seeking to combat social evils, by enforcing laws against overcrowding, by using every educational means at their disposal to create tolerance and mutual understanding, and by emphasising to our own people the value of these immigrants and setting their face firmly against all forms of racial intolerance and discrimination? That is what we believe.”*

Now knowing a little more about Hugh Gaitskell I see why those inspirational words are so revealing of a man committed to equality, extending educational opportunity and whose ideas were often laced with internationalism.

After graduating from Oxford in 1927, Gaitskell spent a year as a Workers' Educational Association (WEA) tutor in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. He spent a lot of time teaching miners at the University of Nottingham. He later wrote:

'It was my experiences there, especially in the coalfields, which were to turn me ... towards active politics.'<sup>2</sup>

Brian Brivati in his much admired biography of Hugh Gaitskell said that the political ideas which dominated Gaitskell's life were rooted in an emotional response to the inequality he saw as a WEA lecturer.

His political ideas, indeed his socialism, were based on a desire to change the structure of society so that it promoted equality rather than inequality. In his address to the 1955 Labour Party Conference in Margate, Gaitskell abandoned his notes and delivered his 'I am a socialist' speech which helped him on his way to the Labour Leadership two months later.

'I became a socialist ...because I disliked the class structure of our society, because I could not tolerate the indefensible differences of status and income which disfigure our society...rewards should not be ...dependent upon the accident of whether you happen to be born of wealthy parents or not. **I want to see all this not only in our country but over the world as a whole'**

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<sup>2</sup> Brian Brivati (1996) Hugh Gaitskell

I contend that individuals such as Hugh Gaitskell can have a profound impact on people's lives, stimulate social justice and, in fact, help liberate individuals and whole groups of peoples. Of course they do so within the given set of circumstances in which they have to make their choices, make their stand.

I also believe that teacher trade unionism is an enormous force for good. People working together, sometimes with different motivations, can change people's lives – can change worlds.

I want to illustrate this by sketching out the role played by the NUT working with allies in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. That work I believe led to an explosion in educational opportunities for young people in our country with the passing of the 1944 Education Act. It is just such an explosion in educational opportunities that is needed internationally at the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Furthermore, the work currently being undertaken by the teachers' organisations in the UK and through the coordinated work undertaken by the international body that represents some 30 million teachers, Education International (EI), is having a positive impact in increasing access to education to millions of children denied the start in life that education can provide.

I also believe that such changes in the world of education, such explosions in available opportunities, can help stimulate social change in individual countries and globally.

I want to explore some of these ideas in the next 30 minutes.

Being with hopeful and optimistic people is a joy in all our lives.

Recently at the Teaching Awards celebrations Professor Tim Brighouse rightly said there were two types of teachers – those who are generators of energy and those who are consumers of energy.

I knew what he meant; and I think that he is right.

But Tim's metaphor applies more widely than to just teachers. I think there are those who are hopeful supporters and activists for justice, human rights and equality and there is the rest. Those who exude hope and optimism generate the energy and stimulate the progress that we in education and progressive teacher trade unionism, for example, work for. I find it is such people who are as fascinated as I think I am by the liberating power of education in this country and across the world.

These people applied their energies to imagining and working for the type of education system they wanted even in the dark days of the World War II.

As the world waited for what was to be the Normandy landings in 1944, and to confront the most dreadful deeds and ideology of Nazism, these hopeful generators of energy were busy arguing for an end to the class dominated education system that stifled opportunities; in its place they wanted the establishment of universal secondary education for every young boy and girl in our country.

Their hope and optimism drove them forward. It enabled them to generate enthusiasm and build alliances; it enabled them to deal with set backs and overcome adversity. They

were fighting for a great cause – free secondary education for all. They demanded an end to the waste of talent that was the product of the exclusion of all but a tiny proportion of the country's people from secondary and higher education.

It was a formidable alliance centred around the Council for Educational Advance (CEA). The Labour and trade union movement was at the campaign's nucleus, RH Tawney crystallised its ideas but the campaign's heart and soul was provided by my union – the members of the National Union of Teachers.

Their case was made by Ronnie Gould the President of the NUT in 1943 and a future General Secretary. He encapsulated the criticisms of the current system and the aspiration and hope of his Union and its supporters when he wrote;

*“...our education system provided unequal educational opportunities in schools of unequal social standing, giving courses of unequal length in unequal conditions. This was socially evil and morally reprehensible. We must aim to provide equal opportunities in schools of equal social standing giving courses of equal duration under equivalent conditions”<sup>3</sup>*

The 1944 Education Act – the greatest of all the progressive education acts – was the product of ideas and work of such people. It stands still as a great monument to them. Despite the Act being a compromise between competing interests and of course having negative features it was a giant leap forward.

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<sup>3</sup> Sir Ronnie Gould (1976) *Chalk up the Memory*

The Act wanted a school system for each young person meeting their educational needs, abilities and aptitudes; it abolished fees in secondary schools and delivered free secondary education for all whilst it promised much more. It was expected to herald in universal nursery education, it raised the commitment to a school leaving age of 18; it definitely produced an explosion of opportunities for young people and gave us a measure by which all educational advance could be assessed.

That measure was equality of opportunity.

Professor Brian Simon has declared that the policy demands of these people to expand educational opportunities for young people were profound indeed. He said; “Such a policy posed a real and serious challenge, implying a new order in English education definitely involving social change.”<sup>4</sup> I think he is right.

This thinking has implications for our global education demands today. I will come onto this shortly.

Potted histories of education often identify the 1944 Education Act as the Butler Act. I pay tribute to the political skills of Rab Butler in getting the Act passed but I also want to place on record names and personalities that deserve more than having the occasional blowing away of the cobwebs from their names and the historical footnotes they now unfairly inhabit. I pay tribute to Chuter Ede, Rab Butler’s fellow education minister and an NUT activist, Sir Frederick Mander, NUT General Secretary and to two great Presidents of the NUT Sir Ronnie Gould and GTC Giles. The contribution of these men was immense.

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Simon (1991) *Education and the Social Order 1940-1990*

I hope you will permit me to stray from what is probably the core of my talk for just a minute but I want to talk about teachers' pay. I do this not because I am obsessed with narrow teacher trade unionism, I am not guilty of that. I do this because in moving onto issues of pay in the international section of this lecture an important contemporary point is made concerning the valuing of teachers. I will refer later to actions taken by international institutions and governments devaluing those at the forefront of raising the aspirations and horizons of boys and girls across the world.

In British education what we now call gender issues have caused debate and created divisions that still have consequences in our schools today. In 1944 the call for equal pay for men and women, further stimulated by the war effort, was gathering pace; the call had been given amplification inside the National Union of Teachers for decades, but it also led to the break away by some men to form the National Association of Schoolmasters (NAS). Equal pay for men and women teachers, was hoped by many NUT activists to be resolved by the Education Bill in 1944.

Indeed, an amendment establishing equal pay in teaching was successfully passed in the House of Commons in that year. But it had been opposed by Churchill's national government. Interestingly, this equal pay amendment was the only time in the war years that the Government was defeated in a vote in the House of Commons.

Following the defeat the Government acted with great speed and Churchill came to the Commons the next day and, on a confidence motion, succeeded in re-establishing the status quo – crude discrimination against women teachers would

continue for a further 15 years. Inside the NUT frantic consideration took place and the cry went out save the Bill. The NAS at the time spoke for a number of male teachers when they praised the actions of Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, because they were opposed in principle to equal pay.

I am pleased to say that the NASUWT do not hold such a position today.

I have spent some considerable time on what many believed was the great challenge of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century because in many ways it parallels the great social and global challenge of our times at the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Even the slogan has a resonance; whilst in the Britain in the 1940s the demand was for *Secondary Education for All*, the great challenge of our age is encapsulated in the universal demand for *Education for All*.

Many of us will be familiar with the high numbers of children unable to go to school. We talk of over 100 million children being out of school. We illustrate the lack of investment and resources in graphic terms - schools without books, shift systems operating, class-sizes frequently in excess of 100, girls having less access to schools compared with their brothers, teachers not paid for months and often poorly trained, corrupt ministers and ministries, and yet still vulnerable education systems are targeted to solve the teacher shortages that have arisen in developed countries following their failure to properly prioritise our education systems.

And we know the damage that this neglect has brought. It has contributed to the poverty of biblical proportions that any visitor to African cities and rural areas witnesses. It has

contributed to the health catastrophe of malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS and the life expectancy rates of below 40 years in some countries.

The world has taken too long to wake up to these realities - the realities that Gordon Brown now describes as the great moral campaign of our age.

In equally graphic terms I believe the inaction of politicians and world leaders is one of the great moral failures in the post colonial period. In words that are more than rhetoric I have commented that this failure to live up to promises made by world leaders in Jomtien in 1990 to enable all children to be able to go to school by 2000 as a breach of a covenant between adults and children. That covenant dictates that promises made to children should not be broken.

But I have set my stall out and asserted that we should be hopeful.

So I wish to record some progress. I wish to record what must turn out to be an awakening.

An international movement – a coalition of NGOs, teachers and their organisations is on the move and it has had some affect.

In 1998 the newly formed Educational International representing some 30 million teachers set itself the task of working with NGOs and other campaigners to create a Global Campaign for Education (GCE) aiming to make the worlds' leaders deliver on the Millennium Development Goals with a commitment to high quality publicly provided education for all.

I think that EI working with NGOs like Oxfam and Save the Children has had an impact.

The GCE has commented in terms of Beverage like simplicity and clarity that many of the world's poorer countries have now shown themselves to be more committed to tackling "the scourge of illiteracy and ignorance".<sup>5</sup> Since 1998 budgets for education in many countries have increased, allowing fees to be abolished. Since 1994 15 African countries have taken this step with 12 of these making the decision since 2000. Malawi, Ethiopia, Ghana, Uganda, Lesotho, Cameroon, Madagascar, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, Mozambique and Benin – these have all made progress and it is likely that next on the list will be the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Burundi.<sup>6</sup>

For poor parents not having to pay school fees is a real blessing. This has enabled them to send their children to school and enrolments have increased. This is the case in sub-Saharan Africa, South and West Asia. It is estimated that some 60 million more children have enrolled at school. In the years when fees were abolished enrolments rose by 68% in Malawi and Uganda; 22% in Kenya and 11% in Lesotho.

What is very pleasing is that such increased enrolments following fee abolition often take place amongst the poorest members of society. This has been the case in Cambodia, Uganda, Malawi, and East Timor.

And what must give us all heart is that girls had higher enrolment rates in Uganda, Kenya and East Timor. These things are reported by Oxfam who also point out that

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<sup>5</sup> Underachievers GCE 2006

<sup>6</sup> *School Fee Abolition Initiative Operational Guidelines* (2006)

urban/rural disparities also declined in Uganda and East Timor and that following fee removal, enrolment rates of HIV/AIDS orphans and other vulnerable children increased significantly.<sup>7</sup>

I hope this is the start of what Gordon Brown has called an “education revolution”. But so much more needs to be done and our patience is being tested.

In a speech on 31 January 2007 to the Government Leaders Forum in Europe, Gordon Brown said:

“We cannot achieve an educational revolution without a new culture emphasising the importance of education: parents, pupils and teachers leading as the agents of change.

And I want parents, pupils and teachers... wholly engaged in the national mission that is my passion, my priority...”

I want to return in a moment to the issue of resources and funding for aid and quality education but let me pick up the Chancellor’s invitation for teachers to be agents of change. I find this a natural attribute to be attached to my profession. My favourite definition of the curriculum emphasises that it is synonymous with change. Teachers change lives for the better.

For teachers to accept this mantle as agents of change they need too to live up to their responsibilities. Occasionally some don’t. Sometimes we hear that a girl in a developing country may not go to school because she fears harassment by her male teacher. Such a teacher has no place in my profession.

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<sup>7</sup> Oxfam International in the Public Interest (September 2006)

I am very pleased indeed that Education International makes this very clear in its Code of Ethics. I recently invited all Ministers and Ministries of Education in the Commonwealth to work with their teachers' organisations to ensure that children go to schools where teachers have the highest professional standards.

In 1996 the National Union of Teachers organised a conference on education and human rights not too far from here in Stoke Rochford, Lincolnshire. The conference for teachers' organisations in the Commonwealth was sent a message by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. He said this;

“It is easy to become cynical about our ability to change systems, about working for peace and justice, about human rights flouted in so many places throughout the world. Yet our young people need not be tainted with that cynicism. They have the energy, the idealism, the courage to take the risks that working for human rights often demands. We have seen in South Africa how our young people played a crucial role in processes leading to change in our land. Without our young people it might never have happened. Many of our young people did what they did because of their teachers.”

Well, how's that for agents of change.

Yet too often teachers are given such disrespect that it is only their commitment to their students and their profession that keeps them going. The Global Campaign for Education draws attention to the comment of a government school teacher in Cameroon who said that becoming a teacher is like “signing a contract with poverty”.

I was asked in 2005 to deliver the Commonwealth Lecture in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The lecture to politicians and

educationalists was broadcast live on state television (and in my version of this story it kept a Manchester United match from the TV screens of West Africa). In that lecture I put real vigour into a sentence that pointed out that it was unpardonable to allow teachers to go months without getting paid. That sentence received an unexpected but supportive and very loud reaction from the audience.

The teachers in Sierra Leone got an unexpected reaction from their Government that month and they were paid on time.

Teachers in Sierra Leone wanted us to have a regular monthly slot on their state television.

I have spoken on platforms with representatives of the World Bank who have sought to justify why teachers should have their pay cut in the interests of the children in the developing world. Such people did not react kindly, however, when it was suggested to them that, *in the interests of the children in developing countries*, representatives of the World Bank should have their pay cut.

The World Bank's policies in relation to teachers are contradictory and not based on evidence. The Bank puts pressure on poor countries to reduce and cap teacher's pay; they take little account of the need to properly value teachers, ILO conventions and collective bargaining arrangements.

The Bank also promotes the idea of so-called *para-teachers*. In some countries these are called *community teachers* in others they are termed *volunteer teachers*. Whatever they are called it angers qualified teachers that their professional skills can be so little regarded that people with very limited

education, scant subject knowledge or training are encouraged to work in schools often ahead of them.

Para teachers are employed on shorter contracts, lower wages and despite the Bank's own research showing that "students of regular teachers systematically outperform those of contractual teachers (Para Teachers)"<sup>8</sup>

The recent Commonwealth Teachers' Forum held at the 16 Commonwealth Conference of Education Ministers (16CCEM) recommended that para teachers should only be employed as an emergency measure and that where they are employed "they must be supported and provided with the means to obtain formal training".<sup>9</sup> These are wise words indeed.

In order to meet the MDG of universal primary education by 2015 it is estimated that 18 million teachers will need to be recruited and trained. Today 2 million additional teachers are required. It is therefore essential that national governments take action to value the teachers they have and ensure that international recruitment practices are consistent with EFA goals and priorities.

It was with this in mind that the National Union of Teachers, working through the Commonwealth Teachers' Group (CTG), worked closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat to draft the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol. The Protocol was adopted at the training centre of the NUT when we hosted a meeting of Commonwealth Ministers in September 2004.

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<sup>8</sup> Vegas, Emiliana and Joost De Laat (2003) *Do Differences in Teacher Contracts affect Student Performance? Evidence from Togo* Washington: World Bank

<sup>9</sup> *Statement from The Teacher' Forum* December 2006 16 CCCEM

One of the motivations for the active engagement of teachers' organisations in working for the adoption of a protocol has been the realisation that Africa alone will need an additional 5 million teachers if it is to deliver universal primary education; yet Africa is probably a net exporter of teachers to the developed world.<sup>10</sup>

I want to pay tribute to the work of Alan Johnson, the current Secretary of State, in ensuring that we had agreed the Protocol. At a key moment Alan, then a junior minister, Duncan Hindle, a senior civil servant from South Africa, and myself drafted a compromise paragraph when it looked like discussions were about to collapse.

I have acknowledged that teachers across the world should display the highest of professional standards. Politicians and world leaders need to do the same. In the year 2000 leaders from the rich countries gave their word that “no country seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in the achievement of this goal by lack of resources”.

But they didn't all mean it.

There is still a gap of at least \$3.7 billion per year according to Oxfam. It may be as high as \$10 billion. The GCE has commented that;

“It is a disgrace that in an age where global military expenditure tops a trillion dollars annually, children are still cheated of their right to an education – a privilege that would cost just a fraction of that cost”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol 2004 Commonwealth Secretariat*

<sup>11</sup> *Underachievers 2006 Global campaign for Education*

In saying that the rich countries are not living up to their responsibilities whilst true as a generalisation masks how badly some are behaving since there are a number of countries which have a commendable record in international development. The GCE praises the efforts of Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

The Global Campaign for Education also pays tribute to the steps taken by the UK Government and especially its commitment to provide \$16 billion in aid to support basic education between now and 2015.

So who are the bad guys – well they include Japan, Italy, Germany and the USA.

I am proud to say that teachers' organisations in the UK are working with GEW, our counterpart in Germany, seeking to ensure that a high priority is given to education and international development when Germany assumes the Presidency of the EU and the G8 later this year. My friend Jerry Bartlett, the Deputy General Secretary of NASUWT has played a great part in this development.

But so much more needs to be done and the generalisation that that donor countries have failed to live up to their promises is stark.

I am reaching the end of this talk and in doing so I am aware of many gaps in my sketch of these international and educational issues.

I would have liked to have considered the curriculum and rights based education. That will have to wait for another day.

I would have liked to have spent more time on debt and aid issues. And I would have liked to have looked in a little more detail at some initiatives dealing with the prioritisation of aid and assistance.

Not the least of these gaps, however, is my neglect of higher education. I am aware of the comments made recently by Professor Mahmood Mamdani concerning the relation between schools and higher education. Professor Mamdani made the following point very forcefully;

“We are all aware that most of our students are in general education. So why speak of higher education? For one reason: higher education is where research is located; it is where curriculum is developed, and where teachers are trained. If your object is to transform general education, you have to begin with higher education. For higher education is the strategic heart of education; it is where choices are developed.”<sup>12</sup>

What a debate we could have on that.

But I don't want to end my talk on this note; I am a campaigner and I want to be true to that tradition.

I want also to be true to other traditions. The National Union of Teachers is non-party political and long may that continue. However, I am delivering a memorial lecture in honour of Hugh Gaitskell a past leader of the Labour Party and one who probably would have been Prime Minister in 1964 had he not died so young in 1963. This permits me to be speculative.

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<sup>12</sup> *Higher Education, the State and the Marketplace* 2006 Mahmood Mamdani Columbia University New York

The Labour Party is about to choose a new leader who will be Prime Minister. All things being equal that person will be Gordon Brown, our current Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The NUT has been very supportive of a number of statements made by Gordon Brown and we are conscious of the messages he wishes to broadcast. Indeed, one of his messages relating to his commitment to education in developing countries he asked me to relay to all schools.

I believe he is unquestionably committed to all children being in school across the world by 2015, or as he says, if not before then.

The Chancellor has also set out his stall telling us that children in our state schools should have the same amount spent on them as children in the independent schools in 2006. This would require additional funding of about £18 billion. The Institute of Fiscal Studies has set out how this could be achieved by 2014.

If Gordon Brown needs friends to stand shoulder to shoulder with him on these two objectives, to be met in 2014 and 2015, he will have some very willing Comrades.

For me 2014 and 2015 is about the time I will close the chapter on my working life. I wish to close that chapter feeling tired but content.

Using the words of Hugh Gaitskell there are clearly a few things then that we can fight, fight and fight again to achieve.

And we will do this in the name of the world's children.

Steve Sinnott  
General Secretary  
National Union of Teachers

6 February 2007