

Introduction: Education as Business and Business in Education Glenn Rikowski

When ‘New Labour’ came to power in May 1997 under a banner emblazoned with ‘education, education, education!’ signifying its principal policy priority, it might have appeared to some that an educational renaissance was a racing certainty. As we noted in *Rethinking Education and Democracy*, the Labour victory provided an ‘opportunity for a fresh start’ (Hillcole Group, 1997, p.6)—where possibilities for movement away from the individualism, marketisation, creeping privatisation, assessment mania and control by quango which underpinned Tory education policy were on the agenda.

Tragically, ‘New Labour’s education policy development since May 1997 constitutes a series of missed opportunities for shifting decisively away from the Tory education nightmare. To date, ‘New Labour’ has failed to establish an education system based firmly on the principles of democratic accountability, equality and a sustainable social and economic environment conducive to the flourishing of all learners rather than academic élites. As Hodgson and Spours (1999) note, after two years in power ‘people are still fascinated by New Labour, but they do not know quite what to make of it’ leading to ‘mounting confusion’ on precisely what ‘New Labour’ is up to in terms of its education and training strategy (p.1). In one respect, however, the agenda is pretty transparent: to open up education to business interests, values, principles and methods of management.

This pamphlet explores ‘New Labour’s business agenda for education. For us, the rallying cry of ‘education, education, education!’ expresses suppressed hope when set against the emerging reality of *Business, Business, Business* – as the foundation of Labour’s education agenda.

Outline

The three chapters in this pamphlet point towards a need for sustained critique of ‘New Labour’s business agenda for education. The Conclusion encourages us to be bold, and to reconnect with future-oriented forms of teaching and learning which do not sacrifice the struggles for democracy, equality and sustainable social life on the altars of business principles and practice in a ‘post-socialist universe’ (Elliott, 1999).

In chapter 1, **Mike Cole** unearths the roots of ‘New Labour’s education outlook: globalisation, competitiveness, and modernisation. As Mike notes, globalisation of capital is the guiding assumption driving forward Labour

education policies and thinking. First, he demonstrates how, as ideology, globalisation functions in a similar way to Margaret Thatcher's TINA (There Is No Alternative). Second, for nation states, all impediments to the flows of global capital require destruction or, in the case of welfare provision and education, either downsizing or modernisation. This is to ensure that they are stable and profitable centres for enterprise in the new 'fast capitalism'. On this analysis of our predicament, UK plc and its enterprises require a new type of state for providing an infrastructure conducive to economic success within a 'new' international context. Third, Mike shows how this entails the *modernisation* of public institutions as servants to globalised capital. Education has a central role to play in this scenario: as the producer of high-quality human capital giving enterprises in UK plc a competitive edge. Mike uncovers the weak points in this outlook and exposes the consequences for school organisation, pedagogy and the future of education should it continue to drive education policies.

Chapter 2, by **Richard Hatcher** and **Nico Hirtt**, indicates how Labour's business agenda for education is not unique. First, other countries within the European Union (EU) are driven by the same forces of globalisation. Leading capitalist states outside the EU are plagued by the same fears regarding whether their education systems are adequate for business needs. Meanwhile, in the EU, through organisations such as the European Commission (EC) and its subsidiary bodies (such as the European Round Table) states are responding collectively and individually to the perceived challenges of globalisation. Richard and Nico indicate how education throughout the EU is being restructured to accommodate the interests of big business in the 'new era' of globalisation. They draw upon a wealth of documentation and policy statements from EU organisations to support their argument. Second, they provide evidence for a *convergence* of education policies across the EU as individual states seek to provide business-friendly education. Finally, Richard and Nico trace the consequences of the business agenda for education in terms of school restructuring, competence-based curriculum reforms, skill generation, a renewed emphasis on 'citizenship education' and the deregulation of school organisation and re-regulation of teachers' working lives. These strategies underpin the project of delivering schools up to the requirements of big business.

Martin Allen (chapter 3) takes up the issue of what business incorporation of schooling means for teachers and the restructuring of teachers' work. He explores the meaning of teacher professionalism within the current 'performance related' work environment. Martin sets this analysis of teacher professionalism within the context of 'New Labour's business agenda for

schools and demonstrates that in order for Labour's businessified education strategy to 'work' the *culture of teaching* requires radical reconstruction. The tasks for 'New Labour's education ministers and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), argues Martin, are to alter teachers' values, contracts, commitments and working lives. This is necessary so that teachers deliver what business requires. He concludes, however, that 'New Labour's 'education for business' strategy is unlikely to succeed. The strength of teacher unions continues to be a vital force resisting the yielding up of schools to business goals. Furthermore, the businessification of education is likely to deepen the crisis of teacher recruitment, as many potential applicants become increasingly aware of the consequences for teachers' lives should the business agenda win out.

Finally, in the Conclusion, **Caroline Benn** and **Clyde Chitty** argue that the left must go beyond critique of existing policy drives and engage with what is required to start to move away from old ideas about educating for business. They build upon the analysis of *Rethinking Education and Democracy* (1997) which set out an alternative education policy, along with the tasks facing those who want to see an education where the values and goals of democracy, equality and *real* educational and social progress are central rather than business-orientated ones. The real tasks for those concerned with a sustainable education which incorporates social justice and equality as leading values is to illustrate and to argue for the structures, forms of pedagogy and financial and other resources adequate to realising an education system worthy of the twenty-first century.

References

- Elliott, G. (1999) Via dollaros: On the 'Third Way', *Radical Philosophy*, No.94, March/April.
- Hillcole Group (1997) *Rethinking Education and Democracy: A socialist alternative for the twenty-first century*. Co-ordinated by C. Benn & C. Chitty for the Hillcole Group (London: the Tufnell Press).
- Hodgson, A. & Spours, K. (1999) *New Labour's Educational Agenda: Issues and Policies for Education and Training from 14+* (London: Kogan Page).