

Education Worker

5 Autumn 1996

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**produced by and for education workers
EWN c/o PO Box 1681 London N8 7LE**

Direct Action Saves Scottish Schools

At the end of last term, Scotland saw an outburst of kids and parents taking action against a massive wave of cuts and school closures by Labour run Authorities.

In Dundee, 20 campaigners against school closures staged an initial token occupation of Linlathen High, one of the secondary schools threatened with closure in April. They occupied the school for several hours, ending at midnight. Police were called in and threatened parents that not only would they be arrested but their children would be taken into care!

On Saturday May 4th anti-school campaigners staged a May Day demonstration round the Fintry estate before marching into town and linking up with the "official" TUC rally. Chanting "Labour- Tory, Just the Same" they were refused speaking rights by the Labour Party hacks who were running the rally. On May 16th demonstrators halted an Education Committee meeting in Dundee Chambers.

In July, parents were again occupying Linlathen Primary school. The occupation has gained much support, and some direct solidarity from other workers. When lorries were sent to clear out the school's furniture the drivers refused to cross the parent's picket line.

In Glasgow, action including 4 occupations, saved 20 out of 22 schools targeted for closure. 7 of these schools were saved by opting out so here the victory is limited by the caring quango FAS.

More than any other issue the school closure issue has highlighted the deceit and hypocrisy of Glasgow Councillors. Firstly, only £4.3 million was needed to save the schools which the councillors said that they did not have. But what about the £12 million that has been made through selling off Strathclyde house and other assets? How come the money was not included in any budget plans. Glasgow citizens have a right to ask where £12 million gone?

Also, four of the seven schools the Council are most adamant about closing just happen to be along the route of the proposed M74. Do they think we are stupid?

Save Our Schools is supported by all campaign groups in Scotland. They can be contacted on:
**DUNDEE: 01382 814922
GLASGOW: 0141 552 6773**

Thanks to:
**Justice - Cothrom (Solidarity Centre, 3 Royal Exchange Court, Glasgow)
and Counter Information (Pigeonhole Cl, c/o Forth St., Edinburgh EH1)**



*Soundwell Strikes Back *

Lecturers at Soundwell, a Further Education College near Bristol, have been at the forefront of the fight against the new contracts which many colleges are seeking to impose on their staff. These contracts require longer working hours and shorter holidays, and are one of the results of government spending cuts in this sector. The contracts are locally negotiated, and many NATFHE branches have reached satisfactory agreements with college managers without having to take industrial action. At Soundwell, however, the principal and senior management have taken an extremely aggressive stance, but they have not gone unchallenged in their aim of cutting jobs and services.

On 18 June, more than 30 lecturers came out on strike over redundancies. They had planned to strike at Easter because staff who had refused to sign the new FE contracts had had no pay rise for three years. This strike was called off when management awarded staff on old contracts a one and a half per cent rise and agreed to negotiate over the terms of the new contracts. It was no coincidence that an Ofsted inspection was due: it would have been very embarrassing if the inspectors had found the college closed due to strike action.

Once the inspection was safely out of the way, however, the principal presented staff with revised terms for the new contracts which increased the workload by 30% to the heaviest in the country. Redundancy notices were issued to all staff. Restructuring swept away the jobs of middle-management; new posts of 'curriculum managers' were created, at reduced rates of pay, to take on their work. In one section, seven lecturers were to be replaced by 'learning advisers' - same job, less pay. Staff made redundant could apply for the new jobs - and, of course, go on to the new-style contracts with their grossly increased workloads!

The lecturers came out on official strike, and stayed out for three weeks, even continuing into the summer holiday. They received strike pay of £ 100 per week and collected £12,000 from other trades union members and sympathisers. They received a lot of support from their local community, and students past and present protested at the threat to the quality of teaching posed by such unrealistic workloads.

On 9 July a 'return to work' agreement was reached. Management agreed to spread deductions in pay for the strike period over one year. There would be no victimisation.

The Soundwell experience is highly relevant to those fighting education cuts elsewhere in the country. Although the new contracts are negotiated locally, management at all colleges are well aware of what is happening elsewhere. The lecturers at Soundwell have been prepared to take all-out strike action, not only to safeguard their jobs and conditions of work, but to maintain their service to the community. They have shown that they will not be intimidated when faced with cynical and aggressive behaviour from senior management, and have taken the initiative by striking as soon as redundancies were threatened, rather than waiting till after the summer holidays, when it would have been too late. They have forged links with local branches of other unions and enlisted community help. They have gained in confidence and solidarity.

Those principals at other colleges who aim to use similar tactics to those deployed at Soundwell should think carefully before acting as Tory government agents to cut education.

**Info:
Soundwell NATFHE
122 Springhill, Kingswood
Bristol BS15 1XW**

**Adapted with thanks from Socialist Parent
PO Box 8446 London N17 6NZ**

KICK OUT THE SCHOOL SPIES i Prepare the Ofsted Boycott !

It's now only too clear that OFSTED is a political quango set up to undermine the right to decent, free, state education for all. Workers are being harassed, abused and undermined on a daily basis by "inspectors" most of whom don't seem to have done a day's work in a classroom. Nurseries now have Group 4 arranging their OFSTED inspections. Meanwhile, the bloke in charge, Tory scum Chris Off- with his-head tells us why we need to get back to Victorian-type teaching methods and why 15,000 "incompetent" teachers should be sacked.

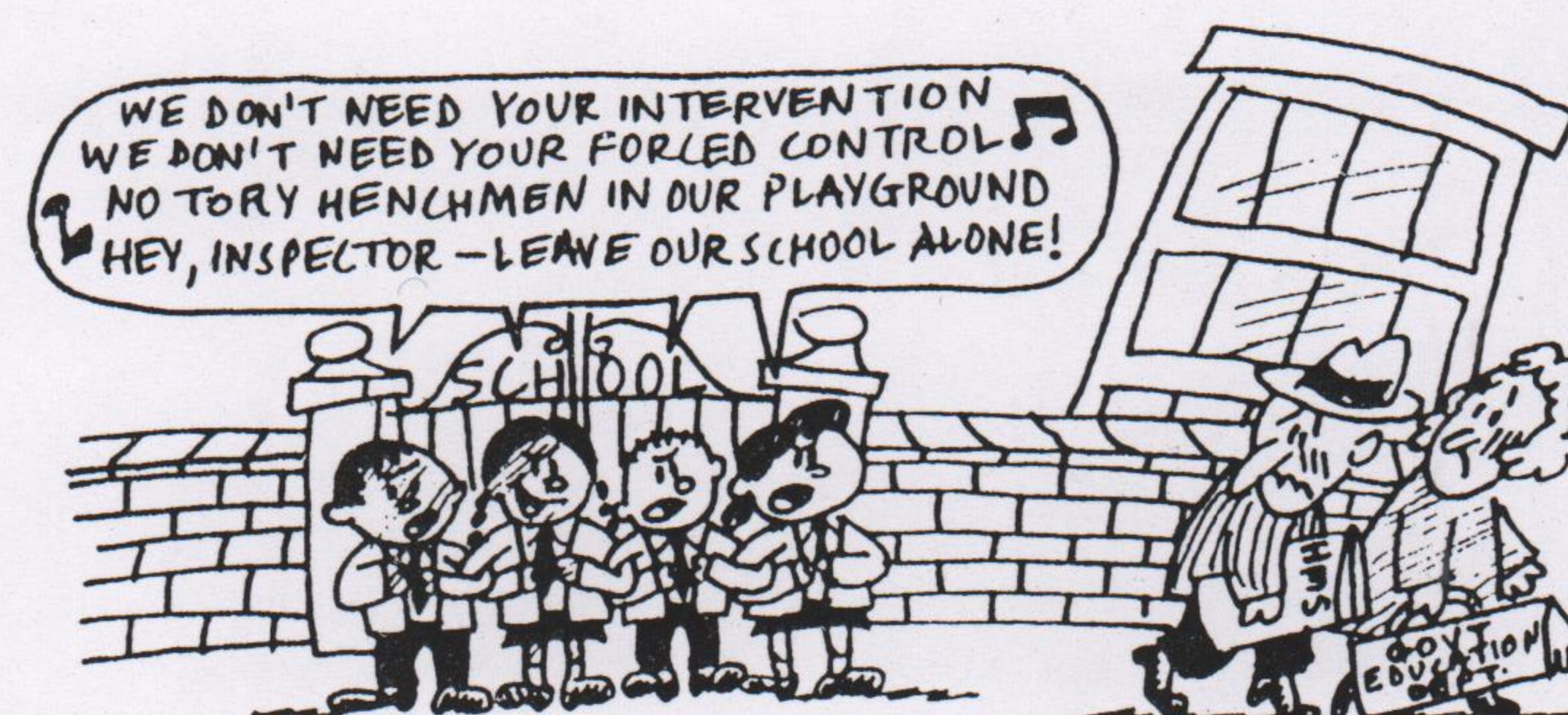
Let's be clear: OFSTED has nothing to do with monitoring education. A pattern is developing that shows that it's the good schools and workers who are being targeted. Inspectors are victimising schools that don't segregate or stream. Schools where there's still some semblance of multicultural, non-sexist education. Schools where there's an organised union group.

These are political inspections: Decisions about which schools will pass or fail are made well in advance of the "inspection" itself.

It's taken a while for most of us to realise this - The question is now how do we stop it? Many teachers have so far gone a long way down the road to cooperating with OFSTED. This is mainly due to fear of being individually victimised or through being seen to "let the side down".

It's time we stopped cooperating with this farce. We stopped the SATs in their tracks, for a time. With inspectors, from September, being able to grass up teachers that they take a dislike to, it's time we started defending each other and said ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. We need a boycott - we need to organise for it now.

(see pull out poster enclosed for more on OFSTED)



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Inside:

Education workers in struggle from Tottenham to Toulouse
Unemployed students, Attacks on asylum seekers, Opus Dei
and more...

Spring in September:

Report from France

In October last year the France had its biggest social crisis for 30 years. The spate of strikes -which united workers, unemployed and students over a whole range of issues, spread across the public and private sectors, affecting traffic and trains, postal services, banks, manufacturing industry such as Renault and Peugeot and miners. It involved mass occupations and direct action up and down the country. This October, it is expected that the strikes will be bigger and will spread to the private sector. Below, a member of the education section of the CNT-F, the fast-growing French anarcho-syndicalist union, writes about how education workers and students were able to organise successfully.

For the first time since 1968 the student struggle is not just calling for the *reform* of the university system. The unrest began in Rouen, calling for more money for the university, which is one of the poorest in France. The Government failed to respond, and around fifty universities joined the strike for more funding. For the first few days, the media tried to make it look as if we were on strike just for more pens and rubbers. But from the start it went further than this. Some universities such as Toulouse, Rennes and Nanterre, are close by private universities like the famous "Fac Pasqua" which emphasises the divide between education for the rich and education for the rest of us. The strikes challenged this inequality. Also, for two years the issue of the status of foreign students has been surfacing, due to the Government's new, repressive, anti-immigration laws.

Organisation

As with the student strikes of 1991 and 1992, students began to organise directly in *general assemblies*, which were mass meetings open to all students. The first priority for us in the CNT is to defend the right of students to make their own decisions and to take these to the national coordination meetings where students from all colleges around the country send delegates elected by their general assemblies.. Counterposed against this structure is the "cooperatist" left-controlled student union model of the UNEF-ID.



At the beginning of the strikes, the UNEF-ID tried to limit the power of the National Coordination. A political battle started, with the UNEF-ID suffering a defeat. At this point, the Education Minister, Bayrou, tried to divide and rule us and began to receive delegates only from the UNEF-ID who were willing to sell out, were unelected and only represented themselves. Bayrou explained that he "understood their problem" and that he would try to help the poorest universities.

In the face of this threat of sell-out, it is necessary to have a strong organisation that defends the rights of students to make our own decisions and that self-appointed leaders did not take over. This is why the CNT, with its University section, the *Formation Action Universitaire* (FAU) and its Workers' union (CNT-F) thus uniting workers and students in one union, has become so important in the university field. This made it possible to clear the National Coordination of the UNEF-ID's dominance and focus the movement towards a more social one i.e. one that links up the problems of all workers and students together and challenges the whole of the system that creates these attacks on us. The involvement of CNT members in the struggles has gained a lot of support for Direct democracy and anarcho-syndicalist ideas. It has also shown that we are not the only people who are against making deals with the establishment. We are working for the movement as a whole, not for a political party. Although the reformist unions try to keep things separate and divided, it is clear that students are in no way privileged: The Government's attacks on people's rights affect everybody.

This October, the struggle will begin again..

Studying on the JSA?

From October 1996, Unemployment Benefit will be replaced by the already infamous "Job Seekers Allowance." Not having a job is no longer good enough - claimants must prove that they're 'actively seeking work' before they get any money. Rather than having a right to participate in education, this is now a concession which allows the unemployed to study while they're looking for work.

Any study must be part time and given up immediately for a job [or at least that's what you need to say!] - and study is still seen as being in conflict with the 'actively seeking work' policy - rather than a means of enhancing job prospects [or god forbid a non vocational urge for knowledge!]. Unemployed claimants can't undertake full time courses even on a part time basis. This new guidance issued to Employment service staff is subject to local interpretation and could effectively bar someone from most educational provision.

More confusion is being caused by the introduction of the 16 hour rule in England and Wales. This rule is supposed to help clarify the definition of a full time course. In Scotland - both the 16 hour rule and the existing 21 hour rule are being operated!

Unemployed people who study part time must not be classified as students or they will lose their entitlement to benefits. [Repeat after me ... "I am not a student I am actively looking for work."] Employment Service staff must apply the 'student regulation' to each case they come across. This is an example of why we can expect the worst from the 'guidance' they are being offered:

"... a person learning to be a bricklayer or typist for the first time may be a student but a qualified bricklayer or typist who attends a course to update their skills may not be a student ..."



Now, more than ever, students will need support from each other, college staff and claimants unions to avoid harassment from the DSS/ES. Tutors should devise a strategy for dealing with course enquiries from the employment service - otherwise they could be jeopardising a claimants' place on a course.

Unwaged workers are organising nationally through Groundswell c/o C.A.G c/o OUWCU East Oxford Community Centre: Princes Street Oxford OX4 1HU.

Info from Stevenson College [Scotland] branch of the Education Workers Union [IWW]



Education Workers' Network

Education Worker is produced by the Education Workers' Network, a national organisation. We want to see workers' organisation which is not divided by union affiliations, bureaucracy or political parties, and which embraces all of us who work in education: canteen staff, cleaners, technicians, teachers, tutors, etc. As long as we remain divided, and in separate unions, our bosses can pick us off one at a time. We also see no point in wasting our time and energy trying to reform the existing remote, bureaucratic and fundamentally unreformable unions, or in trying to elect more left-wing leaders.

We aim to federate on a local basis to unite workers across industries to deal with issues which affect working class people as a whole, and do not restrict our activities to "bread-and-butter" workplace issues.

The EWN is part of the Solidarity Federation - an organisation of workers which ultimately seeks to get rid of capitalism and the state. Capitalism because it exploits, oppresses and kills working people and wrecks the environment for profit worldwide. The State because it can only maintain hierarchy and privilege for the classes who control it and their lackeys. In their place we want a society based on workers' self-management of our own communities and workplaces. Every day our experience tells us that we could run things far more efficiently if we controlled things ourselves, rather than allowing politicians and big business to dictate how we do things. This is all too apparent at present in education - and the rest of the public services - where the decisions of a few rich, powerful politicians are disrupting and sabotaging our ability to do useful work. We believe in using Direct Action - action by workers ourselves, not through intermediaries like politicians and union officials, to get what we want.

If you want to know more about the EWN, or can send us some money to produce the next issue, please make cheques payable to **Education Workers' Network** and send them to:

PO Box 29 SWPDO
Manchester M15 5HW

If you have any comments, articles or information about **Education Worker** write to us at:
PO Box 1681 London N8 7LE

Other industrial networks:

Transport Worker Network:
PO Box 73, Norwich NR3 1QD
Public Service Workers' Network:
PO Box 1681 London N8 7LE

WILDCAT ARTISTS

Students at Middlesex University, site of major occupations in 1992, started occupying again at the end of last term.. In response to ever increasing cuts and staff and facilities, first the art site was taken, and when that ended another site was taken over.

The Student Union was more upset and oppressive than management, telling everyone to leave immediately, while management were willing to negotiate and wait. Since the last wave of occupations, the SU have altered their rules to say that site occupations are unconstitutional without a secret ballot of the whole Student Union at the University. The occupiers said bollox to the ballot.

The National Union of Students has now gone so far to the right that they've kicked out one of their own executive simply for continuing to campaign for free education for all. They, and the local branches now have absolutely no fight left in them, but at least that makes things clear and allows people to organise their own fights without worrying about the "union" anymore. Student numbers have been increasing rapidly, unlike staff and facilities, and students are now much more a mixed bag of young people who see no possibility of getting straight into the job market, older people who have been through various situations, struggles and problems, and others.

Universities are more than ever a meeting point where ideas and struggles can come together but at the same time they are a place where nearly everyone believes that if they work hard they can sort out their own individual future - Like winning the lottery.

Info from Contraflow 56a Crampton St London SE17

SPECIAL EXCLUSIVE

We interview an unusually frank - £50 an hour adviser/consultant to sort out all of those questions you had about OFSTED but were afraid to ask.

It's strange isn't it - how just before an OFSTED, our SMTs begin to look worried ... what do they do then?- they call in a consultant [more likely a gaggle of them] to come and sort out their problems or to test run an inspection at the school ... suddenly money is no object. In a similar spirit we at Education Worker have called one up too.

What are some of the effects of being inspected?

It's a lot of work isn't it ... but the effects are not evenly spread, nor always obvious - for example an SMT busying itself with documentation simply hasn't the time to follow up effectively on assaults on students or staff - so the net effect is to harm the health and safety of workers on site. Similarly, if there've been a lot of exclusions already, then these will be reduced to keep the statistics looking good - or even worse, if a head teacher has slack in the figures, they can start a campaign of clamping down on certain kids - so that they can get excluded for things that they never would have usually. [and what is the end result of this, largely undiscussed, paper work ... well their usefulness as sleep inducers as one tries to memorise them for the OFSTED interview is undisputed!]

This, and the heightening workload, the sudden appearance of long ordered things like blinds, new chairs, new computers help create a state of tension within the school ... and the new things in the classroom when they aren't just giving the kids something new to play on, also press home the message to the children that the only time they are valued materially is when the inspector is about to call - the similarities to Stalinist whitewashing are all too apparent.

For rank and file teachers the workload emphasis is primarily on documentation. This is often a huge task - witness the rise in sickness before an OFSTED visit - made worse when people are new in post. This work does not of course address the interests of the students concerned.

Likewise the need to massage the attendance statistics will mean that form tutors spend a lot of time following unauthorised absences to try and peg the bunking % to a reasonable level, rather than addressing the reasons for school resisters in the first place.

And this list is just the beginning ...

Of course all of these problems are heightened in inner city schools - the job is harder to begin with given the nature of the students that we work with - and a lot of schools operate with non existent documentation, high levels of violence and unauthorised absences and poorly maintained buildings ... it's in this context that schools already struggling to do well for their kids are faced with a more frequent inspection regime ... gee thanks - just what we needed

What type of support can we expect from our LEAs?

The old line about supporting a hanging man is appropriate really - if you can find an LEA advisor who is willing to steal you Schemes of Work then you're in luck - more often than not they are there to harass.

I've heard some classic lines from these inspectors ... for example 'Materials ... you want teaching materials? oh I can't possibly do that' - still if you're rude you can often scare them away ...

What does that mean for education workers who are teachers?

From September with the grading of staff, the designation of schools as failures will be individualised ... but of course what is not recognised is that one severe disruption is enough to limit the lesson to a satisfactory result ...so that many of us are behind the eight ball from the word go. Likewise, an SMT may be so relieved to have avoided failing the overall inspection that they are unwilling to query the failing and naming of individual teachers. All this in a context where given the snap shot nature of inspections, teachers who are new in post are treated the same as the teachers who have been there so long they are the posts ...

Is there a strategy behind these inspections?

Conspiracy theories aren't much help here - better to look at the real effects - who is getting attacked and which children are losing out.

While the inspectors say they are defending high quality education for working class kids - the acid test would come when they resign from their cushy jobs and come and work here. Many of them [the nastiest know it all ones at that] did .. but in the halcyon days of the 70's and 80's when the kids had the hope of a job to go to and the social security system didn't mean that many of the kids come to school hungry.

Why is it that working class kid's education need to be attacked - because it's at school where the connections are made that will help them survive a lifetime of crap jobs, giros and barricades. Disrupting this process is key to the strategy of keeping the cities under control in Britain next century - and Hackney Downs School is a prime example of who loses from the OFSTED process. After the inspectors closed that school - in it must be remembered a cross party team - many kids ended up in no school at all ...

It's also no surprise that the inspectors are attacking the most traditionally militant areas of the NUT - Lambeth and Waltham Forest for example being picked for carpet bombing / inspection last year - and does Doug the Slug [unbeloved leader of the NUT] give a fuck ... no he's laughing all the way to re-election as his opponents are being put under pressure for the national government - that's why he didn't do anything to support Hackney Downs Teachers except sort out their redundancy cheques.

OK - all that's clear - in fact we could have worked it out ourselves - so why are we employing you as a consultant?

That's easy - You've been sucked by the teacher = professional gag too. The worse our conditions become the bosses, the NUT [and especially NASUWT, ATL etc.] and inspectors will crap on about professionalism. One pamphlet which McAvoy sent to us last year to convince us not to strike mentioned it 10 times.

In many ways what we are seeing is a whole set a of new divisions between education workers being opened up - between teachers in the shires who'll face inspection once every 6 years - 'defended' by NASUWT's exclude them quick



approach to students with problems and buffered from the effects of budget cuts by relatively better off parents ... teachers for whom professionalism [and Tony Blair no doubt] still means something.

Then there'll be teachers in the inner city facing yearly or more frequent inspections, rising immiseration of our students and their parents, the abolition of section 11 support staff and the increasing use of short term contracts ... 'professionals'? ... get real!

Isn't it time, workers in this situation began to face up to the realities of the situation - they have ten times as much in common with the other workers in, and the users of the services, where they work than with the middle ground that McAvoy and DeGrouchy are fighting for membership in.

The chalice of professionalism is poisoned - once you've been failed by OFSTED the more you scream about professionalism the bigger the hole you're in. Professionalism is what stops a lot of 'ordinary working class people' from wanting to support teachers. And professionalism is the thing that stops a lot of teachers taking the industrial action needed to defend jobs and services - especially once the inspectors have labelled a school or teachers as failures [and therefore 'unprofessional'].

It's not as if the status of teachers as professionals came about because of a great industrial campaign in any case - in fact it was finally granted by the government in the early 20's at a time of massive wage cuts and the defeat of militant teachers. That's the type of professionalism that Chris Woodhead and co would like to see.

That was worth 50 quid an hour wasn't it?

Now I get to ask a question - how many inspectors does it take to change a lightbulb?

Dunno

They don't change lightbulbs - they get all the light they need from Chris Woodhead's arsehole to write their reports!



Hackney Downs School
East London.
RIP Summer 1996

OFSTED:

**POLICING THE CUTS
AND CLOSURES
POLICING INCREASING CLASS
SIZES AND THE BOSSES'
NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

**KICK OUT THE CLASSROOM COPS
PREPARE THE OFSTED BOYCOTT**

We need to stick together and stop this OFSTED farce once and for all before it destroys our schools.

●From September, OFSTED inspectors are now able to have a go at individual teachers who they don't like the look of. School union groups need to be united and defend anyone who is victimised as part of an "inspection". The best way to do this is for school union groups to pass motions agreeing to take immediate industrial action if this happens.

●We need to link up with and pass on any relevant information to other schools and prepare to take action in support of other schools that may be victimised.

●Pass on details of particularly vindictive inspectors - there are plenty of them! If they are harassing us, we should publicise their actions and organise to stop them.

Send us details of any OFSTED inspectors' behaviour: pictures of sleeping inspectors etc.

We'll send you a prize for the best dirt and publish it in the next issue of Education

Worker.

HOW TO START THE BOYCOTT

Most importantly, OFSTED can be disrupted and made unworkable if we all stick together. Anti-OFSTED campaigns are currently being set up. These need to be based at school level with workers ourselves organising and controlling any action. A useful start would be for joint-school union groups to meet and to start publishing information through newsletters and leaflets about any resistance that's taking place to encourage others. It's vital that we start preparing for a mass boycott to take place, like with the S.A.T.s tests. It's going to be difficult but this is the only way we will get them off our backs.

Education Workers' Network
ORGANISE AGITATE EDUCATE
EDUCATION WORKERS' NETWORK - SOLIDARITY FEDERATION
PO Box 1681 London N3 7LE

This is a special supplement of Education Worker, the paper of the Education Workers' Network

Lifting the lid on Opus Dei sect schools -

Last April 10, the Guardian published an article under the headline "Catholic parents in Opus Dei sect to open school".

This autumn will see the opening in Surrey of a private school with the backing from the Catholic Sect, Opus Dei.

There is a lot of nonsense talked about these schools becoming more liberal. This is far from the truth. As a former pupil in an Opus Dei school in Spain, I have a few a bit of an insight as to what goes on in these secretive, elitist establishments.

Class

Opus Dei centres are generally known to be elitist in recruiting students from high socio-economic backgrounds. The school to be opened in Surrey is, obviously, a private one, so only a few privileged students will be able to entry. Having said that, the Opus Dei school I attended in Spain is a (rare) exception in that it recruits students from working class backgrounds. This school is situated in one of the poorest areas of the province of Barcelona. They offer lower fees and grants (which are compensated by the money they get from the enrolment of pupils in different clubs, institutions, leisure activities, etc.). It is a very subtle, but effective, way of reaching the working classes and, at the same time, of cleaning the Opus Dei image as an elitist body. In this sense, it is worth pointing out that a distinctive feature of the Opus Dei is the fact that it is controlled by lay people rather than priests. You can often hear them saying: "oh no, we are not a group of puritan monks isolated from society... we are a group of professionals in touch with everyday life, we know the feelings of the man in the street". Well, I don't think so.

Ideology

John Philips, businessman and one of the founders of the school in Surrey, told the Guardian, in April, that the school "would not try to make pupils into members of Opus Dei and that the children would not be forced to be Catholics". Bollocks. I've been there. I've heard these words so many times! Not only DO they try to make you a member of Opus Dei, but they FORCE you into it. Of course, it can be argued that everything is relative. What is "to force"? Is it only the use of physical violence to break someone's will? If this is the case, yes, Opus Dei centres don't "force" you to be a member of their sect. However, if we consider that the concept of "to force" also embraces emotional blackmail to children of all ages, psychological threats, daily phone calls to your parents for periods of, at least, six months, and endless interrogatory sessions (no, we are not in one of the episodes of the Bill!) until you accept to be a member of Opus, then, it must be said that Opus Dei schools force their pupils to join this organisation.

"Quality education."

From the cases I know in Barcelona, Opus Dei students don't do better at all than other colleges' students in the University entrance exams. Apart from this, it is needless to say that the pupils are given an ideologically biased education, promoting mainstream values. Summarising: introduction of psychological repression, reactionary ideology, negligence of Humanities' subjects in favour of applied subjects, promotion of competition and intolerance as "compulsary values"...everything aimed at getting former Opus Dei school students in the key posts of society (and in the Vatican mafia, given the interest of the Pope in making the founder of Opus Dei the world record holder as the fastest "beatified" saint in history!) Altogether, very, very doggy. Opus Dei is a SECT, and a very dangerous one. It is not only the danger of their ideological line: racism, sexism, homophobia, greediness, middle class values... a product of capitalism. It is also the danger of their hidden agenda, the subtle ways they have of infiltrating society and gaining influence. As anarchists, as people committed with changing this world into a more human place, we cannot tolerate this sect and the damage it causes to human beings, directly (brainwashing children) or indirectly (spreading the "moral values" mentioned above). I was lucky, quite probably attending this school is the key reason of me becoming an anarchist. But, I'm afraid, my case is not the rule, but the exception.

This is an edited version of an article published in the Autumn edition of Direct Action, the paper of the Solidarity Federation, available from the address on the back page.

I think we've planned a narrow enough curriculum to breed a new, overwhelmingly stupid bunch of Tory voters



Langham School lives to fight another day



On Thursday 18 July, the day before school broke up for the summer, staff were informed that Gillian Shephard had decided not to send in an Education Association to take over the running of The Langham School from the governors and the LEA. This is a victory for all those in the school and in the community who worked so hard to demonstrate that it is local and accountable people who can best ensure that the education and achievements of our pupils are improved.

The retreat by the Secretary of State for Education is significant not only locally to the school and the LEA, but also to all those in education who have opposed the

continual impositions from central government. The sweeping powers allowed to the Secretary of State have been halted. The central issue is - who should run schools? Should it be locally elected and appointed people accountable to school and community, or central government through approved personnel, many of whom have no obvious links with education or the locality, but do enjoy the patronage of government. An Education Association can do only two things at the end of its period in office; close a school or make it grant-maintained.

The Tories have stated publicly over and over again that it is their intention to make all schools grant-maintained, but all of their bribes have only succeeded in a small minority of schools deciding by parental ballot to opt out of LEA control in this way. So if you give parents choice and they choose the opposite of what you want, take the choice away and make your own choice. This now appears to be the government's strategy.

Of course the government uses the argument that The Langham School and others like it are failing their pupils and need to be taken over in order to succeed. There is no question of our examination results being as good as those of Eton or Latimer and the like, but obviously the needs of our pupils and those in similar schools are much more acute and diverse. Such needs as these require more funding and support, not less.

Increasing motivation and expectations to a significant and effective level can only be achieved if it can be shown that there are tangible means to fulfil those expectations. Increased resources for smaller classes and support show pupils that their individual needs can be met and show teachers what pupils can do.

for those readers who haven't had it tattooed on their private parts all last winter and spring

The RAE - research assessment exercise, for those readers who haven't had it tattooed on their private parts all last winter and spring, is a crazy mechanism for measuring how many papers various groups of staff publish in a given period, as a means for deciding how much to give their employers for research. This is supposed to happen every few years and March 1996 was the second deadline since the scheme was introduced a few years ago. So, on the basis of what various departments cooked up (a 'made up' department 'journal' counts less than a book but changing the title and sending it off to two places is well worth it) to pass as published output in the 4 years to March, our money is set for past the millennium.

Funnily enough, last time all the 'old boy network' universities did rather well and got tons of cash - and this time the criteria was so fudgy, no-one really knew what was going to be measured - any guesses on the outcome? So what, this is old news - or is it? It is the way in which the first lot of cash was used which has repercussions for now and the future. Many places chose to spend the windfall on 'releasing' existing staff to write papers. This was an ideal excuse for recruiting loads of temporary staff on short term, cheap contracts to do the teaching, while permanent staff went off to write. Unfortunately, starting to write is not the overnight job some thought, and beating the RAE machine is even harder when the funding council makes the rules as they go along.

So now, it becomes obvious that overall funding this time is to be slashed, and many departments who got tidy sums will get nothing, despite raising their apparent research output. Suddenly permanent staff are claiming back their courses and it's bye bye to the temporary staff, many of whom have 4 years lecturing under their belts and are better placed to teach courses which, in many cases, they have developed over the past 4 years. Many have admin. responsibilities, even in admissions and course leadership on HEFCE funded courses which are ongoing. These people are being made redundant but their jobs still exist.

And what has NATFHE done about this?

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Shrouding this big scam and accentuating the effects, is next years round of funding cuts which has been set nationally at about 7% in the Government's figures. This translates into cuts of 15% or more in many departments when one takes into account the further direct losses caused by under-recruitment. The latter is especially rampant in new universities; the Government's slamming on the brakes of university expansion has led to old universities lowering entry standards to let traditional new university entrants in to fill courses, leaving nothing for the polys.

Tottenham College slashes 62 teaching jobs

... As NATFHE officers sabotage action

Only weeks away from the end of the academic year, staff at the College of North East London in Tottenham were delivered a bombshell by Principal Ian McWhinnie. He announced that, in the interests of cost efficiency, 62 jobs were to be axed. This cut was on top of the previously announced closures of the Falkland, Mattison Road and Tetherdown centres.

At a mass meeting on 6 June, the NATFHE branch secretary ruled out the possibility of an immediate ballot on industrial action, claiming that it would be impossible to organise and more effective in September. Instead, 84 staff voted to take half-day unofficial strike action in protest at the proposed redundancies and cuts in provision. The date was set for 27 June. Unfortunately the union committee, having taken it upon itself to organise the unofficial action, then proceeded to disorganise it. Deciding that unofficial action would pose too great a threat to union funds, and in particular to their own jobs and mortgages, in collaboration with NATFHE regional office the union committee issued warnings to staff about the legal implications of unofficial action, namely, that any breach of contract risks disciplinary action and dismissal. The committee then spread the word that they were withdrawing their support for unofficial action, and that the union would repudiate any individual member involved. The staff who voted for strike action did so in the belief that there would be safety in numbers, but now collective solidarity was destroyed. Having undermined the possibility of this action going ahead, the NATFHE committee then declared that it had been called off.

Two members of the NATFHE committee resigned in protest at this unprincipled and undemocratic behaviour. We did not accept that NATFHE had the authority to call off the strike, and we did not believe that those who put themselves forward to implement the democratic decision of members should have unilaterally reversed that decision.

We have now had a 20% cut in the workforce and a savage attack on educational provision for the community being implemented with no industrial action, official or unofficial! We don't accept the NATFHE view that because there were, in the end, no compulsory redundancies, staff achieved a victory. How voluntary could any redundancy have been in the climate of intimidation? And as teachers we should be fighting for the rights of our students and the local community, who are being denied access to education because of the closure of college centres and the slashing of creche provision. This year 62 jobs have been lost at Conel. Last year 38 were lost. Since 1993 we have lost 50% of our staff through redundancies. A combination of government cuts and management incompetence means that further redundancies are inevitable in the next academic year. It is not enough for us, and particularly for those who claim to speak for the union, to keep our heads down and hope that the blade misses us next time round.

Only a strong and united campaign that goes beyond the narrow issue of jobs can secure the long term future of this college. We need to work alongside our students and the local community to meet the educational needs of the people of Haringey. We need to resist cuts in education at a local and a national level, and be prepared to work with all other groups and individuals who share this aim.

Conel teachers

OFSTED- The attack on Education for All

OFSTED is a central part of the general backlash by the two major parties against the very small positive gains and initiatives that were made in educational practice in the 1980s. Schools like Hackney Downs and Langham are victimised and punished by Central Government and local authority alike.

The agenda is to create a situation where particular sections of working class students are increasingly set up to fail by the system. Through underfunding and under-resourcing whole groups of students can be pronounced "uneducable". It is no coincidence that Hackney Downs was a mainly black school, and Langham is mainly Turkish and Kurdish. The Government don't want to recognise that black, Turkish or Kurdish kids, or working class kids in general, are diverse, and have their own ideas and culture and that this isn't white and middle class. Schools that have been targeted for political reasons face closure and become known as "problem schools". This also encourages racism by making it appear that these schools are failing because the kids are failing. This fits the government's agenda to create "ghetto" schools, or no schools at all, in working class areas. Meanwhile, schools in more wealthy areas opt out and get bribes from Central Government so that they "succeed" in the league tables.

In the meantime, education workers are being told by OFSTED inspectors that they are failing and that they need to work harder, work longer hours and do a lot more paper work. This is the other *real* agenda of OFSTED. If you scratch the surface of an OFSTED inspection it soon becomes perfectly obvious that has nothing to do with improving education. It is simply to change the working conditions of staff and to increase class sizes. It is clear that in cooperating with OFSTED we are colluding in a strategy that will have a number of effects:

* If you manage to get your school a bit higher up the league table or to scrape through an inspection- another school nearby will face closure instead. This is NO victory. We are being set up to compete against each other and whatever happens, there will always be a group of education workers (and students) who 'fail' and are threatened with closure and or redundancy.

In effect, to play the "League Tables" game, we're setting ourselves up- or the unfortunate school down the road- to be out of a job. After all of the hard work that workers of Hackney Downs and Langham have done, they were and are still under the hammer. Hackney Downs was closed and the workers made redundant. At Langham, despite the hype over the temporary "reprieve" it is perfectly clear that now the Government have got their teeth into

the school they won't be letting go. While the school is still on the "at risk" list the Education Association can still be installed. Until we start seeing through this cynical game they're getting us to play, we'll continue to be trampled on.

Labour Tory same old story

Tony Blair's Labour party are falling over themselves to come out with more and more reactionary and anti-working class education policies than the Tories. Professor Micheal Barber, education advisor to both the Government and the Labour Party, has proposed that the system for sacking teachers should be quicker. Both Blair and David Blunket have said that the system must be speeded up.

Organising a boycott

At the end of last term, a 200-strong meeting in London, organised by officers of the main London N.U.T. associations launched a campaign for OFSTED to be abolished and for Chris Woodhead to be sacked. A Conference is planned in the Autumn. **Contact Islington N.U.T. for details (0171 457 5846)**. This is a good step in getting anti-OFSTED information out to schools. But it won't stop OFSTED.

The real shit is going to hit the fan when the first school starts to put up some serious opposition. Links between schools nearby, and in other Boroughs, will have to be made very quickly. It would be useful if, as a start, school union groups in the same area agreed to support each other with strike action if any were victimised. This campaign can't be left to union officials. As with the SATs boycott, any real opposition to OFSTED will be our own action organised not through meaningless ballots, but decided and controlled by ourselves, at school level.

An injury to one..

This Autumn term will see, for the first time, inspectors being able to grass up individual teachers that they don't like the look of. People who don't toe the line, or use the right jargon are going to be victimised. This is unashamed harassment and it needs to be stopped before it starts. As a first step, workers need to get together in schools and agree that if anyone is individually fingered by the inspectors then all workers will boycott the inspection. This isn't going to be easy. Wherever this happens, workers will immediately get hammered by the press and the local authority. And union officials will be down to the school before you know it to tell people to "get back to work" while they sort it out.

As with the S.A.T.'s boycott, we can only rely on ourselves and other workers ourselves to take effective action that will defend us. We need to stand firm in the face of threats.

Is an injury to ALL

Trumping the Tory Race Card

The new immigration laws -the cuts in benefits to asylum seekers and the Asylum and Immigration Bill - add up to the most far-reaching scheme to strengthen state racism that any British Government has ever introduced. The legislation will massively increase the number of deportations of anyone that the State has decided are "illegal immigrants". The measures include heavy fines on employers of "illegal immigrants" and training for teachers, hospital administrators, housing and social security officials to snoop on each other. All rights to benefits are now being stopped for tens of thousands of refugees. Workers will be encouraged to identify suspected "illegal immigrants" and report them to the authorities. Not only will many people no longer be safe from having their homes raided. We will all be expected, if we work for any of the public services, to snoop, spy and shop each other to the authorities.

We must all resist these measures. The decision by the Government to scapegoat refugees is part of a general attack on everyone. We need to actively fight these "divide and rule" tactics. Support for Asylum seekers and refugees is not an act of charity. It is based on the fact that if the Government gets away with deporting people we work alongside, and their families, or denying children's parents their rights, it will make it easier for the State to further erode everyone's rights.

The students we work with and their families will be "under suspicion". There will be a climate of fear. Teachers and lecturers particularly will be under pressure to pry into families' lives. For children and college students this could also mean:

- losing free school meals.
- losing the right to uniform grants.
- students planning to go to college losing their right to further education.
- Families and unaccompanied young people in bed and breakfast will face eviction.
- For everyone we work and study with it could mean threats of deportation.

Defend students, parents and education workers

This new legislation is making the life of refugees in Britain even worse. Already many are facing deportation:

Fatma Tahir and her daughter Ayca, who attends a school in East London, are under immediate threat. The Home Office wants to send Fatma and her daughter back to Cyprus. Ayca has severe behavioural difficulties and requires the special schooling that Downsview provides and the support of her family in Britain. For details about the campaign contact the Colin Roach Centre on 0181 533 7111.

Natasha Matambele is a year 8 pupil at Forest Gate Community School in East London. She came to the U.K. more than 4 years ago to escape persecution in Angola. The Home Office recently refused her families' application for asylum. Natasha's schoolmates and teachers - through campaigning and publicising her case in the local community- have forced the Home Office defer her deportation. The Friends of Natasha can be contacted at: Form 7R, Forest gate School, Forest Street, E7 OHR.

The National Co-ordination of Anti-Deportation Campaigns can be contacted at:
Coordinator: John O, 22 Berners Street, Lozells, Birmingham B19 2DR Tel: 0121 554 6947

In schools and colleges we suggest that teachers:

-Call a union meeting for all workers to discuss this issue, and how to organise non-cooperation. For instance, administration and catering workers may be asked to collude in denying some children the right to free school meals. A joint union policy could be agreed that protects the right of every child to a school meal.

And students need to be involved! Earlier in the year secondary school students in Camden, North London went on strike and marched to the Town Hall when some of them were denied free school meals. Camden Council immediately backed down.

- Check admissions procedures to ensure information gathered cannot be misused
- Refuse to hand over any information which could be used to implement the legislation, including race checks on children or staff
- Prepare to take strike action if any union member is victimised for taking such action

Make OFSTED unworkable- We did it with the S.A.T.s

The national S.A.T.s tests were boycotted and temporarily stopped in their tracks successfully by using widespread school-based level action. We didn't bother waiting for nor appealing to union leaders to let us have a ballot. This saved hundreds of thousands of us (for a time) from having to do massive amounts of meaningless paperwork aimed at streaming students. This unofficial action by tens of thousands of us needed no intermediaries or negotiators to get what we wanted -*we just took it!* Likewise, we could organise to refuse en-masse to cooperate with OFSTED and simply continue to teach students what they actually want and need, as opposed to what the Government wants to indoctrinate them with. There is very little the authorities can do if we ALL refuse. This is not pie in the sky. It delayed, the tests for a long time. We can use this tactic again for to make OFSTED unworkable.

Did you know?

- 1) An inspector who fails a school gets £1000 more.
- 2) In December 1995 Chris OFSTED wrote a pamphlet for the right-wing think tank Politella blaming child-centred learning for any problems in schools.

