

“Caught in the Act” Conference – Dr Patrick Roach, Deputy General Secretary, NASUWT

Speaking to the Conservative Party Conference last month David Cameron said that the role of government was to "lead us out of this economic mess."

So far, his government's record says it all.

- Unemployment rising.
- Youth unemployment at a record high.
- Public spending cut savagely – with major services for children, young people and families disappearing altogether.
- Widespread economic uncertainty.
- Business confidence at an all time low.
- Consumers unwilling to spend.
- Banks refusing to lend.
- Bankers' bonuses back on the increase.
- Zero growth.

And, no plan B.

Haven't we been here before?

This is business as usual for the Tories.

You have spent today examining the detailed implications of the Education Act.

An Act which passed silently into the night.

Why were the press and media complicit with Michael Gove – failing to pass comment; failing to put the spotlight on reforms which will tear our school system apart?

Only the Daily Telegraph was there any national newspaper coverage following the Act receiving Royal assent. And, the focus of their criticism? The possible confiscation of Ipods and I pads!

- Not a single word about the great schools sell off.
- Not a single word about schools being run for profit.
- Not a single word about charging for education.
- Not a word about the centralisation of power in the hands of a megalomaniac Secretary of State.
- Nothing about the hand over the billions of pounds of public assets to private companies.

Melissa Benn was right in her analysis of the battle for Britain's education.

There's no doubt that Michael Gove has won yet another battle with his Education Act.

The coalition government has acted with speed – even haste – to get through their planned education reforms.

Using the excuse of the recession to force through the cuts and reforms.

Last year's Academies Act was just the beginning. An invitation to new education providers to dip their toe into the unchartered waters of the education market. Outstanding schools were told they would be given freedom from local authority diktat.

And now, these new converter academies offer rich pickings for those sponsors who want to establish a profitable education empire as quickly as possible and with as little pain as possible.

And, now the culmination of the coalition project for schools is the Education Act. It marks the massive centralisation of power into the hands of the Secretary of State. The power to direct schools into academy chains without any requirement to consult with local people. The power to saddle cash starved local authorities with mountains of debt.

Privatised schooling will be bankrolled by ordinary taxpayers. Bankrolling of independent schools, schools that are not answerable to local people, schools that will be free to make a profit out of children's education. Bankrolling these schools to the tune of millions of pounds every single year.

And, will they deliver greater choice for parents?

What choice can there be if every school in an area is an academy?

What choice will parents have when these schools choose their intake based on ability to pay or on the basis of selection by ability?

The real truth behind the Govian academy project and the Education Act is that these schools will be free to charge for a range of provision that pupils would otherwise be entitled to receive free of charge. Like music education, like art, drama, sport, IT, study support and so on.

The real truth behind the Govian academy project and the Education Act is that these schools will be free to select their intake. Nothing will exist to prevent the expansion of selective grammar schools.

Michael Gove talks about his reforms as being the new comprehensive school revolution. A progressive policy. A policy which takes forward the vision of Tony Blair.

Well, he might be right in his assessment of what Tony Blair had in mind for our schools. But, these education reforms are as progressive as a street mugging. A smash and grab raid on education.

And, with a weakened Admissions Code, full of loopholes ready to be exploited, the Tory holy grail of grammar schools will be allowed to flourish. The 11-plus is back. Selection is back.

We must continue to tell the public the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about Gove's pet project and what it will mean for ordinary children and families.

Tell the public the full story; that over the last year and half, the coalition government has:

- Cut the role of local authorities in safeguarding the interests of all children's education.
- Butchered SEN and behaviour support services;
- Recklessly removed regulatory protections – on life and death matters in schools;
- Reduced entitlements of pupils in relation to a broad and balanced curriculum.
- Increased the ability of schools to pick and choose their pupils.
- Removed the rights of local communities to be consulted over changes affecting the pattern of provision in local schools.

And, add to that the PM's commitment to diluting the statutory requirements for vetting and barring and on CRB checks – and, we begin to get a glimpse of what the future for children and young people might look like.

And, add to that the Prime Minister's remarks on "outdated employment regulations" and that the only right workers have is the right to have a job – and we begin to see what the future for ordinary workers, for teachers, headteachers and support staff in schools.

Despite all the national and international evidence to the contrary, Michael Gove has chalked up yet another victory. But the war is far from over.

This has been an attack not just on children's education, but also on teachers and other school staff.

- Their pay has been cut in real terms – 5% each year.
- The national machinery for the pay and conditions of support staff has been abolished.
- The independent STRB process is being interfered with.
- Pension rights are being swept aside.
- Contractual rights are being flouted with impunity.
- Workload is going through the roof.
- Teachers are standing at photocopiers instead of teaching.
- Teachers are collecting money from pupils.
- They are being denied PPA time.
- They are supervising pupils rather than planning and preparing lessons.

Teachers have said enough is enough. Our members have said enough is enough.

Yesterday, NASUWT was pleased to announce that in a ballot of over 230,000 members across the UK, 91% voted for industrial action. Strike action and action short of strike action.

On 30th November, our members will be continuing the fight for pensions justice. And, from December 1st, and on every single day thereafter, the members of the NASUWT will be standing up for standards. Continuing daily a campaign of industrial action.

Why is that important in the context of a debate on the Education Act? Because the Act is a direct attack on our members as well as on our schools.

We all know that what matters is what happens inside schools and inside classrooms.

We know that you just can't have great standards of education without great and committed teachers.

But, today, 86% of teachers are deeply dissatisfied with their jobs and feel that they are not trusted as professionals.

Today, half of all teachers say they want to quit teaching altogether.

Teachers are saying that enough is enough.

Our schools are on the brink of yet another recruitment and retention crisis.

We in the NASUWT are saying that for the sake of our schools, we can't allow this to happen.

By working to contract, we will through our industrial action empower teachers to focus on teaching and learning.

We will restore their professional confidence and commitment.

We will be reversing the demoralisation of our members that has been perpetrated deliberately in order to undermine public confidence in state education.

Through our action we will free our members from an endless paper chase. Liberating teachers from centrally imposed bureaucratic demands. And, we will free our members from slavish compliance with nationally imposed targets and accountability measures. Our members will be walking the line. Reclaiming

control of schools and their classrooms. Restoring the conditions they know are essential to enabling every teacher to deliver the best for every child.

We will be securing binding arrangements in schools that can deliver a fair deal for the workforce, for pupils and for the communities they serve.

That's what parents and the public want.

And, it's possible. But, it requires us to think and to act differently.

We must continue to make our case for state education.

And, fight back against those who say that state education has had its day. Those who believe in a school system:

- where schools are judged on the basis of what comes out, rather than what goes in;
- where it doesn't matter if teachers don't have nationally recognised qualifications which equip them to teach, just so long as they can show they are capable of getting good qualifications from their pupils;
- where there is less red tape stifling innovation in schools and where teachers have fewer rights at work;
- where teachers' time is no longer their own and where teachers' work is prescribed by school managers who don't teach;
- where how much a teacher is paid is determined on the basis of the qualifications achieved by the pupils they were fortunate enough to be teaching.

Privatisation. Marketisation. Profiteering.

The Education Act and the Govian revolution will mean fewer rights for parents and for pupils.

And it will mean fewer rights for teachers and the workforce in schools.

By standing together, standing up for standards, teachers, parents, governors and the public can restore trust in teachers and rebuild trust in state education.

As Michael Gove seeks to continue his smash and grab raid on schools, we must continue to respond. And, we must not fall into the traps that have been set for us.

We need to adopt creative approaches that unite the interests of teachers with the interests of parents and communities and which reclaim progressive values within our schools.

A quiet revolution. An inside job. By taking a stand. Reclaiming our schools. Reclaiming our classrooms. Standing up for standards.