

CAUGHT IN THE ACT CONFERENCE – 19 NOVEMBER 2011

Notes of the Workshop, jointly led by Stephen Ball and Martin Johnson

- **Stephen:** Emphasised the connectivity of the different players in the edubusiness arena. He has produced his own grid of the interlocking players.
- **Questioner:** Where does the construction industry fit in? Likewise the religious groups in this scenario?
- **Q:** It is utopian to think the Labour Party can change. It is very similar in ideology to the other two main parties.
- **Q:** The prevailing philosophy regards children as fundamentally dangerous beings. There are dystopian attitudes towards unions, children are placed in rank order, sometimes nowadays in public.
- **Q:** We need to focus on pedagogy. We must examine the ARK model which is pure behaviourism. There is even a model which requires all children to track the speaker (teacher) with their eyes at all times.
- **Q:** What will happen to BSF schools built under the PFI regime in future with escalating long term costs?
- **S:** PFI led to growth for construction firms. There is a trend towards amalgamation of private companies from different sectors, viz Babcock and VT, so that eventually one organisation can design, build and manage a school. This model has now been exported to Romania and Poland. The largest number of new schools is in the faith area.
- **Martin:** Babcock emerged initially as a relatively harmless privatised group of inspectors in Surrey but via a convoluted process has become a big edubusiness player. Pearson PLC is now marketing 'complete solutions' for running schools and then wishes to offer a fully privatised national strategy.
- **S:** The KIP (Knowledge is Power) groups are all pervasive. Hedge funds now control companies. One such philanthropist is Paul Marshall a Liberal. There is the new concept of 'social impact bonds', funded by investors, who receive a profit if it is deemed that the state saves money in the long term.
- **Q:** Sir Alan Davies, {the subject of the Daily Mail headline: 'Superhead held in £1.6m fraud probe: Education knight and deputy quizzed over school funds'} is possibly facing trial. Such use of school funds could be deemed legal in future.
- **Q:** The contributor gave an account of a visit to a Creationist run school in Hull. The Head (not a teacher) stated that it wasn't necessary to staff his school wholly with qualified teachers. He/she relied upon textbooks published in the USA to support the teaching of Creationism.
- **Q:** We need to win the hearts and minds of politicians including those in the Labour Party. Ark, sustained by a hedge fund, is founded on the basis of making money not providing education.

- **Q:** A distinction should be made between HMI, which used to be an independent bulwark between the government and schools, was replaced by Ofsted, an agency, which developed the concept of 'franchising' inspections.
 - **Q:** Beware of the 'Troops to Teachers' trend. It smacks of 'real men being needed to control inner city youngsters'. It is the militarisation of schooling.
 - **S:** 'Learning portals' and 'virtual high schools' are the latest technological substitutes for real teachers.
 - **Q:** The creational car dealer, Vardy, once deployed text books which claimed that the reason why Hitler was unable to invade Britain in 1940 was because of 'an act of god'.
 - **Q:** When the current government removed the 'bias towards inclusion' in SEN provision it built in inequality. The speaker supported a 'virtual academy' based on an 'Every Child Matters' agenda. It was said to be a success.
 - **Q:** What can we do to assist the Labour Party in disengaging from its current political standpoint? We need active groups of members to demand greater democracy and equality in policy formulation.
 - **Q:** We in the SEA, as a Labour Party affiliate, are already fighting to help it to disengage from its current standpoint. We must change Labour's attitude to education. We must highlight the next danger looming i.e. primary schools being forced to become Academies. There is ever increasing teaching to the text. Parents did mobilise against selection in the 1950s. We are bringing up a generation of young people in fear of failing tests. WE should campaign to help parents understand that this pressure comes from competitively run edubusiness companies.
 - **Q:** Many teachers are unaware of these political complexities and some are even in favour of selected Tory policies.
 - **Q:** As a parent and Labour Party governor, the speaker wanted a focus on persuading local councils to change their attitudes to education policies which come from the centre.
 - **Q:** The speaker described as an 'utter disgrace' that children were treated in business terms as 'stakeholders'.
- The discussion terminated at this point due to the amalgamation of the workshop groups for the final conference session.