



PAY AS YOU LEARN

“Only some parents have the luxury of being able to transport their children across a city or a rural county. Only some parents can fight their way through an admissions system that allows individual schools to set their own criteria. That is not choice: that is a test of parents’ ability to fight their way through a morass of admissions schemes and is a recipe for selection by schools.” - Steve Sinnott, National Union of Teachers

Earlier this month Neo Labour announced their five year plan for education, a plan to end the comprehensive schools system in England and replace it with a network of specialist schools, foundation schools and city academies. This “new breed” of schools will give greater freedoms for headteachers to set everything from the wages they pay their teachers to what sort of kids are allowed in the school, and give parents more ‘choice’ where they send their kids. It will also open the back door even further for private companies to get involved in education.

The city academy programme was created in March 2000 as “a radical approach to promote greater diversity and break the cycle of failing schools in inner cities”. This idea was similar to Fresh Start, closing a school with a poor reputation to reopen it with a designer name change. One of these Fresh Start schools was Comart on the Whitehawk estate in Brighton rebuilt under the Private Finance Initiative by Jarvis (see SchNEWS 424). This new state of the art Fresh Start school is now to be closed - although unfortunately under the PFI terms it won't be that simple - or cheap. Jarvis was given a contract to build and run Comart for 25 years and closing it means that the Council will have to pay a financial penalty - which some say could be up to £17 million!

Kevin Dale, from the Local Education Action Group who fought to keep Comart open and turn it into a smaller community school, said to SchNEWS “We are told the school should play a bigger role in the community and we agree. But if the school wants to do anything after 6pm, at weekends or during the holidays it's impossible financially because they will be charged by Jarvis for using its own building!”

Jarvis accepted responsibility for the Potters Bar train crash in which 7 people died, after it was shown that their safety inspections failed to find cracks in the rails they were responsible for maintaining. However with Jarvis now in financial meltdown SchNEWS wonders who will take over this ‘failing’ company?

Despite this, two hundred new academies are now in the pipeline, despite any full evaluation of how well the first lot have done. Mostly funded by the government and partly by private organisations, their overall budget is £5 billion and rising with many questioning whether this is the best use of resources. As one Local Education Authority officer put it: “There will be less money for all other schools, so they will suffer in comparison.” Still it's good news for sponsors who will only have to stump up 8% or less of capital costs, and for their money, will get all future costs such as teachers salaries, overheads, etc. guaranteed by public money - forever. In return for the cash, sponsors are given the right to rename the school and to control the board of governors. As academies are independent of the local education authority, sponsors are also free to influence the curriculum. So will we have more organisations like the Emmanuel Schools Foundation running schools? The Foundation is bankrolled by car hire boss Sir Peter Vardy who by sponsoring the two schools has been able to promote his views that evolution didn't happen but instead God created the earth! Meanwhile the Church Times has plans to divert part of the Church Commissioners' Mission Fund into education. “Schools are today's and tomorrow's future,” said commissioner Peter Bruinvels. “It's about front-line evangelism.”

Then there's the issue of selection because if you have the same ‘failing’ pupils in the same school but under a different name, you could become a failed school again. Solution? Find some better pupils. Research by Professor Anne West of the London School of Economics into schools which currently set their own rules of admission shows that at least half are operating some sort of covert selection, rules, which in the words of the chief adjudicator of schools, are often used to help them ‘drift to the posh’.

ANAL DETENTION

Others say there appears to be a rush to brand some schools as failing in order to get academy status. Despite a great improvement in exam results, Northcliffe school, near Doncaster, was unexpectedly put on special measures this year. Some locals, who are fighting the closure, believe this is to do with a bid from the Vardy Foundation to turn the school into an academy. Northcliffe is in a rural area where there are no other schools available.

In London, the Capital City Academy has been dogged by complaints and has already

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For wearing an anti-Bush T-Shirt.

A couple who wore “Love America, Hate Bush” t-shirts to the president's 4th of July appearance were taken away in handcuffs on trespassing charges. Nicole Rank was subsequently fired from her job, and both her and her husband Jeff Rank have not been able to return home as they can only contest the charges in the place of arrest, and have been living in motels in the area ever since.

* Fuck Bush shirts are for sale to raise money for the Coke Killer Watchers who recently went over to Columbia to confront paramilitaries. They can be ordered for £15 from: fuck_bush@warpmail.net

run into financial difficulties with the headteacher resigning after less than a year in charge. This state of the art, ‘school of the future’ has a strong resemblance to Stansted airport, or what some visiting pupils said reminded them of Ikea, MI6 and a “workplace, not a school.” But then turning schools into workplaces is exactly what some businessmen obviously want.

Alec Reed, with a fortune in the region of £50 million and owner of Reed Executive, already runs one school in London. He has argued that the present school curriculum should be “torn up and thrown away” and that his investment “buys him permission to interfere.” Alec Reed wants free enterprise capitalism to be taught in schools to children of all ages so that presumably they can all grow up to be greedy wankers like him.

As Former Downing Street aide Fiona Millar said “If you asked most parents what they want it would be a good local school, near to where they live, which has a balanced intake.” Instead Neo Labour are creating a free-for-all which will ultimately offer those with the greatest choice more choice, and those with the greatest need, er less choice.

In fact these “new breed” of schools are similar to the new breed of Foundation hospitals which are poised to take over ‘failing’ hospitals. But as Allyson Pollock, head of health policy at University College London says “Don't be fooled by the rhetoric: this is about privatisation.” It might be that soon the only choice will be whether to send your kids to a school run by Creationist nutcases or construction conglomerates.

* For more about the **Private Finance Initiative**, and how it started in the U.K check out George Monbiot's book “Captive State”

SPEAK EASY

This week building firm Montpellier pulled out of the contract to build a new vivisection laboratory at Oxford University. The campaign against the building hailed this as a victory, a spokesperson for the SPEAK campaign said "It is refreshing to see a company take a decision based on ethical considerations rather than profit margins."

This event has been widely reported in the media as a simple case of "Animal Rights vs. Science". Such simplistic lazy journalism painting animal rights activists as anti-science ignores the fact that there are plenty of scientists who believe that experimenting on animals is not the best way to find cures for human diseases.

The lab in Oxford is a replacement for the abandoned centre that was to be built in Cambridge (SchNEWS 439). There was a public enquiry for this centre and the inspector concluded that Cambridge University couldn't prove any benefit from vivisection. Once again all references in the media to the Cambridge lab (which SPEAK had campaigned against) referred to how it was going to save human lives by studying primates.

There has been a lot of misinformation spread regarding the lab in Oxford, for example the lab was originally promoted as an animal holding centre where no experiments would happen, which turned out to be a lie. This error was handily repeated for weeks by the local press and Oxford City Council seemed to have a block on the lab as well - mysteriously the planning application detailing the plans for the new centre disappeared off their website for three months due to technical problems - the only planning application that suffered problems.

And the police have been doing their best as ever to harass protesters, arresting people for handing out leaflets, filming everyone and getting the helicopter out to hover for hours over a peaceful demo consisting of 15 people - and we thought the police were short of resources? The worst behaviour of the police was over their treatment of a disabled woman, who after taunts from builders that she benefited from vivisection, showed them the hump on her back and explained that it was medical drugs that had caused her condition, the police then arrested her for showing her deformed back in public!

Still this is not enough for the animal abusers who do not think the police are going far enough with their harassment - The Association for the British Pharmaceutical Industry wants "a single piece of legislation to address the issue of animal terrorism." But the Government has been busy trying to stamp down on animal rights activities and in March set up the National Extremism Tactical Co-ordination Unit to target animal rights activists and eco-warriors. Apparently security chiefs have also identified Fathers for Justice as a threat to be dealt with as well and supposedly the unit will also eventually be used to co-ordinate investigations into other forms of extremist behaviour such as racial attacks.

It seems to SchNEWS that the police think that targeting people who protect animals and the environment or want access to their kids are more of an immediate threat to the public than racist scum. In an announcement about the new unit Lord Warner said "To use a football epithet in reverse, we went to play the man and forget the ball." In other words they aren't going to play fair. Expect more foul play from the police, but don't go running to the referee or you'll get sent off.

* There's a National Demonstration against the Oxford Lab this Saturday (24), meet 12 noon at Carfax Tower, Junction of Cornmarket St and High St, Oxford City. SPEAK Campaign: 0845 330 7985 www.speakcampaigns.org.uk

* Not everyone thinks animal testing saves lives and promotes human health. Contact Seriously Ill Against Vivisection: 0845 458 1720, www.siv.org.uk

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BATTLE OF THE ALMO

It's nice to see democracy alive and kicking in Camden. The council there recently tried to convince the borough that selling off its council homes was a good idea. In fact they thought it was such a good idea they spent half a million on glossy brochures, adverts, show flats and a DVD. Their Arms Length Management Organisation (ALMO) idea has been rejected in favour of common sense, but this hasn't stopped the council pursuing a local resident through the courts for "placing posters on a bus shelter by means of sticky brown tape". The poster, advertising an anti-ALMO meeting last November, might cost the resident £1,460 in fines and court costs if the council win the case. This case should be seen as a direct attack on our means of communicating in our communities.

NO WEYMOUTH

A protest camp has been set up against the Weymouth relief road; a 6km long - £25m scheme that threatens to destroy one of the area's only remaining ancient woodlands. Celebrating government approval for the road, Dorset Council reckons that the development of a 'green park' in the Lodmoor Valley (an old landfill site) will help offset any environmental damage caused by the scheme.

But, aware of the difficulty justifying the road-building project on environmental grounds, Council bosses have chosen to promote the economic value of the scheme. They say that without the road many local businesses will leave Weymouth, putting workers on the dole. But spending £750,000 justifying the scheme didn't stop the council's own consultants admitting that the companies they surveyed said that any plans to close or expand would not be influenced by the building of the road.

One of the UK's rarest species, a Barbastelle bat, is known to live in the woods. The animal is on the government's Biodiversity Action Plan, which means there is already official concern about its potential extinction. 25,000 vehicle trips are made in the area each day, 24% more than the national average and the council has spent naff all time looking into traffic calming alternatives.

The camp needs URGENT support NOW. Contact: 07800760257, weymouth@roadalert.org.uk www.roadalert.org.uk

* Liberate yer Lungs and Fuck the Fringe! Reclaim the Streets is coming to Edinburgh on 31st July. Meet midday Bristo Sq. and Festival Sq. www.edinburgh-rts.cjb.net

* Another Reclaim the Streets party is also planned for Cardiff. Meet at Virgin Megastore, Queen Street 2pm on Saturday 21st August. cardiffdanceaction@yahoo.co.uk

Positive SchNEWS

Sometimes it's really easy to miss the gems on your doorstep. Above SchNEWS HQ is Whitehawk Hill which "Despite all the onslaught of building development and the damage done by neglect, Whitehawk Hill still clings on to its special treasures: Adonis Blue butterflies, spiders older than the dinosaurs; prairie and alpine flowers; a unique beetle known nowhere else in Britain..." David Bangs, has just published a book 'Whitehawk Hill - where the turf meets the surf' and will be speaking about it next Thursday (29) 6pm at the Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton. Copies of the book will be on sale.

SchNEWS is skint shocker

SchNEWS has been feeding you scally wags the real news for ten years, and wouldn't be able to do it without the donations we get. If you find yourself looking down the back of the sofa and find a few quid think of your favorite weekly SchNEWS-letter. Check out the website or call the office to find out how to donate.

SchNEWS in brief

Over 1 million people in Darfur, Sudan, have fled their homes from the genocide being committed by the Sudanese government along with militia group the Janjaweed. While the international community drags its feet, thousands are killed, raped, kidnapped, bombed, displaced, starved and burned. Protest next Wednesday (28) 12 noon at the Sudanese Embassy, 3 Cleveland Row (Off Pall Mall) 07960-113299 Darfurmarch@yahoo.com ** Demo next Thursday (29) outside Levi's flagship store, 174 Regent St, central London 12.30pm. **Hundreds of workers making Levi's jeans in Haiti have been sacked** because they supported a new union. 020 7525 0456 www.haitisupport.gn.apc.org ** This Sunday (25) **radical Islamic cleric Al-Mahajiroun** is holding a rally in Trafalgar square. Preaching religious intolerance, homophobia and Mysogyny, there are counter demonstrations planned by non other than the National Front, who you would have thought would have got on famously with Al-Mahajiroun, seeing as they share so many of the same values. You can also join a counter-counter demonstrations being organized against both groups by anti-fascist group ANTIFA. Meet outside the National Gallery at 12.30pm. www.antifa.org.uk ** **'No Sweat'** have published an action comic based around the true story of the Kuk Dong garment workers strike in Mexico in 2001. The workers took on Nike, the local bosses, a corrupt Mexican state and won! Check it at: www.nosweat.org.uk/files/No_Sweat_comic.pdf ** **A Georgian anarchist info-shop** needs books and funds. anarchistlobotomy@yahoo.com ** A book all about the joys and hazards of squatting in Britain is looking for your personal stories. Any profits made from the eventual publication will be donated to the **Advisory Service for Squatters**. Send your recollections and pictures to myk@zeitlin.freereserve.co.uk They will be posting up sample stories and photos on the website www.geocities.com/surrealstory from August onwards. ** Get yerself an 8-page pocket size advice and information leaflet on **Police Stop and Search**. Send an SAE with 50p per copy to: Luton Committee for Racial Harmony at 33 Leagrave Road, Luton LU4 8HT. jim@thakoordin.fsnet.co.uk for further information. ** Interested in **'getting involved'** in **Neo Labour's UK ID card tests?** Then call 0161 601 8088. ** And make a space in yer diary for the **SchNEWS at Ten birthday bash** all night party and protest in London on Saturday 16th October - details of events soon.

...and finally...

Remember all those times you've been left covering by the site of a copper with excessive facial hair? No? Neither can we. Nevertheless, police in Madhya Pradesh, India are growing large moustaches in a bid to join an elite force of officers picked to tackle criminals, hoping that their well-groomed bum fluff will intimidate criminals. The India Express quoted a senior officer as saying: "Though guns and thick moustaches had been traditionally associated with bandits dwarfing their victims psychologically, this 'warfare' would be employed against criminals here."

This sounds more like Village People than Special Branch, the idea is due to be launched in other areas and officers will be offered a special allowance for the upkeep of their moustaches.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers...been there, dunce that. Honest!