

A socialist manifesto for education

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I have spent my lifetime as a teacher in `challenging' primary and secondary schools and in teacher `training' and in universities trying to tackle inequalities in schooling- inequalities that result in millions of working class children having far less educational opportunities- and subsequently, usually lower paid jobs- than the children of richer parents, especially the 7% who go to private schools- and snap up most of the highest paid, elite, jobs.

The very choice of what and how it should be taught, how and what schooling should be organised, how any whom it should be funded, and where and how the funding should be targeted, and a consideration of `who wins and who loses' through all of the above, are all intensely political. And we want that politics to be in the interests of the millions not the millionaires!

I come from a working class family brought up in some poverty, for example on Free School Meals (like a million others!) in St. Martins' St., off the Lewes Rd., Brighton. I went to Westlain Grammar School, my brothers to underfunded secondary modern schools, such as Queens Park and Moulscroomb. Three times as much was spent on the education of grammar school students (which educated 20% of state schooled children) than on Secondary Modern students (which educated nearly all the other state school children under the then selective school system)! My children went to local state schools. The inequalities I have witnessed- and lived- as a child, and as a teacher and socialist political activist, have led me to spending my life fighting for greater equality in education and society, and against racism, sexism and against homophobia.

What an indictment of our divisive education system that students from private schools are 25 times more likely to get to one of the top British universities than those who come from a lower social class or live in a poor area. And that (in 2008), only 35% of pupils eligible for free school meals obtained five or more A* to C GCSE grades, compared with 63% of pupils from wealthier backgrounds. This stark education inequality mirrors that in our grossly unequal society.

It is incredible, actually it is only too believable, that in Britain today, the richest section of society have 17 years of healthy life more than the least well-off in society. The minimum wage should be raised by 50%. How can people- decent hard working people like some in my own family, live on take-home pay of less than £200 a week! And there should be a maximum wage, too! Nobody, banker, boss, or buy-out bully, should be on more than £250,000 a year- (and this figure should reduce progressively so that within 10 years no-one is taking more than four times the

average wage, nobody should be creaming off £27 million or £90 million a year for example! Certainly not when there are 4 million children living in poverty! I was once one of them. I was helped by the welfare state. We need our public services. We need to improve them, not cut them, not attack them.

All three parties, New Labour, LibDem, Tory, dance to the music of big business. All are promising cuts. Whatever they say, those cuts will hit schools, children, and the quality of education in our state schools. Already we are seeing staff cuts and course closures in universities up and down the country. In Brighton, for example, both Brighton and Sussex Universities are promising to cut out the nurseries, and Sussex to chop over 100 jobs. Brighton University is proposing to cut its Adult Ed art courses. Vandalism! Cutting popular and widely used public services!

And don't believe cuts are necessary. They're not! Cutting the Trident nuclear submarine replacement programme, bringing troops home from Afghanistan and Iraq, stopping the Identity Card programme, and collecting even some even of the £120 billion in taxes unpaid by the rich... yes, £120 billion! And raising taxes high earners...would mean cuts are not necessary at all!

But you won't hear that from the other parties, just from Socialists, like the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, and from Respect.

A socialist manifesto is:

1. Cut class sizes (they are currently some of the largest in the rich world- much larger than in private schools for example). According to OECD research Britain is 23rd out of 30 developed countries in terms of large class size. Other countries such as Finland have a maximum class size of 20. Finland is widely seen as providing an extremely high quality of education. For a maximum class size of 20 by 2020 in both primary and secondary schools!

2. Abolish league tables and abolish SATS (some external testing is necessary, but SATS so very often restricts teaching to 'teaching to the test', and results in undue stress (and an increase in bedwetting, compared to the pre-SATS era, for example).

3. Restore local democratic control of 'Academies'. They should be run by the democratically elected local councils, and keep to national pay and conditions agreements. Why should rich businessmen and women take control of any of our schools? Let's keep the added investment- but it's the government that pays for that added investment anyhow! Let's keep and enhance the added investment, but distribute it fairly between all schools. Our schools and the children in them are not for sale! Nor, through uneven funding for different types of school (e.g. academies) should some schools be set up for success at the expense of others being set up (and underfunded) for relative failure.

4. Private profiteering out of our schools! Bring the education services hived off to private profiteers back into either national or local private ownership! These include Ofsted, Student grants, school meals, cleaning and caretaking.

5. Free, nutritious, balanced school meals for every child to combat poor diets, obesity, and... yes... for some children... hunger!

6. Restore free adult education classes in pastime and leisure studies as well as in vocational training/ studies

7. Restore free funded residential centres and Youth Centres/ Youth clubs for our children so they can widen their experiences of life in safe circumstances and enhance their education beyond the confines of the home or city.

8. For a fully Comprehensive Secondary School system, so that each school has a broad social class mix and mix of ability and attainment levels.

9. For the integration of Private schools into the state education system- so that the goodies of the private school system are shared amongst all pupils/ students. All schools to be under democratic locally elected local council control. No to Private Schools. No to religious groups running schools. No to big business / private capital running our schools and children!

10. Free up the curriculum so there can be more creativity and cross-subject/ disciplinary work.

11. Get Ofsted and their flawed tick-box system off the back of teachers. The results of Ofsted are to penalise even the best schools (outstanding in every aspect- other than in SATS attainments) in the poorest areas.

12. Encourage Critical Thinking across the curriculum. Teach children not 'what to think', but also 'how to think'. Including how to think critically about the media and politicians.

13. Teach in schools for ecological literacy and a readiness to act for environmental justice as well as economic and social justice Encourage children to 'reach for the stars- and to work for a society that lets that happen- a fairer society with much more equal chances, pay packets and power, and about environmental and sustainability issues.

14. Proper recognition of all school workers, and no compulsory redundancies. For teachers, secretarial and support staff, teaching assistants, school meals supervisory assistants, caretaking staff, there should be workplace democratic regular school forums in every school. Regarding jobs (for example the threatened job cuts at Sussex University- and the 'inevitable' job cuts in every? school after the election- no compulsory redundancies- any restructuring to be conditional on agreement with the unions.

15. Setting up of school councils – to encourage democratic understanding, citizenship, social responsibility, and a welcoming and valuing of 'student/ pupil voice'.

16. Ensuring that schools are anti-racist, anti-sexist and anti-homophobic- making sure schools encourage equality, welcome different home and group

cultures.. As part of this, anti-bullying practices in every school must be fully implemented, to combat bullying of all sorts, including racism, sexism, homophobia, and bullying based on disabilities. And this should be not just in anti-bullying policies, but also be part of the curriculum too!

17. An honest sex education curriculum in schools that teaches children not just 'when to say no', but also when to say 'yes', a programme that is focuses on positives and pleasure and personal worth, not on stigmatising sex and sexualities.

18. No to 'Faith Schools' and Get organised religion out of schools. If Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians, or whichever religion wishes to teach religion, let them do it in their own time, places of worship (Saturday/ Sunday schools) or in their supplementary or complementary schools. Teach ethics and spirituality by all means, and teach about religions. But no brainwashing. Teach a critical approach to religions.

19. Broaden teacher education and training so that the negative effects of the 'technicisation and detheorising' of teacher training (that were the result of the 1992/1993 Conservative re-organisation of what was then called teacher education- subsequently retitled teacher training). Bring back the study and awareness of the social and political and psychological contexts of teaching, including an understanding of and commitment to challenge and overturn racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of under-expectation and discrimination- such as discrimination against working class pupils.

20. A good, local school for every child. No school closures! "Surplus places" should actually mean lower class sizes! And increased community use of school facilities.

21. A completely fully funded, publicly owned and democratic education system from pre-school right through to university. Education is a right not a commodity to be bought and sold. So, no fees, like in Scandinavia, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, where education up to PhD level is free. No university of further education/ vocational training fees, and a living grant for students from less well-off backgrounds/ income.

In my jobs, firstly as a teacher, and now as a Professor of Education (and writer/ editor of 17 books on education and equality) I have been round hundreds of schools. Many of them are brilliant. Schools in the poorest areas, schools in better off areas! Brilliant. But, with better funding, smaller class sizes, an end to the destructive competition between schools (if every school is a good local school) and with more professional judgement being allowed for teachers- then I look forward to a time when all state schools match the class sizes and results of the currently more lavishly funded private schools'. And working class kids – black, brown, white- get the fair deal currently trumpeted- but in actuality denied- by all three major parties.

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The Brighton Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition blogspot is at www.brightontusc.blogspot.com

There is a wiki about Dave at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Hill_\(professor\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dave_Hill_(professor))

Many of his online articles are at www.ieps.org.uk