

EDUCATION FOR THE DOLE?AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND UNEMPLOYMENTMIKE PRESDEEHARTLEY COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION

Whenever the economic base of Capitalism experiences a crisis we may expect specific responses by the State to realign the superstructure of Society, in order to facilitate the survival of the system. In Education, these responses are aimed at realigning the social relations of Society and have concentrated on legitimating the transformation of the economy from a critical state to a more stable structure, by altering the products of Education to more closely fit, without question, the new Labour requirements of Capital. This, in effect, grounds the 'cause' of the crisis within the Labour side of the Capital/Labour relationship and draws attention away from purely economic problems, to problems concerned with the supply and nature of the labour force.

On the one hand, therefore, education can be seen to be the cause of an 'ill-trained' labour force and thus, indirectly, the cause of unemployment. Whilst, on the other hand, therapeutic qualities of Education make it possible to accept that much of the "raw material" in schools is inferior in itself and therefore, for this quantity of unemployables, programmes to upgrade their actual constitution is necessary. Finally, having convinced society that it is in Education that salvation lies, there evolves a desire by all for a fair share of the "sleeping draught"; - this being successful, educators will have done their job.

Even in the early days of organised education, this potential, useful in times of high unemployment, was recognised. In 1862, compulsory reading and sewing classes for the unemployed were set up in England and were immediately found to be, "eminently useful in maintaining order, in promoting cheerfulness and in preventing the contraction of evil habits during a period of unwanted leisure as well as in communicating rudimentary knowledge."¹⁾

The response to massive post-war youth unemployment in 1918, was similar, with Juvenile Unemployment Centres being created for youths under 18 years of age, where attendance was made a condition of unemployment benefits, and where the curriculum was meant to be informal rather than academically formal as in mainstream schools.²⁾ The compulsory aspect of the Centres showed that the true nature of the Centres was to control the unemployed youth of that time in what was little more than occupational therapy centres.

The present response appears to be little different, with unemployment centres and schools popping up throughout the country, including activities such as the "posture and deportment" courses provided by the school for unemployed school-leavers at Port Macquarie, NSW³⁾, and the various so-called 'Earn-learn' programmes⁴⁾ in schools that retain the important nexus of control between income and attendance.

The present developments in Australia can be retraced to the change of government in 1975. During the Labour Government's terms of office, there was a growing concern about the supposed drop in standards, and more specifically the ideological drift within schools; but there was little suggestion that Education was creating unemployment, rather that Education was creating a disruptive workforce.

For example:

Thanks to the socialist learnings of the academics the 'labour' policies are emphasised to such an extent in schools that senior students are becoming brain washed and completely indoctrinated!

(Report to the Victorian Liberal Party Council) 5)

For them (students) to strike at the University authorities is to promote the destruction of the state, and to achieve the political objectives nearest to their heart. (Lord Arron's report published in the Adelaide Advertiser) 6)

And with a typical Monarchist flourish! -

God Save the Queen is still the National Anthem for Victoria's State Schools.

(Mr. Thompson Liberal Minister of Education, Victoria) 7)

However, towards the end of 1975 connections between the products of the so-called "new education" and unemployment were beginning to be made, with the suggestion that the education system was producing a completely new breed of school leaver. The Financial Review went on to say that -

Jobs for school leavers will not only be scarce this year, but for the first time large numbers of teenagers will be entering it from a school background quite unlike that known to generations of Australian adults. 8)

The Confederation of Australian Industry added its weight to the demands, with the suggestion that structural changes were necessary and that Education should be preparing youth directly for the work-force - or what has become known as 'Life'! The Confederation stated clearly in October 1975 that:

It would seem patently clear that our education system, particularly the secondary level is not properly catering for the needs of a very large proportion of our youth. 9)

As unemployment amongst youth increased, the criticisms became confused and contradictory, for it wasn't so much that standards were falling but that school pupils were getting too much schooling which in turn, it was suggested, creates unemployment. This new analysis paved the way for a redirection of Education rather than a push for higher standards, and despite the efforts of Professor Messel the 'standard' debate gradually became of secondary concern. In February 1976 the Director of Apprenticeships in NSW, Mr. A.C. Mills, stated that there were two main causes of unemployed youth: high wages being paid to the young and "misdirected adult educational goals."¹⁰⁾ His analysis encapsulated perfectly the growing criticism that Labour was too expensive and of the wrong type, in that it had the wrong 'skills' and the wrong 'attitudes'.

The 'attitudinal' problem was borne out by the Victorian Employers' Federation secretary, Ian Spicer, who emphasised later in 1976 that schools should be giving greater emphasis to the work ethic in that "there needs to be some expression of the meaning of work and the work ethic", ¹¹⁾ whilst at the same time there was the plea for the structural change in Education needed by industry.

There appears to be a pre-occupation with allowing students to engage in the pursuit of subjects and courses which while of great interest have no relevance or bearing to Industry's needs ¹²⁾

To be consistent, Mr. Spicer, a few weeks later on TV added the final strand to his analysis by adding: "In recent times the gap between adult and junior pay has closed significantly so the economic advantage of employing a 'junior' is not as great as it has been."¹³⁾ This flurry by Industry followed the announcement of the Williams enquiry which was heralded by Parliament as the answer to the problem now accepted by all as being a faulty Education System. The Prime Minister, Mr. Fraser, pointed out quite clearly that even if the job supply increased many of the school leavers would still not get employment¹⁴⁾, but it was left to the Minister of Employment and Industrial Relations, Mr. Street, (rather than the Education Minister) to publicly state the Government's position:

I believe that more adequately prepared young people - and here I refer to attitudes and orientation as much as to knowledge and skills acquired at school - would in itself lead to an increased in job opportunities for school leavers. ¹⁵⁾

It had become obvious that to produce a curriculum that could be directly linked to the Labour market, would need new Educational structures at a Federal and State level which could only be facilitated by Government report, hence the excrescence of enquiries in the seventies, culminating in the Williams enquiry itself.

Now that the Williams committee has met, cross fertilised, and produced, the emphasis has fallen

back onto 'attitudinal' change. Once again, the Minister of Education, Senator Carrick, has reiterated that there is "appallingly low motivation" amongst the young unemployed and also that "even if jobs were far more plentiful many of these young people would lack the basic skills necessary to secure effective employment."¹⁶⁾ There has followed a significant move from the statistical approach connecting low attainment with unemployment, to the psychological attitudinal approach hinted at by the Prime Minister when he found that young unemployed were "a bit different - or might be uncertain of themselves."¹⁷⁾

These personal 'differences' have already been investigated by the Federal Education Department and referred to the ACER for detailed investigation.¹⁸⁾ The study, involving people under 21 years who have been unemployed for more than four months, showed that most suffer from low self-esteem, low motivation, and believed that school was of no benefit to them. This 'scientific' evidence can now be used to show that the problem is quite clearly 'attitudinal' and will have the effect of legitimating and proliferating programmes using such approaches. The Minister, Mr. Carrick, is quite clearly promoting and advocating such an analysis, and has responded to his department's study by commenting that:

What we have in quite a considerable number of the young are attitudinal problems ... What we now have to find out is whether there is any way of identifying these people early on and seeing if we can find remedies in time.¹⁹⁾

The remedies that are prescribed are aimed at attitudinal change, raising of motivation and self-esteem. There is no recognition that the responses made by the subjects interviewed are real responses to a perceived reality, that should be taken as a serious comment concerning the economic structure of Capitalism. The greatest crime committed by unemployed youth is that their analysis is 'pessimistic' which is seen as dangerous in that such pessimism concerning Capitalist society can, and does, lead to bitterness and rebellion.²⁰⁾ At all costs, youth, whether employed or unemployed, should be occupied, happy and content, with the majority of unemployment programmes, whatever their intention, reflecting these elements of social control. Job-hunting skills become essential elements of almost all these programmes where participants feel they are at least gaining necessary skills, with the reality being that where there are massive numbers of applicants for precious few positions, (such as the 1,000 people who queued all day for 100 jobs at a 'Target Australia' shopping store), no amount of job skills will be useful.

The Victorian Federation of unemployed self-help groups prescribe a 12-point plan for job-hunting which includes advice on interviews where students are urged, "not to wear things or scruffy jeans, to speak firmly but not too loudly and to ask questions, but not too many."²¹⁾ The South Australian Education Department has run special four week courses for school leavers looking for jobs that include "human relations, communication skills and interview skills."²²⁾ In all these cases, the problem is situated in the student who must be taught new skills, (which he lacks), that

will enable him to gain employment, but rarely is the 'cause' of unemployment discussed and debated.

At best, these programmes teach students to 'cope' with the unemployment situation through courses on the art of 'survival', although this approach is often accused of being pessimistic. (A good example of this style of course would be the independent Currumbena school at Lane Cove Sydney). These programmes accept unemployment as given, as the situation facing students, who are then helped by survival tactics to make it through to brighter times of bountiful employment, whilst enabling students to maintain their dignity through being kept occupied during jobless periods, and providing the possibility of a part-time living.²³⁾

The reality of course, is that Australia is facing a change in the nature of the labour force, seen in the Government report on "Employment Prospects by Industry and Occupation", where available jobs in manufacturing fell between June 1974 and January 1979 by 212,200 with actual unemployment in April 1979 standing at 6.7% of the work-force, and more importantly, at 18.8% for 15-19 year olds. This has resulted in a jobs chase of 30 youths for each vacancy. And what is even more disturbing, is that whilst unemployment appears to be falling, youth unemployment is rising.

In this situation, it is quite clear that Education is unable to comprehend the true nature of unemployment. It can ultimately only educate for unemployment rather than against and about unemployment. The strategies for action can only be directed inwards, into the student, in order to produce an outward veneer of benign acceptance of the present crisis confronting Capitalism which is portrayed as being although inevitable, nonetheless transient. Education in a Capitalist society is only able to educate for 'domestication' rather than 'liberation', its main function being the reproduction of the social relations of Capitalism. It must, therefore, be successful in gaining acceptance from its students in entering, freely, the unfree relationship between Capital and Labour. That is not to say that Education cannot be confronted by a more critical and contradictory approach which must evoke responses and movements from the system.

I want now to discuss the response of the 'leaving' students that were interviewed during this study. Sixty students were interviewed from three High Schools in the Elizabeth and Salisbury areas of South Australia, and also the heads or deputy heads of each school. The area of Elizabeth and Salisbury is traditionally based on manufacturing industries, with a strong migrant working class population which has a high incidence of youth unemployment making up a massive 51% of all unemployed. Students who were interviewed were allowed simply to discuss the topic of unemployment amongst themselves in order that they might express in some way, their reaction to the situation.

Our results were quite startling in that it was obvious that efforts made by the schools in the area of work-experience programmes and discussions had succeeded in creating the veneer of optimism I have previously discussed. It was also clear that most of these students were not 'planning'

for careers but rather accepting any job that may be available, and in spite of knowing the high unemployment figures there still existed the feeling that jobs were there for the willing. Comments such as "It's not that bad, there's jobs if people want to take 'em" (Derek 15 years), "My Dad says there's plenty of jobs round here" (Paul 15 years), were frequent. Other statements highlighted uncertainty about the future: "It depends what I get" (Paul), "I don't know what career I might get till I get a job" (Paul). There was, overall, a sense of bravado and excitement about entering the world of work, especially amongst the boys, with only one group discussing the reasons for the shortage of job vacancies. In this group, there was a realisation that demographic factors were important, for there was a feeling that their predicament was exacerbated by living in the Elizabeth/Salisbury area. When asked why some got jobs and others didn't, and why in some areas youth unemployment was lower than in others, one girl remarked:

It's 'cos they live in a stuck-up area. Their dads have all got money so they go to private schools and that makes you more intelligent. We're finished 'cos we live in Elizabeth and there's only factories here and they're closing. It's not really fair, everyone always picks on Elizabeth, they say we're rough, always picking on us. We don't get a chance at the good jobs. We're as good as them though so why do they pick on us?

Here, behind the veneer of confidence, we begin to pick up the pessimism, for there is a real fear for the future. The tragedy that is unfolding for these students is a desperate realisation that the remainder of their lives will be filled with struggle and uncertainty. What awaits them is the possibility of a series of jobs involving few skills and where they, the workers will be marginal rather than central to the work process and where, by and large, they will lack political and economic power.

I'd like to be an electrician. Me dad's an electrician. But I'd take anything, most likely GMH. The money's good but it's not very interesting. The money's good so I can do a lot more at night then. (Mark 15 years)

My mum's trying to get me a job in her office, if not I'll get something in Levis, on the machines and that - I don't know. No one's to blame 'cause there's no jobs, it's just how it is. I shall just keep going till I get one. (Janet 15 years)

If I don't get one it'll be because there's something wrong with me. Not brainy enough or not the right 'sort' - you know. Sometimes they're (the employers) too choosy but it's not their fault, there's hundreds of us. It's to do with new technology - but there's jobs at Levis. (Linda 15 years)

The consistent theme is that of hope. Hoping for a job. Hoping to be successful. Hoping it will

be easy. Hoping 'they' will be chosen. Hoping that 'they will not be unemployed. And strangely they have a great deal of sympathy for the plight of the employers having the task of selecting a few candidates from vast numbers of applicants. The 'no fault' approach to Society has led to the acceptance that we are all actors tied to a pre-existing script and directed by forces way out of our control or comprehension, and that what we should be doing is playing our 'role' to the best of our abilities. The schools, through their approach to Capitalism, have ignored any analysis which regards students as being central in the construction of society, preferring to create in students a feeling of hope that somehow, at sometime, the script will get better. These students are now locked in a battle with each other in a desperate "queue jumping" exercise where the members of their own peer group and social class become the enemy, whilst the real problem of unemployment and the de-skilling of the work force is never confronted.

Indeed, quite the opposite approach has been taken with moves to introduce more strands of vocational training into the school system with it being further suggested by some that there should be a move away from the comprehensive education system of the present, back to the more vocationally orientated Technical/High school binary system. But, as Windschuttle has pointed out, any moves towards more vocational training will simply mean that those who are unemployed will have different abilities to those presently unemployed. No matter how skilled and how many exams students have passed, if there are no available positions in their area, they will be unemployed. Vocational training, be it in schools, further education Colleges, or retraining centres, cannot in itself, create jobs. The usefulness of such programmes lies not in job creation but in the 'belief' that they can create jobs, for in the end they are no different to other programmes for the unemployed in that they become no more than therapeutic devices used for social control.

It is hardly surprising, then, that when the Williams Enquiry finally made its report, it was both contradictory and constipated in that it appeared unable to purge itself of all that it wanted to do and say. Its task was to be tacitly critical of Education without criticising the labour/Capital relationship. In the end, all it could do was say "Yes" and "no" and plump for the status quo of "stop-go", whilst legitimating the already existing feelings about the ills of the Education system.

While it must be accepted that education cannot overcome problems of general unemployment, those in charge of its institutions have a responsibility to assist in the solution of current problems by shaping the basic skills and attitudes of school pupils ... 26)

After years of 'enquiring' we are informed that the solution lies again in attitudinal change which should be taught in schools and youth unemployment centres. (See recommendation R14:13 R14:16.) Secondary education is advised to offer more assistance to those with an attitudinal 'problem', with the 'problem' being placed quite clearly at the centre of the relationship between Education

and work. It is here that the years of criticism are legitimated with the Enquiry making the point that schools are not aware of student attitudes to work; are not aware of the attitudes required by industry and are therefore failing in their efforts to bring both the teachers and the students back into line with the needs of industry:

... school principals give systematic attention to is an extension of guidance and counselling so that school elavers and teachers have a better idea of the skills and attitudes required for particular occupations. 27)

Organisationally the Enquiry advises that moves should be made to bring back the old technical curriculum without going all teh way and advising a properly separate binary system. It does, however, recommend the "two schools in one" approach by suggesting that different abilities should have different curriculums. I am only surprised they didn't include the old stand-by: "Equal but different!"

The recognition of the effects of higher retention rates on the need for a greater differentiation of curricula and the maintenance of a wider variety of programmes in the upper secondary school to cater for the range of abilities and motivations and the different academic needs of those who will seek employment after school, and those who will seek a place in a tertiary course. 28)

Behind the jargon, there is a clear enunciation of the need for vocational courses for those good with their hands, whilst academic courses should be retained for those good with their heads. Consequently the Enquiry recommends an increase in vocational courses at schools which include, it is supposed, the correct attitudinal approaches, and which will affectively accommodate and occupy the increases in retention rates created by high unemployment:

... secondary schools continue to stress general educational objectives but give further attention to vocational education that is complementary to, or part of, general education. 29)

Unfortunately, the Enquiries, the Governments and Education Departments appear to have misunderstood the role of Education, for at a time of high unemployment the need for a certain number of workers with certain skills is, by and large, fulfilled, with there being a surplus of both graduates and school leavers. The only remaining concern of Industry is that the attitudes of its 'Labour' is conducive to the needs of Capital, in that they will, on their own, facilitate fresh investments in new technologies in order to retain the maximum of surplus value and profit. The Labour force must accept totally the notion of de-skilling, the notion of surplus population, and the whims and fancies of multi-national companies as they dance around the arenas of cheap labour. It is at this time that Industry demands a happy and contented workforce that will not be too concerned about the 'ups' and 'downs' of the Labour market. Previous National elections in Australia show how the Australian Labour Party has endeavoured to make unemployment an issue yet has failed - spectacularly!

The present moves to enshrine the needs of Capital within Education theory must be confronted. There have been many individual efforts to question and politicise the education process, and each one of these efforts are invaluable. Teachers, as a group, must be free to create programmes that will demystify the nature of the workforce by investigating what is produced, when it's produced, where it's produced and how it's produced. We all have that responsibility.

Meanwhile we are left with thousands of teenagers who will be unemployed for longer and longer periods. R.E. Pahl's study of school leavers in the UK³⁰), where he asked students to imagine they were talking to their grandchildren and advising them how they should tackle the world, showed their plight dramatically. His results show that there is a further responsibility facing us all, for we must refuse to shroud reality, their reality, under a cloak of professional gobble-de-gook and popular science.

I couldn't give him any advice because my life had been a failure.

I only warned him to take care and think. When he left, everything went quite dark and time stood still. 31)

(Dave to grandchild).

FOOTNOTES

- 1) "Social Control in the 19th century". A.P. Donajgrodzki (ed) Croom Helm, 1977.
- 2) For further discussion of these committees, see article by R. Pope in the British Journal of Ed. Studies, Vo. xxvii, No. i, Feb. 1979.
- 3) Adelaide Advertiser, 17/1/79.
- 4) For example, Marion High School in South Australia where they employ those students who are unemployed from the previous leaving year.
- 5) Report to the Victorian Liberal Party Council, March 1975.
- 6) Adelaide Advertiser, 13/11/74.
- 7) The Age.
- 8) Australian Financial Review, 26/9/75.
- 9) Australian, 16/10/75.
- 10) Australian, 16/2/76.
- 11) The Age, 13/9/76.
- 12) Op cit.
- 13) "Face the Nation", September 1976.
- 14) Adelaide Advertiser, 27/9/76
- 15) Adelaide Advertiser, 8/9/76
- 16) Advertiser, 6/2/79.
- 17) Advertiser, 26/4/79.
- 18) Australian, 9/6/79.

- 19) Australian, 9/6/79.
- 20) Crime Statistics Bureau of South Australia Report 1979.
- 21) The Age, 6/11/76.
- 22) Adelaide Advertiser, 14/1/76.
- 23) Australian, 10/1/79.
- 24) Pivot. South Australian Education Department. April 1979 article by Dr. Skinkfield.
- 25) Unemployment. K. Windshuttle. Penguin, 1979, pp.238-9.
- 26) Williams Enquiry, Vol. 3, p.54.
- 27) " " " p.8.
- 28) " " " p.9.
- 29) " " " p.8.
- 30) New Society, 2nd Nov. 1978, Vo. 46, No. 839.
- 31) Op.cit.