

Wasting money on educating the masses and "fear of elitism"

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When I speak to teachers and education activists about my research, I am often told that the vast, well-organized project I describe could not exist without our knowing about it and that what I am describing sounds like a conspiracy. No, it's not a conspiracy because conspiracies are, by definition, secret. And as evidence of the global nature of policies becomes more apparent, more activists are learning about the aims and actual effects of "free market" reforms, available for decades in prospectuses from transnational corporations developing new products and reports from the World Bank.

Now a breathtakingly frank report from an adviser to the Minister of Education in the UK lays out the thinking behind the global project and the UK's educational policies: Education should not be wasted on the masses, who are genetically inferior, he writes, and to say otherwise capitulates to a foolish "fear of elitism." Cummings' rhetoric about improving the quality of schooling and his blistering attack on the mediocrity of education is intended to justify introducing gross inequality into the UK's educational system.

For wealthy, powerful elites who control business, media, and government, public expenditures on educating workers beyond the skill level needed for low paying jobs is wasted. Since most jobs being created require no more than an 8th grade education only a handful of people need to acquire the sophisticated thinking and skills to manage and control the world's productive resources. Minimally educated workers need only minimally educated teachers. Oversight of lowered expectations for educational outcomes can be achieved through exclusive use of standardized testing. Therefore, a well-educated (and well-paid) teaching force is a waste of scarce public money.

What's behind release of Cumming's straightforward description of the ideological premises of the project to make schooling more unequal? My hunch is that the successful joint job actions of England's two largest teachers unions has forced the government's hand. Public opinion is shifting to a more critical view of neoliberal educational policy and much of the negative publicity has focused on the inefficiencies and corruption of Gove's policies. To contest the view that he is inept, Gove is clarifying the real aims of his policies to show that he is getting the job done: basing educational policy on pseudo-Darwinian theories to destroy the promise of quality education for all children. Cummings' report exposes this rationale and explains the tools being used: eliminating the national pay scale for teachers so that communities pay what they can for teachers; introducing "free schools" so as to further disempower local communities through control of the school authorities.

England's teachers go on strike October 17. (Half the country conducted a one-day work stoppage on Oct. 1; the other half goes out tomorrow.) The first action had significant support from US teachers, from which strikers took heart. (Being on strike can be lonely and frightening, even when you know what you are doing is righteous.) I'm supporting England's teachers with messages on social media, tweeting with the hashtag #teachrroar. You can follow this strike and other actions of teachers and students around the world at www.teachersolidarity.com

Defending England's teachers is a vital step to creating the international solidarity we need to turn back this global project. Their project is global and so must be our resistance.

PS - Tomorrow, October 17 I'm speaking in Providence RI and Friday, October 18 at University of Mass. Dartmouth about the role of transformed teachers unions in struggles to save public education. If you're in the vicinity, please join us.

I invite reader comments, either on this website or to me directly at drweinerlo@gmail.com. Is there a subject you want me to tackle? Let me know. And you can follow my thoughts on teaching, schools, and education on twitter , Facebook, as well as my blog here at New Politics.