

EDITORIAL

The Gove Legacy

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This might be thought to be an awkward time for writing a *FORUM* Editorial, given that Michael Gove was dismissed as Education Secretary and replaced by Nicky Morgan in the middle of July this year, and there will be a general election, whatever happens, in May next year.

In fact, I was *not* one of those who got terribly excited by the news of Gove's departure. To see everything that has happened to our schools over the past four years as somehow attributable to Gove's personal whim seems to me to subscribe to what E.H. Carr denounced in *What is History?* as 'the great man/bad man [*sic*] theory of history' (1961, p. 53). Personalities *do* matter – and Gove's unpleasant and combative personality certainly played a big part in alienating large numbers of classroom teachers – but to place too much emphasis on the character and behaviour of specific individuals is to descend to a view of history which is comprehensible 'even at the level of the nursery' (p. 49). Gove was successful (in the short term at least) because he was representative of powerful forces within the Right, and indeed *beyond* the Right, encompassing modernising forces within the so-called Left. The large-scale privatisation of education and the dismantling of local authority power were projects which secured the wholehearted endorsement of New Labour under both Blair and Brown. Indeed, we know that Gove was a huge admirer of Lord Adonis's *Education, Education, Education* and urged his ministers and civil servants to read it and follow its recommendations. So there has been a real sense of continuity linking the education policy of David Cameron's coalition government with that of previous Labour administrations.

The change at the top of the Department for Education is, of course, purely cosmetic; and, apart from the adoption of a slightly less aggressive attitude towards teachers, there is little or no sign of any major shift in policy before the general election. In fact, the new Secretary of State has already been keen to stress her commitment to the Gove Agenda.

Making her first appearance in the House of Commons in her new role on the 21 July, Nicky Morgan described Gove as 'one of the great reforming Secretaries of State for Education' and pledged to carry on his great work, by 'radically expanding Free Schools and Academies, supporting unqualified teachers and keeping changes to the examinations system'. Somewhat typically, Shadow Education Secretary, Tristram Hunt, restricted his critical comments to the government's commitment to allowing unqualified teachers to work in free schools and to the speed with which curriculum changes were being introduced. And Ms Morgan was able to dismiss his comments with something approaching contempt (reported in *The Guardian*, 22 July, 2014).

The new Education Secretary's first senior appointment has been that of David Hoare to the post of Chairperson of the School's Regulator, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Hoare would appear to be singularly unsuited to the post, not only because his background is almost entirely in business (latterly as Chairperson of the Mail Company DX Group), but also because, since January, he has been a trustee of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET), the largest academy chain in the country. Critics have pointed out that the AET has faced severe recent criticisms for the way it has run several of its schools, while the DX Group was floated on the Stock Exchange earlier this year and is now owned via a holding company based in the tax haven of the Cayman Islands. In the words of Kevin Courtney, Deputy General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers: 'Teachers will view today's appointment as further evidence of the Government's politicisation of school inspection ... The new Chair will need to demonstrate his competence to chair the School Inspectorate in an impartial manner with regard to all academy and community schools' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 1 August, 2014).

Many of those viewing the education scene in this issue of *FORUM* find they have very little to celebrate, but there are those articles (notably those by Robin Alexander, Michael Armstrong and Michael Fielding) which contemplate a different sort of education world based on principles which are enlightened and humane. And all our contributors are governed by a passionate belief that things that are rotten at the moment have to be put right for the sake of future generations of children.

A number of campaigning organisations are putting all their energies into trying to influence Ed Miliband's education team, but this might be said to be a futile exercise, since there is little evidence that Tristram Hunt has the same radical vision for education that Andy Burnham has for health and social care. Yet what is the realistic alternative? It is surely up to all of us – campaigners, journalists, unions, teachers and parents – to make such a loud noise that even Labour politicians have to listen. In the end, Cameron had to get rid of Gove, and, although I began this Editorial by arguing that this did not really matter, it did at least show that electoral considerations sometimes have a role to play.

Whenever I am in danger of feeling depressed, I find myself returning to a 2011 article in the journal *Soundings* by the late great Stuart Hall in which he

argued that no hegemonic projects – and particularly those based on profoundly undemocratic principles – were guaranteed lasting success:

No project ever achieves 'hegemony' as a completed project. It is a process, not a state of being. No victories are permanent or final. Hegemony has constantly to be 'worked on', maintained, renewed, revised. Excluded social forces, whose consent has not been won, whose interests have not been taken into account, form the basis of counter-movements, resistance, alternative strategies and visions, and the struggle over a hegemonic system starts anew. These 'counter-movements' constitute 'the emergent' – and are the reason why history is never closed, but maintains an open horizon towards the future. (2011, p. 26)

References

- Adonis, A. (2012) *Education, Education, Education: reforming England's schools*. London: Biteback Publishing.
- Carr, E.H. (1961) *What is History?* Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Hall, S. (2011) The Neoliberal Revolution, *Soundings*, 48, Summer.

