

“ WHO SAYS?”

“My bet is that 20 year olds will be working beyond 60.”

Trade and industry secretary Alan Johnson on the pensions deal agreed with the TUC

“Our research shows that most managers expect everyone to be retiring later within ten years—except themselves.”

Dianah Worman of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reporting on a survey of 2,600 managers

“Less than 26 years of age, more likely to want a job, more likely to have been looking for work in the last four weeks and less likely to have money for basic needs.”

Ministry of Defence survey profiling the average member of the Iraqi resistance

“There will be some level of insurgency, I’m quite sure, for quite some time to come.”

US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice outlining the US’s Iraq strategy

“He didn’t seem too happy. He didn’t know why he was there. He didn’t totally understand why he was over there.”

Dillon Sullivan childhood friend of Lance Corporal Norman W Anderson III, who was killed in Iraq last week

“I would say that we have courted disaster, in Iraq, in North Korea, in Iran, generally with regard to domestic crises... What I saw was a cabal between Cheney and Rumsfeld on critical issues.”

Lawrence Wilkerson former chief of staff to US secretary of state Colin Powell



Bourgeois aspiration: how many parents get the “choice” to go to places like Fettes public school, where Tony Blair studied?

Labour’s education plans are a lesson in division

Tony Blair outlined the government’s education white paper on Monday this week, promising “choice” for all parents. Teacher, parent and union activist Nick Grant looks at the reality of school selection.

SIMON JONES lives in Blackburn. He and his wife have four children currently at infant and junior school. They are more than happy with these schools—but they are not so happy about the future.

The problem is that the secondary school traditionally linked to their junior schools practises gender splitting to compete with a nearby Muslim girls secondary.

“We have absolutely no problem with race or religion,” says Simon. “But my wife and

I object to gender-split classes at the secondary school which most of these kids go on to.”

Blackburn currently has 12 secondary schools. Two are fee charging private schools, two are Christian and two are

Muslim. Two more are some distance away in Darwen, and one of them is about to become a city academy.

Of four remaining choices one school is a de facto boys school, balancing the girls-only

intake at one of the Muslim schools. The other has ongoing problems after a “fresh start” initiative earlier in the year.

“This only leaves two accessible schools that are anything like comprehensive in terms of ability or race,” explains Simon.

“Both are oversubscribed. If you don’t put them down as your first option it’s unlikely they’ll accept your children as a second preference. So you have to gamble and pick one.”

Most parents don’t want a marketplace of competing mini-businesses to choose from. Schools are not chocolate bars or holidays. Parents want good, open access, local schools which respect all races, religions and abilities. But New Labour has no intention of delivering that.



Luxury for a minority—crumbs for the rest of our children

Blair is trying to kill off the comprehensive system

by TERRY WRIGLEY

TONY BLAIR’S revealed his final ambition to make Thatcherism “irreversible” on Monday of this week. That was the key word of his speech announcing the government’s white paper on education.

Margaret Thatcher tried many ways of subverting comprehensive schools, such as setting up special kinds of school and introducing market competition based on league tables.

Blair has continued her policies—and now wants to make absolutely sure that comprehensive schools do not survive.

The real meat of the white paper is the drive to make schools “independent and self-governing”.

This means they will be able to choose their own pupils. The government is even offering to provide free transport to bus “promising” children from poorer neighbourhoods to schools in better off areas.

Superficially this move looks as if it could provide new opportunities for some working class pupils, just as grammar schools did for a lucky few in the past.

But in fact it drives a deeper wedge between high achieving schools in wealthy suburbs and the majority of our schools. It is

no way to provide high quality education for all communities.

Under the present system, some state funded schools can choose some of their pupils. Blair now claims that all state funded schools could choose all their pupils. This means schools in the richest areas will take the pickings, leaving the poorest neighbourhoods with secondary moderns in all but name.

This is an agenda of privatisation and selection. “All schools will be able to take on external partners. No one will be able to veto new providers coming in.” Local council control is a thing of the past, and like NHS trusts,

they are to become “commissioners not providers”.

Schools which don’t survive the dog-eats-dog world of Blair’s reforms will be closed within a year and no doubt privatised.

We urgently need a massive struggle to defend comprehensive education, in parallel to the campaign to defend the NHS.

There are already groans of dismay from within the parliamentary Labour Party from those who can’t stomach this—but the real fight will come from the unions and parents.

Terry Wrigley is author of *Schools of Hope* and a lecturer in education at the University of Edinburgh

IN BRIEF

NHS campaign draws blood

HEALTH secretary Patricia Hewitt has been forced to retreat over one aspect of New Labour’s plans to privatise key aspects of the NHS.

Hewitt had announced plans to transfer some 250,000 staff employed by primary care trusts (PCTs) out of the NHS. But opposition to the plans, including from backbench Labour MPs, means that she looks set to withdraw this measure.

The opposition follows the launch of the Keep Our NHS Public campaign, which has mobilised health workers, local campaigners, GPs, trade unionists and MPs, against the government’s plans.

However, plans to merge many PCTs are still set to go ahead. A meeting in Oxford last Saturday, backed by Keep Our NHS Public, heard about plans to merge all Oxfordshire’s PCTs into a single body.

The health authority plans to put the running of this new body out to tender, leading to the prospect of a private company managing the county’s £600 million health budget.

Another Keep Our NHS Public meeting in Tower Hamlets, east London, on Wednesday of last week attracted 70 people, about two thirds of them health workers.

Former consultant and longstanding health activist Wendy Savage told the meeting, “People need to look at the effects of giving large amounts of NHS money to private contractors.”

The meeting decided to campaign against plans to use private finance to rebuild the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel.

Go to www.keepourNHSpublic.com

‘Whole system failed Kwame’

A CORONER’S court jury at the inquest into the death in police custody of Kwame Wiredu returned a unanimous verdict of death by natural causes last week.

In a statement they said, “We the jury found the whole system failed Mr Wiredu.” Kwame, a 23 year old African Caribbean man from north London, died on 30 August 2002 after collapsing while under arrest.

During the inquest the jury heard how police officers arresting Kwame assumed he was feigning illness when he collapsed. He was dragged to Stoke Newington police station and placed in a cell.

A civilian jail attendant raised the alarm five hours later when she noticed Kwame was breathing heavily. He was taken to hospital but died that evening.

Kwame’s sister Adwoa Wiredu, said, “We have still not got justice. We can’t bring him back, but we want to see this doesn’t happen again.”

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HOUSING CRISIS

A million children are living in squalor

OVER A million children in Britain are living in squalid housing conditions, according to a new report by Shelter, the homeless charity, released on Monday of this week.

The effects of poor quality housing and overcrowding on children include increased educational problems and sickness, the report said.

The lack of housing is a direct result of New Labour’s policies. By selling off council housing

to private landlords and housing associations, the neediest people in society are the ones who go without decent accommodation.

Respect activists in Tower Hamlets, east London, are currently campaigning against proposals to sell off the Ocean estate in Stepney.

“The plans being put forward by the housing association are nothing short of social engineering,” said Glyn Robbins, chair of Tower Hamlets Respect.

“They want to knock down council blocks and community centres to make way for 700 flats for private sale at £250,000 plus. The average household income on the Ocean is £10,000.”

Two of the area’s three local councillors—Respect’s Oliur Rahman and independent Atair Rahman—are backing the campaign against the sell off. Local MP George Galloway was due to meet tenants and campaigners on Wednesday of this week.

