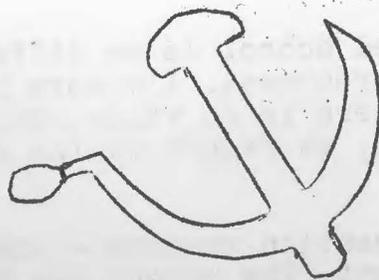


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AN OPEN LETTER TO TONY BLAIR FROM AN ISLINGTON SCHOOL GOVERNOR

Dear Tony

I am a Labour Party representative on the governing body of the Catholic Comprehensive School nearest to your home in Islington, St. Aloysius in Hornsey Lane. I would be very grateful if you would advise me on how I can continue to defend Labour Party policy on grant-maintained schools, when the issue next comes up - as it has to at least once a year - on our agenda. What I have heard you say so far would be dismissed by my colleagues as, at best, a lot of gobbledygook.

You say that you do not want to make a choice for your son on the basis of what is 'politically correct', i.e. crazy. Why do you suddenly stigmatise Labour Party policy as 'politically correct' when it does not suit your personal preferences? Does the fact that it does not suit you personally make it 'politically correct'?

You say that "what is important is that we do not deny other people the choice we made and I haven't done that". But, if you come to power on present policy, you will be denying people this right, or has the policy changed without me noticing? Is it possible that you will allow no more 'opting out', but leave opted-out schools effectively as they are? This would be very convenient for you personally. But surely Labour Party policy is not going to be made according to your personal needs?

Party sources rushed to your defence, claiming that "there were only a limited number of Roman Catholic schools in London which Euan would be eligible to attend".

There is no reason that I know of why he could not attend any RC school in London and there are certainly enough of them for the Catholic population.

If your son had any problem, I'm quite certain that our school, a 10-15 minutes single bus-ride from home, would accommodate him.

Apart from anything else would sending your son to your local Catholic school not be an expression of real commitment to your much vaunted community values? Or, are community values also to be disregarded when they don't suit you personally?

Your colleagues have come up with the argument that choosing a grant-

maintained school is no different from choosing a Trust hospital for medical treatment. I'm sure you recognise that this is a mere debating point. There is no valid comparison between hospital treatment and education, as regard choice of facilities available or in personal needs.

So the question remains - why? You have never mentioned academic achievement. The school you have chosen, the Oratory, is very good for the simple reason that it chooses its students to guarantee good results. That is a fact, despite your claiming that it has no selective policy. A selective policy does not have to be emblazoned on the doorway to exist.

St. Aloysius Comprehensive has all human life represented in its 1000 plus roll. Its results could also be made to look very good if it selected, or chucked out a few hundred kids from each exam year. But it's in the business of giving maximum opportunity to all and not selecting a chosen few. It also achieves very good academic results. This year one of its GCSE students got 9 starred A grades and that boy would have some very worthwhile 'added value' (to use the current jargon) to his educational results from getting them in a comprehensive school. So, I don't think you need fear that your son would in some way be prevented from achieving academic success there.

The only distinctive feature of the Oratory and such schools that I am aware of is the snob value attached to them, which is of course an 'added value' for some people. Could it possibly be that this is the real reason you have made your choice? Until you convince me otherwise, I must assume that it is. As I now get a queasy feeling in my stomach every time I hear you, or see you on TV, I hope you can convince me otherwise.

Yours fraternally, Jack Lane.

(The above open letter appeared in Labour and Trade Union Review Jan/Feb 1995. Copies were given to the Islington Gazette and Morning Star but were not published).

STOP CLASS DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION!

The Tory government wants schools to publish league tables based on exam results. Middle class parents will be able to see which are the good schools and arrange for their little darlings to go to them. Such arrangements can easily be made at informal middle class gatherings such as Labour Party wine and cheese parties.

Teachers don't like league tables. They might give the wrong impression. Sink schools which had pulled themselves up by their own efforts would have lower table ratings than good schools which have simply remained good. Comparison needs to be made with previous years to determine progress.

We agree. Let's be fair to teachers. While we are at it, let's be fair to working class children and parents, too. The Tony Blair affair has uncovered a whole underworld of middle class privilege. The upper class pay to send their offspring to public schools. The middle class get the best of free education, for which we all pay, for themselves.

Let everybody know how many parents at each school are in each social

category A B C D E. If, as seems likely, the A B kids are all going to the good schools and the CDE children are all ending up in average or sink schools, make the good schools open their doors to the CDEs until the balance is about right.

FASCISM COMES TO RUSSIA

Russia is going bankrupt. The Russian ruling class is a gang of crooks. It faces massive popular resentment. All that prevents it from being overthrown is that Russia's communists have not got their act together.

Many Russians regret the passing of the Soviet Russian empire, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In particular, they resent Russians outside Russia being treated as mere Ukrainians, Lithuanians, etc. They resent the fact that Russia no longer has the economic ability to be a superpower. Nowhere is this resentment higher than in Russia's armed forces, an expensive and corrupt body of parasites. The nationalist party of Zhirinovskiy represents these Russians. They, not the communists, control the guns.

Some communists have gone along with the Russian nationalists, demanding the return of the Soviet Union. Other communists behave just like bourgeois politicians, producing newspapers, debating in parliament, etc.

There is one, and only one, source of power for communists. That is the proletariat, the industrial working class. Russian communists are divorced from the industrial working class. They are thereby reduced to mere windbags.

Fascism does not need to get rid of the existing politicians. Political parties, parliament, the prime minister and even the president can say what they like in Russia. If the ruling class and its military representatives disagree, they simply do what they want to do regardless. Nowhere is this clearer than in the war in Chechnya. The Russian prime minister Chernomyrdin appeared particularly impotent.

The war against the Chechens is genocidal. Russia is not worried about winning hearts and minds. It just wants the land.

Ruling classes have often switched over to fascism before, notably in Germany and Italy. They showed their contempt for the democratic politicians. However, in Italy and Germany, etc, the ruling classes had some standing. In Russia, the ruling class is a gang of crooks who have recently stolen the people's property and reduced them to poverty. The ruling class needs outside aid to consolidate itself economically.

The West is in the same fix over Russia that it was over Hitler Germany. If the Russian ruling class is defeated there is the possibility of a proletarian revolution. To avoid defeat Russia's rulers might embark on military adventures. No one wants a war with Russia. There is also the good old crawlers' rule. Back the side which seems likely to win anyway. This used to be known as appeasement. Hence the way diplomats refer to Chechnya as a Russian internal affair.

Chechnya is not a Russian internal affair. Chechens are not Russians. Chechnya has the right to self-determination. Self-determination is impossible while Russian forces are still on its territory.

MOVEMENT NEWS

Open Polemic held a conference on 14th January to discuss the "Definition of the Revolutionary Class under Advanced Capitalism". 15 people attended.

A majority rejected the revolutionary class being defined as the industrial working class. No conclusion was reached as to who the revolutionary class is.

Phil Sharpe, of the Trotskyist Unity Group, maintained that only the class struggle can resolve class relationships. A few years ago, the miners were regarded as very important. Now they no longer exist, he said.

QUOTE OF THE MONTH. "In an absurd and obscene inversion of the reality of British occupation, Cardinal Cathal Daly, head of the Irish catholic church, apologises to the congregation at Canterbury Cathedral and asks 'forgiveness from the people of this land for the wrongs and hurts inflicted by Irish people upon the people of this country on many occasions during that shared history, and particularly in the past 25 years'". (Weekly Worker 26/1/95).

DIMITROV -- A TRUE BILL? "An armed uprising is not inevitably necessary; in certain conditions socialism may be attained without an armed uprising. These conditions now exist: on the one hand, a great socialist country with tremendous political and moral influence - the Soviet Union, and on the other - democratic transformations being put through in a number of countries, which clear the way to socialism". (The Young Workers' League must be a School of Socialism, March 1946 by Georgi Dimitrov). The reference was to countries like Bulgaria which did proceed from People's Republic to socialism without uprisings. The underlined part was reprinted in Communist League Compass for January 1995 with a capital I and the colon replaced by a full stop and produced as evidence that Dimitrov was "one of the pioneers of open revisionism".

FREE while stocks last! QUOTATIONS FROM CHAIRMAN MAO TSE-TUNG" (THE LITTLE RED BOOK). Ordinary SAE straightaway to: Society for Friendship with China, 72 Compton Street, London EC1V 0BN.

WHY INDEED? New Communist Party public meeting. "Why vote Labour?" 7.30pm. Small Conway Hall. February 23rd. Controversy welcome.

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