

BRIEF AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A BOLSHIE DISMISSED

Dave Hill

(This was written in September 1996 following dismissal - through `redundancy'- from Chichester Institute of Higher Education- now, in Dec 2003- called University College Chichester). For a number of years Dave had been the local branch secretary of the NATFHE union- the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education- and was formerly the (Southern) Regional Chair of the higher education section of the Union).

Newly redundant Teacher Educator, former adviser on Teacher Education to the Labour Party, Labour and Trade Union activist.

Sacked, down the road, out on my ear, voluntarily redundant and early retired at 51, pushed out. Call it what you like. The writing was on the wall. Bolshies, and teachers of bolshie subjects such as the sociology and politics of education, are clearly fingered in the restructuring of teacher education.

Following the effective removal of almost anything 'critical' and 'oppositional' from teacher education courses in England and Wales- (in line with the Government's Committee for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Criteria of 1992 and 1993, soon to be ratcheted up by Education Minister Gillian Shepherd) - the sack - kaput - finish by November - out - sorry to see you go - jump through a few hoops please- demean yourself, just a bit, squirm, you powerless employee and then bugger off- you're redundant. An ordure of calumnies, a litany of forgotten and unimagined `offences' and `tensions'. Apparently we aren't allowed to disagree, however pompous and ludicrous and slothful a particular order or its maker might seem. A far cry from collegiality and collaboration. All lightened by kindnesses, a sense of the ludicrous, and by the Union solidarity. But made heavier by the eviction of yet more critical thought and people.

Bolshieness I have always admired - its potential as a purposeful kickback by the powerless against the powerful, in society and in education. My mum and dad, in their different ways, were bolshie. Mum, determined

.exuberant and Cockney, at 83, still wilful and obstreperous - full of fierce love and determination and a sense of justice- and of fickle hates too- marching up the school to help her boys. That was purpose.

Dad, a hard bastard from Hoxton, the toughest part of the East End. Fought all his life to get work. As a cabinet maker in the twenties and thirties, came home during his working life, (or so Mum says), with black eyes, split lips 'after walking into a door' on the buildings, or 'after a wardrobe fell on me'. Fighting to get work, to keep work, to keep proud. He strapped my brothers- but never me - I began to read early. Overt brains begat overt wariness. He taught us to take care of ourselves - taught us judo and boxing while in our junior years, and to stand our ground, to talk back.

He loved words, revelled in them, wanting to know how to pronounce them properly, rolling them round his mouth, savouring them - One of his proudest possessions a huge battered etymological dictionary he would consult. He knew he was placed and situated by his language, his accent, and by his Lawrentian physicality.

As a boy I fought against bullies, did it for myself, or for justice, occasionally noting the applause as more villains bit the dust. Despite being the shortest and youngest of the three, I fought for my brothers, bopping a nose here and there if anyone threatened them. The repertoire extended to jumping in to defend the bullied - getting a black eye on my first day at Secondary School, returning the compliment on the first day of my second term. Great was my surprise when one of the oppressed, on whose behalf I thought I was fighting, rejected my protection and turned on me, flailing in ..., what, - anger, humiliation, pride?

Nobody pushed us about - at least, not that we noticed in the micro-societies of our youth. Not until we were segregated into first and second class schooling, me to Grammar and University, my brothers to Secondary and the manual labour market..

Then I stopped growing bigger- and learned to fight with words, the working class grammar school sixth form debates, in the Trade Union, in the Council chamber, on the rallies and picket lines over 30 years, in the Anti-Nazi street demos and on the Parliamentary hustings a craft was learned. And the craft served, sometimes badly, sometimes well - to elucidate and extemporise and inflame bolshieness. Not any old curmudgeonliness, slothful,

unwillingness to acquiesce, indiscriminate indignation or vandalism, but a bolshieness focused against the ultimate bully, the ruling class, and their complaisant lackeys, 'running dogs of untrammelled capitalism', those who silently and unprotestingly make the trains run on time. Focused against various managements, some brutish, some soft and clever, some even knowingly subversive and ironic of their own role. The irony of the powerful.

We all did well, me, John and Rog, well as London overspill boys (where to, had we been the sons of solicitors and 'society'? - not a path we would have chosen). From mixing cement at 15, via the Merchant Navy, Rog a postman painter of the year, exhibiting in Paris and the Royal Academy; John into factory work- making false teeth- and nine other jobs in his first year at work, then a successful builder; me into education, politics, and the Union.

All of us became shop stewards. John, the Building Workers Confederation steward at the Royal Sussex County Hospital site; Rog, a steward in the Post Office; and me in teaching and lecturing. Great stuff - winning concessions, taking on the local management, surging with anger, outrage and, with what, I guess we assumed, was cleverness. From their high chairs they may well have thought we were dumb schmucks. Probably still do, their ironic smiles well cushioned.

But victories were sweet - and the blood burned as twenty, or two hundred, or five thousand, or a hundred thousand marched - and marvelled - in solidarity - learning through action, the body reinforcing the learning of the intellect. Adrenalin and reason, desire and understanding, theory and practice, a pleasure and an understanding, as five hundred Kent Miners boldly, determinedly, step by step in serried, disciplined ranks, marched towards us twenty thousand demonstrators. Over the Hendon hilltop they came, with the sun behind them, big lads, the shock troops of the working class, out there, in solidarity with the Grunwick strikers, Asian women, pittance pay, compulsory overtime, putting their hands up to ask to go to the toilet.

Later, in the nineties and in charge of a teacher education course, similar victories, of Crawley B.Ed mature and non- standard entry students, in various sorties. In their results (with higher pass rates, academic results,

teaching practice performance and job acquisition, than for equivalent courses), in exam board meetings, in individual and collaborative intellectual leaps and acquisitions, and in co- using individual and group life experiences- and launching the first exam boycott in the history of the college (the 60s bypassed Bognor). Such victories were as sweet as the campaign and comradeship.

And so to teach, to lecture, was a gift, a love, a scintillation in the doing, a labour of love, a love of labour and of Old Labour. It got me denounced of course, as it does any activist. Denounced for being a flying picket while in the Inner London Teachers Association unofficial strikes of the late 1960s. Denounced for presenting a Marxist analysis of history in A level history at Forest Girls School in Horsham. Interviewed by the Director of Education after three years at Bognor College for organising a lecturer/ admin. staff/ manual workers' joint union petition against the cuts. Then, in the seventies, for lecturing on workers' control, on Marx and Benn (instead of Aristotle and Plato) in a session on 'Democracy', and for getting elected as a Councillor, ('You have to choose David, between College and Council'. 'Oh no I don't. I have a legal right to do both'), into exile. Into a fortuitous peripatetic teaching. Teaching prisoners, adult educators, youth workers, and, incongruously and co-terminously, Vietnamese refugees and American politics students. And briefly into election photo journalism and the Left press. Mitterand's France, temporarily socialist in the early 80s, Felipe Gonzales' first election victory in Spain, and post- revolutionary Portugal- where staff still elected headteachers until recently. And into two Labour General Election campaigns as Parliamentary candidate. Bolshiness sanctified, then if not, in Blair's smooth New Labour, now.

So, down the road and signing on, for being bolshie and for teaching bolshie 'critical' subjects such as the sociology and the politics of education and of policy. Student teachers don't need them any more. Will New Labour bring back thinking and critique and social justice into the teacher education curriculum, into the minds and spirits of new teachers? Will it allow disagreement and democracy at work? Big questions, no final answers yet. No hostages to fortune. Only to misfortune, to accepting what is a conservative nationalisation and policing of a national curriculum for schools and for new teachers. A Curriculum for Conformity, bashing the bolshies. Precious little space for anti-racism or anti-sexism, let alone criticism of social class inequalities or homophobia.

Now, following the welcome solidarity of many colleagues, comes a new freedom, to write, to search for a convenient employing organisation to feed, stimulate, challenge, and fund the organisation, development, proselytisation of a particular bolshieness. That in pursuit of a better, egalitarian, solidaristic society. Where accent, language, body language, relationship to the means of production - class- as well as 'race' and gender -are not mocked by the meritocratic facade of a 'free and liberal' school, academy and society. Where critical, focused, constructive and mass bolshieness can rock the foundations of inequality.

Dave Hill was dismissed in November 1996. He is currently (November 1996) looking for work. (Note: Dave worked with his family as a building worker following his dismissal, then worked at University College Northampton, UK, where he is now Professor of Education Policy and Editor of the Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies, www.jceps.com.)

UPDATE: December 2003 biography

Dave Hill is Professor of Education Policy at University College Northampton, UK. Previously, he taught in schools and colleges in inner city London and Sussex. For twenty years he was a political and labor union leader. He stood for Parliament for the Labour Party in 1979 and 1987, led the group of Labour councilors on East Sussex County Council, was Regional Higher Education Chair of NATFHE (the lecturers' labor union), and led and organized many local and regional political campaigns and mobilizations. He advised the Parliamentary Labour Party on teacher education from a radical Left perspective. From a democratic Marxist perspective, he writes on issues of radical Right policy and ideology; New Labour/ Third Way ideology and policy; radical Left ideology and policy; social class, state theory and critiques of postmodernism. His doctorate, at the London University Institute of Education, was a Marxist analysis of schooling and teacher education policy.

Dave is Founder Director of the Institute for Education Policy Studies (<<http://www.ieps.org.uk>>), the independent radical Left policy research unit founded in 1989. (Contact: dave.hill@northampton.ac.uk or dave.hill@ieps.org.uk.) He is also the Founder Editor and Chief Editor of the *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* (www.jceps.com) an international refereed academic online journal.

He co-founded the Hillcole Group of Radical Left Educators with Mike Cole, in 1989 and co-wrote the two Hillcole Group books on education: *Changing the Future: Redprint for Education* (Tufnell Press, 1991), and *Rethinking Education and Democracy: A Socialist Perspective* (Tufnell Press, 1997).

With Mike Cole, Dave co-edited *Promoting Equality in Primary Schools* (Cassell, 1997), *Promoting Equality in Secondary Schools* (Cassell, 1999) and *Schooling and Equality: Fact, Concept and Policy* (Kogan Page, 2001). His most recent co-written book (co-written with Peter McLaren, Mike Cole and Glenn Rikowski) is *Red Chalk: On Schooling, Capitalism and Politics* (Institute for Education Policy Studies, 2001). His two most recent edited collections (with the same co-writers) are *Postmodernism in Educational Theory: Education and the Politics of Human Resistance* (Tufnell Press) and *Marxism Against Postmodernism in Educational Theory* (Lexington Books). His next books are *Schooling and Equality: Contemporary Issues and Developments*, to be published by RoutledgeFalmer in 2004 and *New Labour and Education: Policy, (In)Equality, and Education for Capital* (Tufnell Press, 2004).