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Education, Education, Education . . .

One of the performances offered at the Millennium Dome was to be found in the 'Learning zone'; an audience was ushered into a simulacrum of a down-at-heel state school, and lectured at by a fearsome schoolmaster in mortar board and academic gown who was brandishing a cane. This was an image of state school education based on the school teachers of *Beano* cartoons; the Learning zone promised a new vision of British education, in which the 'bad old days' of the welfare state were to be rapidly replaced by the shiny new possibilities of new technologies. The audience were led from the classroom to a magical space where they were surrounded by a bank of computers – in which every screen declared the name of the sponsor of both the Learning zone and the computers, Tesco supermarkets. This spectacle was a clear statement from New Labour (under whose auspices the contents and sponsors of the Dome were organized) – that commercial sponsorship was more than welcome to become involved in national educational provision, indeed, that new school buildings, new equipment and new technology in schools were dependent on the generosity of sponsors.

New Labour policy for education consisted of a dizzying array of initiatives and new names for the consequences of those policy initiatives. The CTCs (Community Technology Colleges) that Kenneth Baker had initiated under Thatcher were turned into Beacon Schools under New Labour, then EAZS (Education Action Zones), then City Academies, then Academy Schools. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in 2010 is no less fervent for reform, as Melissa Benn expressed it in 2011, 'With manic zeal, the new Coalition Government is advancing the 'choice and diversity' revolution begun in the Thatcherite years' (Benn 2011, p. xix). The coalition's flagship project, under Conservative Education Minister Michael Gove, is free schools. What all these appellations for educational establishments share is that they can bypass Local Education Authorities (whose control over schools was a principle

established in the 1944 Education Act), are sponsored and can be led by private companies and individuals.

What made this intervention of private capital into a state-funded education system possible was legislation introduced under the Thatcher government which had removed the provision of some schools services from local authority control – and forced the hand of schools to offer contracts to private providers. This was a stealthy introduction of the free market into schools (in a way that was then and continues to be mirrored in the Health Service). The British education system had the potential to award huge contracts which were worth a great deal of money (the education market is worth over £100 billion, according to the Association for Teachers and Lecturers (Benn 2011, p. 118); these contracts, from financial services to catering, allowed for-profit companies to enter into education provision (companies which, in many cases, had no previous knowledge of schools). Over successive administrations, private providers have taken over more and more aspects of education, and, increasingly, in the case of Academies and free schools, entire schools, while governments maintain that education remains in the public domain; an example of the process of the hollowing out of the state. In his study of the incursion of private finance into British public services, George Monbiot pointed particularly to ‘... the corporate takeover of schools’ (Monbiot 2000, p. 331).

In 1979, the Labour Party Research department had produced an information paper, ‘The Tories’ Education Policy’, in which it pointed to the ‘Threat to Statutory Services’, the threat to education of both Conservative cuts and the removal of local authority responsibility in some aspects of education provision. The paper argued that:

... cuts of this magnitude would require legislation to relieve local authorities of some statutory duties, including almost certainly provision of school transport, meals and milk. ... Michael Heseltine has announced that legislation will be introduced to take away the statutory duties of local authorities to provide school milk and meals, and to remove the restrictions on charging for school transport ... The effects of such measures will be extremely harmful to the organisation of pupils’ school life and home life which in turn will have a deleterious effect on educational standards. (Labour Research Department 1979, p. 35)

Blair’s electoral promise as he took power in 1997 was famously: ‘Education, Education Education’, an indication of the centrality of education policy to

his administration. Nevertheless, he did not take account of the warnings of the Labour Party Research department, and educational policy for secondary schools under New Labour was not markedly different from that of the previous Conservative government under John Major. As Toynbee and Walker put it: 'On the shape of the secondary schools there was not, in truth, a great difference between Major's and Blair's policies' (Toynbee and Walker 2001, p. 46).

Chris Woodhead, who had been head of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted, the schools inspection service since 1994) under the Major government, was reappointed by Labour's Education Minister David Blunkett in 1998. Woodhead was dismissive of teachers, the teaching unions and local education authorities and has been a key figure in urging successive governments to allow for-profit groups into education. It was Woodhead who ran the HMI inspections of school performance, and so had the power to claim a school as 'failing' – a key element in allowing schools to be taken over by private contractors. Woodhead is now the Chair of Cognita, founded with Englefield Capital LLP, the largest private school provider in the United Kingdom, and with schools in Singapore, Spain and Thailand.¹ Cognita now offers its services to groups interested in setting up a free school, and Woodhead has been vocal in urging education ministers to allow for-profit companies to run state schools.²

New Labour was locked into a paradox of making expensive manifesto promises without raising tax revenues to fund them. The Labour manifesto of 1997 had promised to reduce class sizes and to provide nursery places for all four-year olds, computers in schools and more spending on school buildings. However, under Labour in 1998, expenditure on education was 4.9 per cent of GDP, compared to an average of 5.3 per cent across the OECD. As Toynbee and Walker explain: 'the Blair Government tried to effect an educational revolution on the cheap' (2001, p. 60). As with other policies on health and welfare reform, the private finance initiative (PFI, a policy initiated under the Conservatives in 1992, but substantially developed under New Labour³), seemed to be a means of squaring this circle and a way of securing funding for new school buildings and essential equipment. The first PFI school had opened in 1999, in Hull, where the school building was maintained and managed by private contractors; 4 years later, there were 39 such arrangements.

The question of 'parental choice' was something that had bedevilled education policy since the Education Act of 1944, and a diversification of school provision

was central to New Labour's 'reforms' of education policy. Beck explains the strategy:

...the expansion of specialist schools and the creation of faith schools, academies and...trust schools. This policy of diversification in secondary education has been further legitimized as reinvigorating 'civil society' - by promoting greater parental and also community involvement in schooling, and by increasing participation in the provision of schooling by a range of non-state providers: notably religious groups, business organizations and wealthy individuals. (Beck 2008, p. 15)

It is notable how close the language of 'parental and community involvement' is here to current coalition policy under David Cameron. The 'civil society' agenda here is not far removed from David Cameron's election rhetoric of the Big Society, while the opening up of public welfare, health and education services to 'any willing provider' is a central feature of the coalition government's economic policy.

PFI was one means by which private capital made its way into schools, lured by lucrative contracts for services and technologies, but as Monbiot points out, this was not the only way of capitalizing on the commercial potential of schools: 'There are many ways of making money from education, but the most widespread is the use of school as an advertising medium. It is a lucrative business' (Monbiot 2002, p. 331).

The lucrative business of sponsorship in schools

In 1996, the year before Blair came into office, the managing director of the self-proclaimed 'United Kingdom's largest publisher of books on disk and electronic books for schools' (Attwood 1996, p. 1) wrote a guide to the *Business Sponsorship of Primary and Middle Schools* in which he advised schools on how to pitch for and to attract commercial sponsors. Attwood's company, in dealing with text books and software for schools, was exactly the kind of business that large corporations would later buy up as private providers entered further into the business of education; a small educational company that would give them some credibility in offering services to schools.

Attwood unwittingly provides some insights into the motivations for companies to sponsor schools – which are not at all about community engagement, but rather commercial interest. Schools offer an immediate connection with

students and parents, and these groups are – as Tesco knew well – consumers. As Attwood puts it:

The firms who you should be approaching, the people who you hope will become your sponsors, are businesses who want to reach the parents and give a good impression to everyone who values education . . . they are businesses that sell to families, or use family as the image they wish to promote. (Attwood 1996, p. 12)

He is very clear in his introduction that schools should make the benefits of sponsorship clear to potential sponsors – there is no suggestion that local ties or charitable impulse could be sufficient motivation. Attwood has no compunctions that the school, teachers or students might be compromised by the effects of sponsorship. One of his suggestions is that the sponsor should feature in ‘The head teachers’ speech . . . every sponsor should get a positive mention in every speech the head teacher gives. Meetings of the PTA, meetings for prospective parents, meetings of parents and governors – every meeting should be an opportunity . . . (Attwood 1996, p. 35). Speech Day represents another opportunity for sponsorship: ‘By sponsoring the whole day the sponsor may . . . be doing nothing more than putting up the money to buy the prizes, but it gives you a chance to offer the sponsor more. This is the sponsor’s day. In the advance notices for the day you can tell the parents all about this sponsor’ (Attwood 1996, p. 33). Other ideas include the use of groups of school children for market research, and the sponsoring of particular teachers or library books.

Attwood cheerfully acknowledges that there has been a substantial change in attitudes towards the sponsorship of education under Conservative governments – and that the potential for business sponsorship in schools is there to be embraced by teachers:

It has become clear that government regulations relating to business sponsorship has been much relaxed in recent years and it is now possible for schools to gain business sponsorship over a wide range of areas.

Indeed the government’s own involvement in this field has shown that the government is keen to see the sponsorship of schools by commercial operations in return for recognition for the money that is put into the school.

Perhaps the most valuable ‘property’ that the school has to offer is its name, and it is possible that either a local or a national business may be interested in paying substantial money to our school year by year in return for sign which would reflect the role of the sponsoring company. (Attwood 1996, p. 23)

Attwood outlines 21 further 'Sponsorship Plans' which include: the sponsorship of rooms and buildings, sports, the school uniform, the minibus, the car park, an entrance plaque, computer systems, headed paper, mugs, cups, placemats and lunch boxes (which would carry both the school's name and the sponsor's logo), while exercise books offer 'an opportunity for a sponsor's advertisement to be placed on the front of each and every one of these books' (Attwood 1996, p. 28). In 2001, 'Jazzy Books' were exercise books offered to British schools by sponsors with covers advertising soft drinks and sportswear.

Monbiot's assessment in 2000 demonstrates the extent to which many of these ideas had already been taken up in America – and were increasingly coming to Britain. Cheeringly, *Media Week* reported in 1997 that 'schools seeking to raise up to £5000 from billboards on their premises could be disappointed as no advertisers have signed up to use the controversial medium, due to launch in January. . . . Imagination for Schools Media Marketing, the company running the scheme, confirmed that only 11 advertisers had shown interest and no orders had been placed' (27.11.97). According to Monbiot, however, billboards did appear in British schools for the first time in 1998 (2000, p. 334). Initiatives such as these seemed to many schools a logical response to successive education cuts, and, 15 years later, they no longer seem quite as outrageous as they once did.

School teacher Frank Melling also published a guide advising teachers on how to attract sponsorship in 1996. His own account of his need to attract sponsorship to support a small magazine project is a clear indication of the pressure on professional teachers to find commercial partners to support work that the education system itself would no longer fund:

That State education is under-funded is self-evident. It is not for me to decide whether this is effective government or not. I am rigidly apolitical in my professional life and have no comment to make. However, an inevitable consequence of this lack of resources is that many teachers are unable to carry out work which they feel is important to them. I was one of them.

I reached the point where I felt that the project I wanted to undertake was more important than my reservations about seeking sponsorship. . . . I am inclined to the belief that good education should be supported by central government . . . not even a second-hand paper clip was coming direct from central government. I accepted that this was the situation and buckled down to finding the funding myself. (Melling 1996, p. 4)

Having overcome his reservations, Melling is able to embrace the benefits of sponsorship and to understand its workings. In an interesting phrase, Melling refers to a school's 'brand properties'; this was 4 years before the advent of 'academy schools', which depended on their 'branding', ushered in under Blair's government. The need to attract sponsorship was clearly a lever in making individual schools within the state system develop a sense of 'branding', as Melling puts it: ' . . . the brand, and its associated properties, are the most valuable assets a company has and the same is true for a school' (Melling 1996, p. 18). He is clearly aware that sponsorship for educational projects does not derive from philanthropic motives and that 'sponsorship must provide some tangible benefit for the sponsor. . . ' (Melling 1996, p. 4).

A great many major corporations found that sponsoring schools, activities did represent 'tangible benefits' for their products. McDonalds had for many years produced pens and pencil cases as small gifts given away with children's meals, and so ensured that their logo is present in classrooms across the country. It is no accident that the children in Morton Spurlock's 2004 documentary *Super Size Me* recognized the MacDonald's logo and clown character over any other cultural symbol. Commercial sponsorship in schools has since gathered pace and moved beyond product placement in the classroom, to the point where it has come to shape teaching materials and to inform the school syllabus. By 1996, the Tesco School Vouchers scheme, launched in 1992, had been joined by Sainsbury's Schoolbags⁴, Asda's 'Best for Kids' and school equipment offers from W. H. Smith's, Boots and Dixons (*The Guardian*, 04.03.96). Nike established a football coaching scheme, promoting their footwear and logo. Nestlé supported a range of schemes in schools – Young Enterprise, Food Fitness, tennis promotion and the Kids Club Network, which sponsored art and music activities. The sun cream manufacturer Ambre Solaire sponsored a teaching pack for the National Science Curriculum which presented the properties of sun and light while promoting the necessity of protection with their products (*The Guardian*, 22.05.96). The sponsors for the Regional teaching awards of 2001 included British Telecom and Lloyds TSB (*The Guardian*, 26.06.01). A journalist reported in 2002 that in 1 week, her children came home from primary school with marketing material from three different companies: 'The Ariel Stains and Science Project', another Persil promotion which provided art materials in return for tokens from the product, and a school trip to a chain of gyms – all sanctioned with notes addressed to the parents from the Parent and Teachers Association. The Ariel project was defended by the manufacturer

Procter and Gamble on the grounds that 'it met a genuine need for educational material on data collection and analysis. The project has been used in thousands of schools' (Hockton 2002).

Between 2001 and 2004, the New Labour government invested more than £1 billion in information and communications technology in partnership with software developers. The distinction between the sponsorship of particular projects and equipment and the actual stuff of the teaching curriculum, however, became increasingly blurred. As Monbiot pointed out:

While playgrounds, gyms, corridors and even exercise book covers are used as billboards, the principal means by which most advertisers reach children in American schools is through sponsoring teaching packs and television programmes. Schools, especially the poorer ones, take them, as they are often desperately short of resources. (Monbiot 2000, p. 332)

The use of sponsored teaching materials was now firmly the case in Britain. First Impressions Marketing is a company which has been making inroads into British schools since 1992 – in sending marketing materials to schools that have registered with them. Teaching materials sponsored by corporations to promote their own particular agendas increasingly appeared in the classroom, often in contravention of any academic consensus or benefit to children. Walkers Crisps offered free books to schools, provided in exchange for tokens collected from their crisp packets. This was a scheme endorsed by David Blunkett (then Minister for Education) – despite the fact that Consumers' Association guidelines, drawn up in association with the Department of Education, had explicitly stated that materials distributed in schools should not encourage unhealthy activities.

Colgate continues to operate a 'Bright Smiles Bright Futures' campaign which provides free multi-media classroom products for teachers. Their website cheerfully explains that: 'Classrooms and dental offices are additional settings where children can easily learn about healthy brushing habits. These downloadable materials and activities are specially designed for teachers and dental professionals to help educate kids about keeping their smiles bright' (www.colgate.com/BrightSmilesBrightFutures). Colgate advertising thus came to appear in classrooms and is endorsed as teaching material. High street banks send schools CD ROMS and games machines which promote the banks while purporting to teach schoolchildren personal finance (*The Observer*, 11.02.01). The Royal Bank of Scotland has an education department which supports training days for schools and teachers. It currently runs

a scheme called 'Moneysense' which endorses the bank in an interactive computer game:

Our relationship with money begins before we've left school. By working in partnership with teachers, we've created an interactive programme for schools, which shows how good money management skills help in everyday life. (www.rbs.co.uk accessed March 2011)

One teacher described in 2002 the creeping process by which sponsorship had infiltrated and become naturalized in the classroom:

It does worry me slightly. For us, the Tesco campaign meant we got five or six new computers. But it gets a bit out of hand - soon after that you had W. H. Smith and Walkers crisps operating similar schemes. . . (Quoted in Barton, 30.07.02)

The NUT was so concerned that it produced a leaflet for the DfES with guidelines for teachers, in which it clearly stated its concerns:

The NUT . . . is deeply alarmed at the targeting of schools by businesses seeking simply to market their products and exploit schools, pupils and parents. In recent years there has been an unprecedented increase in the use of commercial materials in schools, with UK brands spending an estimated £300m a year on targeting the classroom to increase sales. (www.teachers.org.uk, accessed March 2011)

The NUT produced a paper, 'Education not Exploitation', in which they reported the degree of sophistication in First Impression's marketing to school children through the distribution of 'goody bags' which:

. . . were aimed at different age groups and contained sample products by companies such as McVities, Tomy Toys, The Popcorn Institute and Disney. These bags now reach one in four school children. The benefits to First Impression's clients are listed on the agency's website; bags are handed out by teachers "giving your product added credibility", "double exposure" for primary school bags that are taken home and seen by "parents/decision-makers". The agency's website goes on to state that children can be accurately targeted by age, sex and TV region. (www.teachers.org.uk, accessed March 2011)

Nonetheless, commercial sponsorship continued to expand in the education service, although the beneficence of sponsors was not equally spread in all regions or city areas.

Bennett and Gabriel pertinently asked the question: 'Schools sponsorship: Corporate philanthropy or integrated marketing?' and concluded that schools in affluent areas were 'far more proactive in their approaches to sponsorship and employed head teachers with more positive attitudes towards marketing and sponsorship than schools in poorer neighbourhoods' (Bennett and Gabriel 1999, p. 142). In a 2001 article, 'The ethical climate of public schooling under new public management', academics Dempster, Freakley and Parry also drew attention to the many ways in which the competitive climate in education was putting ethical standards under stress. The then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, was sufficiently concerned at the incursion of commercialism into schools that he spoke out against the marketing strategies directed at children and, in 2005, supported the Compass think-tank report 'Commercialisation of Childhood' (www.compassonline.org.uk).

A number of sponsored schemes entering into schools disguised the origins of their support, and in some cases were supported by organizations that teachers and parents might well feel uncomfortable about. In 2001, Scottish Enterprise distributed teaching materials 'Biotechnology and You' which was published by a lobby group funded by, among other companies, Monsanto and Pfizer; the classroom exercises attacked organic farming and promoted the use of GM crops. A charitable scheme addressed to schools, Operation Christmas Child, operated in Britain from 1995. It was organized by an American evangelical group, 'Samaritan's Purse International (SPI)', led by the son of Evangelist Billy Graham. Half a million Christmas boxes were collected from British schools, churches and businesses, with schools involving their pupils as part of the citizenship curriculum. Apart from the value of the contents of the boxes, SPI also asked for a £2 donation for each box to cover costs. The charity's accounts for 2001 showed an annual income of £96 million. The scheme was supported in Britain by the morning programme GMTV and was sponsored by the car fitting company Kwik-Fit. The instructions contained no indication of the charity's missionary role, nor that the boxes were sent out with evangelical literature.

The market in education

Whatever the ethical problems of this kind of sponsorship, what was even less visible than direct and indirect marketing to school children (and their parents) was the steady development of corporate presence in the management, building

and provision of school services. What had begun with outsourcing increasingly extended to the running of entire schools. Outsourcing in the education sector had initially been in back room activities, such as payroll, personnel and property management, but now moved into direct control over schools.

Under the Conservative government, capital investment in school buildings had fallen dramatically, and New Labour deemed that the necessary rebuilding and repairs of schools could only be achieved under PFI. According to Nick Mathiason of *The Observer*:

Nearly 20 per cent of the more than £9billion committed by the Government since 1997 to rebuild schools is earmarked for schemes under the private finance initiative. Under this, private consortiums build schools and then receive rent from the local education authority for up to 50 years. These index-linked contracts eventually cost much more than direct state investment. (Mathiason 11.02.01)

In 1999, Dave Hill wrote a pamphlet in which he argued that New Labour education policy was closer to the agenda of what he terms the 'Radical Right' than to any Social Democratic model. He suggested: 'New Labour is actually spreading the frontiers of neo-liberalism in education, in its promotion of the business ethic and privatised control over schooling and education. . . .' (Hill 1999, p. 26).

This 'privatised control' was evident when Islington became the first local authority to have the actual teaching in schools wrested from its control in 2005⁵. Cambridge Education Associates were awarded an £1.5 million contract for 7 years to run Islington's schools. Islington Green School had failed its Ofsted report in 1997; in a controversial decision, it was categorized as a 'failing school', in which Chris Woodhead overruled his HMI Inspectors who had unanimously agreed that it was not 'failing' (*The Guardian*, 04.02.05).⁶ Cambridge Education Associates (CEA) continue to 'work in partnership' with the council, but are still in place in Islington. In 2003, CEA merged with Cambridge Education Consultants to form Cambridge Education, which runs schools in America, China, Australia, Thailand and Islington. Cambridge Education is now part of Mott Macdonald, a management and development consultancy, whose business is founded on engineering and is now a global corporation: 'At Mott MacDonald our business spans the globe, with around 150 company, site and associate offices in over 120 countries' (www.mottmac.com). The website for Cambridge Education now offers support to schools applying for academy status and free schools under the new initiatives of the coalition government.

The pattern in which a state school was declared to be 'failing' to then be taken over by a small company that ostensibly has some connection with education, which itself is then taken over by a much larger corporation (often with no background in education at all), was a model that would be repeated across schools and local authorities over the next decade. This process, whereby a major corporation would acquire a company or charity related to education and use it as a fig leaf to claim specialist expertise, would become known as finding 'bid candy' and would be replicated across public services, in education, health and welfare.

The handing over of a whole school authority to a for-profit company was a step beyond CTCs, even the Thatcher government had not handed schooling over to the private sector on such a scale as did New Labour, as Toynbee and Walker explain: 'Thatcher had blustered; the Tories had dreamt of but could never quite steel themselves to take this step' (Toynbee and Walker 2001, p. 46). In 2000, Monbiot announced:

Education management in Britain looks as if it is about to become big business. In February 1999, King's Manor School in Guildford, Surrey, became the first state school in Britain whose administration was handed over to a private company. One month later, the government announced that it would contract out educational services to private companies in Hackney, east London. In November, 1999, the Department for Education and Employment named a consultancy company as its 'preferred bidder' to run the schools in the London Borough of Islington. (Monbiot 2000, p. 337)

In fact, by 2000, 'education management' was already big business, and 'private companies' were being invited to involve themselves in schools as partners, in ways that went well beyond management. The first 25 Education Action Zones (EAZs) had been announced and were expected to begin in January 1999. A requirement of the designation 'Education Action Zone' was that education areas were required to find private sponsorship and were to be run by 'action forums', which would include commercial interests. As Ofsted explained EAZs:

EAZs are partnerships of schools and other local interests, including business, which have the autonomy and flexibility to harness partners' expertise and develop innovative educational strategies for the benefit of schools and local communities. (www.ofsted.gov.uk, 2001)

In practice, the business partners were to include Shell (in Lambeth), Manchester Airport (in Wythenshawe, Manchester), Cadbury Schweppes (in Birmingham), British Aerospace, Tesco, Kelloggs and McDonald's (Monbiot 2000, pp. 335–6). These were not 'local' companies, nor did their expertise have anything much to do with education.

The benefits to corporations for their involvement with EAZs were close to those derived from the sponsorship of projects and equipment, goodwill from consumers and an apparent beneficence, which actually had little to do with philanthropy. As Monbiot explains:

In return for their financial contributions, the munificent companies can reap both public relations benefits - as their good works become known to parents and teachers - and potential recruits, as they can guide educational policies better to meet their employment needs. (Monbiot 2000, p. 336)

Whatever the benefits to corporations, the EAZs were not a success for teachers or for students. They came under sustained criticism from teaching unions, Ofsted, school inspectors and the Institute of Public Policy Research. And the results were not good, the Schools Minister Stephen Timms admitted that 'there were very significant achievement gaps' in secondary schools in EAZs, and that they were improving at a slower rate than the national average (*The Guardian*, 15.11.01). The scheme was condemned (ironically, given their later support for 'free' schools) in an investigation launched by the Liberal Democrats as 'an embarrassing flop'.

A National Audit Office report showed that the zones attracted barely half the target for private sponsorship. According to *The Guardian*: '... the accounts show some zones received substantial investment from central government but failed to deliver private sector money' (*The Guardian*, 27.11.01). The schemes were quietly withdrawn. The EAZs were a clear demonstration that government faith in sponsorship picking up the short-fall in state expenditure was not only misplaced, but also that such schemes required a considerable government outlay which was often not recuperated. Whatever the failings of EAZs, they were an exemplar of New Labour thinking, and the shape of things to come. As Ball explained from the hindsight of 2007, EAZs:

... brought together a number of the new forms of funding and of local social relations which typify the Third Way aspects of the competition state ... the EAZs provided a test-bed for strategies and ideas which would be developed

further in later policies . . . Again key boundaries between the public sector and between the public and private sectors were breached and reworked. (Ball 2007, p. 23)

The Labour Party manifesto for the 2001 election promised further investment in education – investment that would come from private sponsorship rather than taxation. Despite the fact that the Social Market Foundation was critical of the practice by which ‘private companies were brought in to turn round “failing authorities”’ (*The Guardian*, 04.11.01), in 2001, Estelle Morris, then education and skills secretary, announced a new raft of ‘specialist schools’ – bringing the total to 684. These ‘Beacon’ schools were required to raise £50,000 in sponsorship in order to qualify for extra capital and grants from government (*The Guardian* 22.06.01).

Academy schools

Academies were the next strategy; set to take over from the EAZs, they too ran into the same problem of attracting private sponsorship. One of Blair’s advisors at the time, Peter Hyman,⁷ described the mission of Academy Schools as ‘one of Tony Blair’s pet projects. They symbolize many of his aims for public services. . . .’ (Hyman 2006, p. 306). The ‘academy’ schools, initially known as ‘city academies’, drew on the City Technology Colleges model first proposed by Conservative Education Minister Kenneth Baker and extended it across the education system. Academy schools were independent of local authorities, able to withdraw from national agreements on teachers’ pay and conditions and from the national curriculum and able to appoint, rather than elect, their school governors; as Melissa Benn expressed it: ‘The academy model . . . enabled a complete break with local democracy’ (Benn 2011, p. 4). The coalition government of 2010 would take the model even further with the development of ‘free schools’. Academy schools were, under New Labour, an attempt to inject private capital into deprived areas, and schools were identified for academy status because they were underperforming.

David Miliband, Schools Standards Minister under Blair, promoted city academies as a pioneering new initiative, but they were no such thing – they had been tried, tested and failed as CTCs and EAZs. City Academy Schools began with three schools, later to be named Academies. These replaced existing schools that had been designated as ‘under-performing’. The Academy scheme was

announced in the Education Bill of 2000; in order to style itself as an academy, a school was required to attract private sponsorship and also to develop a clear and distinct 'brand'. Peter Hyman describes the head of the Academies division and gives his account of who these sponsors might be:

Sir Bruce Liddington,⁸ a successful ex-head teacher who was now heading up the Academies division in the Department of Education . . . said that sponsors usually fell into three categories: rich men who had made their money and now wanted to put something back and wrote out a cheque; grant-giving bodies like the Mercer Foundation . . . and corporate sponsors, who wanted to set up schools because it was good for them and their employees. (Hyman 2006, p. 313)

Academies were thus technically independent schools – funded by both the government and the private sector – but the state's contribution was considerably greater, generally in the region of 80 per cent. In Melissa Benn's assessment:

Perhaps the ultimate irony of the academies was the small amount of money that private sponsors brought to the table. The academy programme was, in fact, a highly managed and supported kind of privatisation, in which central government handed over control of schools to enthusiastic industrialists or church bodies in exchange for relatively small amounts of capital, and in some cases – when the sponsorship money was not forthcoming – none at all. (Benn 2011, p. 109)

In 2008, Beck estimated that the sponsor's contribution was 'normally of the order of £2 million', and assessed that '... most of the sponsors have been individual entrepreneurs, companies or local consortia of business interests, and (less commonly) various religious foundations' (Beck 2008, p. 110). In many cases, the sponsors were combinations of these groups, and included individual entrepreneurs or companies with a clear religious focus – as in the case of the Emmanuel Foundation.

The *Times Educational Supplement* ran an editorial which was roundly critical of the academy scheme, and particularly of the involvement of businesses which had little, if anything, to do with education:

Quite why it is assumed that property developers, holiday companies and car traders are able to govern schools better than representatives of the local community is hard to fathom. Their academies are the educational equivalent of the private housing estates gated and walled to keep out the riff-raff . . . (quoted in Hyman 2006, p. 330)

The reference here to ‘car traders’ was a clear allusion to Sir Peter Vardy, owner of a chain of car dealerships, founder of the Emmanuel Schools Foundation, and an evangelical Christian. Vardy had responded to the Thatcher Government’s appeal to local businesses to get involved with education as early as 1988, and was one of the first sponsors of a City Technology College, with the Emmanuel CTC in 1990. The case of the Emmanuel Schools charts the move from CTCs to academies – and the increasing involvement of evangelical Christian groups in the provision of state schooling. City Academies were having difficulties getting off the ground until the highly controversial Emmanuel Foundation stepped in with the offer of £12 million to set up six academies. Another company to move into academy schools was the Reed Employment agency whose head, Alec Reed, reportedly declared that the national curriculum should be ‘torn up’ in order to teach ‘free enterprise’ capitalism in every lesson. (*The Guardian*, 15.10.02)

There seems to have been remarkably little discussion of what the motivation of such rich individuals (or other corporate sponsors) might have been in supporting schools from either the Department of Education or government. Hyman came to recognize, from the hindsight of 2005 and the experience of teaching in an Islington state school, that the sponsors achieved an enormous return for a relatively small investment and that sponsorship is not entirely a philanthropic gesture:

What I was realising too, in a way that had not struck me in government, was just what immense power a sponsor has, simply by contributing £2m out of £30m. For £2m, small change for some very wealthy individuals, the sponsor was effectively buying the school. (Hyman 2006, p. 322)

Despite the controversy surrounding the Emmanuel Schools Foundation, and its reported teaching of creationism⁹ – the Blair government was undeterred in involving religious organizations and companies in the management and sponsorship of schools, and it was religious groups who were the keenest sponsors. The then Liberal Democrat education spokesman, Phil Willis, declared at the 2002 National Union of Teachers conference:

We cannot ignore the potentially dangerous cocktail of religious segregation and privately-sponsored academies that government policy is deliberately encouraging . . . it goes to the very heart of the government’s policy of diversity and its love of private sponsorship’ (quoted in *The Guardian*, 01.04.02)

Nonetheless, the Labour government pushed ahead with the process of handing contracts to religious organizations and other private contractors.

Faith Schools

In 2008, a collection of essays was published in support of and to make the case for faith schools. Its editor noted:

In the early part of the new millennium, the Labour government not only promoted but actively supported the expansion of faith schools. Various groups, including teachers' leaders, Labour activists and backbench MPs opposed and continue to oppose, the expansion of faith schooling, but the government has been resilient in defeating all attempts to curb their support for this form of schooling. (McKinney 2008, p. 6)

Despite Alistair Campbell's assertion that 'we don't do God', it is the case that Tony Blair (himself a practising Christian) had laid down the structures which facilitated religious organizations in taking over the running of state schools. While the Church of England had historically long been involved in state education, the term 'faith school' was coined in 1990; as other religious groups called for their own state-supported schools. When Tony Blair came into office, there were only Christian and Jewish religious schools in the state system; Labour extended the range to include other faiths. By 2011, there were 6312 secondary and 6230 primary schools which could be termed 'faith schools' (www.humanist.org, accessed August, 2011), of which the great majority are Christian.

Michael Barber, head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit under Tony Blair, gave a speech in 2003 in which he stated:

We are intentionally breaking the mould in our relationships with the voluntary and religious sectors, by, for example, providing for the first time, state funding for Muslim, Sikh and Seventh Day Adventist schools . . . It is clear in Hong Kong and elsewhere that the business and religious sectors are strong allies. This is true in the USA too . . . (quoted in Beck 2008, p. 15)

This association of business, religion and education was neatly embodied in the figure of Sir Peter Vardy, a self-made millionaire, evangelical Christian and head of the Emmanuel Foundation. The Emmanuel Schools Foundation was among the first groups to be involved in the sponsorship of schools; it had sponsored one of the first CTCs (which later became a Beacon school, specializing in 'Enterprise'); Sir Peter Vardy invested £2 million and became chair of the board of directors. The Foundation was also early in supporting academies. While all faith schools were once required to teach to the National Curriculum, academies and free schools no longer have such regulation. The

Emmanuel Schools Foundation website is explicit about the Christian ethos which informs their schools, and also about its 'partnership' with the Department of Education:

The EMMANUEL Schools Foundation (ESF) exists to promote the highest possible standards within comprehensive secondary education through provision based upon Christian principles.

The Foundation is based in the North-East of England and its schools operate within areas of socio-economic deprivation. The schools are non-fee-paying and work with the Department for Education and Skills and their local communities in their pursuit of 'personal best' achievement for all students.

By valuing every individual, regardless of ability, and by welcoming those of all faiths and of none, the schools place the Person of Christ and His example at the centre of their inspiration as they seek to deliver a curriculum appropriate for the personal, social, moral, spiritual and academic development of students preparing for life in the 21st century. (www.emmanuelctc.org)

There are clear rules in Emmanuel Schools which promote a strong Christian agenda. Students are required to have two bibles, which must be carried at all times, and are also expected to attend 'Special Lectures' on spiritual topics each week. Under the national curriculum, schools are required to teach the Darwinian theory of evolution – but there is nothing to stop Evangelical schools from teaching creationism as well, presenting it as a theory alongside Darwin. The creationist organization 'Truth in Science' whose mission is, according to their website, 'promoting good science education in the UK' continues to offer free teaching materials promoting creationism for use in secondary schools and sixth-form colleges. 'Truth in Science' is the UK branch of the American Discovery Institute, a conservative think-tank which was set up to promote the teaching of Intelligent Design in schools.

The Emmanuel Schools ran into controversy in 2002, when it was widely reported that the Foundation was promoting creationism. The row extended to parliament, with petitions addressed to Tony Blair and to Estelle Morris, then Minister for Education. In 2002, an Emmanuel School hosted a creationist conference – at which staff gave a series of lectures urging teachers to promote Christian fundamentalism in their teaching and to encourage teachers to present the 'superiority' of creationist theory over Darwinism. One teacher presented a lecture in which he suggested that evolutionists 'have a faith which is blind and vain by comparison with the faith of the

Christian . . . a Christian teacher of biology will not (or should not) regard the theory of evolution as axiomatic, but will oppose it while teaching it alongside creation' (quoted in Branigan 2002). In 2002, the media focus on the teaching of creationism in Emmanuel Foundation schools led to the chief inspector of schools, Mike Tomlinson, asking the Foundation to clarify its position on science teaching, but Tony Blair refused to condemn the school on the grounds that its results were so good. In 2006, Ofsted published a report which rated Emmanuel College as 'outstanding' and reported that there was no cause for concern about their teaching of science. *Tribune* published an article in 2009, 'Creationist Claptrap that Beggars Belief', which was legally challenged by Peter Vardy and finally settled out of court, with the requirement that the magazine print an apology and donate an unspecified sum to charity. Nonetheless, that same year, a Channel Four programme, *The New Fundamentalists*, interviewed ex-pupils of Emmanuel schools, who said that they had indeed been taught creationism (www.British Centre for Science Education, accessed September 2006).

The then head of Emmanuel College, Nigel McQuoid, and the Vardy foundation's chief education adviser, John Burn, wrote an article together in 1997, which is cited approvingly on the Creation Ministries International website (www.creation.com, accessed April 2011) in which they argued: 'To teach children that they are nothing more than developed mutations who evolved from something akin to a monkey and that death is the end of everything is hardly going to engender within them a sense of purpose, self-worth and self-respect'. Nigel McQuoid, later the director of Emmanuel Schools, has since publically stated that he believes that the world was created in 6 days. (*Times Education Supplement*, 10.03.06)

John Burn was among the founders of the Christian Institute, set up in 1991 with the express aim of promoting fundamentalist Christian beliefs. It is clear that the Institute is committed to furthering its cause through schools, and, implicitly, articulates a creationist position in its affirmation of the 'truths of the Bible'. The Christian Institute exists, according to its website, for 'the furtherance and promotion of the Christian religion in the United Kingdom' and 'the advancement of education':

The Christian Institute is a nondenominational Christian charity committed to upholding the truths of the Bible. We are supported by individuals and churches throughout the UK.

We believe that the Bible is the supreme authority for all of life and we hold to the inerrancy of Scripture. We are committed to upholding the sanctity of life from conception (www.Christian.org, accessed April 2011).

While the Christian Institute has no proven formal connection to the Emmanuel Foundation, teachers at their schools regularly publish on education on the website. The Christian Institute also monitors MPs votes (which are updated regularly on their website) according to whether or not they voted in accordance with Christian ethics – on issues including gay rights, contraception, abortion rights and divorce.

Creationism was taught at the Seventh Day Adventist school in Tottenham, which in 1998 became the first school run by a Christian denomination outside the Church of England to receive state funding. Keith Davidson, director of education at the British Union Conference of Seventh Day Adventists which runs the school, is a registered Ofsted inspector – who, in 2002, was reported as in discussion with local authorities about moving more Adventist schools into the state sector.

Oasis Community Learning is a charity and an international movement and another Christian organization that currently sponsors 12 academies in the United Kingdom (including South Bristol, Grimsby, Immingham, Enfield, Salford, Croydon and Southampton East and West), and which plans more. Oasis UK was founded in 1985 and is part of the 'Oasis Global family'. Its website makes its evangelical mission very explicit:

Oasis Community Learning is clear about the ethos and values that underpin our Academies. The person and life of Christ inspire this ethos and because of this our whole approach is inclusive . . . Oasis has a vision, to see every person given the opportunity to experience God's all encompassing love.

(www.oasis.communitylearning.org)

Oasis Global also runs charity projects informed by that same evangelical spirit.

The Church Schools Company is an Anglican educational charity, originally established in 1883 to promote a Christian education for young women. In 2002, it reconfigured itself as the United Church Schools Trust (UCST), to take their ethos into the Academies Programme and so establish a presence in the public sector. As their website expresses their mission:

. . . to extend UCST's work and ethos into the state sector through the Academies Programme . . . Our family: embracing the private and public sectors . . . (www.ucst.org.uk, accessed August 2011)

UCST put up £1 million to set up an academy in Lambeth in 2002 and another in Manchester. In 2009, two Academy schools in Sheffield run by UCST were failed by Ofsted (*Times Educational Supplement*, 24.07.09).

In an article in 2008, Francis Beckett described the UCST in these terms:

What is the most powerful organization in secondary education? A good case can be made for the United Church Schools Trust. The biggest academy sponsor (through its subsidiary, the United Learning Trust), with 13 already set up and several more on the way, the UCST also owns 11 private fee-charging schools and employs 1,700 people. It controls hundreds of millions of pounds' worth of public assets and property (it will not say exactly how much). It has spent hundreds of millions of pounds of public money building its academies, and the taxpayer will pay it hundreds of millions more every year to use them. . . . It runs its 24 schools in a more centralised way than any local education authority has ever done. (Beckett 2008)

The 'United Learning Trust' is a subsidiary charity of UCST which dropped the word 'Church' from its name, allowing it to operate under a less visibly religious title. By 2007, United Learning was the single most powerful sponsor of academies. Although Ed Balls, education minister in the Labour Government, had attempted to curb the expansion of ULT in 2010, Michael Gove, education minister of the incoming coalition government, welcomed ULT's takeover of Emmanuel schools. There are a number of known creationist groups who have expressed an interest in establishing free schools. The British Humanist Association led a campaign, 'Teach evolution, not creationism', against the teaching of creationism in schools, supported by Richard Dawkins and David Attenborough, among other leading scientists, which forced the government to adjust its funding agreement, and to withdraw state support for those schools which taught a curriculum that ran 'contrary to established scientific and/or historical evidence and explanations' (*The Observer*, 13.01.12). While this was a victory, Richard Dawkins warned that while a ruling on the teaching of creationism was welcome, it would need to be properly enforced. Only a month later, Michael Gove issued a statement which refused to stop the distribution of an American homophobic booklet in Lancashire schools. The Trade Union Congress had alerted Gove to the pamphlet, 'Pure Manhood: How to become the man God wants you to be', which claimed that homosexuality and the use of contraception were 'disordered acts'. The TUC argued that the 2010 Equalities Act prohibited

discrimination, and that such material went against the legal duty of schools to challenge prejudice. Gove's response was that the Equalities Act did 'not extend to the content of the curriculum. Any materials used . . . will not be subject to the discrimination provisions of the act' (*The Observer*, 19.02.12). This does not bode well for any protection against religious extremism in the classroom; a coalition of faith groups and politicians, The Religious Education Council of England and Wales, was set up in 2012 to 'protect religious education in schools'.

Although, in 2008, the Children, Schools and Families Select Committee raised concerns at the expansion of religious groups into state education provision, there seems to have been remarkably little concern from either the Labour or coalition administrations over the past 20 years at the power that religious sponsors now hold over British schools (Frank Dobson was one MP who did attempt to ensure that religious schools should have a quota of places for pupils who did not practise a faith – but his bill was voted down). The organizations who have made those inroads are discreet as to their international allegiances and their sources of funding. Many academics in education policy (with the notable exceptions of Beck, Benn and Ball) have also been quiet about the burgeoning influence and changing shape of religious schools in Britain. A 2008 edited collection on faith schools made only one mention of the Emmanuel Foundation and none at all of the UCST. Cairns' 2009 study *Faith Schools and Society* references neither.

While public opinion polls find that there is no majority support for faith schools, it was religious organizations that were in the vanguard of groups wanting to set up free schools. In 2012, the evangelical Christian group Christian Family Schools bid to set up a free school in Sheffield, where they currently run an independent school, the Bethany school, which boasts a 'carefully planned curriculum based on the book of Genesis'. On their website, the 'frequently asked questions' section asks the question 'Will the curriculum include creationism?' The answer is a resounding 'Yes . . . Because the creation story is relevant to **all** areas of the curriculum' (*The Guardian*, 20.03.12).

Beck's assessment of New Labour's legacy for education policy in 2008 was that it had facilitated: ' . . . the new agencies and groups . . . notably the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and the clusters of business and religious interests who are only too eager to embrace the opportunities government is offering. . . . ' (Beck 2008, p. 113). By 2011, that eagerness was finding an even more sympathetic welcome in the shape of free schools; seven out of ten applications to set up a free school were reported to be from faith-based organizations (Benn 2011, p. 26).

The outsourcing of services was a process that was not limited to education but which was being effected across a range of public services. As Oliver Burkeman expressed it in 2002: ‘. . . a relatively new corporate beast has reached maturity: the public-sector outsourcing firm, ready to snap up contracts everywhere from education to criminal intelligence, prisons to defence.’ (Burkeman 2002)

It was not that outsourcing was new – but it was accelerating and its scope was growing. As in the health service, international companies had been hovering to take over local authority contracts, and corporate providers were taking over more and more responsibility for the management of schools. According to *The Guardian*, companies like Capita were now in a position to influence Boards of Governors over the choice of head teachers. (*The Guardian*, 26.06.01). George Monbiot declared:

The general privatisation of schooling in Britain has begun . . . Our schools are being privatised not for the benefit of our children, but for the benefit of our corporations and the export economy to which, the government hopes, they will one day contribute.

Children are simply the raw materials with which they work. They will . . . be traded on the world’s stock markets like so many barrels of oil. (Monbiot 2002)

Monbiot points to the outsourcing of management and services, school inspections, teachers’ pay and pensions – and the further encroachment of privatization into the curriculum, with contracts for e-learning. The outsourced education market was in 2001 worth £2.5 billion.

Sponsorship was also embedding itself in teacher training programmes. Teach First was advertised in 2003 as ‘a unique business-led programme for top graduates’, which offered teacher training through ‘the UK’s leading teacher training provider’. This was Canterbury Christchurch University College, which boasted that it could offer its students: ‘cutting edge mentoring networking and management training from the most highly regarded institutions in the world’ (www.Teachfirst.org.uk, accessed April 2011). These institutions included: PricewaterhouseCoopers, Citigroup, Clifford Chance, Capital One, Canary Wharf Group, Morgan Stanley, Deloitte & Touche, UBS Warburg – none of them organizations noted for their experience in education.¹⁰ The language of this advertisement for a ‘teacher training provider’ removes teacher training from the education sector and promotes financial corporations as the appropriate training ground for teachers. It also prefigures the coalition government’s intentions to remove teacher training from the higher education sector.

Stephen J. Ball has explained the blurring of the boundaries between private and public provision that were accelerating in education in this period:

Contemporary privatisation is part of a much broader and more fundamental design of the public sector . . . This involves private and not-for-profit companies and voluntary and community organisations and NGOs and parastatal organisations in income-generating activities inside the public sector. . . . The newer forms of privatisation mean that the distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' services, books and educational media, etc. on the one hand, and 'those services which require human interaction' . . . on the other, is now thoroughly breached - the private sector operates across this divide. There are no service areas which are exempt from private sector participation . . . The state is increasingly repositioned as the guarantor, not necessarily the provider . . . nor the financier, of opportunity goods like education. (Ball 2003, p. 13)

There were many examples of the private sector taking advantage of the 'opportunity goods' of the education service. One such was the construction company, Amey, which became 'a leading provider of public services'. In the words of their website:

Although you may not be aware of Amey, you will come into contact with our diverse workforce and services on a regular basis. We inspect and assess the state of the nation's railways, repair and enhance key areas of the UK's road and rail network, and maintain key public buildings and spaces such as airports, schools, parks, and offices (www.Amey.com, accessed April 2011).

This lack of awareness of major corporations taking over familiar locations that had once been public spaces was characteristic of the 'partnerships' imposed on educational (and other public) services by government policy.

Commercial 'partners' in education

The careers advisory service once run by the Department of Education was replaced by an agency, 'Connexions'. The 7-year contract to run the service was given to the consultancy and recruitment company Capita in 2001, in a Private-Public Partnership that was worth £109 million. The service provided by Capita operated a scheme by which children were given swipe cards, on which they could accumulate reward points for attendance and then trade them for goods offered on the Connexions website, including products from McDonalds and

PlayStation – a technique close to the ‘Nudge’ theory.¹¹ The choices made were monitored and relayed to the company’s ‘commercial partners.’ The scheme didn’t work – and ended in 2006.¹² A national evaluation for the Department of Education estimated that while 1 million swipe cards were issued, only 145,947 had ever been used – and there was no evidence of improvement in attendance, learning or career choices (www.education.gov.uk). Capita was also given the contract for the scheme for Individual Learning Accounts – under their management, their agents were found guilty of aggressive sales techniques and of fraud, and the budget went over the estimate by £60 million. The scheme was abandoned a year later.

Nonetheless, Capita continued to be awarded contracts across education (Capita were also given the contract for refurbishing the NHS website). The company claims to ‘Help all schools raise standards’ through its management services and took over a range of systems management contracts, including the Teachers’ Pension Scheme, Children’s Trust accounts and National Learning Strategies. Their SIMS services for schools records are used across state schools and in 2008, Capita took over the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme (later cut by the coalition government). By 2009, it had a £2.7 billion turnover (www.capita.co.uk), and in 2011, the Capita website could boast of its wide experience of working in state education:

We have over 20 years experience of helping schools and local authorities delivering a wide range of services. By increasing efficiency and improving performance through expert resources and support, ICT, specialist software and information management systems and property consultancy, we are regarded as a reliable, knowledgeable and innovative partner. (www.capita.co.uk, accessed April 2011)

Capita was not alone as a major corporate player in the business of education. *Investors’ Chronicle* in 2001 referred to Nord Anglia as a ‘group cashing in as authorities seek to outsource work’ (quoted in *The Observer*, 11.02.01). Nord Anglia is a for-profit education management company which had been involved on the boards of EAZs. Nord Anglia currently runs international schools in Beijing and Shanghai, Bratislava, Budapest, Lausanne, Prague, Warsaw and Abu Dhabi. Its company website makes much of its close association with government and education:

Nord Anglia Education is a leader in the international provision of high quality, innovative education, training and guidance for children and young adults.

Since we were founded in 1972, we have developed extensive experience of managing schools and working with governments to raise standards and improve educational achievement. (www.nordanglia.com, accessed April 2011)

Nord Anglia had taken over a 'failing' school in Hackney in 1999, but failed to improve services; they were replaced by the not-for-profit Learning Trust, which currently runs all schools services in the borough. In 2001, Nord Anglia was contracted to manage a Surrey comprehensive school and to run 'back-office' services in Waltham Forest. Monbiot reported in 2000 that 'Nord Anglia predicts that 200 state schools will be wholly managed by private companies in Britain within five years' (Monbiot 2000, p. 337).

Ensign was another company bidding for contracts to take over from local authority education services that were deemed to be 'poorly performing'. A consortium backed by Group 4 in a joint venture with the Tribal group, Ensign has a subsidiary, PPI, which inspects schools on behalf of education watchdog Ofsted. *The Guardian* (26.06.01) reported that Ensign withdrew its bid for the education contract in Waltham Forest after allegedly offering payments of £5,000 to two consultants working for the PPI bid. While the Tribal group refuted any claim of impropriety, an internal council audit concluded that the payments could have been seen as 'irregular' (Prison Reform Trust 2001).

Serco is an international public services corporation which bought up the educational consultants QAA in 2010 and so became 'one of a handful of key private sector players in UK state education' (Burkeman 2001, p. 2). Serco describes itself as 'an international service company that improves the quality and efficiency of essential services that matter to millions of people around the world' (www.serco.com, accessed April 2011). In 2001, the company was awarded contracts in Walsall and Bradford over seven years 'to provide education improvement services, including management-consultancy advice'. (*The Guardian*, 26.06.01). By 2003, it ran what was then described as 'the biggest privatised education authority' in Bradford, under the title of Education Bradford. In that year, the targets for exam results were lowered in order to allow the company to protect cash bonuses – and Serco had to approach the Department of Education and Skills for financial support. Serco was quoted as saying that it had 'underestimated the scale of the challenge facing it in Bradford' (*The Guardian*, 20.10.03).

W. S. Atkins is another company which had had little to do with education; a global corporation which, according to their website, specializes in engineering.¹³

Atkins is one of the world's leading engineering and design consultancies. We have the depth and breadth of expertise to respond to the most technically challenging and time critical infrastructure projects and the urgent transition to a low-carbon economy. Whether it's the concept for a new skyscraper, the upgrade of a rail network, the modelling of a flood defence system or the improvement of a management process, we plan, design and enable solutions. (www.Atkinsglobal.com. accessed April 2011)

Atkins was awarded the outsourcing contract for almost all the educational services, building maintenance, payroll, staffing and purchasing in Southwark in 2001. After a critical report on Southwark from Ofsted, and after an investigation by the private management consultants KPMG¹⁴ (which advised that the entire LEA should be abolished, and run instead by Atkins), David Blunkett, then education secretary, imposed what was claimed as a 'partnership' with Atkins on the council. This contract was then the largest 'outsourcing' educational contract under New Labour's policy of private/public partnerships. W. S. Atkins' only previous experience in education had been two contracts: a project researching the use of school buses and another to remove asbestos in a primary school. They had been fined £10,000 by the health and safety executive for failing to achieve the second. Nonetheless, they became the 'preferred bidder' for the £100 million contract to run Southwark, and all non-teaching members of the LEA became Atkins' employees. Atkins was also given the PFI contracts for schools in Cornwall and Kent.

A 2002 Ofsted report roundly criticized W. S. Atkins for its lack of transparency over finances, and the head of 'school improvement' resigned. In 2003, Atkins pulled out of Southwark less than half way through the 5-year contract – 2 years early – leaving behind it 'a trail of financial and educational misery' (*The Guardian*, 22.11.03), with outstanding debts to staff and service providers. Southwark head teachers gave a vote of no confidence to Atkins' management and the DfES had to pay £2.2 million to manage their departure from the borough. Under Atkins' management, the number of schools in 'special measures' had increased from six under the Southwark's authority to eight; in 2002, Southwark came bottom of the league tables for Key Stage Two.

A Southwark Liberal councillor (ironically, given the Liberal Democrats' later position on education in the coalition government) commented:

The kind of stuff that you expect the private sector to be good at - payroll, human resources, invoice processing - were precisely the kinds of things that Atkins was tripping up over from day one . . . The wheels really did come off the New Labour bus in Southwark' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 22.11.03).

The wheels falling off the bus in Southwark did not, however, deter New Labour from inviting other companies to move into youth services and education. In April 2003, David Miliband awarded a £1.9 million contract to Jarvis Educational Services (an arm of Jarvis engineers, who were investigated in the aftermath of the 2002 Potters Bar rail crash) - an organization which was formed as a subsidiary only 2 months before the award of the contract. Two of Jarvis' key personnel had been central to the Atkins management structure (*Times Educational Supplement*, 02.05.03). In 2003, Jarvis were roundly criticized by the Governors of a school in Brighton only 1 year into its contract, while a Jarvis contract with Haringey underestimated costs and ran £3.7 million over budget (*The Guardian Education*, 30.11.03)

But New Labour forged ahead - arguing that PFI allowed for the building of new schools; under the Thatcher and Major governments, capital expenditure on school buildings had fallen dramatically, and, without increased taxation, private investment seemed the only means of securing funding. Ball suggests that for New Labour, the embrace of sponsorship and 'commercial partners' was largely a matter of pragmatism: ' . . . the private sector is not a simple ideological preference as it was under Thatcherism; it is a means to an end, a mechanism rather than a belief system' (Ball 2007, pp. 35-6). Ball also argues that Blair played a key role in providing the rhetorical legitimization for a 'diversity of providers', a phrase that would be echoed in the coalition government's enthusiasm for opening up public services to 'any willing provider'.

Tony Blair made a major speech on education at the opening of the first newly built academy school, The Business Academy in Bexley, in September 2003, in which he announced his desire to expand the academy programme and launched an appeal for more private sponsors to invest in schools. Despite the Atkins, Serco and Jarvis scandals, and in the face of mounting unease about the involvement of the private sector in education (expressed variously by unions, the *Times Educational Supplement* and MPs), Blair denigrated any opponents of his 'reform' in public services - and announced plans for at least 50 further academies, urging 'many more sponsors ready to take on the challenge of

academies and specialist schools' (quoted in *The Guardian*, 19.11.03). By 2011, one in six secondary schools was an academy. In 2012, the Local Schools Network reported that the Department of Education figures demonstrated that academies were underperforming in comparison with state schools, that, while 60 per cent of pupils in local authority run schools were achieving 5 A* to C grades in their GCSES, in the sponsored academies, the figure was only 47 per cent (www.localschoolsnetwork.org.uk).

The experiences of Serco, Nord Anglia, Jarvis and W. S. Atkins had clearly demonstrated that corporate sponsors were emphatically not up to the 'challenge', and did not represent value for money, all had to be bailed out by public funds at considerable expense. The union Unison undertook a research project, 'What is wrong with PFI in Schools', which they presented at the Labour Party conference in September 2003. The report gave example after example of PFI failures and cost overruns. Unison concluded:

As more PFI schools are built it becomes possible to judge their success. UNISON has members intimately involved in PFI. This report draws on their experience and rounds up the evidence to date. It shows that:

- there is a growing consensus that PFI is not working in schools
- PFI is not value for money because it costs more
- PFI leads to an affordability gap which in turn puts pressure on quality, design and services
- PFI can cost the jobs, pay and conditions of the workforce
- PFI has serious accountability issues
- Private companies see PFI as a rich source of profit.

(Unison, September 2003)

Unison's criticisms of PFI projects echoed an earlier report by the independent Audit Commission, which had come to similar conclusions, if less forcibly expressed: 'this study of the early wave school schemes shows that the PFI process did not as a matter of course guarantee better quality buildings and services, or lower unit costs. This is the key lesson' (www.audit.commission.gov.uk, 2003).

While academies were sold to the electorate as a means of offering parental 'choice' in education – there was evidence that parents were less able to send their child to the school of their choosing. As Fiona Millar, of the Local Schools Network, put it: 'Despite the public rhetoric of . . . two decades, choice for most parents has narrowed. One of the greatest myths perpetuated by "reformers" about the English school system is that it has been too weighed

down by the dead hand of uniformity' (Millar 2012). The rhetoric of 'choice' became a means of denigrating the welfare state principles of education, 'one size fits all' (a term that began in America and which was rapidly taken up by the *Daily Telegraph*) was a phrase that was regularly invoked as a dismissal of state run schools. Alistair Campbell made a speech in 2001 which disparaged the 'bog standard comprehensive' (ironically, the speech was written by Peter Hyman who later became a teacher – and to regret the phrase). However, according to Beck, with all the claims of 'diversity' and 'choice', the range of 'providers' was distinctly limited, and it was business interests that prevailed in academy schools:

Despite this diversity of providers, there are, nevertheless, clear signs that among the various constituencies supporting these new initiatives, especially academies, it is business interests that predominate. For example, of the 46 academies that had been opened by September 2006, no fewer than 25 had either business or enterprise as one of their designated specialisms. . . . Similarly, among the sponsors, a clear majority of the 46 institutions were sponsored by individual entrepreneurs, or companies . . . In a number of cases, there is co-sponsorship by business in conjunction with religious or education foundations of various kinds. (Beck 2008, p. 113)

The Emmanuel Schools Foundation is one such example of 'co-sponsorship', in which a wealthy entrepreneur was facilitated in the promotion of an extreme evangelical agenda in the schools that he sponsored. Other cases of co-sponsorship involved large companies acquiring small educational companies (such as publishers), or investing in educational charities in order to give them some claim to involvement in education, as with Group 4's partnership with Tribal Group. Trust Schools were introduced in the 2006 Education Act, in which individual schools or groups of schools were 'partnered' with a charitable foundation or trust, and so further facilitated the pathway for private 'providers' (particularly religious groups) to take over a school.

Hatcher has argued that New Labour's education policy laid the basis for the creeping growth of privatization in schools and had paved the way for for-profit educational providers:

. . . a possible future scenario of the business takeover of schools for profit is real and a legitimate concern . . . the actual developments taking place today . . . concern the role of business and other interests as key agents in the transformation of the school system . . . the colonization of government education policy implementation and delivery of national and local educational

services by private companies for profit . . . (and) . . . the reshaping of schools through non-profit sponsorship, which in the case of Academies amounts to a non-profit form of privatization. (Hatcher 2006, p. 599)

In a speech in 2005 to the City of London Academy (the year of the Education White Paper which proposed a major expansion in the number of academy schools), Blair restated his commitment to 'diversification' in the sponsorship of schools:

The logic of changing to the specialist schools, of starting City Academies, of giving greater freedom to schools in who they hire, what they pay, how they run their school, is very clear. . . . It is to break down the barriers to new providers, to schools associating with outside sponsors, to the ability to start and expand schools; and to give parental choice its proper place. (Blair quoted in Beck 2008, p. 112)

The 'barriers' which Blair invokes here are also protections, for parents, schools and their students. It is notable how close Blair's language here is to the rhetoric of the Conservatives David Cameron and his current Education Minister, Michael Gove, who would regularly invoke 'wastage' and bureaucracy as a justification for sweeping reforms. In the name of parental 'choice', public education was opened up to markets, while the relaxation of local authority controls meant that those sponsors and new providers were no longer accountable. In return for a 10 per cent investment in the capital costs of the school,¹⁵ a sponsor had the right to take over the school and shape its curriculum, ethos, and establish its own contracts for teaching staff. In the words of the Department of Education website: 'A funding agreement is signed to formally transfer leadership of the school from the local authority to you . . . you will become responsible for the new academy and can start putting your vision into action' (www.education.gov.uk, accessed July 2012). There was very little control over the nature of the sponsor, whatever that 'vision' might be, and once a sponsor was in place, very little accountability.¹⁶

If New Labour had done little to challenge Margaret Thatcher's denigration of the state school system and opened the education sector even further to commercial sponsorship, in turn, David Cameron apparently had little disagreement with the previous administration's education policies. As Beck puts it:

. . . in 2007 the leader of the British Conservative party, David Cameron and his shadow education spokesman David Willetts, moved to distance their party

from its traditionally unswerving support of grammar schools, whilst strongly endorsing academies and trust schools. (Beck 2008, p. 16)

There was in fact no need to support grammar schools, Gove (who became Secretary of State for Education in 2010) had a new initiative, the 'free schools', which, with their control over admissions, could be grammar schools in all but name.¹⁷ The coalition's endorsement of the academy model went far beyond vocal support; while it had been financially beneficial under New Labour for schools to become academies, under a 2010 Act, the Secretary of State for Schools (then Michael Gove) was given the powers to force academy status on any school that had been given notice to improve, even in the face of opposition from parents, teachers and school governors. The first school to encounter this power was Downhills primary school. The process was described as 'brutal'; the governors were sacked, the head resigned and the school was handed over to a trust run by a Conservative peer and the chair of Carpetright.¹⁸ Other school heads stated that they had been given 'no option' in becoming a sponsored academy (Mansell 2011). The Education Act of 2011 allowed only for the setting up of new schools as free schools or academies, and by March 2012, over half of state secondary schools were academies, or in the process of becoming an academy. Under the coalition government, academy schools rose eightfold. David Cameron set up a committee to foster the involvement of independent schools in academies, with Andrew Adonis (architect of the academies project under Blair) and Anthony Seldon, master of the public school, Wellington College, as members. Wellington set up one academy and has plans for more, but Seldon reported that many public schools were reluctant to become involved in the state sector: 'Leadership from the independent sector has been sadly lacking . . . British independent schools have lost their moral purpose'. Seldon nonetheless argued that public schools should be subsidized by government, 'so the schools don't bear the cost' of setting up an academy (Seldon 2012).

Cameron and Gove were determined to abolish what they consistently referred to as 'red tape' in the schools system, what they meant by this was made clear in their 2011 Education Act, which abolished a number of bodies, such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, which were central to the maintaining of consistency and standards in teacher training and education, and established instead a 'framework' of companies pre-authorized to offer management and educational services for a fee. While Cameron and Gove's rhetoric purported to give control to parents and to teachers, commercial

providers were being lined up to take over schools services, in much the same way that reforms in the Health Service claimed to hand power to doctors and to patients, while paving the way for large medical corporations. Gove's open-armed approach to corporate involvement in education extends to policy development; the only member with expertise in primary literacy on the committee overseeing the national curriculum review in 2011 was Ruth Miskin. Miskin's company Read Write Inc. sells reading programmes to schools and is in receipt of government-matched funding every time a school purchases her government-approved scheme (see Benn 2011, p. 12).¹⁹

The Education Act also repealed the duties of governing bodies and local authorities in relation to admissions and school meals (www.legislation.gov.uk). In 2012, the School Food Trust reported that 9 out of 10 academies were selling junk food to students in dinner halls and vending machines; no longer bound by the Labour ruling that academies had to abide by required standards of nutrition, the schools were making between £3000 and £15,000 a year from the sales of fizzy drinks, crisps and chocolate (www.schoolfoodtrust.org). Two academy schools are, at the time of writing, being taken to court for refusing to admit pupils with statements of special needs, on the grounds that their admission 'would be incompatible with the efficient education of other pupils in the academy' (www.ipsea.org.uk, May 2012). In 2012, on the day of the opening of the Olympic Games in London (a good day to release controversial government decisions), Gove announced that academies were permitted to employ teachers with no formal qualifications. In the aftermath of the Games, when all parties were calling for strategies in schools to build on their success and to promote a sporting legacy, it was announced that 31 schools had been allowed to bypass the independent School Playing Fields Advisory Panel and to sell off their playing fields; academy schools could go direct to Gove at the Department of Education, who ignored the advice of the advisory panel and approved the sales. Among the schools was Newquay Tretherras, which had proudly hosted the Olympic torch and was now selling land used for football and cricket to Tesco (www.bbc.co.uk/news/education).

A little noticed clause in the 2011 Education Act allowed private companies to run Further Education colleges for profit. The Conservative think-tank Policy Exchange has argued that this model should be extended into schools. Michael Gove is a former chair of Policy Exchange. Once in place as Minister of Education in 2010, Gove advocated his own variation of the City Academies, 'free schools.' These differ from academies in that while the academies were

to a degree accountable to local authorities, free schools are state-funded independent schools. Free school status is granted to existing 'outstanding' schools, a shift from the academy model which was designed to improve schools in inner-city areas; in Benn's phrase, the free school offers 'special status to the already advantaged' (Benn 2011, p. 4). A free school can set its own curriculum, organize admissions (i.e., maintain selection) and recruit teachers (even if they have no qualifications). By 2011, under this scheme, six private schools had become free schools, supported by state funding; among them, the Maharishi school in Lancashire; this school, set up and funded by the transcendental meditation group of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, was once fee-paying but under the name of a free school, the state will pay the fees. The evangelical Christian Family Schools run an independent school in Sheffield, the Bethany school, and are currently applying to set up a free school in Sheffield. According to a Department of Education spokesman, any private school can bid for free school status (*The Guardian*, 12.04.11).

In 2011, Michael Gove announced that vocational academies, known as 'university technical colleges' were to be run with the involvement of companies including Toshiba, Blackberry, Boeing, Rolls Royce, Hewlett Packard and Cisco Systems, the pharmaceutical firm Novartis and Babcock, a manufacturer of defence equipment. The schools are for 14–19-year-old students, and the companies are to provide training that 'fits their needs for skilled workers'.

In a strange reversal, where once commercial sponsorship was called upon to plug the gaps in state funding for schools, public funding from taxation is now available to support private fee-paying schools, to provide professional training for corporate interests and to facilitate independent schools in setting up academies. Sponsors are no longer required to provide funds for their sponsorship of schools, and Michael Gove has announced plans to financially support organizations prepared to sponsor academies. This is in a context where the Building Schools for the Future scheme (launched under Labour and intended to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school in England) and the Educational Maintenance Allowance (to support low income students to remain in education) have been abolished, and in which public libraries, health education programmes and Sure Start schemes are facing swingeing cuts as part of the government cutbacks under its austerity programme.

Michael Gove has said that he has 'no ideological objection' to private providers running state schools for profit. A statement from Gove at the Leveson enquiry²⁰ had echoes of the reforms to the National Health Service when he suggested that: 'I believe that it may be the case that we can augment the quality of state

education by extending the range of people involved in its provision' (www.levesoninquiry.org.uk). In 2012, the Conservative think-tank the Institute of Economic Affairs published a report *The Profit Motive in Education: Continuing the Revolution*, which argued that the Conservative-led reforms to education would not be complete until for-profit companies had been wholeheartedly welcomed into schools.

Michael Gove, as Education Minister under the new Conservative-led coalition government, had spoken approvingly of the Swedish model of the 'free school' before the election and as he took up office. The references to the Swedish model became less frequent as the Swedes themselves became disenchanted with the impact of the system and evidence emerged of the damage that the free schools had done to a flourishing state education system. The head of Sweden's school inspections argued that free schools had done nothing to improve school results, while OECD figures showed in 2010 (www.oecd.org) that since the introduction of private providers into the school system in Sweden, literacy rates had dropped 10 places in the international ranking. The ex-minister of the Social Democrat Party, Lena Sommestad, argued that the 'choice' presented by free schools had undermined the quality of education in Sweden,²¹ and had embedded class and racial differences:

... there are now dramatic differences in the quality of the education offered in different schools, overall results are down, and Sweden's international ranking has been falling since 2003. The introduction of 'freedom' into our education system has meant that those with the financial resources to move into areas which have schools considered good, do so . . . We are now seeing segregation in our schools, along lines of social class. (Sommestad, quoted in Benn 2011, p. 126)

Sommestad also pointed out that allowing Swedish schools to be run by commercial companies had allowed venture capital to make profits which were not reinvested in education or in Sweden, but put into offshore tax havens. The largest commercial education company in Sweden is Kunskapsskolan (the Knowledge School), which is now sponsoring the Learning Schools Trust, which has taken over three academies in England. Another Swedish firm, IES (Internationella Engelska Skola, run by an American science teacher Barbara Bergström) was given a 10-year contract to manage the Suffolk school IES Breckland in 2012. IES has a business turnover of £60 million annually, and makes £5 million in profit, the UK manager of IES was quoted as saying 'It is awful, but we kind of have to accept failure more than we do at the moment. So

if a school does fail because of its results, then that is right that it should fail . . . if there is an awful company out there, then they should be allowed to fail' (Jodie King, quoted in *The Observer*, 29.01.12). Notwithstanding the implications for the school's students if a school is allowed to fail – a failed school and its students can only be salvaged with money from public funds. Kunskapsskolan and IES are currently planning to manage chains of free schools in Britain.

The Institute for Public Policy published a report in 2012 which demonstrated that non-commercial schools outperformed schools run by for-profit companies internationally, including those in Sweden. The secondary school performance tables for the United Kingdom in the same year demonstrated that despite the increased funding available to academy schools, their results were less good than those under local authority control (www.localschoolsnetwork.org). Public opinion, as the Local Schools Network has monitored, does not support the privatization of UK education, but the 'framework' that the 2011 Education Act introduced embeds commercial interests in the system. In January 2012, the permit to run a Swedish free school was found to be on sale on the Swedish version of eBay; the schools inspectorate said that it was not in a position to prevent those to whom it awarded licences from selling them on. It is now clear that British schools are also firmly on course to be sold to the highest bidder.

Notes

- 1 Cognita was at the centre of a storm in which parents at Southbank International School in London complained that the company had 'milked the school' for profit – underpaying teachers and raising fees for students. The Southbank parent initiative board argued that Cognita had made £3 million profit from the school in 2010.
- 2 At the time of writing, Cognita is under investigation by the Department of Education for alleged fraud in its dealings with state pension schemes (*The Observer*, 10.06.12).
- 3 Under the Conservatives, there were only 50 PFI deals over a 5-year period, but between 1997 and 2001, Labour had agreed 300 (Seddon 2001).
- 4 Sainsbury's followed this scheme in 2005 with Active Kids vouchers for sports equipment, and Active Kids Get Cooking, which featured 'Toolkits' filled with Sainsbury kitchen and food products, aimed at schools, with kits designed for children as young as 3 years old.

- 5 David Blunkett as education minister went on to 'name and shame' 18 schools within 'days of taking office' (Toynbee and Walker 2001, p. 47) – a strategy which allowed the government to promote a strategy for introducing the private sector into education. By 2000, 396 schools were deemed to be failing.
- 6 The controversy over Woodhead and the Ofsted report is not referred to in *1 Out of 10*; the account by one of Blair's policy advisors who became a teacher at Islington Green School, although he does recount the takeover by Cambridge Education Associates (see Hyman 2006, p. 32).
- 7 Peter Hyman worked with Tony Blair from 1994 to 2003, and was Head of the Prime Minister's Strategic Communications Unit between 2001 and 2003, a period which saw many of these initiatives going through Parliament.
- 8 Bruce Liddington is now the director general of E-ACT, described on their website as 'a leading academy sponsor and social enterprise, specializing in the development of world class academies and schools in the UK. . . . Our mission is straightforward. It is to become the leading education provider developing and nurturing highly successful academies and schools.' (www.E.Act. org)
- 9 In 2009, *Tribune* ran an article accusing the Emmanuel Foundation schools of teaching creationism, which was legally challenged by Peter Vardy and settled out of court. The *Tribune* article also pointed out that compared to the £2 million the Foundation had invested, it cost the taxpayer £22 million to build an academy.
- 10 Teach First was designed to cream off the best graduates, many of whom went on to secure jobs not in teaching, but with one of the sponsoring companies.
- 11 'The Nudge' was a theory that emerged from the Chicago Business School. In 2008, Richard Thaler, an economist from the Chicago Business School and Cass Sunstein of the Chicago Law School published *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth and Happiness* (Yale University Press, 2008), see Conclusion for more on 'The Nudge'.
- 12 In March 2006, the Executive Chair of Capita, Rod Aldridge OBE, resigned over controversy that Capita had given a £1 million to the Labour Party.
- 13 Atkins announced their partnership in building new nuclear power stations in 2010:

Atkins and Assystem are to form a strategic alliance to create a 50/50 nuclear engineering joint venture to provide consultancy and engineering services to the rapidly-expanding international nuclear new build market. The Nuclear Atkins Assystem Alliance will enable both companies to address demand from governments and utilities in countries developing nuclear power as part of their energy mix and will provide services to nuclear new build projects and across the entire nuclear fuel cycle.

The alliance will enable both Atkins and Assystem to expand in a highly promising market. (www.Atkinsglobal.com, 2011)

- 14 KPMG describe themselves as ‘a global network of professional services firms providing Audit, Tax and Advisory services’ (www.kpmg.com, accessed April 2011).
- 15 It would seem that under the coalition government, not even this minimal financial investment is now required, a frequently asked question on the Department of Education website currently asks: ‘Are sponsors required to make a financial contribution?’, to which the answer is: ‘No . . . this is not a requirement’ (July 2012).
- 16 There is no safeguard against a sponsor who might actively want a school to fail and close. Like public libraries, schools are often in desirable central locations, which would prove very attractive to many sponsors.
- 17 In March 2012, a group of parents in Sevenoaks, Kent, won support from the county council to allow existing grammar schools to open satellite schools.
- 18 The general secretary of the National Union of Teachers was quoted as saying ‘This is a major political attack on state education. This is not schools opting for academy status; this is the government forcing schools away from local authority influence into the arms of external sponsors. It is hugely undemocratic’ (Christine Blower, quoted in Mansell 2011)
- 19 Miskin was the only expert in primary level literacy on the curriculum review committee, the primary heads appointed to the committee were both advocates of her controversial training programme.
- 20 The Leveson Enquiry is, at the time of writing, an ongoing public investigation into the ethics of the Press, following evidence of phone hacking by journalists on papers owned by News International.
- 21 Similar criticisms have been made of the American Charter School programme, another model for private companies running schools that Gove has invoked sympathetically. For more information on Charter schools, see Benn 2011.