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## Chapter 11

### Has There Been A Conspiracy?

In previous chapters we have argued that public servants and politicians have, wittingly or unwittingly, used concepts from the cults of efficiency and the market - especially privatisation and competitive tendering - to create endless, useless work and prevent the public reflecting on the workings of the system of which they are a part. We also saw that critical thinking has been stifled in other ways, too. These included the encouragement of competitive "higher education" organised around multiple-choice testing, the move toward competitive funding of research in a way which linked security of academic tenure to publication of non-knowledge and insistence on public service control of the publication of research findings. By privatising the media, it has been possible to further discourage reflection on the way society works.

We have also seen that governments, the banks, and the TNCs have good reasons for pressing for privatisation. Some of these are exactly opposite to the public claims of these institutions. Governments and the TNCs need to *manage* the economy. Neither wants a self-managing system. But both can pursue their own goals most effectively by *talking* about the desirability of creating Adam Smith's self-managing system but in reality developing a system which *they* manage. The question of whether, or to what degree, the evolution of the complex web of mutually supportive institutions, activities, and mythologies was propelled by some kind of internal logic or was brought into being deliberately - in effect as a conspiracy - to further the interests of a small group of people became ever more insistent.

We should not just *assume* a conspiracy: Ideologically-motivated action may have led to unanticipated benefits whose value, once recognised, led to reiteration of the ideology and reinforcement of the actions. After all, the actual benefits of privatisation include (i) the way in which it creates jobs (though not of the kind supposed) - and especially middle-class jobs whose holders are likely to support the policies of right-wing governments, and (ii) the way in which overseas investment and the exploitation of the Third World increases the flow of funds into government coffers.

We will first consider some developments in the educational area which look as if they might have been - but were not - deliberately engineered to support the social order.

One of these incidents occurred in 1976, when the Minister for Education in England and Wales set up a committee to bring twenty years' discussion of whether there should be a

common system of examinations to a close. The report<sup>11.1</sup> of the committee he set up reviewed the available evidence and showed that it all pointed to the need for diversity in the educational system. It concluded that a wide variety of syllabi having different goals and courses taught in different ways, and an equally wide variety of levels and modes of assessment, were required to nurture these diverse qualities and give students and teachers credit for the outcomes. However, the committee then inexplicably negated the effect of these observations in a single sentence which said that the results of the assessments (e.g. of creativity, initiative, ability to work with others, as well as knowledge of academic content) would be expressed on a single scale of 7 points in a subject area. How could a high-level of creativity be expressed on a single scale which also measured knowledge of Latin? It seemed that the sociological need to have a clear and unarguable criterion of “merit” to (in Jencks’<sup>11.2</sup> phrase) legitimise the rationing of privilege had over-ruled all explicit occupational and educational considerations. A similar outcome was observed in the workings of an earlier Irish education committee<sup>11.3</sup>.

In this case, there was little doubt about the integrity or goals of those who saw the need for reform and little doubt about the nature of the opposing argument. The former were concerned to ensure that a much wider range of pupils obtained opportunities to develop and gain recognition for their talents. The opposition was expressed in no uncertain terms by one member of the committee who said: “Our task is to get poor boys into good jobs - and we do not want any change that will make that job more difficult”. Note the explicit reference to the sociological, as distinct from the educational, functions of the system. The committee recommended the adoption of a wider range of assessment procedures. However, since it recognised that it did not know how to do what needed to be done, it concluded that the primary need was to create an innovative climate in schools and to establish an appropriate research and development service. A recommendation, which would have an exactly contrary effect to that intended - at least by the majority of the committee - came in prioritising the way forward. Priority was given to “improving” what was already being done. This had the effect of deflecting attention from what needed to be done to tightening up the *status quo*. (Note the similarity to what happened in the Bruntland Committee, discussed in Chapter 2.) There was no plot, only a failure to create the necessary variety and to attach sufficient importance to facilitating experimentation, research, and development. At the heart of the failure was a simple statement from the Ministry of Education to the effect that there were no resources to adventure into the unknown without any certainty that the outcome would be positive. No one on the committee was prepared to argue that funding such activity was, indeed, the most important investment the Ministry could possibly make.

The third area we will look at concerns the introduction of the National Curriculum in England and Wales and its equivalent in Scotland. As one read the documentation of the Scottish recommendations<sup>11.4</sup> one could not help feeling that it would be wonderful indeed if schools functioned in the manner depicted. The problems were:

- a) There was no possibility of the curriculum processes which were portrayed being introduced into most schools - it would simply be too difficult for most teachers to implement them without new tools, new understandings of developmental processes, and new administrative arrangements to permit them to cater in different ways for students with different talents. Worse still, the assessment programme which was to accompany the new curriculum would not give students credit for these outcomes. This is of the greatest importance because teachers teach and students work toward the goals that are *assessed* - and neglect other more important goals - because it is these - and

only these - attainments which will stand to pupils' credit when the time comes to scramble for a job.

- b) There was to be almost no investment in the basic research needed to develop the understandings and tools required to implement the curricula and give pupils and teachers credit for achieving its goals. Instead, there was to be a vast programme to develop traditional forms of testing.

The result was a huge programme of activity which took time away from the everyday activities of schools and, as Popkewitz<sup>11.5</sup> has argued, directed attention away from the destructive reality of our educational system. In this way an impression that a problem had been diagnosed and was being forcefully tackled was created and the activity made life more tolerable for teachers.

More fundamentally, despite the high-sounding claims in the brochures, the statements about core curricula, and especially the assessment procedures to be adopted, actually resulted in the goals of education being narrowed because not only were the time and the procedures required to nurture qualities like the ability to lead, to invent, to put others at ease, to exert influence, and to understand and intervene in social systems to be eliminated, the intrusive assessment procedures which were introduced removed all possibility of recognising the achievements of pupils or teachers in these areas<sup>11.6</sup>. As a result, those who could not achieve in traditional "academic" terms - which actually do not merit the name - were still more seriously denigrated, their talents overlooked, and further deprived of resources. More competition against still narrower criteria was introduced both within and between schools by first restricting the modes of assessment available to certify outcomes and then publishing the results. The contributions which teachers had made to their students' wider development and the adverse conditions under which they worked were in this way made still more invisible. Still more benefits were heaped on those who did well in these terms by increasing the financial differentials between those who entered different kind of jobs (and especially those who became unemployed). By introducing Local Management of Schools and giving parents a greater role in them, publicising narrowly-based, school "performance" data, and introducing an increasingly divided society, parental pressure and social forces were recruited to make sure schools attended to these narrow goals, anything else being disparaged as mere frills. The terms of schools' reports to the community were determined by government and teachers, parents, and schools were actually deprived of the right to insist on the inclusion of more broadly-based evaluative information. Teachers' responsibility for thinking about the talents and abilities of individual students and how to nurture them was removed. Henceforth, they were to attend to the dictates of government. Teachers' energy was diverted into trying to make the prescribed assessment procedures work and making sure their pupils succeeded in these terms. Everyone of good-will found themselves trying to manipulate what was going on in such a way as to minimise the harm being done by the changes which were being introduced instead of addressing the more important issues which called for their attention. More and more people found themselves drawn into double-talk and misrepresentation and, as a result, became less willing to castigate others for such behaviour. All available energy came to be directed toward the government's agenda: there was no time to do anything else and no chance of being listened to anyway. It became increasingly apparent that the agenda was fraudulent: It was not really about improving education but about exaggerating differentials, creating competition, and legitimising laying the blame for the failure of pupils and teachers on themselves instead of on the leaders and managers of society.

It looks as if what happened was a deliberate attempt to mislead the public. And some politicians' statements about the need for pupils to learn their place, often denigrating goals like nurturing investigative skills and the ability to question support this thesis. Yet the suspicion that what happened was not the outcome of a carefully considered plot is supported by the number of Acts of Parliament which were subsequently introduced to streamline the system. Subsequent actions may have been based on the observation of "what worked" - this being defined in sociological, not educational, terms.

As I have shown elsewhere<sup>11.7</sup>, the educational system's failure to achieve the main goals which have been advocated for more than a century is no plot. For the most part, at least, it results from a lack of understanding of how to achieve these goals and how to assess progress toward them, and from the absence of the arrangements which would be required to cater for variety and handle the values conflicts which are involved. It is therefore primarily due to a failure to implement an appropriate programme of research and development activities. To substantiate a thorough-going conspiracy theory one would have to produce evidence of a systematic attempt to denigrate research and reinforce an authoritarian image of science. While observations consistent with a such a viewpoint abound, it seems more likely that such activities played only a part. Deep-seated, sociological processes, which operate in such a way as to perpetuate the existing social order, were almost certainly of greater importance.

While these examples illustrate the way a system *can* come to function *as if* it had been deliberately designed, there are also a number of examples in which there is more direct evidence of calculated change driven by a hidden agenda.

Before reviewing them it is, however, necessary to say a few words about the nature of evidence, scientific and otherwise. Even in science there are few cases in which what is seen is uncontaminated by preconceptions of the observer. What one sees down a microscope is almost entirely determined by prior beliefs about what one should see, and some of the most important developments in science have come about because someone looked at something familiar and saw it in a new way. In most cases, the evidence is incomplete. One is dependent on putting together scraps of information to form a new picture. One cannot, therefore, expect to find *incontrovertible* evidence of any plot.

When we move into the social area it would seem that any suggestion of a conspiracy has to overcome a very strong, basic, human need to believe in the good-will of authority. Incomplete evidence is met by cries of "paranoid". Indeed an editor who reviewed a previous draft of this book wanted to remove much of the material that follows on the grounds that because the conclusions were not proved beyond reasonable doubt they gave the impression that the author was not only an "extremist" but also paranoid. I can only respond that my own initial reaction to the idea of a conspiracy was exactly the same: individually, the claims were not proven beyond reasonable doubt. Only as evidence accumulated did the probability that there had been one or a number of conspiracies become more convincing.

For our first examples we may return to curriculum development in education. In this case it is *known* to those who were involved in them that a number of curriculum development programmes which would have nurtured students' ability to think about their society and a number of value-laden social issues were deliberately sabotaged. One of these was the Schools Council Integrated Science Project. This was designed to teach science in a way which promoted questioning skepticism, collection of evidence, making of observations, debate, and consideration of the social (moral) consequences of particular developments.

That is, it focussed on the very processes that lie at the heart of scientific endeavour. Those running the project had, unlike those running the Nuffield Science projects, taken steps to ensure that the attention of teachers and students would not be deflected from the project's goals by an inability to give students credit for having developed the desired qualities in the examinations which would determine their life chances<sup>11.8</sup>. Steps having been taken to ensure that this typical source of project failure did not neutralise it, the project was terminated by officials acting on behalf of a small group of people who found the students' enquiries threatening. Its coordinator was forced to leave the country. The Schools Council Humanities project was sidelined for similar reasons. What we have here is, therefore, two cases in which real attempts to achieve educational goals which have been advocated for more than a century (and which are, in fact, not only widely endorsed but of the greatest importance at the present time) were undermined by people who feared for their privileged positions.

This information is known only to those who were directly involved. More thorough documentation of the impact of those with vested interests on educational programmes which strive to nurture these very competencies has been provided by Robinson<sup>11.9</sup> who used previously classified documents to describe the way in which the American National Association of Manufacturers mounted a deliberate, well orchestrated, and highly successful campaign - involving, among other things, coordinated lying to several congressional committees of enquiry - to discredit one of the most important authors of school textbooks of the late 1930s - Harold Rugg. From their point of view, the threat was not that these books *taught* subversive (communist) beliefs. (The authors of such books were safe from attack because few took them seriously.) It was that they effectively encouraged students to *think* - and especially to make acute observations about society, how it worked, their own role in it, and how it might be changed to function better in the public interest. That is, the threat was precisely that posed by the Schools Council Integrated Science and Humanities Projects in the UK. One is forcefully reminded of the reasons for the persecution of Socrates.

With these insights, we may return to the question of to what extent there was a *deliberate* narrowing educational goals so as to reinforce the existing social order behind the objectives of the British National Curriculum.

The heavy involvement of Public Relations firms in the production of the brochures immediately arouses one's suspicions. Not only are these lavishly produced in colour and printed on good paper, the words and layout have been chosen with great care to conjure up desirable images. When one then finds that there is no connection between the wonderful schools depicted and the steps which are proposed to achieve them one becomes more suspicious. There is no acknowledgment what so ever of the well-established barriers to running educational programmes of the kind described, of the inadequate provision of the resources which would be required to implement the programmes, a complete absence of provision of the resources which would be required to undertake the necessary R&D (the need for which is hardly acknowledged), a total failure to acknowledge the role which conventional forms of assessment play in deflecting educational activity from its goals, and the prescription of unbelievable amounts of "busy work" which would inevitably deflect the attention of teachers from their educational activities.

The suspicion that an outcome exactly contrary to that which was proclaimed was actually *intended* is further confirmed in a number of Ministerial pronouncements - such as comments on the need to eliminate "play schools" (i.e. progressive education) and what the next prime minister described as "educational fairy tales".

It has also been much more directly confirmed in a remarkable book by Graham<sup>11.10</sup>, who describes his appointment as Chairman and Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council and his subsequent disillusion as all his advice and all outcomes of “consultation” exercises were ignored and the organisation starved of the funds required to do the job it had nominally been set up to do. The unmistakable conclusion is that the consultation exercises he was asked to carry out were fraudulent.

The programme was set up in such a way as to ensure that there was no protest from organisations like the British and Scottish Educational Research Associations. In their own short-term interests, the officials of these organisations argued that proposals for research to address more fundamental questions would not attract funding and reviews of the relevant literature would be unlikely to have much effect - i.e. such activities would not have been “realistic”. In this way professional bodies behaved unprofessionally. Their members were too busy competing for government funds, and, having obtained some, found that they could not even admit that they had conducted a project until the government had approved of their findings - let alone share unacceptable findings or reveal that public servants had changed the actual statistics in their reports prior to publication. They found themselves in even deeper trouble for now they could not tell all for fear of government reprisals.

None of this proves beyond reasonable doubt that the activities were deliberately planned. But, taken together with studies of the way in which power oriented individuals are able to set up social activities in which many people end up exercising extraordinary creativity to discredit each other and carry out anti-social activities, it is apparent that a few people could have set up an overall scheme which would have the desired effect without having to themselves think through the details.

We turn now to more direct evidence of conspiracies on the part of financiers and those who control capital.

It is no secret that those with financial interests not only lobby governments but also deliberately make the economy go sour in order to force governments into actions which suit them. For several years, I myself travelled each day on a train which ran non-stop from London’s stockbroker belt to the City. My fellow travellers deliberately - and successfully - schemed to create conditions which would lead the IMF to intervene in the British economy to force policies which suited the City on the (Labour) government. Roberts and Dodd<sup>11.11</sup> have documented similar activities in the USA. Roberts has also shown how interest rates and the money supply were deliberately manipulated to create conditions in which large businesses were able to acquire smaller ones and the banks to gain control of small businesses.

There is also little doubt that the Conservative government in Britain during the 1980s deliberately required civil servants to introduce change after change at the same time as cutting their numbers so as to ensure that they were so busy that they had no time to think about anything. It is therefore entirely possible that their privatisation programme was driven at least in part by a similar Machiavellianism. Indeed, there is some evidence that those who promoted the idea that there would be an economic boom based on information technology never believed it, but were, from the beginning clear that it would lead to unemployment, increased differentials which would terrify the workers, and thus to increased corporate profits.

Historically, there is ample evidence from the work of Douglas<sup>11.12</sup>, Roberts<sup>11.13</sup>, Rakus and Judge<sup>11.14</sup>, Bell<sup>11.15</sup>, Dodd<sup>11.16</sup>, and Daehnhardt<sup>11.17</sup> that financiers are not above engineering major social upheavals to their own advantage. These authors document the contribution of bankers and industrialists to the creation of the American Civil War, the Napoleonic Wars, the Russian Revolution, the First and Second World Wars, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. Among other things, this involved the use of Carnegie Foundation funds to plan how to precipitate the Second World War (including the stage managing of the attack on Pearl Harbour) in such a way that it would not only allow the financiers concerned to make money by selling armaments and oil to both sides but also to gain more control over society, indeed to introduce a world government dominated by the international banking community. It also involved the deliberate incorporation into educational text books of beliefs about history, economics, banking, and society which were known to be false.

Daehnhardt<sup>11.18</sup> has thoroughly documented the way in which US TNCs, indifferent to destruction of human life, financed the rise of Hitler. Lest it be thought that such activities are a thing of the past, both he and Bell go on to cite similar processes at work in the Vietnam and Gulf Wars.

The banks have also deliberately sabotaged attempts to create local currencies<sup>11.19</sup> and it is alleged that they conspired to have President Lincoln shot because he had discovered that governments could print their own money without going through the intermediary of banks and thus avoid interest payments. Thereafter, as Douglas<sup>11.20</sup>, Adelman<sup>11.21</sup>, and Roberts<sup>11.22</sup> document, the international banks conspired to misrepresent the nature of the Federal Reserve Bank and keep information on its ownership and operation forever secret.

Adelman<sup>11.23</sup> claims that income tax was deliberately introduced to stop the printing of government money becoming too obvious: It is not in fact necessary for governments to tax anyone. As we have seen, they could simply print the money they need. But that would lead to a crisis of confidence. Taxation prevents people noticing that the bulk of the money spent by governments is simply being printed, that most of it goes on interest payments to bankers for the loan of fictitious money, and that inflation is one of the results.

There are also several studies suggesting that there might have been a deliberate plot to use market mythology to further powerful people's own ends in the same way that some late Roman emperors cynically used the Christian religion to advance and maintain their position<sup>11.24</sup>.

Roberts<sup>11.25</sup>, du Berrier<sup>11.26</sup>, and Eringer<sup>11.27</sup> present (not entirely convincing) accounts of the way in which a small group of bankers and industrialists concerned with one-world government appear to have been able to manipulate the governments of the US and Europe. The material comes across as the views of a rather paranoid group of authors, with many links filled in without substantiation. However, Pacheco<sup>11.28</sup> has provided an extraordinarily well documented account of a conspiracy by the US and Brazilian governments, the CIA, the FBI, and several firms (who turned out to be front organisations for drug smuggling and arms dealing) around Keppe - who had initially started out simply writing a book<sup>11.29</sup> to draw the appalling state of America to the attention of its rulers (in the [mistaken] belief that they were well-intentioned people who were genuinely concerned to do something about it). In addition, our own research into motivation shows that the activities attributed to the Bilderberg Group and the Trilateral Commission are entirely plausible. People often find it virtually impossible

to believe that anyone should have concerns and pre-occupations which differ markedly from their own, yet even relatively minor functionaries in both public and private sector organisations often devote enormous - regularly devious, underhand, and unscrupulous - effort to empire building so that they can have the feeling of power which such effort produces<sup>11.30</sup>.

Wolf's<sup>11.31</sup> writings amply document a carefully orchestrated conspiracy on the part of Japan to present itself to the world as something quite other than it is.

The Conservative Government's dismantling of the British National Health Service shows many signs of having been carefully planned. Perhaps one of the most significant was the way in which the network of committees which had previously existed was destroyed very early on. This prevented people comparing notes and finding out what was happening. Overwork, stress, and burn-out induced by trying to keep up with continuously changing policies and directives, varying dramatically from area to area, were widely reported. As in education, glossy brochures to provide reassurance and convince readers that the government had the public interest at heart were widely disseminated. They were accompanied by "consultation" exercises which projected an image of goodwill and interest in public and professional suggestions and responses, but which actually deflected all effective opposition into black holes. In the end, funds flowed into private hands and the average quality of care was dramatically reduced. Those at the receiving end were deprived of the arrangements needed to make their voices heard.

We are left with three major questions about modern times: First, did the banks deliberately create the conditions in which interest rates were initially lowered to bring about sales of armaments to Third World countries thus boosting the American economy, and then raised so as to both lead to the acquisition of enterprises in Third World countries and to the policies of the IMF which resulted in the export of below cost agricultural products, minerals, and educated people to the West? Second, did the bankers conspire to create conditions for the imposition of IMF's destructive policies on Eastern Europe? And, third, has there been a conspiracy to generate and promote an economic mythology which obfuscates reality and furthers bankers' and other capitalists' interests, and, if so, how has this been disseminated through the selection of puppet politicians?

Answers to these questions would greatly influence views on the steps which need to be taken to move us out of our current crisis.

Meantime, it is abundantly clear that we cannot afford to have blind faith in the goodwill and public spiritedness of politicians. For whatever reason, a sufficient proportion do not justify our tendency to assume that they are well-intentioned until proved otherwise. We need to make arrangements which, while not denying the possibility of integrity and public spiritedness, will work effectively in their absence.

#### *Notes*

11.1 Waddell, 1978

11.2 Jencks et al., 1973

11.3 I.C.E. Report, 1975

11.4 Scottish Education Department, 1989

11.5 Popkewitz et al., 1982

11.6 The importance of these qualities, the procedures required to nurture them, and the assessment methods required to give students credit for having developed them are described in Raven (1994).



- 11.7 Raven, 1994
- 11.8 Working toward goals which do not show up in examinations would take time away from mastering material which would determine one's life chances. As a result, students and teachers generally decline to work toward goals which are not assessed - however important those goals may be from a personal development or societal point of view.
- 11.9 Robinson, 1983
- 11.10 Graham and Tyler, 1993
- 11.11 Roberts, A.E., 1984; Dodd, 1976/94
- 11.12 Douglas, 1924/79, 1934, 1935/78a&b, 1936
- 11.13 Roberts, A.E., 1984
- 11.14 Rackus and Judge, 1993, 1994
- 11.15 Bell, 1984
- 11.16 Dodd, 1976/94
- 11.17 Daehnhardt, 1994
- 11.18 Daehnhardt, 1994
- 11.19 Roberts, A.E., 1984
- 11.20 Douglas, 1924/79, 1934, 1935/78a&b, 1936
- 11.21 Adelman, 1989
- 11.22 Roberts, A.E., 1984
- 11.23 Adelman, 1989
- 11.24 Romer, 1988
- 11.25 Roberts, A.E., 1984
- 11.26 du Berrier, 1994
- 11.27 Eringer (undated).
- 11.28 Pacheco, 1994
- 11.29 Keppe, 1985
- 11.30 Raven and Dolphin, 1978; Hogan, 1990; Winter, 1973
- 11.31 Wolf, 1983