



Independent Labour Publications invites you to:

Unbalanced Britain: Education, inequality and Labour's response

A one day seminar at The Circle, Sheffield, Saturday 4 March 2017

Education ought enable all our citizens to fulfil their potential and contribute to a good society. It ought to be available to all equally and fairly. Yet recent Tory policy is serving to reinforce and reproduce society's inequalities.



Changes to the education system and Labour and co-operative responses will be the subject of the ILP's next Unbalanced Britain meeting in Sheffield on Saturday 4 March.

About the speakers

Melissa Benn is a writer and campaigner on education. Melissa is currently chair of the cross-party group campaigning group Comprehensive Forum, is a vice president of the Socialist Education Association, and founder member of the Local Schools Network.

Julie Thorpe is schools programmes manager at the Co-operative College, heading a programme working towards establishing co-operative values in the education system.

Seminar programme:

- 11.00: Welcome and introduction (tea and coffee available from 10.30)
- 11.05: **Melissa Benn** – Education policy and inequality in the UK, plus discussion.
- 12.00: **Julie Thorpe** – Co-operative schools: where values make a difference.
- 1.00: Lunch*
- 1.50: **Melissa Benn** – What should Labour's response be?
- 2.10: Small group discussion.
- 3.30: Report back and plenary discussion.
- 4.00: Close

Venue

The seminar takes place at The Circle, 33 Rockingham Lane, Sheffield S1 4FW <http://www.thecirclesheffield.org.uk/>. It is free **but you do need to register in advance, deadline Friday 24 February**. Register via the link to Eventbrite on the ILP web site: <http://www.independentlabour.org.uk> (info@independentlabour.org.uk; 07799 502 937).

*Lunch can be provided at a cost of £4; to be confirmed on booking; payment on the day.

Education in Unbalanced Britain

Education ought to be the means by which we provide all our citizens, young and old with the knowledge, experience and confidence to make their way in the world, to fulfil their potential and contribute to a good society. It ought to be available to all equally and fairly, regardless of the background, wealth or belief of them or their family.

Yet for most of our history, Britain's education system has served to reinforce and reproduce society's inequalities. It has divided the wealthy few from the less well-off many, giving the already advantaged a head-start that has hugely increased their chances of greater wealth and power in later life. All too often, it segregates people and reinforces inequalities of gender, race, religion and ability, entrenching rather than undermining stereotypes and prejudices.

While educational inequalities continue throughout life, into higher education and opportunities for life-long learning, they are perhaps most pernicious in the earlier years, at primary and secondary level.

The comprehensive system introduced in the 1960s and '70s sought to alter the balance, to provide good schooling for all on an equal basis under local democratic control. Although it was far from ideal and never completely accepted nor fully comprehensive, it did arise out of a set of important principles: that all children were of equal value, had an equal right to learn, and should do so alongside peers from all backgrounds.

But comprehensive schooling has been under sustained attack from successive governments for more than 30 years. A system based on the ideals of democracy, equality and co-operation has been eroded by an ethos of competition – between pupils, teachers and schools – measured by exam results, league tables and inspectors' reports.

The introduction of payment by results, the rise of academies and 'free schools', the primacy of 'standards' based on endless testing and data, and the undermining of local education authorities by chains of private providers are just some of the markers of the profound shift we have seen – a shift from the notion of education as a public good and fundamental right, a shared process of enlightenment and enlargement, to a system based on the ideology of the market in which education is a commodity, a mark of personal achievement that will determine a child's individual chances of success and failure in a competitive world.

The current Tory government's desire to bring back selective grammar schools, to turn back the clock some 50 years or more, is only the latest stage in this deteriorating process. It must be resisted. Education should be a vehicle for overcoming and levelling out our unbalanced Britain, yet these reforms will further tip the scales in favour of the privileged.

So how can the tide be turned? How can the ideas that fired the comprehensive movement be reasserted and renewed? What should the Corbyn-led Labour Party be doing and saying about education? What role is there for co-operation in the modern education system? How would a comprehensive national education system work today? How can education be rebalanced in the interests of the many and not the few?

To discuss these ideas and more join the ILP and our speakers Melissa Benn and Julie Thorpe at our next Unbalanced Britain seminar on Saturday 4 March at The Circle, Sheffield, <http://www.thecirclesheffield.org.uk/>. Book via Eventbrite link on the ILP web site.

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