**Training Without Jobs:
New Deals and Broken Promises**

YOUTH QUESTIONS

Series Editors: PHILIP COHEN and ANGELA McROBBIE

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Training Without Jobs: New Deals and Broken Promises

*From Raising the School Leaving Age to the
Youth Training Scheme*

Dan Finn

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Mr Rowley, much enthused, came and set the first moot point, chalking it up on the board – ‘Children should go to school until they are fifteen’ . . .

Mackie chose me at once as a protagonist. Unfortunately, in spite of threat or cajolery, he couldn’t find a single other pupil willing to stand before the class and put the opposing, or indeed any, point of view, and this not for want of ideas but through fear alone. Free speech didn’t come easily to children kept down at home and in the classroom. Just before the time for the debate arrived, however . . . the teacher dragooned a terrified girl off the back row . . .

I got on the box provided and did my three minute stint without trouble. Rich people, I remember saying, sent their children to schools and colleges until they were twenty-one, so there must be something good in it. We would become doctors and teachers and chemists and explorers – things like that, if we went to school until we were fifteen. I was all for it.

Although Mackie had informed us that the audience was quite free to heckle or clap, they heard me out in dead silence. But both adult listeners seemed very pleased; the Head even patted my shoulder . . . My opponent, Lily Weeton, a pallid girl with plaits, came out and stepped on the box. Her words were few but explosive, ‘I think’, she said, ‘we should gerrount to work at fourteen and fetch some money in for us parents’. Then she stepped off the box to a thunderclap of applause, cheering and clog-stamping that rocked the school. Bubbling excitement, our ‘electorate’ now went to the poll, and the headmaster, acting as returning officer, announced the result in professional style:

Roberts, Robert   2

Weeton, Lily   48

Storming cheers again for the victor. Eddie Franklin and a girl friend had given me a sympathy vote, but nevertheless admitted to being intellectually with the opposition. (*A Ragged Schooling: Growing Up in the Classic Slum*, Robert Roberts, Manchester University Press, 1975, pp. 151–2)

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Race Relations Act 1976
Shops Act 1934
Sex Discrimination Act 1975
Young Persons (Employment) Act 1938

List of Abbreviations

AMB	Area Manpower Board
ATS	Adult Training Strategy
CACE	Central Advisory Council for Education
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CEP	Community Enterprise Programme
CP	Community Programme
CPRS	Central Policy Review Staff
CPVE	Certificate of Pre Vocational Education
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
CTC	Central Training Council
DE	Department of Employment
DES	Department of Education and Science
DHSS	Department of Health and Social Security
EEC	European Economic Community
FEU	Further Education Unit
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
IDS	Income Data Services
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ITB	Industrial Training Board
IMS	Institute of Manpower Studies
JCP	Job Creation Programme
LEA	Local Education Authority
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NAS/UWT	National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers

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NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NEDC	National Economic Development Council
NTI	New Training Initiative
NUT	National Union of Teachers
NYEC	National Youth Employment Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic and Co-operative Development
OTF	Occupational Training Family
OFV	Opportunities for Volunteering
RSLA	Raising of the School Leaving Age to Sixteen
RSSL	Recruitment Subsidy for School Leavers
STEP	Special Temporary Employment Programme
TES	Times Education Supplement
TOPS	Training Opportunities Programme
TUC	Trades Union Congress
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
UVP	Unified Vocational Preparation
VPP	Voluntary Projects Programme
WEP	Work Experience Programme
WEPP	Work Experience on Employers Premises
YES	Youth Employment Subsidy
YOP	Youth Opportunities Programme
YTS	Youth Training Scheme
YWS	Young Workers Subsidy

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D.F.

Foreword

Paul Willis

Since the early 1970s when I did the research for *Learning to Labour* (Gower, 1977) the transition from school to work of minimum age school-leavers has changed unrecognisably. Then all sixteen-year-olds could get a job if they wanted one. There were plenty of jobs but not much training. The worries concerned the quality of jobs, the lack of training and the lack of provision for continuing education for most young workers. Now there aren't any jobs but plenty of 'training'. The deadest of dead-end jobs are presented as the new youth Eldorado, and the obscenity of mass youth unemployment has been met with the promise of work in the ever-delayed future along with near compulsory training/work experience and massive regulation of the transition by a newly ascendant and assertive state apparatus – the Manpower Services Commission.

But what is the quality of what happens in these two years? Does the Youth Training Scheme represent the long overdue reform and equalisation of provision between the social classes over which the left and labour movements have been campaigning for fifty years, or is it simply another diversion or oppression for the young working class?

The 'training' bit of the education and training couplet always seems to pose problems for progressives and socialists. Whereas employers and industrialists warm to their contradictory platitudes, the left seems bored or reticent. That is one of the reasons why the right has claimed the field as its own in the era of the new realism and the vocationalisation of everything for working-class students. It is also why the persistent and well-informed work of Dan Finn in documenting and exposing the rise of 'MSC-dom' has been so

important over recent years. He brings to the training debate the qualities of seriousness, attention to detail and the impulse to practicality which usually characterise only the right's and employers' perspectives, and which, in their hands, help to render the whole area so impenetrable and eye-glazing. But Dan Finn brings those qualities to bear from a progressive viewpoint and shows both that training matters, and that it links up with other areas of crucial concern. This book is the culmination of his recent work. It provides us with a firm framework both for the critique of current tendencies and for the discussion of the alternatives which must come.

Why is Dan Finn so unusual? Why don't progressives and socialists get properly stuck into the training debate? In my view the problem of entering the whole debate from a progressive viewpoint is that 'training' at once concretely presupposes what it is that is to be trained for – working-class destinations structured by division and hierarchy. It cannot be avoided that 'training' not only helps to reproduce but is explicitly addressed to reproducing the existing divisions of labour.

Training is always to some degree about class (and other) reproduction – bottom end up – but the current trends seem to be making it exclusively so. The whole massive apparatus of the MSC and its training programmes have hardly been set into place for the middle-class young! For the middle class and mobile working class it is still 'Education' – now separated more than ever and with a vengeance from the new menial tracks of the 'new realism'.

There may be a crisis in higher education and some interruption in privileged transmission, but this is nothing like the attempted wholesale restructuration downwards of opportunity for the young working-class which the MSC and the penetration of the 'new vocationalism' even further back into the working-class school curriculum are bringing about.

'Training' is now coming to stand for the reversal of decades of concern with educational equality. Structural inequality is now back on the agenda – but in a different column. Now it is what is to be promoted rather than what is to be eradicated. The more the school curriculum is vocationalised, the deeper and earlier will class reproduction take root.

Of course this new obsession with training might have been acceptable in a genuinely mobile and 'equal opportunity' society

where, for instance, a similar proportion from the different classes and races entered the different education and training routes. But, actually, it has never been more true than now that it is 'education' for the middle class and 'training' for the rest. YTS membership is overwhelmingly working class. The middle-class young are still six times as likely to go into higher education as are the working-class young. Within YTS itself – reflecting the hierarchy which locates it – there is a class, race and gender hierarchy which mirrors and reproduces inequality *within* the working class.

Dan Finn shows how the Tories were originally hostile to the MSC which they saw as a Labour-inspired QUANGO and a fetter on free-market relations and forces. They were converted to a belief in its usefulness by two possibilities it offered: firstly, to throw up a smokescreen around the obscene and unacceptable facts of youth unemployment; secondly, and under the cover of this screen, to shift the whole education/training complex – ideology, institutions, curriculum, resources – firmly on to the applied training terrain defined exclusively in terms of employers' needs. The education 'bit' could be finally dropped from the education/training couplet and the remainder subsumed as never before to the needs of capital and industry. What a prospect! As Dan Finn so clearly shows, achieving the aims of a century of reform aimed at limiting the exploitation of young workers and extending educational provision has been purchased at the price of handing the whole thing over to those from whom the young were to be protected: the employers.

For all of these reasons it is only too easy to see the training issue and recent developments as serving dominant interests only too well. Many feel that to enter the debate and to assume its definitions necessarily is to collude in the operation and success of those interests.

But there is a whole other side to the training debate which Dan Finn rescues and brings into focus for us – though it is usually forgotten in fashionable left debates. This is quite simply that there is a real working-class stake in training. It is in their main material interest for the young working-class to gain access to wage labour.

They must negotiate whatever framework is put in their way to reach wage labour. Their 'good sense' and practical cultures are organised around the getting and giving of wage labour and the spending of its rewards. Despite forty years of the welfare state, it is still fundamentally the case that 'the labourer into the market place

naked goes'. The young working-class person without capital, without income guarantees and without income support from parents if forced (with the partial exception of young mothers), for all practical purposes, to seek out wage labour as the only means of decent survival and as the only access in this society to the future possibilities of dignity, consumption and separate independent living. If training increases the possibility of individual or collective access to the wage, or brings greater individual or collective bargaining power to make it bigger once possessed, then training is a good thing and, of course, a central trade-union issue. After all, from a practical working-class point of view, it may well seem that, short of the millenium, there will always be social classes and they will always be reproduced somehow. Meanwhile the problem is how to find the best personal and collective terms of accomodation and settlement *now*. So long as the wage is the universal target for the working-class young – and what other 'clothes' are we offering? – so long will there be a central, perhaps excluding, working-class interest in training. Now that the MSC has all but destroyed other kinds of access to wage labour, YTS has become of paramount importance to the working class. It is their only access to the wage, quite apart from its pretensions to provide quality skill training. Putting aside the confusing, contradictory and masking ideological debates concerning 'quality of labour supply' and 'national economic interests', the fundamental question which Dan Finn's book poses is this: how is it, and is it, possible to reconcile the tensions between training as class reproduction and training as working-class interest more in favour of the working class? It is a scandal that, so far, there has been no effective response – ideologically or politically – to this question from the labour movement.

In working through our positions on this question we should not overlook the vigour and autonomy of the material cultures of the young working class and of their likely reactions and resistance to the new vocationalism and its institutioned bridges and compulsions. This can alert us to some deep-seated and intractable contradictions in the new vocationalism which ensure its longer-term failure – in its own terms at least – and which gives some footings to a more rational and hopeful view of the training question.

In *Learning to Labour* I argued that the dominant teaching

paradigm in schools, locating and underlying actual teaching relationships, concerns the 'fair exchange' of knowledge for respect. In theory, students get the knowledge; the teachers get the respect. Knowledge is the basis for gaining qualifications which is the basis for getting a job. Respect is the basis for the teacher's moral and social control of the classroom (gaining obedience from students). This paradigm was in trouble when I wrote *Learning to Labour*. Now it is in tatters. Many working-class students, especially through the expression of their collective cultures, cannot see the point of yielding their obedience for inflated or worthless 'qualifications' followed by no jobs anyway. YTS makes a valiant post-school attempt to reinstate the teaching exchange for its 'trainees'.

In one way this new relationship is more tangible for 'trainees' than the old one was for its 'students'. 'Trainees' receive a document setting out rights and obligations in quasi-contractual and legal forms. The difficulties arise, however, as before in finding a meaningful equivalent to offer the trainee in return for attendance and good behaviour. Many 'equivalents' have been used up or discredited already – especially in the vocationalisation of everything in the school – or are simply plainly valueless in relation to the future. But the new training schemes are finding ingenious though tautological ways of scraping the barrel of vocational relevances. They are offering (institutionally) to the kids what they have (culturally) already: detailed knowledge of work; motivation to work; skills to deal with working with others – in short the capacity to labour itself. One might say that the curse of the working class – work – has been taken from the working class, repackaged, and given back to them as a 'blessing'. It seems that it is now necessary to provide for the working class remedial learning in order for it to be properly working class! The next step may be vocational certificates to prove that future workers are human at all – measured by the employers' template of course.

As Dan Finn shows it is, of course, the working class which knows and knows intimately most about the world of work, about boredom, about compulsion, about coping on low pay, about the compensations of camaraderie, and about the faceted deflection of unreasonable authority. It is these things which constitute the daily fabric of production. And the working class know about work from *their* point of view through 'useful knowledges' derived from and

addressed to survival as the weaker party in continuous struggle. Such knowledges are passed to the new generation through shared cultures, shared stories, shared conditions and through the massive working-class experience of child labour.

Of course there may be a more Machiavellian point in the new training schemes. It may be that the aim is to make institutional additions to, and work insidious reformations of, *recognised* existing working-class material cultures and *in situ* knowledges to make them more consonant with employers' views of the basic qualities necessary to worker humans.

In some ways such an explicit cultural offensive would be more acceptable. It would perhaps provide the terms of a real and critical exchange within which 'really useful' working-class knowledge would have a meaningful role – no matter if contested. The 'world of work' might then signify something of the real complex of interests and conflicts involved in production rather than simply the crass class interests of employers in the fullest domination of their workers. As it is, the crucial point here, it really does seem that the current tendency of the vocational approach – especially social and life skills and transferable skills for the YTS bottom track – is to assume a cultural vacuum amongst students: that they know nothing about the world of work or that what they do know is completely invalid. This is remedialism for an imagined deficit. Effectively it constitutes a cultural insult to 'trainees' – an insult which is going to be at the heart of likely future resistances and disorders (in newspeak, motivational and behavioural problems) amongst trainees.

But there are also and will also be inevitable responses from trainees to the other more blatant contradiction of YTS – the use of massive doses of work socialisation as an antidote to mass youth unemployment: often mindlessly applied manual training for precisely these jobs which are disappearing. Training for what has disappeared or does not exist actually doubles the cultural insult. The reality of a future of poverty and unemployment faced by many trainees will be lived through their own material cultures and practical social relations and knowledges – precisely those resources which are ignored or devalued on training schemes.

My point is simply this: that those subjected to the new, narrow and 'realistic' training will not be without their own collective and cultural reactions. Those capacities insulted or denied in industrial

remedialism will strike back here and in many other sites, with their own forms of life: cultural, social, political and practical.

It is this life which must in some sense be grasped and dialectically developed in alternative models of post-school education and training if we are not to be left gasping embarrassing reflections of the 'new realism' at young workers and non-workers across incomprehending cultural and economic divides.

Dan Finn concludes his book with a discussion of the many reforms necessary to tilt the training apparatus more towards the interests and definitions of the young working class. It is clear that there has been enough of training aimed at increasing *individual employability*. What is needed now is *employment*, or at least honesty about (un)employment. Genuine training (for jobs, not the smokescreen) must be part of a total package which includes economic and employment development and vigorous equal opportunities policies – training should be part of a larger process of a wider public policy aimed at breaking down rather than reproducing the division of labour and its associated hierarchies and ideological dualisms.

I endorse Dan Finn's shopping list, but would like to add two further points relating directly to that wider 'life' of young workers and non-workers that goes on, now, despite rather than because of current training schemes.

The first is the importance of maintaining, and opening up, in all possible ways – institutionally, formally, financially, culturally – broad and life-long working-class, female and black educational interests and opportunities in ways that are not mugged all the time by the dull thud of employers' views of characteristics appropriate to be developed in worker (or non-worker) humans. The crisis of mass unemployment does not lessen the importance of this – it adds, immeasurably, to it.

My second and final point concerns the urgency of making real progress in the long overdue task of developing a strategic and integrated policy for youth, for youth emancipation and for youth autonomy which is way beyond our current *de facto* youth policy of 'MSC-dom'. My recent work (*The Social Condition of Young People in Wolverhampton in 1984*, Information Centre, Wolverhampton) has been exploring the new social condition of young people and the ways in which a variety of state forms are, and are perceived to be, oppressive and/or infantilising rather than

emancipatory for young people. Our inner cities are developing bureaucratic walls of containment to go along with the economic, social and policing ones. In a whole variety of areas – including social services, careers work, housing, planning, finance, urban programmes – we should be looking to, and *involving* as contributing partners, young people as the nucleus of a developing society rather than as a social problem for the old static society requiring hard policing or soft welfaring, or as, at best, peripheral material to be moulded in narrow and contradictory ways to suit the self-interests of small dominating groups. It is high time that we offered more to our young than being sent ‘naked into the market-place’ – even if it takes the disappearance of the market to make us act.

There have been enough empty and repetitious promises for a new deal. Let’s really use some imagination. Let’s take and make a political will. Let’s take the force of the crisis to put some real guts into the rhetorical shell of the next ‘new deal’.

Wolverhampton
August 1986

P. W.