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Where does one start? There is so much wrong with schools and education that it is difficult to know where to begin. Staff are unhappy and underpaid; schools are prisons where trapped staff and kids manoeuvre and work against each other, each one making the other miserable. Yes, there are the better and the happier moments - but they are few and far between. I got one letter from a girl in Oxford thanking me for opening her eyes to English Literature. That was one in 24 years. A lot of kids regarded me with disdain. I was there to get them through examinations. That was my job. Their parents told them so. And me. The be-all and end-all of education was the 'O' level and the 'A' level. This with over four million unemployed, including 36,000 qualified teachers. And classes of over 40 in the Primary sector and over 30 in the Secondary sector. But in the Private sector the classes are less than half the numbers, and education which has to be an interaction between teacher and children has got to be that much richer and more satisfying for all concerned. So the State system staggers on with teachers coming in as graduates and paid less than Junior N.C.O.s. I know how insulting that is because I was a Sergeant at 20 and left the teaching service 40 years later paid a lot less than a Sergeant. What price the values of our society when it values a senior graduate master less than a senior N.C.O.?

Or let us look at the medieval patronage that exists in schools today. The Headmaster is God. He or she has bobbed and weaved and crawled to every interview, made the right remarks, read up on the right books, come out with the right philosophies of education, in order to reach this pinnacle from which very little can unseat them for the rest of their non-teaching careers. They are in charge. They control the living standards and destinies of thousands of children and hundreds of Staff. They have been creeps and yes-men and they expect their Staff to be the same. The system recreates itself. It cannot stand those who are different or who think differently. So the creeps and yes-men are promoted. The Head holds the power of patronage. Promotion is handed out to those who toe the line. The system cannot brook those who are different. The good teacher will get nowhere unless he or she curries favour with the Head. The quality of work in the classroom goes unregarded. The Head has little contact with the children or the classroom. That is why he/she became a Head. Administration is better paid and more highly regarded. Only the failures stay in the classroom. Success in teaching is all about getting away from the kids into the offices and adviserships where one may escape from the chalk-face and the realities of coping with bored, abusive and non-motivated children who see little future in what is imposed upon them. So the system creaks on and I see little change possible unless there is an explosion in education. And teachers are not made of the stuff of revolution. Most were creeps when they were at school. They are pliable and docile material. They feel secure in their creeping. They have the same standards as their head-teachers. They even like the system. And it's not the bitterness of 24 years in secondary education that drives my thinking. I joined as a Scale 1 teacher (and that's the bottom of the range) and I left as a Scale 1 teacher after nearly a quarter of a century. But I had some happy moments. I liked the children. Felt sorry for them. Helped a few to enjoy literature - even to pass examinations and launch out on full and satisfying careers. But knew that many never saw any sense in it. The girl who replied to my pleas to read as widely as possible, to share great minds, with the laconic, "So where did it get you? You're only a crummy teacher!" still sticks uncomfortably in my mind. Can one respect a so-called profession that gets less than a Junior N.C.O. or a new policeman? Why are teachers expected to give up their time and their services without pay? Have you ever expected a solicitor to give up three or four hours in an evening without pay? So why expect free overtime from a teacher?

As an ex-Lieutenant Commander I have always felt unhappy with teachers. They are too humble and too mean. They creep unashamedly for promotion. They do not, a large proportion of them, even like children. I happen to like kids. They remain happy and cheerful even in school. But we have not succeeded in education in harnessing that bubbling enthusiasm, that youthful optimism for anything but the limited heights of examination passes. And that is increasingly less and less important. So where do we go?

I know what I would like to see. Voluntary schooling for everyone. No more compulsory education. Schools to attract children in with what they have to offer. Children consulted individually about what they wish to learn. Each one treated as an individual. The term worked out in advance for each pupil. Lots of spare time for games and creative work. No examinations. Continuous assessment all the way. Classes of anything from six to a dozen. Games and hobbies and outside pursuits like swimming and car-maintenance and driving to be part of the curriculum. House repairs and maintenance of cars to be taught to girls as well as boys. Visits to local industry and commerce and local government to be part of every pupil's education. Care of the environment and gardening and the growing of flowers and vegetables to be part of every pupil's learning. Politics to be taught so that children see why society is as it is and how to improve it. Teachers to be paid double their present

miserable rates. Promotion to be a thing of the past. The highest job is dealing with young children's minds. Those in administration to be on a lower scale than those who teach. Head teachers to be elected by their Staff every 3 years and to be paid less than classroom teachers, who are the coal-face workers. Advisers to be put back into the classroom or offered retirement as most are not worth their salt let alone their salaries. Schools to be part of the community so that their facilities be shared each evening with the neighbourhood. Education to be broadened so that schools become the seed-beds of change and not the cemeteries of tradition. But I know I ask too much and too soon. But one day ... one day ...