

Prime Minister must speak
to Kenneth Baker urgently.

PRIME MINISTER

Walter Hill

16 December 1988

"framework" - no - his group will do the
job. not

NATIONAL CURRICULUM: HISTORY WORKING PARTY

Kenneth Baker's proposals for the teaching of history and
the composition of the History Working Group are extremely
disturbing.

His guidance for the history working group, while laying
some emphasis on content, would in fact enshrine what has
come to be called the New History in the national
curriculum! This is precisely the opposite of what was
intended when you set up a national curriculum.

He proposes no major historian or academic for membership of
the Working Party: what I find quite incredible is that he
proposes

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G. Gray
30/7/2016

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(Flag A-C) The Historical Association have also
written critically about these trends.

Recent Trends and the New History

The Historical Association sum up in a fair way what has
happened since the 1960s.

"The importance of History in our lives is recognised by
all, but in this country its place in the school curriculum
is declining. Many pupils study it only in disjointed
fragments as part of various 'Humanities' themes, and about
half drop it entirely at the age of 14.

Until the mid-1960s, History was regarded as central to the curriculum on the Arts side, and it was normal practice for a school syllabus to consist of British (or English) History from beginning to end, plus a period of European History, each taught in a narrative way with much rote-learning. In the mid-1960s, the advent of CSE gave the opportunity to design many new syllabuses based upon British Social and Economic History and World History. In the 1970s, the Schools Council Projects moved the focus from content to the skills and concepts which History should teach. The National Criteria of 1986 show how there is now a consensus that pupils should be expected to analyse and evaluate sources, to understand what is evidence, to appreciate the perspective of people in the past, and to comprehend change and continuity through time. But there is no consensus about content. In this respect the United Kingdom is quite unusual amongst EEC countries, most of which expect pupils to know something of the history of both their own country and of Europe."

Unlike traditional pre-mid 1960s teaching of history, the modern approach aims at novel ways of communicating the subject to "satisfy the personal and social needs of adolescents"(!), lays great emphasis on concepts rather than knowledge and chronology, and uses empathy in particular as a way of understanding. The CPS publication, Errors and Evils of the New History, is a stinging attack of this whole approach. (Flag A)

Clearly the last thing we want is for the history national curriculum to enshrine the very weaknesses which led you to reform education in the first place!

Two key steps need to be taken.

(a) Guidance for the Working Party

First the Working Party needs clearer guidance.

At present the document suffers from four major weaknesses.

First, the objective of history which is set out is open to misinterpretation eg it suggests that history is to

This is for logic - "help pupils acquire and develop values based on objective analysis of evidence".

swill - How can they evaluate "non-evidence" of history - because we cannot make a balanced assessment except by balanced evidence
Unfortunately this would fit nicely into a Marxist let alone a liberal view. If history teachers felt they were there to teach values there would be no stopping those who were zealots. And all of it having a statutory basis!

Helping children develop values is a laudable aim but the first and major step in history, which is never clearly laid out, is that it is simply the story of the past! The facts and the record are critical. (The article by Professor Kenneth Minogue from the TES, is excellent on this point.

(Flag D))

Second the programmes of study which are proposed are subject to the usual HMI/DES jargon which is simply a camouflage for the New History eg to

"lay the foundation for the progressive development of the processes and skills of historical inquiry. They should foster: a sense of place and time and a grasp of chronology and historical terminology ..."

Third far too much emphasis is given to cross-curricular learning. It is specifically stated that history should not be taught as a separate subject (underlined by DES).

✓ Fourth it is too broad and a recipe for a disastrous curriculum.

We are told it is relevant to "developing economic understanding, political and civic education, participation in a multi-ethnic society, European and wider awareness of the world, aesthetic and creative capacities and personal and social education generally".

✓ This kind of statement is open to abuse by any group of trendy teachers who care to hijack it to suit their own whims. It is precisely what the national curriculum should exclude and not include.

(b) Membership of the Working Party

The Chairman - Commander L M M Saunders Watson, may have a family interest in the history of our nation and a professional interest in historic houses, but I fear he may be eaten alive by the likes of [redacted]

I suggest that Kenneth Baker has already sounded him out about being Chairman. If he could be more Deputy-Chairman it would be a great step forward.

If, however, you keep the Chairman, the following action is essential:

- [redacted] must be removed
- the credentials of other members of the Working Party need to be checked out
 - you need to add at least three names which you choose and who you know are reliable.

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It would be good to have an outstanding history master from a northern grammar school and at least two well-known academics, at least one of whom is a historian.

I would suggest very strongly that Professor Kenneth Minogue be included. He would make an outstanding contribution. He has a great record in this area and one should discount opposition to him because of his conservative views.

Possible historians include:

Professor Geoffrey ELTON (formerly Regius Professor at Cambridge)

Professor Derek BEALES (Professor of Modern History at Cambridge)

Both of these are uncontentious and their books are already read by schoolchildren.

Other names include:

Professor David DILKES (Professor at Leeds)

Professor Elie KEDOURIE (LSE and quite outstanding)

Dr John MORRILL (Selwyn Cambridge and who does a lot with schools)

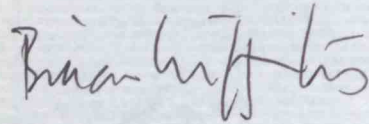
Dr Michael BENTLEY (Sheffield)

Recommendations

- 1 We need new guidance on history for the Working Party and a clearer statement of aims.
- 2 We need a strong chairman who commands respect in the

world of history. This points to a professional academic historian. Commander Saunders Watson would be a good deputy chairman.

- 3 We need to remove at least one existing name and add others.
- 4 This suggests that the Secretary of State will not be able to make his announcement until mid-January.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Brian Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

BRIAN GRIFFITHS