

UK government supports plans for military schools

Liz Smith**8 February 2012**

Respublica, a Conservative Party think tank supported by British Prime Minister David Cameron, has proposed the setting up of military schools within the British school system. The plan is outlined in a document titled “Military Academies: Tackling disadvantage, improving ethos and changing outcome.”

Authors Phillip Blond and Patricia Kaszynska stress their proposal is for a new model of schooling as a “solution to the social ills that became manifest at the time of the riots”—a reference to last August’s inner-city disturbances in England. They are part of the wholesale privatisation of state-funded education via privately controlled but publicly funded academies and Free Schools.

The report states that the military schools would be a “partnership in the delivery of education between the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Department for Education (DfE)”.

It recommends “a chain of academies sponsored by the Armed Forces delivered with and by the Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations (RFCAs) using their practical experience and existing governance support”.

RFCA are regional civilian bodies that comprise voluntary members and a full-time secretariat. They are established by statute to offer advice and support to the Defence Council, chaired by the secretary of state and including other ministers, the chief of defence staff and senior service officers, on behalf of the Reserve Forces and Cadet Movement.

Respublica’s initial plan is for the setting up of 10 academies, which correspond to the number of existing RFCAs. These would then be extended to areas with the highest percentage of 16- to 24-year-old so-called NEETs, who are not in education, employment or training. The ultimate goal is that they should be adopted throughout England and Wales.

The document cynically cites rising social

inequality—euphemistically termed “intergenerational disadvantage”—as the pretext for the militarisation of state education. These disadvantages, states the report, include lack of opportunity and education and the rise in long-term youth unemployment past the 1 million mark.

These were all key factors that led to the riots in August 2011, the report states. This flatly contradicts the assertions of Cameron and his government, who insisted that social deprivation had nothing to do with the disturbances.

Utilising low educational outcomes for poorer children, the report couches its aims in the language of “pastoral support” and “mentoring”. But this is employed solely to back up the assertion that the military is essential to improving “the nation’s moral health”.

Respublica is at pains to distance its plans from the Phoenix Free School in Oldham, due to open in 2013, and set to be the first in the UK to be staffed by former members of the armed forces.

Phoenix is the brainchild of former teacher and military instructor Tom Burkard. “Discipline is an absolute first priority” of the new school, Burkard said. Captain A.K. Burki, who recently completed a tour of duty in Afghanistan, is signing up potential pupils.

“The elements of the armed forces we really want to instil in the pupils are the core values of the Army,” he said. “Courage, discipline, respect for others, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment.”

As with the Phoenix school, Respublica highlights statements by Education Secretary Michael Gove and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg that have stressed “the value of military training”.

Gove has called for boot camps for expelled children and Clegg recommends special summer camps.

For all their talk of extending “opportunities”, the only opportunity on offer is for young people to be used as cheap labour or cannon fodder in new wars of aggression

by British imperialism. When asked about the military schools during Prime Minister's questions (PMQs), Cameron said it was a "very, very good idea" that cadet forces should be linked to schools in deprived areas.

Alongside the proposals for military schools are plans to further increase the pressures of "economic conscription" amongst the youth.

It was Labour that sowed the basis for military schools when, in 2002, the Blair government sent Skills Force—a scheme run by ex-military personnel—into inner-city schools. By 2004 it was involved in 100 schools. Geoff Hoon, then defence minister, opened a new national HQ in Edwinstowe, North Nottinghamshire. Skills Force last year received £1.5 million from the government for its further expansion in deprived areas.

The government is offering ex-military personnel bursaries of up to £9,000 to train as teachers, as well as scrapping the requirement for teachers to record instances when they use physical force, as part of a wider move to "restore adult authority".

When making their case for the Phoenix school, Burki and Burkard stressed, "All the old remedies for poverty, under-achievement and alienation have been tested to destruction. The consequences were starkly before us on the streets of Tottenham and Croydon. But before we put troops on the streets we should consider putting them in our schools."

The planned schools are part of government efforts to intimidate young people—as witnessed in the state repression meted out against youth in the wake of the riots and the student protests that preceded them.

Gove has stated, "The rules of the game have changed." This is a barely veiled threat to young people and their families that if they dare to step out of line then the full force of the state will be used against them.



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